

# **WEST BENGAL VISIT: LESSONS LEARNED FROM JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES**



23<sup>rd</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007

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**Utpal Dutta  
Nishorgo Support Project  
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Forest Department sent a team to West Bengal from 23<sup>rd</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007 in order to learn from the Joint Forest management initiatives. The team consisted of 17 members from Forest Department and Nishorgo Support Project, and out of 17 members 8 are Foresters, 4 are Deputy Rangers, 3 are Forest Rangers and 2 are NSP Staffs.

The main purposes of the visit were:

1. Visit sites where Co management of Protect Areas in West Bengal is currently being implemented as a tool for improved conservation and management and learn lessons from these cases;
2. Meet the key officials/professionals who have worked on Protected Area Co management attempts;
3. Expose the Joint forest management activities in India to Forest Officers through interactions with communities participating in JFM in Northern West Bengal;

The whole tour was organized in collaboration with Centre for Biosocial Advancement (CBA), Kolkata. Mr. Prabir K. Das, IFS (Retd), Mr. Nabarun Sen, IFS (Retd), Mr. Promotes Sannayal, IFS (Retd) and Mr. M.S. Rai, IFS (Retd) facilitated and guided the whole tour program.

We have visited Mohananda Wild Life Sanctuary, Sukna Orchidium, Kunjapara Eco Tourism Complex, Kunjapara Eco Development Committee (EDC), South Khairbari Nature Park and Forest Protection Committee (FPC), Jalda para Wild Life Sactuary, Chipra Forest Protection Committee of Chipra Beat under South Raidak Range of Buxa Tiger Reserve, North and South Panialguri Forest Protection Committee of Buxa Tiger Reserve, Eco Tourism Complex, DhupJhora managed by EDC under Garumara National Park, Senchal Wild Life Sanctuary and West Senchal Range Eco development Committee and Padmja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Lessons came to light through discussion with the team members, quick reflection meeting at Shiliguri and debriefing meeting at Dhaka, were as follows:

- ✚ High degree of commitment of the forest officers are the key to success of Joint Forest management initiatives. When we asked Mr. Amar dey, Beat Officer that what sorts of reward he received for his good work, he replied *“I am a Government Officer, I am doing my duty”*.
- ✚ Forest officers have continuous effort to motivate the illegal feller to turn to forest protector. Bimal Debnath, Range Officer of Dhupjhora Beat cited *“If one group of illegal feller is motivated than another group started to illicit felling. To me motivation is a never ending process”*.
- ✚ Forest Officers minimized the gap between FD and local community through different activities mainly through dialogue and awareness and community development activities. According to Range Officer Bimal Debnath it is a *“Friendship Package”*.
- ✚ Local Stakeholders are highly motivated and aware to protect the forest for their livelihood. Rama Deb, one women leader of Forest Protection Committee told us *“When the village is good than forest will be in good condition and when the forest is in good condition than the livelihood of the villagers will be better”*.
- ✚ Support from the higher level officers to the Beat and Range officers are ensured. CFs and DFOs intervened to help the field level officers against big timber mafia. They (DFO and CF) even took the leadership to evict the illegal saw mills if necessary.

- ✚ Forest Officers are the leaders of all sorts of initiatives for forest protection and livelihood development of the community. For this reason they always have to interact with the local communities. This help to build a close relationship with the community people.
- ✚ All sorts of fund from central government or other donors for forest development under Joint Forest Management approach go through a “Forest development Authority (FDA)”. CF is the Chairman of the FDA and related DFO acts as member Secretary. Obviously, representatives of the EDC and FPC are the member of the FDA. FDA distributes the money to FPC or EDC according to their priority. Beat Officers act as member secretary of FPC and EDC.
- ✚ Forest Department provides necessary support to the villagers for their livelihood purpose. FD takes the initiative to provide skill development training to the villagers for their alternative income generating activities.
- ✚ The role of local government “Panchayate” is critical to involve and motivate local community in favour Joint Forest Management.
- ✚ Government has a good initiative for eco tourism development. Infrastructures and facilities are created to attract the tourists. A portion of the income goes to EDC and FPC for increasing their fund.
- ✚ Enforcement of law and regulation are important to protect the forest from timber mafia. Such as, truck carrying the wood if seized will not be released till the case solved by the court; this discouraged the owner to rent their truck for carrying the illegal timber.
- ✚ To protect agriculture field from elephant damage, FD put power fence surrounding the agricultural field. The fence only can give a small shock to the elephant, does not create any risk to it. At the same time FD keep some salt slab inside the forest area, near to the elephant corridor. Elephant like to pitch with those slabs and get less time to damage human habitat.
- ✚ FD provides compensation for live loss, crop loss or any sorts of other loss made by elephant. FD has a guideline or policy for this sorts support. Besides, a volunteer team always patrols at night to protect the fields from elephant damage. FD also agrees to provide insurance premium for those volunteers.
- ✚ The villagers are aware and empowered enough to safe the forest from timber mafia and illegal intervention. The villagers cited *‘Beat Babu illegally cut out the trees earlier, we did not tell anything but now beat Babu will not be escaped from us.’*
- ✚ EDCs and FPCs are the agent to channel all sorts of development activities inside the villages. For this reason, these committees have got honor from the villagers.
- ✚ Individual level support is discouraged and mainly all sorts supports from EDC and FPC employs for community level development purpose. Such as Electricity for the villagers, Water for the community, House repair, Road construction, Scholarship for the students etc. One old EDC member of Senchal Wild Life Sanctuary of Darjeeling told us *“We were in dark, 50 years we are living here, we didn’t see electricity, but now due to EDC we have ‘light’.”*

In conclusion I want to quote one of our Forest Range’s opinion. He told *“Only 7 days visit changed our 25 years attitude. We can change our forest condition within 5 years and I want to contribute my rest of the service period through involving local community in forest protection”*.

**Name of the participants for Exposure visit to West Bengal**  
**Period September 23, 2007 to October 01, 2007**

1. Mr. Md. Akbar Hossain, Forest Ranger, Habigonj Range-2, Sylhet Forest Div., Sylhet
2. Mr. Sanjit Kumar Mondol, Forest Ranger, Chunoti Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Moulvibazar
3. Mr. Md. Fazlul Haque, Forest Ranger, Moulvibazar Wildlife Range, Srimongol, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Moulvibazar
4. Mr. Abdus Samad, Deputy Ranger, Teknaf Range, Cox's Bazar South Forest Div. Cox's Bazar
5. Mr. Nazrul Islam, Deputy Ranger, Shilkhali Range, Cox's Bazar South Forest Div. Cox's Bazar
6. Mr. Md. Abdus Salam Tarafdar, Deputy Ranger, Sylhet Wildlife Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Moulvibazar
7. Mr. Abdul Motaleb, Deputy Ranger, Whykong Range, Cox's Bazar South Forest Div. Cox's Bazar
8. Mr. A.K.M. Saidul Haque, Forester, Teknaf Range, Cox's Bazar South Forest Div. Cox's Bazar
9. Mr. Abu Taher, Forester, Shilkhali Range, Cox's Bazar South Forest Div. Cox's Bazar
10. Mr. Md. Monirul Islam, Forester, Habigonj Range-2, Sylhet Forest Div., Sylhet
11. Mr. Md. Shahjahan Chowdhury, Forester, Jaldi Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Chittagong
12. Mr. Md. Mazharul Islam, Forester, Jaldi Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Chittagong
13. Mr. Avijit Kumar Barua, Forester, Chunoti Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Chittagong
14. Mr. Syed. Mohaddis Ali, Forester, Moulvibazar Sadar Wildlife Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Moulvibazar
15. Mr. Monjurul Alam, Forester, Satchari Range, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Div., Moulvibazar
16. Mr. Md. Raihanul Islam Chowdhury, Project Coordinator, Nishorgo Support Project, Srimongol
17. Mr. Utpal Dutta, Local Governance and Capacity Building Specialist, Nishorgo Support Project, Banani, Dhaka