



# Nishorgo Vision 2010:

A Vision Statement Concerning  
Management of Protected Areas  
Under the jurisdiction of  
Forest Department through the Year 2010

Task no.:  
USAID Contract no.: 388-C-00-03-00050-00



# Nishorgo Vision 2010:

A Vision Statement Concerning  
Management of Protected Areas  
Under the jurisdiction of  
Forest Department through the Year 2010

*Prepared for*  
**Nishorgo Support Project**



The Nishorgo Program  
Forest Department  
Ministry of Environment and Forests  
Government of Bangladesh

February 2005



With Partners: CODEC, NACOM, RDRS & IUCN



## Contents

Introduction and Context .....	1
Pressures on the Protected Areas in 2010.....	1
The Nishorgo Program as a Response .....	2
A New Institutional Focus for Protected Area Management.....	3
Collaboration and Partnerships in the Management of Protected Areas .....	4
Management of Protected Areas within Broader Landscapes .....	6
Protected Area Economics and Financing .....	6
Coverage of the Protected Area System in 2010 .....	7
Conclusion: A Vision of Our Protected Area System in 2010 .....	7

## **Introduction and Context**

As Bangladeshis, we possess a profound and deeply rooted respect for the natural world. We have a special affinity in particular for the forests that once blanketed large areas of this country, from the once vast Sal forests of the north and central to the endless Mangroves in the south to the towering Garjan of the east.

In recent decades, the Government has taken steps to set aside forest lands as "Protected Areas" under the Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act, 1974 under the legal categories of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Game Reserves. These Protected Areas are under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the Forest Department. With the addition of these Areas, Bangladesh has an estimated 0.5% of its surface area under Protection status. With the continued growth of the country's population and the consequent demands placed on these natural forest resources, even these Protected Areas have come under enormous pressure.

Recognizing that impending pressures on already scarce Protected Areas will only worsen in coming years, the Forest Department has conducted an internal participatory visioning exercise to identify the future threats to Protected Areas and set priorities for addressing those threats. The Department focused on the year 2010 for a few reasons. The date is beyond any existing current short-term projects to support Protected Area management, and thus represents a time by which the Department must be fully capable and self-sustaining in its Protected Area efforts. Also, the 2010 date is near enough in time to serve as a useful focus for management decisions and yet far away enough in time for it to be realistic that the vision can be achieved.

This document, the fruit of that visioning exercise, is intended as a means of focusing internal improvements in Protected Area Management at the Forest Department, and in projecting a clear agenda for action to all those concerned for management of the Protected Areas under the jurisdiction of the Department.

## **Pressures on the Protected Areas in 2010**

The demands placed on our Protected Area network will become increasingly severe by 2010. Among the most important pressures, the following may be highlighted:

- ⇒ Demands placed on Protected Areas by neighboring local stakeholders will also increase. People living outside Protected Areas now covet the resources inside those Areas, whether for logging, fuel wood or land for farming. At many, if not most, Protected Areas, these resources have been perceived as "free for the taking", and this mindset of local stakeholders continues.
- ⇒ As the country's economy grows, industrial pressures on Protected Area land will increase. Already, industrialists are seeking to build factories or other infrastructure inside Protected Area lands. As priority continues on the need for an economic development led by industrial growth, this pressure will only become more severe. In short, the voice in favor of industrial development will become stronger and this may place new pressures for conversion of the already small Protected Area system.

- ⇒ The number of tourists visiting Protected Areas and other nature sites will continue to increase dramatically. The extremely high visitation rates at newly established small nature areas (such as Dulhazara Safari Park or Sitakunda Botanical Garden) makes it clear that a significant unmet demand exists for a nature experience, even at current income levels. As household disposable income grows, citizens will look increasingly for places to which they can escape to experience nature, and they will be ready to spend more money and travel further in doing so.
- ⇒ At the same time, domestic and international NGOs, academics and the world community will put a steadily increasing pressure on the Forest Department to conserve and manage Protected Areas in a more sustainable way. So expectations will increase upon the Forest Department even as challenges to Protected Area management become more severe.
- ⇒ Protected Areas will see increasing intractable ethnic and other social conflicts. Tension and conflict between powerful local vested interests and poorer communities, as well as between local communities and the Forest Department, will increase. And ethnic conflicts will become severe, as ethnic diversity is particularly high in the traditionally forested areas that have become Protected Areas.
- ⇒ As land prices rise, Protected Area land will increasingly be seen as "un-economical" or "unproductive" from economic and financial perspectives. This will itself place an extra pressure on the Protected Area system. The Protected Areas will increasingly be seen – from a purely internal financial perspective of the Government – as a loss of tax revenue. Powerful interests will claim that the opportunity costs of keeping land in Protection is too high given other more productive land uses.

What will the Protected Area system look like in 2010 if nothing is done, and if the status quo remains? The prognosis is bleak. All of the current Protected Areas are being gradually depleted, even the once intact forests of the Sylhet Division. The Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary is now bereft of mature trees. A constant depletion of the Teknaf Game Reserve, once a vast area of contiguous forest, continues. Even the Rema Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary and the Lawachara National Park are under intense pressure by illegal logging interests and fuel wood sellers. In light of these pressures, the Forest Department estimates that, at current rates, the now intact forests of the country's upland Protected Areas will be unrecognizable by 2010. Mature trees will be gone. Middle story growth will be eliminated. Large conversion of Protected Areas to farmland, industry and other uses will abound. In short, if the status quo remains, Bangladesh will no longer have a Protected Area system worthy of the name.

## **The Nishorgo Program as a Response**

Recognizing the urgency of this need to consolidate and conserve the country's existing Protected Area system, and put it on track towards long-term sustainability, the Ministry of Environment and Forests launched an ambitious program entitled Nishorgo. The Nishorgo Program is a comprehensive effort to improve the management of the Protected Areas under

the jurisdiction of the Forest Department. "Protected Areas," as the term is used by the Forest Department, include Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks, Game Reserves and even the more recently designated Safari Parks and Eco Parks. The Bangla name "Nishorgo" evokes the idyllic and even surreal beauty of nature within Bangladesh. The Program aims to protect and conserve Bangladesh's forests and biodiversity for future generations. The Nishorgo Program was officially launched at Bhawal National Park on February 24, 2004 by the Honorable Minister of Environment and Forests.

## **A New Institutional Focus for Protected Area Management**

In order to manage the pressures that will be placed on Protected Areas, nothing less than an institutional reorientation of Protected Area managers will be necessary. At present, the Forest Department is perceived principally as managers of forests that are eventually to be cut and sold. In order for the Nishorgo Program to succeed by 2010, local and national stakeholders must recognize that a separate cadre of Forest Department staff exists with a fundamentally different mission: the conservation and management of Protected Areas in partnership with citizens. The Protected Area management staff of the Department must be perceived as a trusted partner in achieving the societal goal of conserving nature for present and future generations of the country. This overall re-focusing of Protected Area management implies a number of additional modifications, including the following:

- Protected Area managers that have been perceived in the past as distant and distrusting of local people around Protected Areas must by 2010 focus more on coordination with the local populations;
- Protected Area managers that have focused in the past on administration, collection of fines, fees and taxes should by 2010 focus on sustainable local development, production systems and improvements in livelihoods of populations;
- Protected Area managers that have in the past focused on protection and replanting of forests should by 2010 focus on sustainable management and value generation through sustainable and nature-friendly use.
- Protected Area managers that have in the past focused on plantation management should by 2010 re-focus on naturally regenerating ecosystems and biodiversity.

As a response to these coming challenges and trends, the Forest Department will need to master new approaches to Protected Area conservation. The Forest Department's Protected Area managers will certainly need to evolve in the following ways by 2010:

- Continue building expertise in forest and ecosystem management and eco-restoration.* Skills in forest and ecosystem management are the foundational skills to building a viable Protected Area system, and the Department currently has strong skills in this area. These skills need to be further deepened, and adapted to the particular needs of Protected Area management.
- Understand -- and make use of -- participatory management processes.* The Forest Department's skills in participatory forest management have grown as it has gained experience in social forestry. The challenge for the coming years will be to adapt the

experience of managing social processes for use and application in the Protected Areas.

- *Re-evaluate the mandate, processes and systems of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Circle.* The Circle, now the designated part of the Forest Department responsible for some Protected Areas, is now evolving to meet the needs and pressures on the system. By 2010, the mandate, processes, staffing and orientation of this Circle, or an institutional modification of it, must be undertaken.
- *Clarify the roles of the Divisional Forest Officer for Wildlife vis-a-vis the Divisional Forest Officer for other production forests.* A clear functional relationship between these two key Divisional level implementing staff members is central to the resolution of challenges to the Protected Area system in 2010.
- *Maintain constant and regular dialogue with all key stakeholders in and around Protected Areas.* The days are past when Protected Area managers in Bangladesh could manage their Areas as islands independent of the rest of society. Indeed, by 2010, the central key to success of Protected Area managers will be their success in interactions with local stakeholders, without which the Areas themselves are unlikely to be conserved.
- *Ensure a cultural sensitivity and openness to the diversity of ethnic groups in Bangladesh,* including those that live in and around Protected Areas. The various ethnic groups living in and around our Protected Areas are a stakeholder of priority for the future of the Protected Areas system.
- *Be active in ensuring a platform for dialogue with local stakeholders.* In order to extend the reach and effectiveness of the Protected Area managers, and to ensure that conflicts can be defused, some form of platform for local dialogue must be ensured and Protected Area managers will need to participate in it.
- *Be increasingly capable of managing legal challenges and issues concerning the Protected Area system.* Already, legal issues are regularly raised by local and national stakeholders. By 2010, the Department will need to reinforce this skill set and ensure that it is available for Protected Area management issues.

As a result of this institutional reorientation, the Protected Area management team of the Forest Department should by 2010 become an established and recognized institution of excellence in Protected Area management.

## **Collaboration and Partnerships in the Management of Protected Areas**

The Forest Department will need to re-focus its Protected Area management staff and systems, but success by 2010 will not be possible if the Department tries to act alone. By 2010, the Forest Department must reach out and build alliances and partnerships with a wide range of people and institutions -- both public and private -- that have a stake in conservation of a Protected Area system.

This collaboration and partnership development must occur at multiple levels. At the local level, in and around Protected Areas, managers will need to develop collaborative management (or "co-management") relationships with key stakeholders. While the degree of consultation, participation and shared responsibility will vary according to the needs of the particular Protected Area, some measure of collaboration will be necessary at all Protected Areas.

At a District and Divisional level, Protected Area managers will need to maintain dialogue and open communication with local Government representatives and with members of the civil society. Protected Areas, if well managed, can be an important economic and social asset for local and regional communities, so these stakeholders can become important allies in Protected Area conservation. It will be particularly important to ensure coordination with local representatives or offices of other Ministries of the Government.

Throughout the country, the Forest Department must reach out to many current and potential advocates for Protected Area conservation from civil society. These groups are numerous, and include:

- *Professors and researchers at our Universities and institutions of higher learning.* Our leading thinkers can provide guidance in improving our knowledge base for Protected Area management.
- *Nature-oriented clubs and associations.* Such clubs and associations are formed by people already committed to conservation. The Bangladesh Boy Scouts are but one of many examples of this category of potential partners. The energy and initiative of groups such as these should be harnessed to support the Protected Area system.
- *Philanthropists and benefactors interested in the environment.* As the country's wealth grows, there may be individuals that would commit energy or resources to supporting a legacy of Protected Areas for the country. As such individuals are identified, they should be provided with information necessary to support their interest in the Protected Areas system.
- *Students of all ages.* If we do not engage our youth in the urgency of nature conservation, and Protected Area conservation in specific, we will have lost the war even if we should win a few battles. Our youth are the source of support for permanent improvements to our Protected Area system.
- *Private domestic and multi-national businesses.* Many businesses now recognize that a "green" image helps build customer loyalty, product sales and employee commitment. For these reasons, private businesses are in many cases interested in supporting conservation. One important challenge of Protected Area managers will be to capture this interest and direct it to supporting the country's Protected Area network. Approaches such as the "Nishorgo Conservation Partnerships" -- a public-private partnership approach for facilitating private contributions to support Protected Areas -- is a worthy example to follow.



In addition to these groups, the Government's many Ministries work in many ways to support nature conservation, and the Department should work to engage them in the broader national effort of Protected Area management.

## **Management of Protected Areas within Broader Landscapes**

Throughout the world, it has become accepted practice to manage Protected Areas taking into account not only the land and resources within the Area boundaries, but also the socio-economic and environmental context in the "landscape" surrounding the Areas. In Bangladesh's Protected Areas, where population and economic pressures are associated with extensive human-nature interactions, this landscape approach is both fitting and appropriate.

In practice, application of a landscape approach by Protected Area managers means that no Protected Area should be managed as an island. Rather, they should be managed taking into account the extensive interactions of the Area with the socio-economic and natural systems in and around the Protected Area. By 2010, the Protected Area managers of the Forest Department should be fully applying this landscape approach to Protected Area management.

## **Protected Area Economics and Financing**

In recent decades, the sustainable financing of natural protected areas has captured the attention of political leaders and conservationists throughout the world. National governments have developed and instituted entry fee, tourist taxes and other financial mechanisms to ensure conservation of these areas. Multi-lateral and bi-lateral financing institutions have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to establish Trust Funds, Foundations and other permanent financing institutions to ensure conservation. This emphasis derives from a fundamental observation: while Protected Areas contribute considerably to national sustainable development, most of these economic contributions are "non-market" values, meaning they are not realized in a formal monetary market. The manifold non-market economic benefits from Protected Area conservation -- recreational, genetic, hydrological, medicinal, aesthetic, not to mention the contribution of Protected Areas as poles of local economic growth -- have more than justified this allocation of resources.

In light of the importance of our Protected Areas to the country's economic growth and sustainable development goals, it is urgent for the Forest Department to explore options for improving the financial self-sufficiency of the Protected Area system. One important option to consider is the introduction of revenue sharing with local participants in Protected Areas conservation. This process may develop as a corollary to the Forest Department's success in enabling local social forestry participants to share in revenue generated by forest management. One other option for consideration is an increase in private contributions to protect forest areas, as implied in the Nishorgo Conservation Partnerships approach.

Internally, the Forest Department must move to distinguish the financing processes relating to Protected Area management from those relating to production forests. Only with the highest level of clarity and transparency within the Protected Area management sections of the Department will its credibility grow.

## **Coverage of the Protected Area System in 2010**

Bangladesh's declared Protected Areas cover 0.5% of the country's surface area.<sup>1</sup> This is compared to 5.1% for India, 9.6% for Sri Lanka and 12.7% for Thailand. On a per capita basis, Bangladesh has the third lowest level of available Protected Areas of any country in the world. While pressure on land for other economic uses is high, it is urgent to consider options for expansion of the Protected Area system before 2010, not just for environmental reasons but also to ensure that Bangladesh's citizens can benefit from a sustainable and healthy living environment.

Although the Forest Department does not have any authority to extend the Protected Area system, the Department should build on its expertise and experience with Protected Area management to propose viable options for expansion of the system. Throughout the world, new models of protected areas are being developed, and many of these areas, like Bangladesh, suffer from high population pressure. Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) are one example of these new models, and others are being developed or already exist. The Forest Department should provide models and options for expanding the Protected Area system of Bangladesh from the current level to 3% of surface area at a minimum.

## **Conclusion: A Vision of Our Protected Area System in 2010**

If the Nishorgo Program succeeds, what will the Protected Area system look like in 2010? First and foremost, the existing collection of Protected Areas will be recognizable as a unified and integrated "System" of Protected Areas. At all of the Protected Areas, one will be able to recognize that the Forest Department has instituted a new way of operating in the Protected Areas. The difference will be apparent in both the visual appearance of the Protected Area facilities and the mode of operation of the staff. Protected Area managers will be well-trained. They will have strong alliances with local partners, both public and private. They will be highly valued by local Government for the contributions they make to sustainable economic growth, and they will be service-oriented. Most importantly, they will take pride in their contribution to sustained management of a treasured national natural heritage.

One will be able to see, at each Protected Area, that information about that area is available and easily comprehensible. Protected Areas will be attractive destinations for nature lovers and eco-tourists. The Areas will be kept clean. Visitors to the Protected Areas will be given a proper orientation so that they are aware of their responsibilities in visiting nature.

At the national level, the Nishorgo Program will have helped carved out a new and distinct image for the Forest Department as a whole. Complementing its historic role as a production forest manager, the Department will by 2010 also be recognized as an accomplished and successful manager and guardian of Protected Areas on behalf of the citizens of Bangladesh.

The successful refocusing of the Protected Area activities of the Department, along with its success at field level, will generate strong support of political leaders and common citizens alike. The young generation, in particular, will be informed about their country's Protected Areas and will be active supporters of Protected Areas conservation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Using IUCN Categories I-V Protected Areas for 1993.

As a result of all these improvements, Nishorgo's impact will be demonstrably evident in the richness and diversity of our Protected Areas. Already the Nishorgo Program has begun collecting baseline measurements in Protected Areas of forest volume, incidences of illegal logging, population of key indicator species, and contributions of the Areas to local economic growth and poverty reduction. All of these core baseline indicators will show statistically measurable improvements before 2010.

This is the vision of the Forest Department for Protected Area management in Bangladesh. The Nishorgo Program marks a new direction and re-focusing of the Department, one that is grounded in strong partnerships and collaboration at the local and national levels. Together with key partners, the Forest Department is confident that this vision of 2010 can become a reality for the citizens of Bangladesh.