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INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREA CO-MANAGEMENT (IPAC)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIVE MEETING
ON CONSERVATION AND CO-MANAGEMENT OF
LAWACHARA NATIONAL PARK



SEPTEMBER 16, 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON CONSERVATION AND CO-MANAGEMENT OF LAWACHARA NATIONAL PARK

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Held on August 4, 2009 at:

PDU Conference Room, Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI), Sreemongal

Organized by: Integrated Protected Area Co-management (IPAC)

September 16, 2009

DISCLAIMER

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“When a forest disappears, human beings suffer,” US Ambassador James F. Moriarty said at the Consultative Meeting on Conservation and Co-Management of Lawachara National Park (LNP), organized by the USAID-funded Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project. The Consultative Meeting, held on August 4, 2009 in Sreemongal, provided a forum for gathering the views and suggestions of representatives from all concerned groups – from relevant policy makers, Government departments, local administration and business entrepreneurs to civil society organizations, members of co-management organizations, and IPAC and USAID officials – and to reach a consensus regarding priority actions to be implemented in support of improving conservation of LNP through co-management. This paper summarizes the recommendations made during that Consultative Meeting.

IPAC, funded by USAID and implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, through a consortium of partners led by International

“Lawachara is a tropical forest; it has a unique ecosystem, which is developed after at least 100 years of natural process. This achievement can be destroyed within 100 days, if not cared for properly.”

Md. Abdul Motaleb, Chief Conservator of Forests

Resources Group (IRG), promotes equitable economic growth, enhances biodiversity conservation, and strengthens environmental governance in order to manage the natural resources of targeted Protected Areas of Bangladesh.

Lawachara National Park is one of the Protected Areas targeted for co-management. At present, LNP is undergoing intense pressure from illegal logging in the remaining areas of natural forest, and an increasing volume of tourists visiting the Park, along with poor enforcement of rules and regulations set by the government.

The meeting was successful in stimulating a frank dialogue that engaged many different perspectives on the issues, and brought out a range of significant recommendations from key participants. Participants discussed: **priority actions** to control illicit felling in LNP, **legal issues** that required more attention, **Alternate Income Generating Activities (AIGAs)** to contribute to increased and more sustainable livelihood opportunities, necessary actions to **improve the conservation and co-management of LNP**, as well as related **policy and institutional issues**.

SHORT-TERM PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

Without support of local people it is not possible to protect forests by the Forest officials, stated Rafiqur Rahman, President of Lawachara Co-management Committee, one of the Meeting’s participants. All agreed there was a need for increased coordination and cooperation between the Government and community groups. They also noted it was important to stop illegal transportation of logs and timber – perhaps by installing more checkpoints.

Among the immediate actions that could be undertaken to improve the situation, participants recommended:

- Improved coordination and cooperation between the Forest Department (FD), Co-Management Committee (CMC), and Community Patrol Groups (CPG)
- Control of sawmill licenses and verification of wood sourcing for furniture makers

- Checkpoints to restrict entry / exit and movement of timber to prevent illegal felling, and suggested that more check posts should be added by rail and community police
- Briefing on the situation to Parliament (discussion of rule 147)
- Planning and initiation of boundary demarcation and fencing

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Along with a commitment to taking action against illegal fellers, encroachers, and corrupt officials, the importance of transparency and accountability was emphasized by participants. *“Relevant ministries should work in collaboration with IPAC to maintain accountability,”* noted Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Additional Secretary of Economic Relation Division, adding that *“the Government is also accountable to the public.”* As one important step towards increasing transparency, they called for the Forest Department to produce a monthly report of illegally felled trees and the number of arrested people, and agreed that the 65,000 forest cases that pending nationwide required immediate attention.

“Income from PA must be distributed properly and transparently for the development of community people and stakeholders.”

Prokash Kanti Choudhury,
Chairman, Co-Management Council, LNP

They also agreed that 50 percent of the revenue from eco-tourism should be distributed for community development and maintenance of the eco-system, which would encourage the local communities to conserve LNP.

A sustained political commitment is required for the protection of forest resources, which often dissolved during political transitions. *“All our Parliament Committee members agreed to work together to protect the forests and to free our environment from pollution,”* noted Abdul Momin Talukder, Member of Parliament and Chairperson, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment & Forests.

Some other institutional issues that were also highlighted during the Meeting included promoting eco-tourism, improving visitor management, and building good relations with eco-tour operators and relevant companies.

LEGAL ISSUES

It was widely agreed that a number of Forest Department regulations, including The Forest Act, Wildlife Act, Social Forestry Rules, should be amended, and irrelevant rules and regulations related to national parks, the wildlife sanctuary, and the game reserve needed to be reviewed.

Some of the other recommendations included:

- License-issuing authorities need to be stricter
- Forest laws need to be strictly enforced
- Stronger penalties for illegal fellers and any government official found linked to illegal fellers had to be penalized

“[We] need revision and application of new social forestry rules and laws.”

Vice Principle Abdus Shahid,
Chief Whip, Bangladesh Parliament

ALTERNATE INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES (AIGA)

Participants stressed the need for increased support for livelihood and AIGA for surrounding communities, including:

- Economic support for CPG
- Proper selection procedure for CMC and CPG members
- Further development of conservation enterprises through enhanced market linkages
- Expanded support for AIGA training and access to credit

“Protected Areas can be preserved through co-management only when the poor people’s livelihood is developed. A certain amount needs to be fixed for patrollers and others to improve their livelihood.”

Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan,
Additional Secretary of Economic Relation Division

Participants also suggested that a Corporate Social Responsibility Program be introduced to conserve LNP and enhance alternate livelihood activities for surrounding communities.

IMPROVED CONSERVATION OF LAWACHARA NATIONAL PARK

Another major issue the participants discussed was the need for improved conservation of LNP. In addition to developing new Forest Department laws, regulations, and rules that would provide a legal basis to implement the co-management approach, and improved communication activities for relevant stakeholders, it was agreed that it is also important to build a sense of ownership among the stakeholders so that they feel that conservation is necessary in LNP for themselves and future generations.

Recommendations included:

- Strengthened role of Forest Department; increased vigilance on the part of field staff
- Increased logistical and training support
- Increased effectiveness and transparency of CMC
- Operationalize entry fee sharing
- Improved collaboration with other agencies (police, BDR, DC, etc.)
- Communication, outreach, awareness raising, social mobilization

CONCLUSION

The Consultative Meeting helped to bring out recommendations and suggestions that could help IPAC achieve its objectives for LN. Participants identified the necessary actions that concerned departments need to take. They shared their views and ideas with each other, which adds leverage to the co-management approach, and pointed out that it is still possible to conserve LNP – provided the concerned departments understand what needs to be done, and are ready to take the necessary actions.

“It has taken a long period of time to build up these community organizations, initiate the co-management approach, and to mobilize people. The democratic process has started and it is reflected in this meeting – and this force is mobilizing the communities,” Denise Rollins, Mission Director, USAID/Bangladesh noted at the close of the Meeting.

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