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INTEGRATED PROTECTED AREA CO-MANAGEMENT (IPAC)

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

August, 2009

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AUGUST 04, 2009

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Introduction

The Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project provides technical advisory services and other support to GOB environment, forestry and fisheries agencies and key stakeholders engaged in the further development and scaling up of the collaborative management or co-management of Protected Areas (PA) in Bangladesh. IPAC is designed to contribute to sustainable natural resource management and enhanced biodiversity conservation in targeted landscapes with the goal of preserving the natural capital of Bangladesh while promoting equitable economic growth and strengthening environmental governance. IPAC is being implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, through a consortium of partners led by International Resources Group.

IPAC project includes the Sylhet Region in northeastern Bangladesh as one of its five clusters. With support from IPAC, field teams have been organized to extend support for co-management in the following Protected Areas: 1) Lawachara National park ii) Khadimnagar National Park iii) Satchuri National Park IV) Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary VI) Tanguar Haor and VII) Hakaluki Haor.

Lawachara National Park (LNP) is bisected by a major road, as well as the train line leading from Dhaka to Sylhet. The Park is easily accessible by road from Sreemongal, and is a popular destination for nature tours organized to the tea estates and natural areas of the region. The Sreemongal town and adjacent areas also include a number of sawmills and furniture making businesses. Brickfields are less of a threat than in the case of some other Protected Areas such as Teknaf. Because of its size, elevation and proximity to the Hail Haor and other wetlands, the watershed protection functions are critically important.

The LNP has come under intense pressure and is liable to over-exploitation and non-sustainable use from uncontrolled tourism and recreational visitors (picnicking, loud music, litter, unguided walks); illicit felling including extraction of high value teak logs and other hardwoods, daily harvesting of fuel wood and other minor forest products and encroachment for agricultural development. To help address these situations and improve the management status of LNP, IPAC organized a consultative meeting with relevant policy makers, Government departments, local administration, corporal sectors and local communities. During the discussions, a number of important findings and recommendations emerged which can usefully orient and consolidate support for a range of actions aimed at the improved management of LNP.

Program Objectives

A. *Objectives of the event:*

- ❑ To provide a forum to gather the views and suggestions of representatives from all concerned groups to better conserve the LNP;
- ❑ To discuss key issues related to the conservation of this important repository of biodiversity for Bangladesh; and
- ❑ To arrive at a consensus on how to address the most pressing issues threatening the integrity and value of LNP.

B. *Expected achievements of the event*

- ❑ Raise awareness with managers and decision makers on the significance and diversity of the resources of the Lawachara landscape, and priorities for conservation and opportunities for increased local socio-economic benefits; and

- Identify practical and effective measures to improve and sustain the co-management of LNP, including strengthened national government and local level commitment and priority interventions for IPAC.

Distinguished Participants

Vice Principal Abdus Shahid, Honorable Chief Whip of Bangladesh Parliament; Abdul Momin Talukder, Member of Parliament & Chairperson, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment & Forest; His Excellency James F. Moriarty, the Ambassador of the United States of America in Bangladesh; Ambassador Lauren Moriarty; Dr. Mihir Kanti Mazumder, Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forest; Denise Rollins, Chief of USAID and distinguish participants from different GOB agencies, business entrepreneurs, civil society organizations and members of co-management organizations (Annex 1, List of Participants).

Main Discussions

IPAC Overview by Bob Winterbottom, Chief of Party, IPAC

In his context setting introductory remarks, the IPAC COP recognized the role of all of the technical and strategic partners of the project including GOB agencies, NGOs, local communities in facilitating the development of a successful co-management strategy for both wetland and forests. He remarked that in continuation of the USAID funded Nishorgo Support Project (NSP) and MACH, IPAC is scaling up co-management in 25 PAs sites including wetlands, forest and ecologically critical areas of the country. He commented on the main biophysical and social attributes of LNP, and noted its importance to the watershed of the Hail Haor basin, a biodiversity hotspot and an eco-destination with a significant number of tourists, which provides livelihood support to some 30,000 natural resource dependent rural households.



He then briefly commented on the dynamics of the park's landscape and the history of NSP interventions over the past five years (Annex 2, Background Note). The COP mentioned that USAID has supported the Forest Dept (FD) in their efforts to implement a co-management approach for conserving forest resources through a varieties of activities such as formation of CMCs and CPGs, sharing of responsibilities of stakeholders, support for livelihood improvement strategies, habitat restoration, strengthening of FD field staff capacity, visitor management, strengthening of value chains for promising conservation enterprises and facilitating of the preparation of Annual Development Plans by the CMCs.

Bob then presented data from two indicators used to monitor progress: bird survey and number of offense cases from the registrar of local FD office. In both cases, there have been demonstrated positive impacts on the Park's biodiversity (Annex 3: LNP Monitoring Data). However, he acknowledged that despite commendable progress over the past 5 years, LNP is still facing illegal harvesting of forest resources. He hoped for a meaningful dialogue among distinguished participants to ensure a transparent and accountable sharing of roles and responsibilities between government technical agencies, local communities and others aimed at more effective conservation of LNP, in tandem with expanded efforts to ensure equitable sharing of benefits with CPG members and others contributing to the co-management of LNP.

Major Activities of IPAC by Dr. Ram Sharma, DCOP, IPAC

Dr. Ram Sharma, IPAC DCOP, commented on the implementation of the Government approved management plan for LNP landscape demarcation and other activities that require urgent implementation. He mentioned that finalization of Park boundary demarcation will be done under IPAC. Dr. Sharma expressed his concern that although currently encroachment is not a major problem for LNP, in the future it may become a more serious threat, and he pointed out the necessity to ensure coordination between adjacent wildlife and territorial forest divisions of FD. The following issues were specifically highlighted:

- A number of activities were implemented under the USAID funded Nishorgo project including development of an approved management plan.
- A number of recommendations of the plan have been implemented during the implementation of Nishorgo project.
- Boundary demarcation for LNP has not yet been completed. The management committee is now fully operational and so it is now possible to complete pillar posting as has been done for Satchuri National Park.
- We need to select a core area first, and then buffer areas.
- We need to be careful about land encroachment as well as find out better ways to control illicit felling of trees.
- We need a strong coordination between territorial field staff and wildlife field staff of FD to control illicit felling at local level.

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

Concerns

- Illegal logging, illicit felling of trees and wood smuggling are increasing gradually.
- Encroachment of agriculture and settlement are problems for this area.
- According to section 8 of Sawmill License Rules 1998, no Sawmill can be established within 10 Km of a Protected Area. However, in the Pourashava area, Sreemongal and Komolganj Pourashavas are very close to Lawachara NP, and many sawmills exist in these 2 areas; they are the big threat.
- More than 30,000 people living in and around the LNP create tremendous pressure on LNP for fuel wood, timber and other forest products. This non-sustainable harvesting hampers bio-diversity, ecological balance, habitat and creates food scarcity for the endangered wildlife species.
- There are some private owned lemons or citrus gardens inside the LNP; they are a threat to LNP.
- Lack of coordination on the wildlife management; the gap exist between nature conservation division and territory division.
- This is insufficient coordination between the FD and the co-management committee; sometimes the CMC has no idea about the initiatives of FD.

- LNP is a favorite picnic spot. Tourist vehicle management and security is a problem, especially in the tourist season. Tourists will have to know, what they must do, or must not do. The detailed information & guidelines have to be displayed in strategic locations of LNP.

Recommendations:

- Need to amend irrelevant rules and regulations for the National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary and Game Reserve.
- LNP has a number of entry points that hamper its safety. So, demarcation of boundaries and protection are needed, especially for core zone and buffer areas.
- Awareness building movement, realistic initiatives & motivational works need to be done with local representatives, government officials, user groups, local elites, resource owing groups, ethnic community, law enforcing agency, community leaders and other representatives.
- The concerned license issuing authorities should be strict and formulate a strong legal framework to regulate timber traders, furniture shops, brickfields, sawmills, etc.
- Achieving political consensus against smuggling of timber is an urgent requirement.
- The stakeholders, neighbors, hard core poor and jobless have no source of income but are totally depending on the forest. They need assistance, such as: proper training, financial help for starting Alternative Income Generating Activities (chicken rearing, goat fattening, milk cow management, vegetable gardening, small cottage industries, micro-nursery enterprises, homestead and social forestry, bamboo replication enterprises, cooperative activities, craft production, eco-tourism, etc).
- Income from PA must be distributed properly and transparently for the development of community people and stakeholders. It will motivate Community Patrolling Groups and lead to a sustainable forest conservation approach which will continue after finishing IPAC project.
- Introducing Corporate Social Responsibility Program in support of conservation of LNP and sustainable development of surrounding communities.
- Promotion of ecotourism, improve visitor management, human resource management, development of cooperation between the tour operator & relevant companies.
- Introduce proper selection process of CMCs and CPGs members. It should be taken as a priority of the IPAC program. Sustainable conservation financing is needed to accelerate functioning of CMCs and CPGs.
- Involve the local stakeholders, community members, community patrolling groups, forest user groups in tree plantations on the basis of benefit sharing along UP roads and other roads in the landscape zones, and also on highways that are properly maintained by the Roads & Highway and NCD.
- Control Sawmill and Brickfield licenses in PAs.

Shimona Quazi, Researcher

Concerns

- Illegal felling of forest trees is a serious problem.

Recommendations

- Strict enforcement of existing forest laws, rules and forest acts can prevent further losses through controlling of illegal poaching.
- Provide adequate logistic support to the FD.
- Political will can be activated within the existing system to control Sawmills.
- Local people should be involved in the whole process.

Mahbubur Rahman, DFO, Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division

Concerns

- Without involving local people, forest management is impossible; considering this point IPAC is progressing well. They are working with formation and promotion of co-management councils, committees and community patrol groups.
- Illicit felling can be controlled through CMCs.

Vice Principle Abdus Shahid, Chief Whip, Bangladesh Parliament



Concerns

- Political commitment is necessary to protect LNP.
 - FD and UNO's role is insufficient to control the illegal logging.
 - Shortage of manpower and logistics of FD.
 - Lack of coordination between forest divisions and wildlife territorial wings of FD.
 - CMC is a very important institution and we need to be careful during selection of CMC members.
 - Appreciate the assistance of US government.
 - Lack of technical capacity to manage forests by Government officers.
 - Need revision and application of new social forestry rules and laws.
 - Climate Change is a very important issue which is affecting us.
- The IPAC Co-Management Committee is not working very well because deforestation is still happening.
 - Relevant laws are not sufficient to prevent sawmill installation and brick manufacturers.
 - Environment Conservation Act, 1995 has empowered the government to declare the areas which are ecologically critical. The Ministry of Environment and Forest has already declared eight areas as critical.
 - The ministry of FD, the social elites, the political parties needs to decide how to protect the forests, wild animals by the assistance of specialists.
 - The land is becoming barren because wood and timber is being removed from the forest areas by the illegal fellers.
 - People always complain against forest officials, and rich people who do not provide adequate support for the protection of forests.

Recommendations

- The forest areas should be well fenced by FD staff.
- The FD field staffs who are assigned forest protection duties must be well equipped. They should be more vigilant in their duties, as compared to others, and they need to be recognized.

- We need to work for the betterment of poor people and there is a need to create some business and small loan opportunities to improve their lives.

Commitments

- We should consider afforestation in all the degraded forest areas.
- Political commitment exists for this IPAC program. Formulation of required policies, legislation, laws in favour of biodiversity conservation will be discussed in upcoming parliamentary session.
- A general discussion under the Rule 147 can be initiated in the Parliament by the Chairman of the Environment & Forest Parliamentary Committee.
- I request my colleague (the Chairman of the Environment & Forest Parliament Committee) to raise this concern in the next parliamentary session.
- Let us introduce and implement the Environment Conservation Act, 1995. If we are able to implement this Act sincerely, I think it will help preserve the Park's biodiversity.
- We can formulate Acts & Laws and the Secretary can help in formulating and implementing those acts & laws.
- I can assure people that I can render all sorts of help to keep the forest intact.

Mr. Rafiqur Rahman, President of Lawachara Co-management committee

Concerns

- No way to prevent illegal loggers.
- FD is getting support from all stakeholders for planning and patrolling.
- CMC is a democratically elected body and has representations from all stakeholders.
- CMC led Community Patrol Groups (CPGs) and FD can control illicit felling with the support of CMC.

Recommendations

- Adequate livelihood support should be provided to the CPGs and CMCs; identified challenges should be taken care of; otherwise this success may not be sustained.
- Voluntary services for a longer period by the poor forest dependent people cannot be expected; some livelihood support is necessary.
- In some cases FD and CMC arrested illicit fellers but within a short period they were bailed out from the jail. CMC needs support from law enforcement agencies and from the judiciary.
- Project management should give adequate attention to the decisions of monthly meetings of CMCs.
- After formation of the CPG, the guards received access to enter any area in the forests and they have no problem to take trees from the feller's house also.
- Without support of local people it is not possible to protect forests by the Forest officials. The illegal fellers can be identified now. The way the trees are taken out and the paths and timings used needs to be identified.

- The support provided by Nishorgo and IPAC is not enough; more monetary support is necessary to improve livelihood of the surrounding communities of LNP. We need to think about how the poor can be rehabilitated, and how their alternate livelihoods can be provided.
- There were three Patrol parties. Earlier, we supported them with some money. However, for the last 1.5-2 years, we are unable to provide them with any form of help. How long these poor people can help us voluntarily? Still though, they are helping us.
- The law enforcing agencies can play a vital role. Their support is essential. When a Forest Official arrests an illicit feller, in a very short time, he gets released. There is no result regarding the efforts of Forest officials and Community Patrol Groups.
- To protect the forest, support is required from the Civil Society, Police Force and Judiciary. It is not only the Co-Management Committee and the Forest Department -- we need to work together to preserve our culture and protect the forest.
- Need to consider local level decisions at a higher/national level. If this does not happen, then there will be no output because there is no representative from the Co-Management Committee at the higher level. We have sent minutes of the meeting to them but it is yet to be taken care of.
- If the authorities take necessary steps about the problems that we have identified through our meetings, then we believe that trees won't be felled anymore.

Mr. Samsul Haq, CMC member and Owner of Nishorgo Nirob Eco-cottage

Concerns

- Since 2008, NSP has been contributing in the development of eco-tourism and providing financial assistance to the CMC.
- He hopes IPAC would assist more local youth in conservation enterprises.
- More effort is needed to provide security to the tourists of his eco-cottage. To maintain the security of the tourists, laws and regulations are required here in order to mitigate problems.
- Eco-tourism is a good business. The support that was provided by Nishorgo to initiate this business was very beneficial for them.

Recommendations

- Need to abolish '*free labour*' system of FD and to improve law and order situation for the safety of tourists.
- I was able to take a loan from the Bank because I had some connection with them. People who will be interested to do eco-tourism business may need help regarding the loan procedure of a bank.
- Issuing a Government circular to the concerned departments may help to stop the illegal activities in Lawachara.

Shaymol Kumar Nath, Additional Superintendent of Police

Concerns

- Illegal transportation of timber is happening in Lawachara.

- We have motivated the forest employees.
- If we establish check posts which include forest officers and local community people, then it would be more effective.

Recommendations

- We need to build up networking with those who will be involved to save the Lawachara National Park.
- More manpower and equipment are needed for the FD.
- More check posts and Rail Police and Community Police should be added to assist FD.
- Trains should be stopped in the station only, not elsewhere; otherwise, it often facilitates illegal transportation of logs/timber.
- Need poverty reduction initiatives in and around the LNP through providing Alternate Income Generation.
- Should start an awareness building and motivational program.

Major Raqibul Hasan, Battalion Commander, Bangladesh Rifles

Recommendations

- Blaming poor people is not the real solution, rather timber traders, owners of furniture stores and local influential people need to be checked.
- FD could raise a boundary wall around the LNP to ensure protection. We can raise a boundary wall around the LNP and I think our partner USAID can help us.
- BDR provides physical protection but the forest department is issuing the permits that need some modification. Permits can be duplicated and it needs some modernization. It will help the police or other law enforcing agency to identify the offender correctly.
- Security aspect we like to request USAID to provide night vision goggles and thermal device those are not very costly but useable. USAID can provide some capacity building training to our security guards.

Commitments

- We have to build up good relationships with the local communities.
- The police agencies can establish check post at strategic points in the forest.
- We can check the railway compartment with the help of the Rail Police and we have to ensure the stoppage in the rail station, not elsewhere.

Mr. Akhter Ahmed Chowdhury, President, Truck Owners' Association

Concern

- Involvement of Truck Owners is very low regarding transportation of illegal timbers because Transit Pass (TP) has been issued by FD. They ensure TP for loading a truck for transportation.

Recommendation

- To control the illegal logging, the checking process could be strengthened by the police and FD.

Mr. Gopal Dev Chowdhury, Journalist and Vice Chairman

Concerns

- Trees in the Lawachara National Park and other Protected Areas in Sylhet are being stolen in collaboration with the Loggers Association. This is the main income of their livelihood. There is a problem with those syndicates who have been financing illegal felling.
- Lawachara CMC has been performing as a watchdog for a long time. Illicit felling is possible to control and the media can play a positive role to stop this practice. During the last five years, there has been significant damage to the forest. About Tk. 4.50 crore has come from the plantations of Lawachara forests.
- Syndicates of timber traders with local miscreants are involved in poaching forest produces. Since forest guards are few in number and without modern firearms, they cannot prevent armed gangs. Although, in some cases, with the assistance from local Police and BDR Forest Guards, they have seized forest products and sent miscreants to the jail. But they are often bailed out and then continue illicit logging. However, reliable facts and figure of illicit logging are not published by FD. It is difficult to assess the number of trees and its worth in the forest.

Recommendations

- Government should ban using Teak, Koroi, Acacia and Garjan trees for the next 10 years.
- Strongly implement the Forest Act/Law. Improve the equipment of Forest Guards. Provide them with modern weapons/arms. Terminate any person linked to the Illegal Fellers Association.
- Restrict saw mills within 20 miles around the Protected Area. Cancel all the licences that violate this rule. Create a policy/rule for furniture sellers to maintain a register regarding the source of their wood.
- Make IPAC's role more practical on Environment and Biodiversity conservation. Ensure transparency in the activities of the Co-Management Committee in order to reinforce social pressures for conserving forests.
- The Community Patrolling Groups and the Forest Guards should be accountable to the Co-Management Committee. Strengthen the coordination between CMC and local administration, especially local agencies for law and order.
- Ensure protection of the core zone through provision for beneficiaries in buffer plantations. Support appropriate Alternate Income Generating Activities (AIGAs) for CPG members, including participation in buffer plantations in the forest reserves.

- Keep records of all sorts of illegal felling of trees from the LNP and ensure monthly reporting. Ensure required support from territorial forest to the wildlife division. Provide training to FD personnel to deal with forest cases.

Mr. Younus Ali, Conservator of Forests, Central Circle, Dhaka

Concerns

- Law enforcement approach does not work in LNP.
- Nationwide, 65,000 forest cases are still pending and this needs an immediate solution.
- Support for AIG activities is necessary for the hard core poor to conserve eco-systems.
- The Forestry Rule 1927 and 1878 does not bring good results.

Recommendations

- To protect open resources of LNP, we have to address local poverty first.
- We need more financial support for providing appropriate AIG activities for forest dependent population; USAID assistance is necessary.
- We also need sustained political commitment for the protection of forest resources, which often retreats during political transitions.
- A sense of ownership needs to be developed among the key stakeholders and sustainable livelihoods need to be ensured for dependent communities to protect LNP.
- Co-management is a new but effective approach.
- A consensus is required between local people and political leaders.
- To maintain transparency, detailed information showing number of arrested person, status of trees felling, should be available on a monthly basis.

Ms. Ambalika Dev Borma, representative from Dolubari Tipra community

Concern

- She appreciated Nishorgo interventions to promote their weaving, craft production and cultural performances through training.

Recommendations

- They request more training for weaving and assistance with linking to the market.
- Electricity supply is a necessary requirement for the Tipra community.
- A boundary wall is needed to protect LNP.

M. Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Additional Secretary of Economic Relation Division

Concern

- Relevant ministries should work in collaboration with IPAC to maintain accountability. The government is also accountable to the public.

Recommendations

- Development partners need to review what percentage of taxpayers' money is spent for poor communities and what percentage is for consultants. Mobilize adequate funds to give priority to livelihood development programs for rural communities.
- 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.
- Provision should not only be made for training; funds also need to be mobilized as loans for business investments. IPAC and other projects have done some work like this. Different medicinal plants can be planted. Develop ownership among the stakeholders.
- If any government official is found to be corrupt, or has links with illegal fellers, then he/she needs to be caught. That person needs to be penalized at the highest level in accordance with the law.
- Many Government officials do not want to work with risk – but if anyone wishes to do ensure support for them, honest and patriotic Government officials can have opportunities and take courage to work. Political commitment and involvement of the Government -- these two things need to be balanced, considering their inter-relationships.
- There should not be any Saw Mill within 10 miles of the forest area. The Government and local representatives should be responsible for implementing this.

Md. Mofizul Islam, Deputy Commissioner, Moulavibazar

Concerns

- The conservation of LNP is important for local environment and to address the environmental challenges of this country. Unfortunately, this forest is being degraded for various reasons which already have been discussed.
- The District administration can mobilize the courts and take legal actions against illegal encroachment of forestlands. District administration is in a strong position to take legal action if any offence occurs under Forest Act. And we are all in position to take legal action if there is any offence under the Bangladesh Wildlife Preservation Order.
- I express my gratitude to the authorities of USAID for providing this support through IPAC.

Recommendations

- A comprehensive development program is necessary for local dwellers through motivation and livelihood support. We should have motivational work for those who are involved in illicit falling. It may be public servants, and it may be village dwellers who are living around the forest. Only law enforcement may not be enough to stop these fellers. We need to provide job opportunities for them.
- Some concrete guidance is required to protect natural resources of LNP and for the nation as a whole. Forests play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance and protecting biodiversity. Moulavibazar district has significant forests and wildlife resources.

Commitments

- We can develop an action plan and implement it to improve LNP.
- If we receive a proposal from the Forest Department to protect against the encroachment of the forest, we are ready to take necessary actions by conducting a mobile court.
- It is already understood that for the sake of our existence we should protect this Lawachara National Park.

Abdul Momin Talukder, Member of Parliament and Chairperson, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment & Forests

Concerns

- He respectively invites all of the Politicians; members of Parliament to LNP -- then they will come forward to adopt appropriate measures for environmental protection.
- He considers LNP as a unique biological treasure of Bangladesh; he is prepared to assist the Government in conservation endeavors.
- Lawachara National Park is a huge resource. We need to protect this resource at any cost. We need to arrange meetings to create awareness among people.
- It is not possible to protect the forests by the existing Forest guards. I believe the initiative that has been taken through USAID, through IPAC and through people's participation is very significant. We can protect the forest through this initiative.

Recommendations

- Need to create an awareness and motivation about conservation of forest. Always need to present accurate data by the development partners.
- Need to increase human resources of FD and ensure necessary policy supports to conserve LNP resources.

Commitments

- Our parliamentary standing committee is committed to stop illegal felling of trees from all the forests including Lawachara National Park.
- All our Parliament Committee members agreed to work together to protect the forests and to free our environment from pollution.

Md. Abdul Motaleb, Chief Conservator of Forests

- FD has brought about a major shift in forest management whereby social forestry paved an arrangement for creation of forest and harvested benefits to be shared among the communities.
- Lawachara is a tropical forest; it has a unique ecosystem, which is developed after say at least 100 years of natural process. This achievement can be destroyed within 100 days, if not cared for properly.
- Recently, the FD has shifted from traditional management of forest to participatory arrangement. They are engaging the local people, especially the landless, the poor people under this participatory management.

- Livelihood improvement programme and AIGAs are considered to be very appropriate interventions of IPAC which can be adopted.
- Mass awareness of biodiversity conservation in wider platforms is needed.
- He gives assurance of being a more proactive manager and hopes for strong support from politicians and local administration to save the LNP.
- Poverty is the most toxic element on earth.
- FD is working to demarcate the forest areas. FD is harvesting forest products and sharing the benefit with people.
- FD have taken initiatives on co-management. The earnings from forests will be shared with the local people. Through this process the local people will feel that it is their property; definitely forest will be protected, and the situation will be improved.
- If FD can help to keep the forest habitat intact; and if wild animals get their food, habitat and breeding ground, definitely the wildlife will be protected, it will be restored naturally.
- Pressure on forests will be reduced if the surrounding people get alternative income, and more opportunities to work and maintain their livelihood. FD wants to involve people in a more intensive way, in a bigger way.
- Lawachara is a unique property, it is a unique ecosystem, it is the pride of the local people, it is the pride of our chief whip and he is the main guardian of the forest. If he wants it to be saved, it will be saved.
- I passed 30 years as a Government official and have been able to communicate to 5000 people maximum. But the honorable Chief Whip can reach one million people in a day. This is the difference between a Government officials and a Political Leader. Politicians can help to make Lawachara well known and popular and help to introduce it as a unique visiting place.

Ambassador James F. Moriarty, US Embassy

Concerns

- The Ambassador stated that he feels passionate about the environment and forestry.
- In his home state of Massachusetts, they have recovered from deforestation. In 1820, the forest cover of Massachusetts had declined to 20%, but by 2009 it had come back to 50% or 55% even though the population of the state had increased 2 to 3 times.
- If we all try together to tackle a problem, it can be solved. USAID and the US government are supporting IPAC because it's a good way to help the people of this country.
- When a forest disappears, human beings suffer; and now, we also have the added threats of climate change. The problem of deforestation in Bangladesh is compounded by a huge population.
- If there is no forest for your children or your grand children, they will suffer.



Commitments

- We will be with you; we do want to work with you. But the approach of IPAC is to recognize that it will be the wisdom of Bangladeshi that will solve these issues.
- I hear a great passion from the Chief Whip; I hear much wisdom from the comments of the Chief Conservator of Forestry; I feel the commitment from the people of the communities.
- I am very hopeful that IPAC can help the people of Bangladesh address these problems and make real progress for the communities.
- USAID will support Bangladesh to conserve its natural resources for future generations.

Ambassador Lauren Moriarty

Comments

- This consultative process is witnessing democracy in action -- and tackling a very difficult challenge.
- The answer is not so easy. It is not easy in any country. But what do I see? I see a process that is trying to bring people together so everyone can help come up with a solution. And it makes me hopeful and makes me proud that the United States of America can do a small part to help in this process.

Dr. Mihir Kanti Mazumder, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests

Comments and Concerns

- Bangladesh is not a poor country; rather it is a bio-rich nation.
- Our huge population is a problem, and inattention to ethics and frequent natural calamities have made us backward.
- A huge rural population is dependent on natural resources; as a result, if poverty increases, then forest resources will decrease.
- There are some successes through the USAID financed Nishorgo program like involving Community Patrolling Groups to control illicit tree felling.
- We have significant examples of commitment to protect our forests, such as the late Rafiqul Islam – of Shilkhali who sacrificed his life for forest protection.
- He thanked the organizers for such a fruitful meeting in which leaders of all stakeholders had an opportunity to interact.

Commitments

- Initiate more people-centered forestry programs like participatory forestry in both core and buffer areas of the protected areas.
- Develop co-management rules; reclaim encroached lands for distribution among communities.

- Distribute 50% of the revenue from eco-tourism for community development and maintenance of our eco-system.

Denise Rollins, Mission Director, USAID/Bangladesh

Comments and Concerns

- 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.
- It is important to continue dialogue with all stakeholders to make co-management a successful endeavour. Different issues have been discussed like illegal logging and corruption. Solutions will come out if all the persons - the villagers, community and everyone participates in the democratic process.
- Livelihood is the key component to address poverty. I appreciate the engagement of women in all development activities. Different kinds of AIGAs are now operating in the communities without extracting forest resources, and that is a good indication.
- More suggestions are required from the audience on other kinds of income generating activities that will help the communities. This is because we recognize that poverty is the base of all illegal activities.
- It is necessary to continue this type of dialogue to improve our IPAC program; we feel this is how we can help the people of Bangladesh to manage natural resources more effectively for their future.

Commitments

- President Obama is committed to assist in protecting the environment, improving the management of natural resources and addressing climate change. Our commitment is to support Bangladesh to carry out these types of activities.
- The US government and USAID are also committed to help you to improve the democratic process of Bangladesh. We are looking forward to engaging with communities around the country, not only with those around the Lawachara National Park.

Mr. Asif Shaikh, President of IRG, Washington, D.C.

- Democracy in action is appreciable. This dialogue is a great beginning for the local communities, implementing partners and people of Bangladesh to all emerge as winners.
- A major lesson learned from this dialogue is that without addressing the livelihood needs of dependent rural communities, the protection of natural resources is not possible.

Conclusion

Through a participatory and consultative process, the different concerns, recommendations and commitments came out from the different speakers. The statements showed many positive indications of support to achieve the expected results of the IPAC program – and to control illegal felling, increase livelihood support for local communities and to conserve LNP. Based on the recommendations of this consultative meeting, the identified actions and commitments by the concerned departments and responsible persons should ultimately help this country to protect and conserve LNP and to institutionalize a sustainable system of integrated co-management of protected forest and wetlands areas.

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Annex 2: Background Note

Consultative Meeting on Conservation and Co-management of the Lawachara National Park - Sreemongal, 4:30 – 6:30 pm - August, 4, 2009

Goals and Objectives of IPAC

The Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project provides technical advisory services and other support to GOB environment, forestry and fisheries agencies and key stakeholders engaged in the further development and scaling up of the collaborative management or co-management of protected areas in Bangladesh. IPAC is designed to contribute to sustainable natural resource management and enhanced biodiversity conservation in targeted landscapes with the goal of preserving the natural capital of Bangladesh while promoting equitable economic growth and strengthening environmental governance. IPAC is being implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, through a consortium of partners led by International Resources Group.¹

USAID's Environment Program in the Sylhet Region

USAID's Integrated Protected Area Co-management (IPAC) project includes the Sylhet Region in northeastern Bangladesh as one of its five clusters. The Sylhet Cluster includes three pilot sites targeted by the Nishorgo Support Project (2003-2008): Lawachara National Park, Rema-Kalenga National Park and Satchari Wildlife Sanctuary. It also includes one of three pilot sites established by the MACH project (1999-2008) – Hail Haor, which includes the Baika Beel sanctuary. With support from IPAC, field teams are being organized to extend support for co-management of additional Protected Areas in this Cluster, including another relatively small National Park of the Forest Department located near Sylhet city – Khadimnagar National Park, and two very large wetland areas: Tanguar Haor and Hakaluki Haor. Tanguar Haor is one of the largest remaining inland capture fisheries areas of Bangladesh and an internationally recognized RAMSAR wetland site. Hakaluki Haor is one of 8 designated Ecologically Critical Areas (ECA) in Bangladesh.

With support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and others, the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh has been supporting environmental education programs in and around Lawachara and Satchari National Parks, with a particular focus on conservation of the threatened hoolock gibbon. Chevron has also contributed support to environmental impact assessments carried out in conjunction with the seismic testing, exploration and expansion of gas fields in and around Lawachara National Park.

State of the Lawachara National Park:

Lawachara National Park is widely regarded as the “crown jewel” of the network of national parks, game reserves and wildlife sanctuaries managed by the Nishorgo Program of the Forest Dept. Covering 1250 hectares of relatively dense and tall forest, it is one of the larger Forest Dept protected areas, outside of the Sundarbans and Chittagong Hill Tracts protected areas. It was first established as a Reserved Forest, and managed through periodic cutting, harvesting and sale of timber by the Forest Dept, and reforestation. Teak, jarul and moluccana are the dominant plantation species, and forest villages were established by the Forest Dept to assist with the establishment and maintenance of these plantations. Lawachara is one of the wettest areas of Bangladesh, and with high rainfall and fertile forest soils, the forest growth is luxuriant when protection is assured.

¹ In addition to IRG, the IPAC team partners include: WWF-US, dTS, East West Center, ELI, Epler-Wood International, WorldFish Center, CIPD, RDRS, CODEC, BELA, Asiatic Communications, Oasis Transformation, Module Architects, Independent University of Bangladesh and Jahangirnagar University.

Over time, with continued protection from encroachment and as a result of natural regeneration, some plantations have gradually reverted to mixed stands of indigenous forest species. As a result, Lawachara has been able to conserve significant populations of wildlife and birds. The flora and fauna of Lawachara include 460 species, including 167 species of plants, 4 amphibians, 6 reptiles, 246 birds, 20 mammals and 17 insect species. Most significantly, Lawachara is now a critically important habitat for the surviving population of hoolock gibbon. In 1970, primate census studies reported several thousands of gibbons in Bangladesh throughout a number of residual natural forests. Some 3000 gibbons were reported in 1982, and that population had dwindled to less than 300 by 1992. In some protected forests such as Chunoti, entire populations disappeared as the forest was cut down. Currently, largely as a result of loss of habitat and poaching, about 200 hoolock gibbons survive in 22 locations, twenty of which have less than 20 individuals; the remaining populations could collapse in a few short years if trends are not reversed.

The National Park is bisected by a major road, as well as the train line leading from Dhaka to Sylhet. It is surrounded by tea estates, additional areas of Reserved Forests which are still being logged and rice fields. It includes two forest villages with communities of Khasia ethnic minorities: Magurchara Punji and Lawachara Punji. Adjoining the SW boundary of the park, the Tripura tribal villages depend on cultivation of pineapples and lemons, along with cloth weaving. Within the impact zone of Lawachara National Park (5 kms), there are 20 communities with a combined population of 30,000. The Park is easily accessible by road from Sreemongal, and is a popular destination for tours organized to the tea estates and natural areas of the region. The Sreemongal town and adjacent areas also include a number of sawmills and furniture making businesses. Brickfields are less of a threat than in the case of some other Protected Areas such as Teknaf. Because of its size, elevation and proximity to the Hail Haor and other wetlands, the watershed protection functions of Lawachara National Park are also critically important.

The Park is under intense pressure and liable to over-exploitation and non-sustainable use from:

- uncontrolled tourism and recreational visitors (picnicking, loud music, litter, unguided walks);
- illicit felling and extraction of high value teak logs and other hardwoods
- daily harvesting of fuelwood and other minor forest products
- encroachment for agricultural development

USAID funded support for co-management of Lawachara National Park

Over the past five years, with support from Nishorgo Support Project, and in the past year with continuing support from IPAC, USAID has funded a number of interventions designed to address these pressures and threats to conservation of biodiversity in Lawachara, while improving the socio-economic well-being of the surrounding communities and building the capacity of the Forest Dept to implement a program of co-management with targeted communities. A comprehensive list of those interventions is available in Annex I.

Despite these interventions, a number of issues remain and several serious threats to the sustainable conservation of Lawachara have not yet been fully resolved. These include:

- Resurgence of illicit felling and encroachment
- Insufficiently equipped and trained Forest Dept field staff
- Inadequate coordination between FD, CMC and law enforcement agencies such as BDR and Police
- Insufficient capacity and interventions to adequately manage increasing numbers of visitors
- Insufficient physical demarcation of boundaries of LNP

These challenges will be discussed at the Consultative Meeting in order to arrive at a consensus on follow-up actions by the Government, communities and others.

Annex I

Summary of USAID funded Interventions at Lawachara National Park

- Organization of a Co-management Council and Committee
- Drafted and gained official approval of a Lawachara National Park Landscape Management Plan;
- Prepared and printed brochures summarizing a Forest Landscape Restoration Plan for Lawachara – to target areas for restoration and for increased involvement of local communities in gaining benefits from social forestry plantations
- Support for 250 hectares of buffer zone, enrichment, wildlife fruit and fodder plantations to restore degraded areas, improve wildlife habitat and generate local benefits
- Organized participatory monitoring of selected indicator bird species, to assess progress in conserving biodiversity; several species showed an increase in populations, particularly in the understory, as daily harvesting of fuelwood was reduced; birds dependent on upper story canopy habitats have not increased – owing to continued illicit felling of tall trees
- Provision of applied research grants for social science researchers to investigate and report on issues related to local livelihoods and governance
- Assistance to Community Patrolling Groups to control illicit felling and encroachment
- Training and other support to Forest User Groups and Federations engaged in Alternative Income Generating and conservation enterprise activities, including tree seedling nurseries, milk cows, cloth weaving
- Provision of small grants through a Landscape Development Fund
- Support for construction of improved cook stoves to reduce fuelwood consumption
- Support for Eco-tourism Development Planning and associated training for Forest Dept officials
- Support for training of Forest Dept field staff, including forest guards, beat and range officers
- Training and organization of locally recruited eco-guides
- Establishment of a network of Eco-cottages through co-funding, technical support and training of owners / operators
- Targeted support and training to ethnic minorities to assist with expanded production and specialized product development of hand woven cloths
- Support for awareness raising and park visits by Scouts, students, civil society and others
- Development of a network of visitor trails and funding of interpretive signs
- Funding of infrastructure development needed by the Forest Dept to strengthen park conservation and to implement co-management , including refurbishing of CMC offices, new FD offices, student dormitory and other facilities
- Organization of a design competition and Public Private Partnership to fund the construction of a Nature Interpretive Center
- Organization of outreach and communication activities with local government authorities, elites, community leaders, businesses and others
- Publication of “Images from the Wild – travels through Five Nishorgo Forests” to raise awareness of the beauty, importance and ongoing threats to protected forests
- Assessment of the institutional sustainability of CMC
- Organization of Sylhet Cluster Inception Workshop to present IPAC goals, co-management strategy and work plan objectives and to take stock of local priorities and recommendations
- Completion of updated Participatory Rural Appraisal / Rapid Rural Appraisal site level assessment of priority interventions
- Assistance to CMC with preparation of Annual Development Plans
- Organization of lessons learned workshop to review experience and lessons learned from forest and wetland protected area co-management
- Approval of entry fee retention policies and guidelines with provision for reserving 50% of park entry fees to support co-management activities managed by CMC

IPAC strategy and project support for Conservation and Co-management of Lawachara National Park

The basic co-management strategy for Lawachara will continue to include support in four critical areas:

- 1) **social mobilization** and empowerment of forest users, local communities and civil society in a collaborative framework with Forest Dept and local authorities, of power sharing and improved, accountable, transparent and democratic **governance**
- 2) expanded support for poverty reduction, alternative income generation and **increased economic benefits** to local users and co-managers investing in habitat restoration, conservation enterprises and co-management – through **partnerships with private sector** and market-led, strengthening of targeted value chains
- 3) technical support, training and capacity building for **landscape level planning and land use zoning**, and implementation of **improved natural resource management** practices aimed at habitat restoration, sustainable use, increased resource productivity and more effective protection and conservation of biodiversity
- 4) strengthening of **communications and development outreach**, through consultative meetings, workshops, mass communications, popular theater, films and documentaries and implementation of IPAC communications strategy

Potential actions that could be supported by IPAC include assistance with the following:

- Demarcate core protected areas (in 1250 of LNP) and buffer zones, including co-managed areas of 1336 ha of adjacent reserved forest
- Divert population pressures and non-sustainable use from core protected areas to more intensively managed and sustainable use areas of buffer zones
- Mobilize PPP and private investment in core restoration and enrichment plantations and buffer zone sustainable use plantations for production of fuelwood, timber and non-timber forest products
- Promote increased political commitment to reduce abuse of authority, and to increase transparency, accountability and commitment to co-management in support of IPAC goals and targeted results
- Support application of revised Social Forestry Rules
- Clarify rights and address concerns of ethnic minorities, women, poor and other targeted stakeholders; reinforce their participation and increase their level of economic benefits in association with their support for conservation and co-management
- Revamp organization and operations of community patrolling groups
- Increase accountability and transparency of CMC and FD
- Explore prospects for carbon forestry and associated financing in Lawachara landscape

Annex 3: LNP Monitoring Data – Bird Surveys and Illegal Felling

Indicator Bird Monitoring

Participatory bird survey was taken under Nishorgo Support Project (NSP) as the tool to assess the management impacts of NSP in five protected areas, situated in the northeast and southeast of Bangladesh. Unlike animals of other taxa, birds are more visible and more responsive to any change. Therefore, birds were taken as the indicators of the ecological changes of their habitats.

The participatory survey started in 2005 and continued each year up to 2008. The fieldwork continued from February to August (about 30 observation-days in the field). The members of Bangladesh Bird Club (BBC) and the local communities living around these sites had actively participated in the surveys. Strip transects sampling and opportunistic survey methods were followed in the field.

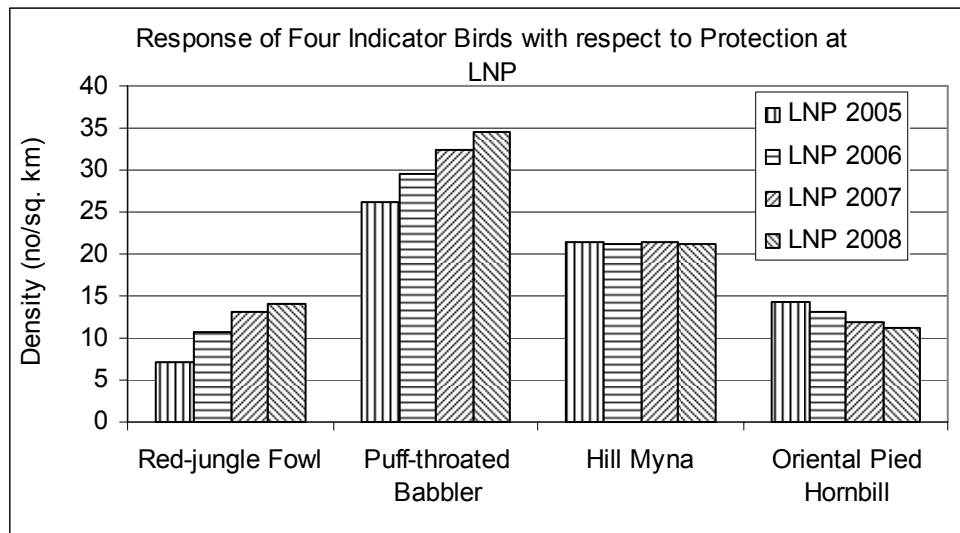
Eight species of primarily forest birds were taken as indicators and their population densities (no. of individuals/km²) in each of the five protected areas were estimated (Table 1). These eight species were suggested on a meeting of bird experts, based on a set of criteria put forward by NSP. These criteria were: 1) they are primarily forest birds, 2) they live in different strata of the forest, 3) they are noisy birds (least likely to miss during the counts), 4) they are breeding residents and 5) they have communication value. Since all the eight indicator birds are primarily forest-dwellers, it was assumed that the improvement or degradation of the forest condition will have a direct impact on the feeding and breeding of the indicator species, which in turn will be reflected in the change of the population density of these species.

Table 1. Eight indicator bird species of different strata of the forest

Sl. No.	English Name	Scientific Name	Forest Stratum Where it Lives
1	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	Lower
2	Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	Lower
3	White-crested Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>	Lower
4	Red-headed Trogon	<i>Harpactes erythrocephalus</i>	Middle
5	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	Middle
6	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	Middle
7	Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	Upper
8	Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>	Upper

When this year's density estimates were compared with those of the three previous years, it was found that two of the indicator birds (Red Junglefowl and Puff-throated Babbler) that live in the understory of the forest have been increased over the last four years. This indicates

that the forest understory has started regenerating, which increased the carrying capacity and nesting sites for these two species. The community patrolling, awareness programs and other activities by NSP played the key role in reducing the clearing of forest understory for firewood as well as reducing the hunting pressure.



This, however, should not be treated as an overall improvement of the forest condition, because the forest (particularly the tree cover) requires a long time to complete the regeneration process. Hence, the improved protection to the forests must continue. Moreover, the illegal logging of timber trees and conversion of natural forests to monoculture plantations and agricultural fields are still going on in some areas, which is probably causing the decline of the Oriental Pied Hornbill population. This bird lives in the top canopy and hence is severely affected if the large trees are removed from the forest. The densities of other five indicator birds remained more or less unchanged over the last four years.

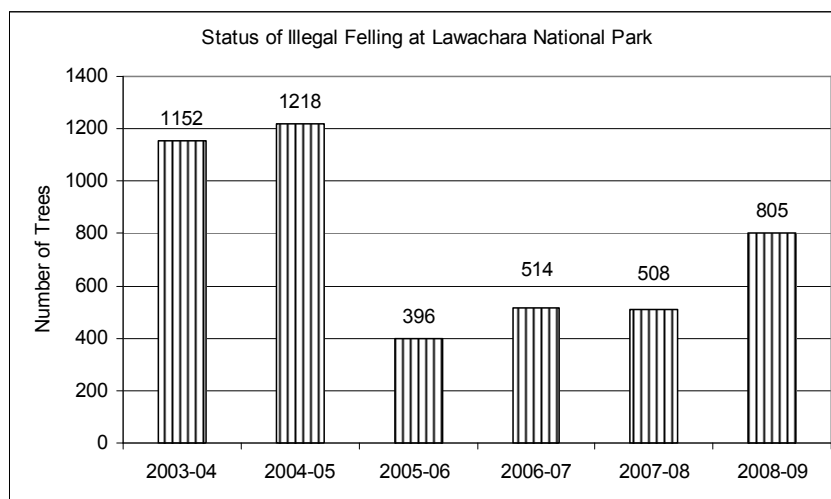
A total of 225 species of birds was recorded in five NSP sites, of which 190 (84%) were resident and the rest 35 (16%) migrant. Out of 225 species, 37 (17%) were Very Common, 65 (29%) Common, 41 (18%) Uncommon and 82 (36%) Rare. This shows that the largest proportion of birds is Rare, which requires monitoring and protection. Over the last three years no significant difference was found in the proportions of the number of species of primarily forest birds in relation to the total birds in any of the five NSP sites.

Illegal Felling Monitoring

The illegal felling was found to be the main threat to our Protected Areas based on the five Site Level Field Appraisal Reports (Mollah et al 2004a, b., Mollah and Kundu 2004, Mollah et al 2004 a, b). Thus illegal felling was selected as indicator of increased levels of protection resulting in part in improved capacity of FD and community groups actively participating in

the protection of the PA. The data was collected from Forest Department's Offence Register on a monthly basis.

Nishorgo started working in the field beginning of year 2004. So the data for financial year 2003-04 was taken as baseline year against which the subsequent year data is compared. From Beat Office, the data on number of cases and trees were taken. The baseline figures as well as subsequent years are shown in graphical and tabular format below.



Community patrolling started in early 2005 at Dalubari village (Dalubari Community Patrolling Group – 20 members initially, later 18 members), followed by two more patrolling groups, one group formed from community people from Baligaon and Baghmara villages and other group formed from villages like Kalapur, Sirajnagar, Lamua and Kakia bazar. Later women patrolling group was formed in end of 2006 involving women of Baligaon and Baghmara.

Group No	Group Name	Group Type	Member	Coverage
1	Dalubari	Male	18	Southern part of NP, on both side of Srimongol Kamalganj road, west up to railway line, NE up to Fulbari camp.
2	Baligaon and Baghmara	Male	20	Northern part of NP, from Fulbari camp to Baghmara, along with trail up to Beat Office.
3	Baligaon and Baghmara	Female	20	Outside of NP, along the boarder of Baghmanra and Baligaon.
4	Chautali	Male	18	Chautali Beat
	4 groups	3 male, 1 female	76	

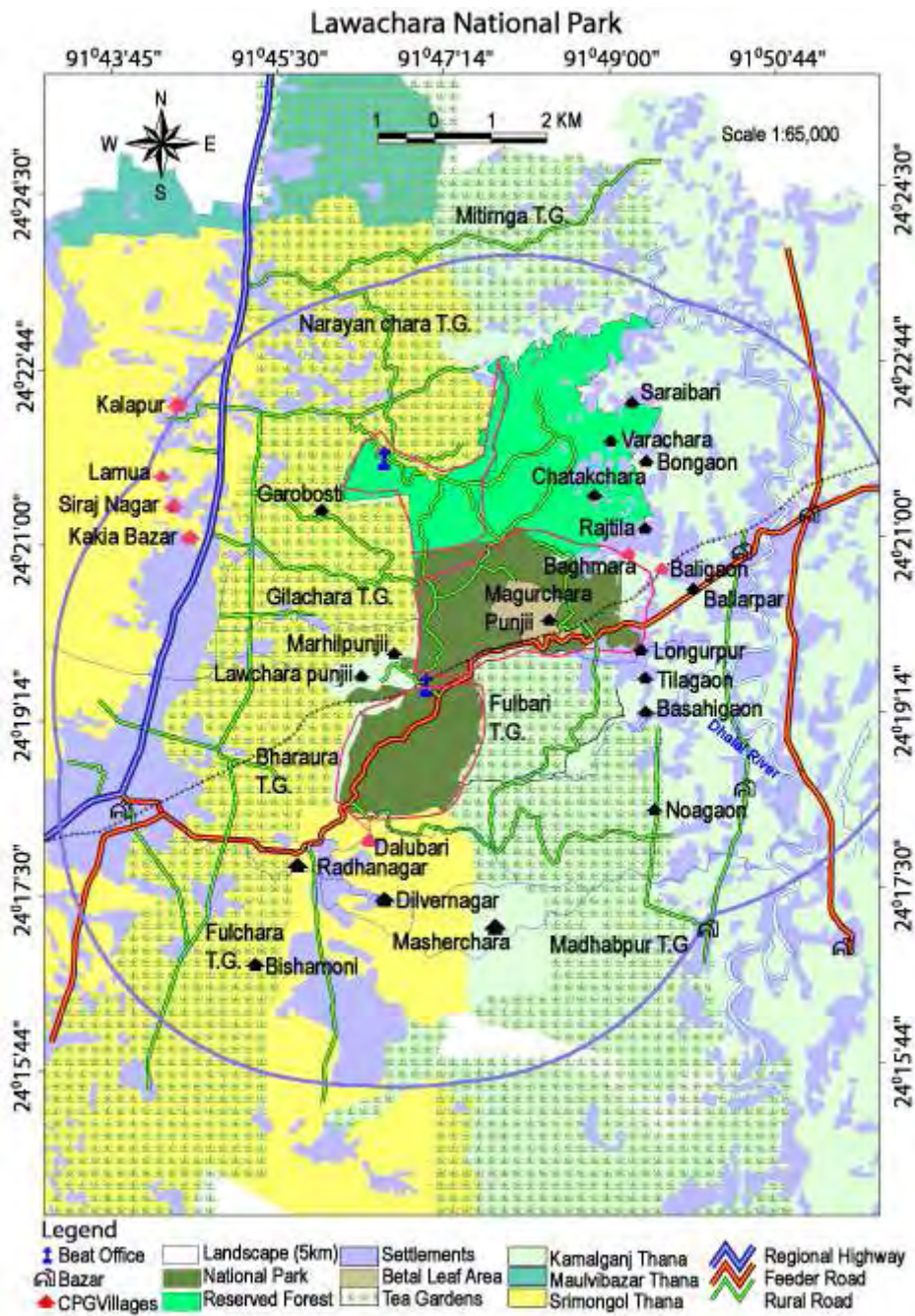


Figure – Coverage of 4 Community Patrolling Groups at Lawachara National Park

