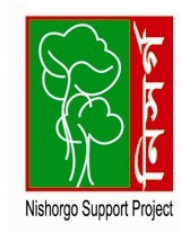




**FOLLOW UP REPORT  
ON  
TEKNAF AWARENESS WEEK  
(22-27 DECEMBER, 2005)**

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With Partners : CODEC, NACOM & RDRS



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## Foreword

Ecotourism, with its unique characteristics of combining nature with tourism can play effective role in conservation. As the

Ecotourism is of special interest to Nishorgo for its relationship with conservation, sustainability, and biological diversity. As a development tool, ecotourism can advance the three basic goals of the *Convention on Biological Diversity*:

- conserve biological (and cultural) diversity, by strengthening protected area management systems (public or private) and increasing the value of sound ecosystems;
- promote the sustainable use of biodiversity, by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business networks, and
- share the benefits of ecotourism developments equitably with local communities and indigenous people, by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism businesses.

In the field, well-planned and managed ecotourism has proven to be one of the most effective tools for long-term conservation of biodiversity when the right circumstances (such as market feasibility, management capacity at local level, and clear and monitored links between ecotourism development and conservation) are present.

## What is Ecotourism?

According to the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, ecotourism "embraces the principles of sustainable tourism... and the following principles which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism:

- Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage,
- Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, contributing to their well-being,
- Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitor,
- Lends itself better to independent travelers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups".

## **Teknaf Awareness Week**

### **Introduction**

With a view to conserve the protected area system of Bangladesh, Nishorgo Support Project of the Forest Department held Teknaf Ecotourism Week from 22<sup>nd</sup> December to 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2005. The objectives of the week were as follows:

- to increase awareness among the local stakeholders regarding the need of conservation for economic development.
- to increase awareness among the local stakeholders of the potentiality of ecotourism and its social & economic impact on local level
- to promote Teknaf as a new destination for nature tourism among a selected group of tourists
- identify key aspects of nature tourism requirements and tourist expectations
- baseline data on impact of tourism on local impact, both socially and economically.

### **Preliminary Activities**

The preparation for observing the week started during late November, 2005. The Enterprise Development Specialist was given the responsibility of coordinating the activities with the local CODEC, local partner of NSP in Cox's Bazar region.

The preliminary work schedule was prepared and finalized during the Mid-Year Review Meeting held in mid-November. The Regional Coordinator was apprised of the steps to be taken in order to make the initiative successful.

There were also visits to the field level to oversee the development of works related to successful arrangement of the week. The school adjacent to the Whykheong site office of NSP was earmarked for the dropping place for tourists visiting the site during week. There were also arrangements made for toilet facilities, refreshments, and transportation.

A local tour operator based in Cox's Bazar was given the responsibility to promote the week to the prospective tourists. Also contacts were made with different hotels in Cox's Bazar to motivate their guests visit Teknaf GR during their stay there.

A promotional flyer was developed by the NSP Head Office along with a site booklet highlighting the places of interest at TGR.

## Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was held at the Whykheong School ground where the makeshift resting place was prepared to welcome the guests. Mr. Monoj Kanti Roy, Conservator of Forest for Wildlife and the National Coordinator of NSP inaugurated the week. The inauguration ceremony was merged with the National Scouts Hiking program, also arranged by NSP. On the opening day the scouts went for visit to the Kudomb Cave, one of the natural wonders to experience during a trip to TGR.



## Week Proceedings

The beginning of the week was not as good as anticipated due to incessant rain resulting from the low pressure in the Bay of Bengal. The rain continued till 24<sup>th</sup> December afternoon restricting free movement of the tourist out of Cox's Bazar. It also hampered promotional activities among the target audience as they were mostly within the confinement of their rooms in the hotels.

However, the activities at the site level continued. There were several sessions with the local stakeholders where they were conveyed the probable impact of tourism on their social and political standings. The sessions were both formal and informal and included members of the administration, political figures, businessmen, farmers, teachers and root-level stakeholders of the locality.

A colorful rickshaw rally was organized on 25<sup>th</sup> December to increase awareness of Teknaf Game Reserve being a prospective tourism spot. It also included motivational messages to stop tree felling and protect the forest areas. About 30 rickshaws and 200 people took part in the rally which starting from Whykheong went upto Kanjarpara and returned.

The first group of the tourists visited Teknaf Game Reserve on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2005. The 15-member group was a unique assemblage of people of different ages-the oldest being a 65-year old lady and the youngest a 9-month old baby. The group took a hike to the Kudumb Cave. The NSP personnel accompanied them along with the local eco-guides. The trip can be termed as a good achievement as it proved that hiking can be carried out by peoples of different ages with little difficulty. Even after the long one and a half hour ride on her father's shoulder the smile on the face of the little 9-month girl was as bright as ever.





The tourists were at first hesitant to go inside the forest fearing leaches. However, with the assurance from the eco-guides, they continued with the hike. At the end of the hike their common comment was “a rare experience in an exceptional setting!” One of the tourist commented that “though I was brought up in Teknaf area due to my father’s posting job requirements, I never heard of Kudumb. Now seeing it physically proves how less we know about our surrounding areas, let alone about the country.”

The next group of tourists visited Teknaf in a different route on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2005. This group consisted of 18 tourists from diverse background and interest. This group used a different route than the first group. It went to Shilkhali through the beach, took a hike in the Shilkhali garjan forest, then using the Shaplapur-Whykheong road, it went to Harikhola where they took a hike to the Kudumb Cave. On their way back, they made a stopover at Whykheong NSP site office for lunch.



The route taken by the second group made the trip more attractive. It enabled the tourists to visit three places of natural beauty, i.e. Inani beach, Shilkhali Garjan forest and the Kudumb cave. Though the whole day trip was hectic, the feedback about the trip from the group members was unanimously “excellent”.

### **Feedback from Tour Operators**

During the week, a lot of interaction took place between the tour operators and the ED team. The team contacted over 15 local tour operators of Cox’s Bazar. All these tour operators showed keen interest in promoting Teknaf GR to their clients. The major points that came up during the discussions are given below:

1. The tourists normally fix their itinerary before they visit Cox’s Bazar and allocate their days accordingly. Therefore, TGR must be in their itinerary before they reach Cox’s Bazar. It is seldom found that the tourists ask the tour operators to give them options for places to visit.
2. In order to make TGR a tourist spot, the promotion should be done initially to the mass.
3. There may be certain areas earmarked in the TGR surroundings as picnic spots.
4. A particular spot to be earmarked where the tourists can get down from the transport to access to TGR.
5. A strong linkage of Eco-guides with the local tour operators is needed.

6. The tour operators are interested to sell the tour as a set package. They require NSP to prepare the package for them and only then they can start selling it.
7. The tour operators require guidance and information about the TGR in detail. An orientation process will help them a great deal to place TGR as an option to the tourists. They suggested a session with the NSP staff to be briefed about the game reserve, facilities available and the places to visit. They also require a trip to the places of interest at TGR.
8. Unless and until the tour operators get any profit out of arranging the tour, they will not promote TGR to their clientele.

### **Feedback from the Tourists**

The visiting tourists showed a positive interest towards visiting the areas earmarked by NSP as tourist attraction. However, they did identify certain areas that need attention in near to distant future. They are as follows:

1. They require an access point where they can get all the information before they plan a visit to the place.
2. A clear road marking should be in place for the tourists to disembark from their vehicle and proceed to the trails.
3. For the long trails, the tourists suggest a resting place at the end of the trails with toilet facility.
4. Leeches are a concern to the tourists. Therefore, they need to be informed about precautionary measures to protect themselves.
5. Availability of transport facility needs to be seamless. A system should be in place to inform the tourists about how to go to TGR.
6. Prospective tourists still do not know about the existence of natural wonders at TGR. These needs to be passed on to them through effective media coverage.

### **Feedback from Forest Department**

Forest Department is a key element to convert TGR as a tourist attraction. Therefore, due importance is given to the opinion of FD officials of the area. A few critical points came up during the discussions taken place with different FD officials.

1. There is a rest house of FD near the Range Office at Whykheong on hill-top. It is currently abandoned but still is in good shape. It may be refurbished to act as the information center for the TGR.
2. Support from FD at field level was satisfactory, while it needs to be more proactive. The field level staffs of the FD are yet concerned about the tourists visiting the spots. Security being one of the major concerns, they are yet not equipped to provide effective protection to the guest when asked or required to. Also they require a system to be in place in order to be prepared for incoming tourists. The current level of manpower is too less to handle an



onrush of tourist in this spot and requires a review of workforce allocation and management of tourism activities in this areas.

3. A few new areas may be allocated for mass tourism like picnic spots. The DFO suggested that an area near Mochoni is a good spot for such activities and there is already a skeleton facility available there. This may be improved to offer such activities. The management of the area may be outsourced to the co-management council, as suggested by DFO.
4. An information outlet may be set up at the Cox's Bazaar FD office to provide support to the Tour Operators and Tourists and coordinate with the FD staff at the field level for availability of forest guards during tourist visits.
5. A subsistence allowance may be given to the forest guards who accompany the tourists. This allowance may be bourn by the tourists within their tour package charges.
6. More promotional items are to be provided to the local FD Office and Range offices for display and information.
7. The FD Officials and staffs lack the concepts of ecotourism and needs to be appraised of their role in developing ecotourism in protected areas.
8. Coordination between local people and FD staff members still is a major obstacle in developing ecotourism. The FD officials requested NSP for suggestions and steps in order to improve the situation.
9. In order to make the tourist experience memorable, more tourist attraction points needs to be developed/incorporated. Suggestion from DFO in this regard is Inani Beach, Himchari, and Teknaf Beach.

## Recommendations

Teknaf Awareness Week was a great opportunity for NSP to identify opportunities and threats in developing nature tourism at protected areas around the country. Perspectives of different reference groups were taken. Based on the inputs, the following recommendations are made:

1. While planning any future Awareness Programs, the promotion should start at least one month prior to the week. The promotion should be targeted to tour operators as well as prospective tourists. It is found that the tourists make their travel itinerary well in advance and a visit of the PA needs to be in their travel plan before they start their tour.
2. Tourist facilities (Information center, toilets, rest areas around the trail areas, etc.) need to be developed at the PA to provide tourists with a better and memorable experience. Road-signs clearly marking the disembarkation points for tourists to access the PAs need to be erected. There should also be a easy mode of contacting the eco-guides even when they go the visit the PAs without prior notice.
3. The awareness level of the tour operators regarding the prospect of these protected areas is very limited. Steps need to be taken to increase their knowledge of the attractive spots in the PAs. An information session about tourist attractions and prospects of selling of the tour packages will be beneficial.
4. Media coverage to inform the prospective tourists about the locations and its salient features will help getting a steady flow of tourist in the PAs.
5. The tour operators need a fixed tour package to promote to their client base. They expect the NSP to develop it with a price suggestion that they can sell.
6. As the feedback from tour operators suggest, there might be a huge flow of tourists to the protected areas once they are open to the public as tourist spots. Therefore, there is a need for zoning of tourist activities within the PAs. Movement of tourists needs to be controlled under a well-developed Tourism Management Plan that is well-understood by the Co-management council and the FD and jointly implemented.
7. To establish a constant flow of tourists in the area, there needs to be certain areas earmarked as picnic spot. These spots may be in the buffer zone, thereby not affecting the core protected zone.
8. Security is a major concern for the tourists while traveling the PAs that poses risks of wild animals and often hoodlums. FD and local government's concentrated effort is required for improved security of the tourists.
9. More points of attractions needs to be identified to attract a variety of tourist segments.
10. The local stakeholders need to be made aware of the impact of tourism and the economic benefit it might bring with it. Till now they are oblivious of this impact and needs considerable amount of intervention in developing their level of understanding.