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SUCCESS STORY

Alternative Source of Income Changes Lives in Bangladesh

Co-Management ensures livelihood



Photo by: Reeda Wadani

"We use to sit at home before, our husbands were often involved with illegal logging due to dire financial struggles, but now we no longer need to turn to the trees, we are financially independent," Halima, Medha Kachapia, Chittagong

Women of Medha Kachapia making Kharengs

USAID funded Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) Project continues to create avenues for alternative sources of incomes for forest and wetland dependent individuals while building a strong co-management system between the government and local communities.

U.S. Agency for International Development
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Halima and Gulzar, who were stay-home mothers only three years ago, are now one of the main breadwinners for their families. Through the assistance of USAID's Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) project in Bangladesh Halima and Gulzar along with fifty others started making bamboo baskets, *Khareng*, for wholesalers in Medha Kachapia, Chittagong. Now their daily income is up to 240 taka, at times more than their spouses. "We use to sit at home before, our husbands were often involved with illegal logging due to dire financial struggles, but now we no longer need to turn to the trees, we are financially independent," said Halima with a shy smile on her face.

The IPAC project concentrates on working with local communities around forests and wetlands and the respective governing bodies, Department of Forestry, Department of Environment and Department of Fishery. By socially and economically empowering the local communities, including them in forest and wetland management and giving them ways for alternative sources of incomes the IPAC project is building awareness and partnership between the government and the local people in 26 protected areas of Bangladesh. Through Co-Management Committees (CMC), with elected representatives from the communities and government officers, conservation friendly decisions are taken and activities are implemented to empower the poor while protecting forestry and wetlands of Bangladesh.

A severe flood in the late 60s in Cox's Bazar brought Halima, Gulzar and the rest of their community to the Medha Kachapia forest. As refugees they started building their lives back in this forest, during which many trees were cut down to provide a source of income. Since the establishment of USAID funded Nishorgo program a predecessor of the IPAC project the community in Medha Kachapia, with the help of CMCs, has found ways of becoming a part of market driven value chains. Now the community gives more importance to conserving the forest and co-management as their lives have enriched through these initiatives.

Gulzar has two children who she is now sends to school. She wants her children and her community to prosper. She said proudly "Why should we just sit around when we know now there is a better life waiting for us."