

Co-Management Commitment

Conservation in Bangladesh Reaches a New Height

28th March, 2008 is a significant date for all individuals working to conserve forestry and wetlands through co-management in Bangladesh. The date marks a momentous sacrifice by 25-year-old Rafiqul Alam, a Volunteer Forest Guard under Community Patrol Group (CPG) in Shilkhali range, Teknaf. Rafiqul Alam was murdered by illegal loggers during his attempts to stop them. His death doesn't only symbolize his dedication towards the conservation of forestry in Bangladesh but also represents the transformation which is taking place within individuals in Bangladesh regarding conservation of nature and the idea of co-management. Rafiqul Alam was appointed by the Teknaf Co-Management Community (CMC), a recognized organization that comprises of representatives for the local community and the Forest Department. Recently, Rafiqul's wife Zaheda Begum was elected to be a member of the Shilkhali CMC, demonstrating the height of commitment towards a successful co-management system.

The concept of community members coming together as CPGs under the CMC to protect natural resources was institutionalized by USAID's Nishorgo program. Nishorgo's co-management approach in five forest protected areas to bridge the gap between local communities and the Government, a first in Bangladesh. Through co-management local communities living in and around natural resources are empowered by the

government to work together in conserving the protected forests and wetlands while it also assists the local communities reach means of sustainable livelihood. With the success of the Nishorgo Program, USAID started the IPAC project in June 2008, which includes 26 protected areas around Bangladesh.

To honor Rafiqul's extraordinary sacrifice USAID and Bangladesh Forest Department's Nishorgo program declared 28 March as "Co-Management Day." Additionally, Honorable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina of the Government of Bangladesh personally presented Zaheda Begum with a check of Tk. 1 Lac as a token of respect to Co-Management Day 2010. The legend of Rafiqul Alam has set a unique tone for conservation of forestry and co-management in Bangladesh.



Community Patrol Groups continue their work all around forests of Bangladesh

"Zaheda wants to continue the work her husband left off for the community and for the forest" – Mr. Nazmul Abedin, IPAC Site Facilitator, Shilkhali, Bangladesh