

Public-Private Partnerships in Support of Conservation

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When Nishorgo began in 2003, it was increasingly common for development programs in general, and conservation initiatives in particular, to seek ways of engaging the private sector in passive or active support roles. The possibility for corporate interest in conservation-friendly growth had by then been well established (Porter and Van der Linde 1995). Large NGOs and other development organizations had been exploring opportunities for finding synergy between the development and conservation communities (Heap 2000; Earthwatch Europe 2002; International Business Leaders Forum 2000). USAID had already adopted this approach: on May 11, 2001, the then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell had introduced the USAID Global Development Alliance as a programmatic approach to engaging the private sector in support of development initiatives.

In the conservation community, this focus on common interests between public and private sector conservation goals had also received considerable attention, not least by the IUCN (IUCN 2003; 2004). By the time of the IUCN Bangkok Congress in late 2004, 30 resolutions were passed associating the private sector and conservation, including Resolution 1.81 that urged expansion of “dialogue and productive relationships with the private sector” (IUCN 2008).

In light of these trends, the Nishorgo team sought from its earliest days to engage private individuals and organizations in a coalition of public and private actors in support of conservation. The team believed that forest conservation goals in Bangladesh would be most effectively met where individuals and private companies were engaged as active partners in that process, and that with careful planning, transparent management, and a focus on delivering services to people, the public and private sectors might collaborate for the common good.

The Nishorgo team thus undertook a number of initiatives aimed at engaging private sector support for conservation activities. The purpose of this chapter is to review a number of those initiatives and to draw lessons from the efforts made in building such public-private partnerships.

Starting Assumptions and Subsequent Adaptations

The “Nishorgo Conservation Partnership” Concept

In mid-2004, the Nishorgo initiative attempted to frame its strategy for public-private partnership in a proposed “Nishorgo Conservation Partnerships” program. The program identified five distinct ways in which private entities could take part in contributing to improvements in PA conservation (Mahbub 2004). The five areas were:

- Contributions to establishment of visitor services: Partners would be able to contribute

to a range of PA facilities, including small items like park benches and larger items such as visitor centers. Prominent signs would be placed in the PA to acknowledge a partner's contribution according to the level of contribution.

- Co-financing of communication activities or outreach: Partners would be able to provide funds for national or local campaigns or publications, in which the partners brand as well as the Nishorgo brand would both appear.
- Helping to improve livelihoods for people living around the PAs: Partners would provide direct support for livelihood activities for the poor living around a PA and dependent on that forest.
- Licensing of the Nishorgo image: Partners would pay a license fee to use the Nishorgo brand on products to be sold at the PA visitor centers (t-shirts, hats, mugs, etc.).
- Practicing PA-friendly behavior: This area of partnership was targeted at those companies operating in the immediate vicinity of a PA. Through this type of partnership, environmentally or socially responsible companies would be awarded the right to use the Nishorgo logo if they met "Nishorgo-friendly" criteria of behavior.

The same program document included a proposal that private contributions to PAs would be overseen by the independent non-government Arannayk Foundation for Tropical Forest Conservation, a foundation established under the Bangladesh Companies Act of 1994 with initial funds from the US Tropical Forest Conservation Act.

This Partnerships program was never formalized as a joint program of the Forest Department (FD) with Arannayk and the Nishorgo Support Project, nor was it ever formally approved. Indeed, at this early point in Nishorgo, there was little likelihood of obtaining formal approval for proposals to allow private firms, for example, to directly contribute to improvements inside PA lands. But the FD Project Director at the time nevertheless encouraged support for the "Nishorgo Conservation Partnerships" concept as a way of testing on a small scale how such partnerships might be accepted and work, and of establishing a number of examples that could demonstrate the viability of the concept. The first three categories of partnerships were subsequently developed through the partnerships discussed below.

Initial Partnership – the Radisson Water Garden Hotel

An early opportunity to test the partnership concept came with interest of the Radisson Water Garden Hotel, then under construction. The Managing Director at the time was approached by the Nishorgo team, and expressed interest in associating the hotel with an environmental image through Nishorgo. They subsequently financed the 2004 Tree Fair publication and also provided financing for advertisements about the Tree Fair in widely displayed banners in Dhaka that promoted both the Tree Fair and the Radisson brand.

Over the coming years, the Radisson continued to deepen its interest and involvement with Nishorgo's conservation efforts, resulting in 2008 in the inclusion of Nishorgo activities in the hotel's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. Under the CSR, Hotel staff supported

Nishorgo's conservation efforts through donations to the Rema Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary Co-Management Organization, training of eco-cottage owners in hotel and food management, and CSR visits to Nishorgo sites.

The Scouts of Bangladesh

In 2004, the Scouts of Bangladesh numbered just over a million members, of which some 20 percent were young women. The average age of Scouts in Bangladesh is much older than in Europe and the US, with a large number of active Scouts remaining members through their high school years.



As part of its partnership with Nishorgo, Radisson Water Garden Hotel hospitality staff have taught Nishorgo Eco-Cottage cooks about preparing table settings.
[Md. Tarek Murshed]

The Scouts expressed an early interest in being associated with the Nishorgo conservation efforts, and in 2005 worked with Nishorgo to undertake a highly publicized series of PA-to-PA hikes. Young men and women Rangers (an advanced level of Scout) hiked first from Satchari National Park to Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary and then to Lawachara National Park over the course of two days, led by an eminent ornithologist and outdoorsman. A few months later, a similar PA-to-PA hike was undertaken across the southern Nishorgo sites. These two hikes were covered by many television channels and local and national dailies (with an ATN Bangla camera team following the entire length of the hikes) and generated extensive awareness of Nishorgo.

In subsequent years, the Scouts have continued to be a part of rallies and events in support of conservation in general and Nishorgo in particular, including allocating activities and stalls for the Nishorgo initiative at many of their regional and national Jamboree events. In these events, the Nishorgo team conducted quizzes on Bangladesh's PAs to popularize and to build consensus for conservation of the PAs among the Scouts and demonstrated how to build and use improved stoves in a bid to save fuel wood.



The 2005 PA-to-PA hikes of the Bangladesh Scouts brought extensive television and press coverage to Nishorgo, and at low cost. [Left: Philip J. DeCosse; Right: Nishorgo Support Project]

The Nishorgo team forged strong partnerships with local scouts troops who continued doing hikes in individual PAs. The scouts in Srimongal and Moulavibazar areas came forward and helped the Forest Department to manage the large number of visitors that now come in the weekends to Lawachara National Park during the winter season.

Joint Financing of Books, Booklets, and Movies

In this same effort to build partnerships that could extend the awareness of Nishorgo's conservation work, the cell phone provider Banglalink was approached in late 2005 for its interest in associating with Nishorgo. With little hesitation, Banglalink's then-CEO approved financing for publication of 4,000 copies of a newly prepared "Visitor's Guide to the Protected Areas of Bangladesh." The attractively illustrated publication was the first ever practical guide to all the PAs of Bangladesh. At that time, Banglalink was in a rapid expansion phase, and was particularly keen to associate its brand with the environment, and in particular with the Sundarbans and tigers. Encouraged by the initial success, a year later, Banglalink provided further funding to print a Bangla version of the guide, and has subsequently sponsored the FD's tiger day initiative.

Later, in 2008, Duncan Brothers associated itself with Nishorgo through financing of a 200+ page color book on the wildlife of Bangladesh (Khan 2008).



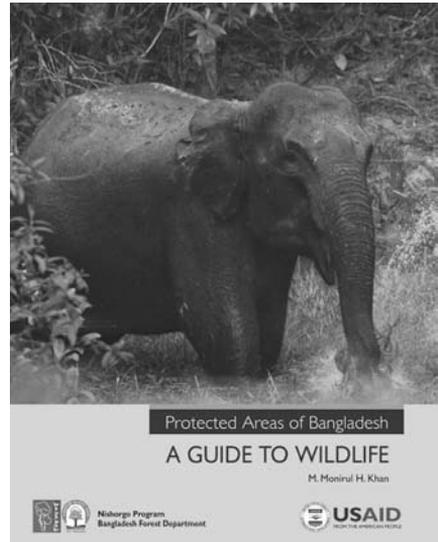
In 2004, the telecom Banglalink paid full costs for English and Bangla versions of the first 5,000 copies of this 48 page "Visitor's Guide to the Protected Areas".

Generally, the Nishorgo team found that obtaining financing or co-financing for attractive publications related to Nishorgo was not difficult. Private companies in particular were glad to associate themselves with publications, as long as the quality of the publication was high and they could include their logo and a corporate message. Publications are relatively less expensive than other activities such as national campaigns or alternative livelihood development for the communities around PAs. Furthermore, when donated funds are allocated to co-finance printing costs, the sponsor knows exactly how their resources have been spent, since the only significant cost and invoice is that of the printers.

Private partnership in communications also took the form of private individuals contributing their time and energy to books and movies associated with Nishorgo. In 2007 and 2008, the noted photographer and naturalist Sirajul Hossain travelled throughout all the Nishorgo PAs

and photographed the wildlife along with the people living in those areas, and the challenges they faced. The many months of effort he put into publication of this photographic journal – later to appear in the book “Images from the Wild: Travels Through Five Nishorgo Forests” (Hossain and DeCosse 2008) – was all contributed voluntarily. Nishorgo provided him with access to the areas and a vehicle to move his equipment around, but the rest of the work was his own private contribution.

Earlier, Enamul Haque and the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) had made a similar private contribution to Nishorgo through the creation of a video documentary about the Nishorgo effort – “A Nimble Walk through Five Protected Forests” – for which Mr. Haque travelled for weeks throughout the Nishorgo sites with his film equipment. This film was used extensively to communicate the activities of Nishorgo, both in meetings and on television.



Duncan Brothers financed the printing of this book: Protected Areas of Bangladesh – A Guide to Wildlife.

Architectural Competition and Private Involvement in Construction within the Protected Areas

In this same vein of raising awareness while engaging private partners in conservation work, Nishorgo obtained approval to undertake a national architectural competition in 2006 to design a Visitor Information Center for Lawachara National Park. Private donations were sought to finance the competition, which would award financial prizes to the three top submissions. The design submitted by the winner would be later built within Lawachara National Park.

Engaging private contributions and leadership for this architectural competition was greatly aided by the owner of Bay Developments, who contacted other private firms that made substantial contributions, including AMK Steel and Mirpur Ceramic Works Ltd.

Undertaking this private competition for design work on public lands represented a novel activity for the Forest Department and for the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The proposal for this competition was made at the 3rd meeting of the Nishorgo Steering Committee on February 26, 2006 and although it was not formally approved as the time (the Committee’s remit did not include approving proposed activities), no objections to it were registered. Subsequently, Nishorgo Support Project, in association with the Institute of Architects of Bangladesh (IAB), arranged an open architectural design competition to stimulate the most creative ideas for an environment-friendly design for a Visitor Interpretation Center. All member architects of IAB were eligible to participate. The competition was formally announced through advertisements in two leading daily newspapers, where the sponsor’s name and logo were prominently displayed. The competition received an outstanding response from the architectural community. Eighty-one registrations were made, and 32 designs and models were submitted, of which 29 were judged technically responsive.

Nishorgo
Bangladesh's Protected Area
Management Program

We have lost more than 50% of our forests since 1970. To save our natural heritage, the Forest Department has launched a Program called "Nishorgo". The Nishorgo Program works to improve management of the Protected Forest Areas through building of partnerships with the stakeholders.

The Nishorgo Program is now working to design and build Visitor Interpretation Centers in five Protected Forest Areas. With the support of three private sponsors, Nishorgo is conducting a national competition to develop an architectural design for one of these Visitor Centers, in Lawachara National Park in Simongal.

The prizes are:
Winner: Taka 100,000
1st runner up: Taka 60,000
2nd runner up: Taka 40,000

The Jury will include:

- Architect Khadem Ali, IAB
- Architect Jalal Ahmad, I.A. Architects
- Architect Saif Ul Haque, Saif Ul Haque Sthapati
- Architect Iftekhar Khan, Bay Developments
- Engineer Gene George, USAID

For more information visit www.nishorgo.org.

- The competition will be coordinated by the Institute of Architects of Bangladesh (IAB).
- All the competitors must be member of IAB.
- Register to compete and obtain rules and requirements from Nishorgo Support Project (House 68 Road 1, Block 1, Baranai, Dhaka 1213) by May 25, 2006 during office hour.
- The proposal must be submitted by June 25, 2006 at Nishorgo Support Project. Awards will be declared in July 2006.

Architects
আমরা প্রকৃতিকে বাচাবো অগামী প্রজন্মের জন্য

SPONSORS
 A.M.K. STEELS LIMITED
 Bay
 Mirpur Ceramic Works Ltd.

Nishorgo Support Project
 Forest Department
 Ministry of Environment & Forests
 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
 USAID

Three companies provided the money to run the national architectural competition to design a visitor center at Lawachara National Park. This advertisement appeared in national newspapers.

private donations were collected from companies for the estimated USD 120,000 building, with early donations and interest shown by Mobile Lubricants, Rahimafrooz, and Lafarge Cement. However, during 2008, the issue of using private funds to construct a building to be operated by a Co-Management Organization on public lands was raised. Official approval of this arrangement only came after the Nishorgo Support Project had ended, in late 2009, when a letter was issued by the Secretary at the Ministry of Environment and Forests approving this privately financed construction on public lands. Fund-raising was at that time re-initiated.

Misses and Near Misses

These public-private partnerships certainly proved the viability of the concept, but there were also no small number of unsuccessful attempts at such partnerships, and it is worth noting the misses and near misses, and why they did not come to fruition.

For months in 2007, Nishorgo worked with Nestle Bangladesh on a partnership that would associate the Nescafe brand of Nestle with Nishorgo, in a campaign to be targeted to attract university students to drink coffee. The many hours of preparatory meetings for this campaign never resulted in an executed program. The Nishorgo team felt that neither Nestle nor Nishorgo could find a link between the Nescafe brand and PAs.

The Awards were given at a gala ceremony at the National Museum followed by week-long exhibition of the models and designs which drew over 5,000 visitors and extensive press coverage that highlighted the sponsors.

The winning design – prepared by young architects from Vitti Sthapati Brindo, Ltd. – was constructed in a smaller version at four Nishorgo sites, with one of those nominated in late 2009 for an Aga Khan architectural award.

For the fifth site, at Lawachara National Park itself, a subsequent proposal for public-private partnership was made in late 2007, for which permission was sought to construct the Visitor Center in its original design, with construction to be financed entirely through private donations.

A donation package was subsequently prepared and marketed, detailing information on the “Community Owned Nature Interpretation Center” (CONIC) at Lawachara National Park. From late 2007,

Nishorgo also worked to persuade HSBC to finance a national photo competition, but HSBC did not want to be constrained to focusing on the Protected Area system (the main focus for Nishorgo). Instead, it wanted to keep the photo competition topics broadly about nature. So, in this case, there was a gap in the central objectives between Nishorgo and HSBC.

The case of Grameen Phone (the largest mobile telephone provider in Bangladesh) presented a different challenge. Given its size, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Grameen Phone explained that the company did not want to be a part of any initiative in which other contributors were involved. They preferred to finance a full program rather than part of a program, no matter the cost. The CEO at the time also expressed his concerns with the risk of being associated with a specific program (such as the Protected Area system) as opposed to more general concepts such as nature conservation. And yet Nishorgo's core communications objective for a partnership with Grameen Phone (and other private donors) would have been to communicate the existence of the specific national system of Protected Areas being co-managed by the Forest Department. Grameen Phone also raised concerns that loss of trees to theft within the system, for example, could reflect badly on Grameen Phone, and it would not be something they could control.

In late 2008, the Nishorgo team worked at establishing a partnership with Nokia Bangladesh, as part of Nokia's efforts to market its 3G phones to university students at the major public universities. Nishorgo proposed joint activities with Nokia in which the students would use their internet accessible phones provided by Nokia to visit and report on the 19 Protected Areas then within the system. In the end, Nokia decided to modify their campaign targets, and so this partnership did not come to fruition either.

Throughout the Nishorgo effort, a regular dialogue took place with Chevron, in which both sides explored opportunities for a mutually beneficial partnership. This seemed particularly appropriate given Chevron's presence (and its predecessor Unocal's activities within Lawachara National Park). However, political and local community concerns about Chevron's activities made establishment of a partnership difficult, and ultimately not feasible. Any public-private partnerships had to be acceptable to the FD senior staff and also to the Co-Management Organizations of the concerned PA, and in the case of Chevron, a partnership was not deemed appropriate by either of these parties at the time.

In one other partnership example, Nishorgo worked in a joint campaign called "Explore Bangladesh" with Guide Tours Ltd, the premier ecotourism company in Bangladesh, with financial support from Banglalink. The objective of this campaign was to raise awareness about sustainable nature tourism, and large events were held at both public and private universities in Dhaka. The program was launched at Dhaka University, where more than 400 students participated. However, in the end, the Nishorgo team found that this time-consuming campaign, while valuable as an education and sensitization campaign, was not so successful in raising awareness of the PA system. Instead, the core messages of the campaign were more generally focused on nature and responsible tourism.

Government Buy-in and Public Sector Support for Public-Private Partnership

As Nishorgo was implemented, government support for public-private partnership remained intermittent. Senior staff of the Forest Department actively supported the broad range of public-private initiatives, recognizing most of all the value demonstrating a new openness of the Department to partnership outside the government, but nevertheless being careful not to suggest that FD lands would be freely available for private marketing or other interventions. More specifically, it was the willingness of those senior FD staff -- and particularly the Project Coordinators -- to push the limits of what was acceptable that gave the Nishorgo team the support to proceed with such pilots.

By 2006, it had become clear that a more open public debate about the role of public-private partnerships for conservation would be necessary, so that a broader consensus of support might be obtained. The Nishorgo team accordingly worked jointly with IUCN Bangladesh to organize a “Public-Private Round Table” in 2006, at which the Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests and some 30 senior business executives discussed interest in and modalities for such partnerships.

The principal output from that round table was the strongly voiced support by private company executives for the kinds of partnerships that had been tested in the preceding years. Although there was no official decision taken at the round table, holding that event provided support for continued work on partnerships. However, it was not until 2009 that the Government formally supported public-private partnerships for conservation (in the aforementioned letter in support of the CONIC at Lawachara NP).

Lessons Learned

The time it takes to establish public-private partnerships is high, while the financial size of contributions tends to be low. The Nishorgo team accepted that the value of contributions would be seen more as a signal that private companies and individuals were interested in conservation than as a viable source of sustained financing. The contributions received (except for the CONIC) have generally been quite small, generally under 5,00,000 Taka (about USD 8,000).

Although association with a “green” image through Nishorgo was of interest to some companies, the more common interest of private firms was finding a mechanism for spending CSR funds on benevolent activities. CSR allocations are much more likely to be allocated to cyclone victims, or the blind, or acid survivors, or any number of direct human needs, rather than to the more abstract idea of the environment, or the PA system. Nishorgo learned to make its requests for partnership as specific and tangible as possible, and when it did so the partnerships were more easily completed. The companies felt more comfortable focusing their CSR activities on more popular and concrete themes. Such was the case, for example, when Nishorgo sought funds for high quality publications such as the “PA Visitor’s Guide” and the “Wildlife of the Protected Areas” books. Moreover, companies need their contributions to complement their marketing and brand management efforts.

Private corporate donors tend to avoid partnership with official government systems or programs. Donations are easier to obtain where there is no involvement of the government, and this certainly made partnership work under Nishorgo more difficult, since the Nishorgo effort is a government program. Private corporations look for an accountable and transparent framework for providing finance. In its early dialogue with Chevron, Nishorgo proposed that Chevron provide support to the entire PA system, rather than just for the communities at Lawachara National Park. But Chevron hesitated to make such system-wide commitments, in part because of concerns about committing to a government program that might change or be less-well managed at a later date. Also individual government departments such as the Forest Department do not have the explicit authority to pursue public-private partnerships, thus making the decision-making for conservation support less clear and direct.

As pollution and environmental conditions in Bangladesh worsen, however, the attractiveness of associating with “green” partnerships such as Nishorgo seems to be on the increase. Later in the Nishorgo period it became easier to obtain private contributions of time and support than it had been in 2004, apparently due to the increased interest in an environmentally friendly image. At the same time, CSR efforts of companies are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their treatment of the environment, with creative companies such as Rahimafrooz and Radisson seeking to make a sustained commitment to conservation through their CSR programs.

Resources need to be explicitly allocated to maintain the partnerships over time. The partnerships need to be consistently renewed and maintained. A company such as Radisson, that explicitly includes Nishorgo in its CSR, needs to be supported in subsequent years, not least so that it can continue to have easy contact with the field level activities of the program. Indeed, a gap in such support from Nishorgo in 2008 was associated with a slowdown in the strength of Radisson’s commitment to conservation. The Nishorgo team had hoped that an independent and private organization such as the Arannayk Foundation would take up this long-term facilitator role, in light of Arannayk’s permanent status and its mandate to support conservation, but such activities were not at the time considered a high priority for Arannayk.

Multi-partner events are rarely effective. It is difficult to control the message when several private sector or other partners are involved in an event. Moreover, private sector partners prefer that their recognition for support is not mixed with that of other companies.

More avenues can be sought for successful partnerships, particularly those based on voluntary initiatives from individuals and civil society groups that become associated with the PA system. Perhaps the most effective of the private partnerships under Nishorgo were those with committed individuals that sought to offer their time and creativity to conservation. Time-based contributions, including especially those of the Scouts and a number of leading nature photographers, zoologists, and wildlife experts were among the most effective in communicating the work and objectives of Nishorgo.

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed the experiences of Nishorgo with advancing the role of public-private partnerships in support of conservation. The Nishorgo team allocated considerable

energy and time to promoting these partnerships. Although the volume of financing generated by them was minimal when compared to the overall project resources, the range of partnerships have suggested a greater openness by the Forest Department in particular in welcoming expertise and interest from outside the government as it works to improve forest conservation.

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