

# **Eco-Guide Certification Program**

## **Why certification program is needed?**

Nature-based tourism is gaining its popularity in Bangladesh. Visitation to protected areas has been increasing (Singh et al. 2012) and this means that efficient management of the natural areas and visitors becomes very crucial. Eco-guides are available in most of these protected areas and they are there to interpret the nature to the visitors and to enhance visitor experience.

Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), an association consisting of a handful of tour operators which aims to develop and nourish tourism in Bangladesh and to promote tourism products of Bangladesh in the international arena, has raised the need to certify the eco-guides, trained by Nishorgo and IPAC, in several meetings with Integrated Protected Area Co-Management Project (IPAC). IPAC and Nishorgo National Network of Ecco-Guides and Eco-Cottage Owners (NNNEEO) also recognize this need as professional certification of eco-guides is an important mechanism for improving and maintaining eco-guide standards and professionalism. Some developing countries, such as the Galapagos Guides in Ecuador, and countries such as Australia and US have professional certification programmes for tour guides. Professional certification is a term that refers to an individual's ability to perform professional duties and showing that the individual has reached a certain level of competence (Altschuld 1999). On December 6, 2012 a decision was made to implement the guide certification programme with support from IPAC in January 2013. This report contains a proposed model for eco-guide certification.

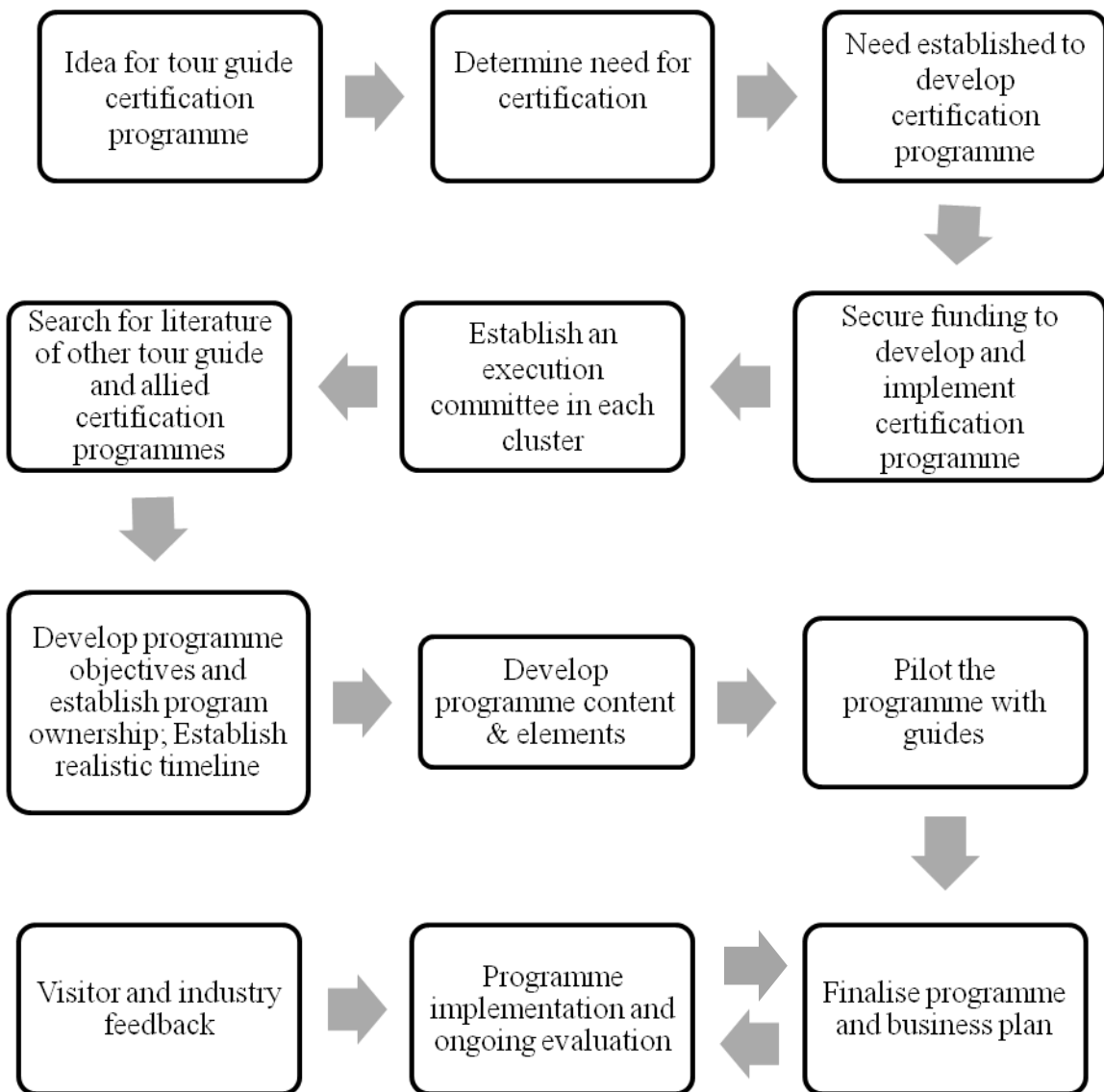
**Objectives** of the certification are:

- To help promote best practice guiding standards in the nature-based tourism industry;
- To reward guides who have achieved specified competencies and standards and
- To place guides in respective categories (depending on their competencies and standards):  
Green– those qualified to take foreign tourists on guided tours; Blue – those qualified to take locals who have an avid interest in wildlife and conservation; Pink – those who are qualified to take locals who have come to the protected areas for recreation purposes.

### Proposed Process Model for the Development of Eco-Guide Certification

In order to determine an eco-guide’s ability to perform profession duties and the level of competence that he/she has achieved, an examination or series of assessments need to be carried out. The eco-guide’s level of skill and proficiency has to be ascertained before he/she is certified.

The following is the proposed process model for the development of eco-guide certification:



**Figure 1** A proposed process model for the development of tour guide certification

The above model has been designed in reference to a model developed by Rosemary Black and Sam Ham (2005).

The execution committee will be comprised of 5-7 members from TOAB and NNNEEO. The committee will be headed by the Presidents of TOAB and NNNEEO and the advisors of TOAB. The committee will be responsible for developing the programme objectives, content and elements and for implementing and evaluating the programme. There will be one execution committee in each cluster.

The certification process will involve a written test and a mock tour assessment. In the written test, the eco-guides will answer questions in relation to their profession and the protected area where they work. The questions will be both subjective. The written test will have duration of 30 minutes. Eco-guides having a 70% pass will take part in the next assessment process which will be a mock tour assessment. The mock tour assessment will be one where the eco-guide's performance will be marked by assessors. In the mock tour, there will be a group of people pretending to be visitors including the assessors. The eco-guides will be assessed on the following points:

- communicates effectively with visitors (including those with special needs);
- uses effective and appropriate presentation techniques;
- applies principles of interpretation;
- where appropriate, encourages visitor participation, inviting and responding to matters raised courteously and correctly, or offers help;
- incorporates information into guiding activities in an environmentally and culturally appropriate way;
- encourages interaction among visitors, appropriate;
- advise visitors about, and provides role model of acceptable behaviors in environments and communities;

For the pilot certification programme, the mock tour assessment will be conducted in the following manner:

- 2 assessors will be in charge of assessing 8 guides.
- The assessment will take place for 2 hours. 15 minutes will be spent on assessing one eco-guide.
- Some eco-cottage owners from NNNEEO will participate as visitors in the mock tour.

Eco-guides who have been trained by Nishorgo and IPAC and who are currently active are eligible to participate in the certification programme. They will be informed earlier about their participation in

the certification programme and the reason for such a need. They will be asked to prepare for the assessments as well.

As this is the pilot project, no fees are being charge for the certification. IPAC is funding the programme as of now and is providing technical support. However, in the coming years minimal fees can be charged for the certification programme.

After the eco-guides are certified, they will be eligible for employment by TOAB and also they will be recognized as professionals in their field. They will be categorized into Green, Blue and Pink and their payment will differ according to their categories. The payment rate can be fixed between TOAB and NNNEEO. Certification will remain valid for 3 years, after which re-certification will be required. The renewal process may cost some fees, depending on the decision making of TOAB and NNNEEO.

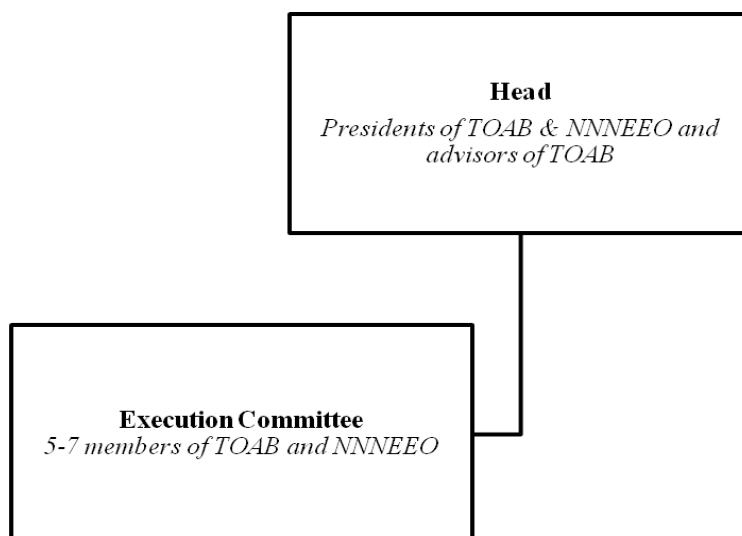
Annexes 1 and 2 contain the sample of the question paper for the written exam and the mock tour assessment paper. Annex 3 will contain the tally marks of the assessment papers.

The **proposed dates** for the implementation of the programme (as discussed in the meeting on December 6, 2012):

- Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar, January 6-9, 2013
- Sylhet, January 14-15, 2013

Sundarban is a possibility depending on the availability of vessel to take the team.

### Organization Chart



**Eco-Guide Certification Programme**  
**Proposed Written Examination Question Paper Format**

Name: _____	Age: _____		
PA: _____	Cluster: _____		
Date: _____	Total Marks: 30	Score: _____	Percentage: _____

**You may answer the following answers in either English or Bangla. The total duration of the exam is 30 minutes.**

**1. Please provide brief answers to the following questions: [10x1=10]**

- a. What is the number of protected areas in the country? Name 5 PAs.
- b. What is the total area of your PA?
- c. What type of forest is your PA?
- d. How many and what types of species of wildlife are there in your PA?
- e. Name the flagship species of your PA.
- f. How many ethnic communities live in and around your PA? Name them.
- g. Name five species of plants in your PA.
- h. Name five species of birds in your PA.
- i. What are the do's and don'ts of the PA?
- j. What are the attraction sites adjacent to your PA?

**2. Write the answers to the following questions: [5x4=20]**

- a. What is the difference between ecotourism and conventional tourism?
- b. Define national park and wildlife sanctuary.
- c. What are the benefits of ecotourism to the local people?
- d. Why is conservation of your PA important?
- e. How should visitors conduct themselves when they are in a PA?

**Eco-Guide Certification Programme**  
**Proposed Mock Tour Assessment**

Name of assessor: _____
Designation & Organization: _____
Date: _____
Signature: _____

Name of guide: _____
PA: _____ Cluster: _____

Duration: <u>15 minutes</u>	Total Marks: 100	Score: _____
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**Note to the assessor:**

In the following page, you will be given a table with a list of characteristics. You will observe whether the guide displays the listed characteristics as he/she takes on the mock tour. Based on your observation, grade the guide in the marking column of the table against each characteristic. Each characteristic carries 5 marks each. In the comments column, please provide detailed comments on performance and potential training needs/additional experience. **If you have not observed certain characteristics then you may need to get additional evidence through oral questioning.**

Thank you.

<b>Sl.</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Marking(5)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
01	Welcomed in friendly manner		
02	Interact with visitors prior to tour		
03	Appropriate information given (e.g. tour requirements, length, difficulty, safety issues)		
04	Appropriate Dress or uniform		
05	Appropriate speed		
06	Used effective voice articulation		
07	Eye contact		
08	Effective gestures (body language)		
09	Use of storytelling/anecdotes		
10	Appropriate language and vocabulary		
11	Information on flora and fauna		
12	Information on the history, management of the Park and the initiatives taken		
13	Information on Nishorgo and their projects		
14	Information on the threats to the Park		
15	Information on the places around the Park		
16	Information on the ethnic community		
17	Group control		
18	Provides answers in polite, friendly manner		
19	Safety issues considered		
20	Clear & Positive conclusion		
	<b>Total</b>		