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Ratargul Reserve Forest becomes a “Special Biodiversity Protected Area”

The Ratargul Reserve Forest, a unique fresh water swamp forest 18 km North-East of Sylhet, has been declared a “Special Biodiversity Protected Area” by the Ministry of Environment and Forests of Bangladesh on May 31, 2015 through a Gazette notification. . This new status will allow for the development of co-management strategies resulting in more equitable governance of biodiversity, improved planning of natural resources and more diversified livelihoods of natural resource dependent communities in this area.

The evergreen forest is situated by and connected to the Goain River and is also linked with the Chengir canal. The swamp forest is rich in biodiversity and provides a number of important ecosystem services. Hijol and Koroch trees, a diversity of local fish, snakes, monkeys, lizards, insects and birds can be found in the Forest, which as a result of being declared a “Special Biodiversity Protected Area”, has reduced threats from grazing, extraction of forest products, illegal fishing and conversion of land into other uses.

USAID’s Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project played a key role in facilitating the Ratargul Swamp Forest being declared a protected area. CREL has organized field visits, discussions and strategic planning with the Forest Department, civil society and other local stakeholders to raise awareness on the importance of this forest.



CREL supports Forest Department on ‘National Tree Plantation Campaign and Tree Fair 2015’

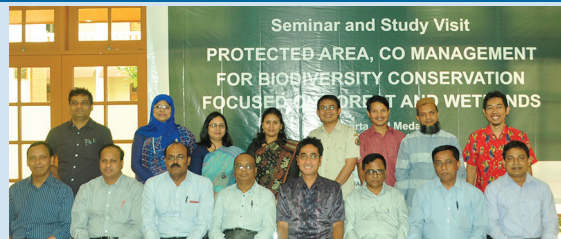
Bangladesh Forest Department and USAID’s Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project organized a three-day long photography exhibition at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka during June 23-25, to observe the National Tree Plantation Campaign and Tree Fair 2015. This year, the theme for National Tree Plantation Campaign and Tree Fair -2015 was পাহাড়, সমতল উপকূলে, গাছ লাগাই সবাই মিলে (Let's plant tree together in hills, plains and coastal areas). The exhibition followed this theme.

Photographs for the exhibition were collected through a month-long contest including a social media campaign targeting young photographers at university campuses, university photography clubs and young photographer’s Facebook groups. 26 photographers sent a total of 150 photos from which 60 photos were selected for the exhibition. The contest and exhibition has helped to motivate and raise awareness on conservation of forests and biodiversity among young photographers.



CREL organized overseas study visit for the Government Officials and Stakeholders

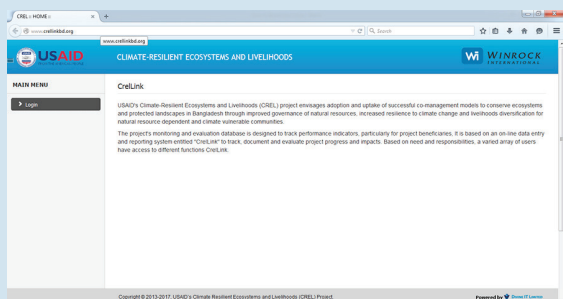
CREL arranged an overseas study visit program during June 3-9, 2015 to Jakarta, Medan and Belawan, Indonesia for 12 government officials from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Land and Forest Department. One CREL representative also attended. The trip was organized by The Bridge, Bangladesh and the Asian Integrated Training Network (AIT). The main objective of the study visit was to share and learn about protected area co-management, climate change adaptation, natural resource management and biodiversity conservation. This team visited The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR); USAID's IUWASH program area; Gunung Leuser National Park at Bukit Lawang and the rehabilitation of mangroves and community-based aquaculture program of YAGASU in Indonesia.



Another visit was organized during June 10-16 to Shiliguri, Dargiling, Jalpaiguri and Jaldapara, West Bengal, India for 10 Range Officers of the Forest Department and CMO members from 4 working regions of CREL, also organized by The Bridge. The team visited North Bengal Science Center, Shiliguri; NTFP Division and Museum, Sukna; Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary; Jaldapara National Park/ Wildlife Sanctuary; Gorumara National Park/ Wildlife Sanctuary and Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary, Darjiling.

The multiple objectives of these study visit programs included capacity building and practical knowledge and experience sharing on NRM, policy and strategy development for protected areas; conservation strategy and co-management systems in protected areas; climate resilient natural resources management (NRM) policy and exposure to protected areas for biodiversity conservation focused on forests and wetlands. A better understanding of the gaps, problems and conflicts in NRM and biodiversity conservation, alternative livelihoods systems for poor people of buffer zone, climate change adaption and mitigation policy and strategies for protected areas of forests were achieved by these visits.

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developed CrelLink using MySQL and PHP platforms with ultra-thin-client architecture to ease access from remote locations and low band width. CREL M&E team administers the access to CrelLink and more stakeholder users are being accommodated. CrelLink is powered by a local IT firm, Divine IT Ltd.

CrelLink captures real-time project implementation data and archives it. Operational since October 2013, CrelLink has more than 150 users from 20 remote sites around the country who are constantly entering data and using it to monitor progress. Facilitators (site level teams) enter data using 20 field forms. Once Site Officers verify data, users can view up to 50 pre-defined reports. As of June 2015, CrelLink is populated with detailed data on 46,938 CREL beneficiaries' livelihoods interventions, biophysical activities and other activities of the project. CrelLink also contains all the profiles of 27 CMCs and PFs in the Forest Protected areas, 8 RMOs in the Hail Haor and 25 ECA committees. CrelLink is highly appreciated by users for its effectiveness in archiving real time project data and its hassle free reporting system.

Traditional methods for monitoring and reporting on development projects has been replaced by CrelLink, an innovative web-based M&E data management system. The CREL monitoring and evaluation team

CREL facilitated UP ADP in Cox's Bazar

Four Union Parishads (Khutakhali, Dulahazra, Fasiakhali and Hnila) in Cox's Bazar District have allocated budget for climate change related activities based on their commitments to the CMO Annual Development Plan (ADP), developed with CREL assistance. CREL has worked with communities to produce area specific climate change information on threats and potential adaptation measures to use in decision making processes, by means of a participatory climate vulnerability assessment (PCVA). These PCVA reports were shared with Union Parishads requesting that they adopt the recommendations in their annual planning process. Through this process UP and CMC identified potential activities that could be included in 2015-16 annual plan. These NRM activities included roadside and institutional afforestation efforts, promotion of saline/ drought tolerant crop varieties and seed distribution, stream re-excavation for improved water supply, tubewell installation, dyke construction, guarding of new afforestation efforts, installation of improved cooking stoves, protective structure construction and sanitation facilities for forest dependent poor.

USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project