

Creating New Forests



Mangrove restoration around Gabura of Satkhira district and Koyra of Khulna District can be marked as one of the major accomplishments among all the plantations supported by USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project. CREL has been working since 2013 for biophysical improvement including tree planting and habitat protection. The major focus of mangrove planting and protection is improved resilience to climate change with greater community engagement.

Planting more than 200,000 mangrove saplings in these two areas started in 2014. After three years of nurturing and protection by the community, with CREL support, these trees have reached an average height of 3 meters. Already the local people are enjoying the benefits from these mangrove trees. Salahuddin of Koyra commented pointing to the battered embankment-“Without these trees this embankment would have washed away long ago”. Bharati Rani of Koyra is proud of their Nypa palm plantation and how that brought back birds and bees to the area. Six months back they harvested honey from a bee colony in the plantation. Communities of Munshiganj and Koyra are glad that CREL supported them with these plantations, which will protect them from future storms and cyclones.

Satchari National Park Witness the Making of a History

Satchari National Park Co-Management Council stepped into history on May 24, 2017 when the council members unanimously selected Alhajj Chowdhury Shamsunnahar as the new president of Satchari National Park Co-Management Committee. Ms. Shamsunnahar is not only the first female president of Satchari CMC, but also the first ever female president of any CMC in Bangladesh. The history of co-management of forest protected areas in Bangladesh dates back to 2005 with formation of first CMC in Lawachara. Every two years CMCs have changed their office bearers as they are mandated by the regulation, and Satchari is the first CMC to choose a female president.

Ms. Shamsunnahar has been the serving as the elected Chairperson of Deorgrach Union Parishad since 2011. Her commitment towards conservation through co-management of Satchari National Park has earned her respect among all the members of Satchari Co-Management Council.



VCGs Obtain Rights to Conserve Their Wetlands

The Ministry of Land signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on May 29, 2017 with the Ministry of Environment and Forests for handing over of Goaljur group fishery of Sylhet district to Ekata and Judhistipur baderdeuli Village Conservation Groups (VCGs) under Department of Environment. Under the MoU these water bodies will be taken care of by the concerned VCGs so that biodiversity and wetland ecosystems are conserved and wetland resources are used on a sustainable basis for the benefit of local fishers and other poor people.

Rescuing a Python by Tripura Tribe

Recently Babul Tripura and Simul Tripura, members of the Tripura community living in Hazarikhil Wildlife Sanctuary near Chittagong, rescued a Burmese Python (*Python molurus*) trapped in a drain near the forest. They immediately informed their Headman who is the secretary of Hazarikhil beat Community Patrol Group - Mr. Kumbo Tripura, and Mr. Abul Hossain, Forest Department officer for Hazarikhil Beat. Next morning, they released the three-meter long python weighing about 10 kilograms into the forest.

USAID's CREL Project has been working with the people of 23 villages surrounding Hazarikhil Wildlife Sanctuary since 2014 and was able to raise conservation awareness among these communities. As a result the Tripura community now consider snakes as wildlife rather than food. Babul Tripura said, "Previously we ate snakes as a food but after joining the Community Patrol Group through CREL we do not eat snakes, we save them."



Scoping Expansion of Nature Tourism in Cox's Bazar



Cox's Bazar is famous for its long sandy sea beach. Thousands of national and international tourists flock to Cox's Bazar to enjoy the beauty of this sea beach, some venture to the nearby St. Martin's Island. Very few of them know of other gems of Cox's Bazar region – evergreen forests. Medhakachapia National Park, Fashiakhali Wildlife Sanctuary and Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary are among the well-preserved forests of Bangladesh boasting rich biodiversity.

USAID's CREL Project is supporting

the local community and Forest Department by developing attractive facilities for tourists with the objective of increasing visitor numbers in these protected areas. This will help generate funds for the local communities who are actively involved in nature conservation along with the Forest Department.

Recently CREL organized a visit for a group of representatives from popular hotels of Cox's Bazar and tour operators to these three protected areas including Shilkhali Garjan forest in Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary. The communities in these three areas, through CREL, are seeking support from these businesses to encourage tourists to visit their areas. The visitors were very happy to see facilities firsthand and promised to promote these forests among the tourists by offering tour packages.

A Journey from Slavery to Self-dependence

Ali Hossain was not a bonded laborer by choice; rather his master brought his father and his family from Comilla fifty years ago to work in his homestead and agricultural fields. This form of bonded labour still exists in a few places of rural Bangladesh, where the rich landowners give shelter and food to poor marginal farmers and their families, in return for lifelong service and loyalty from current and future generations of the family. For Ali Hossain, his story would have been like that of other bonded laborers without an intervention by USAID's CREL Project.

In 2014 Ali Hossain (30), living in Kamalgonj Upazila of Moulavibazar district, joined one of the Village Conservation Forums linked with Lawachara National Park. As a forum member, he received basic training on agriculture and nursery; also CREL linked him with the Department of Agricultural Extension who gave him further trainings on agriculture. This gave him confidence, he leased an



agricultural plot of 90 decimals to start cultivating vegetables. Within two years, he made enough profit to buy a piece of land to build a house for himself. After working for his master for 25 years, with backing from other local people he was able to leave his master without any payment and start a new independent family life. Hossain now works as a successful Local Service Provider, selling seeds and fertilizer and providing agricultural information to the local farmers. He said, CREL supported him to get out of bonded labor and start a new life as a free man. Now Hossain earns 12,000- 15,000 taka in a month and lives a happy life with his wife and two children.