

## National Co-Management Organization Congress Held in Dhaka



USAID has been promoting the co-management approach in Bangladesh for 20 years. This began with the Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry project in northeast wetlands. For the past 20 years, the Nishorgo Support project, the Integrated Protected Areas Conservation project and the Climate Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods project have promoted co-management in forest protected areas in partnership with the Forest Department. During this 15 years, co-management faced many challenges and achieved considerable success. Presently, 28 co-management committees (CMCs) are functioning in 22 forest-protected areas of Bangladesh. Co-Management has become a key approach to forest management. To share their successes and challenges among stakeholders, the Forest Department organized a national congress on April 18, 2018. USAID's CREL Project and Sundarbans Management Project of the GIZ jointly supported Forest Department with a one-day event titled "Co-Management Organizations Congress 2018" in Dhaka. Nearly 230 participants attended the Congress to review achievements of Co-management organizations, discuss regional recommendations for strengthening CMCs, exchange views and experiences and interact with policy-makers and development partners and recommend further actions to strengthen co-management.

Mr. Anisul Islam Mahmud, MP, Honorable Minister for Ministry of Environment and Forests led the Congress as chief guest. Mr. Abdullah Al Islam Jakob, MP, Honorable

Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Forests; Mr. Abdullah Al Mohsin Chowdhury, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ms. Janina Jaruzelski, Mission Director, USAID Bangladesh and Ms. Caren Blume, Deputy Head of Cooperation, German Embassy was special guests. Mr. Mohammed Shafiul Alam Chowdhury, Chief Conservator of Forests, chaired the program.

Mr. Zahiruddin Ahmed, Deputy Chief Conservator of Forests and PD, USAID's CREL Project welcomed participants and guests. He emphasized the role of CMCs in forest management and importance of capacity building. Ms. Caren Blume noted that importance of effective management of natural resources and ecosystems on the verge of climate change and appreciated Forest Department for adopting Co-Management approach. Ms. Janina Jaruzelski, Mission Director, USAID Bangladesh emphasized that natural resource management is difficult task in a country like Bangladesh where population density is high but forest department and local communities are efficiently carrying out this task and the members of the Co-Management Organizations have been playing important role to this effort. Mr. Abdullah Al Mohsin Chowdhury mentioned that the participation of CMOs in forest protection and management initiative is very much appreciated; Bangladesh Government has provided co-management approach a legal status through the "Protected Area Management Rules-2017".

*Cont. to Page 2*



## National Co-Management Organization Congress

*Cont....*

Mr. Mohammad Shafiul Alam recognized the role of CMOs in sustainable natural resource management and expressed his wishes for the success of the national congress 2018. Mr. Abdullah Al Islam Jakob, Honorable Deputy Minister, informed about Government's plan to increase forest coverage. Chief guest Mr. Anisul Islam Mahmud, Honorable Minister, appreciated the role of co-management organizations in reducing deforestation rate and improved biodiversity conservation in Protected areas of Bangladesh.

In a later session, representatives of co-management organizations discussed aspects of co-management including policy issues, institutional capacity building, government support, coordination and network and financial sustainability. The Congress adopted a set of key recommendations that had been consolidated from those developed through four regional consultations. These recommendations include: coordinate efforts among government agencies for strengthening Co-management Organizations to protect forests; support effective implementation of PA Management Rules 2017; provide comprehensive support (safety-nets) and livelihoods for natural resource dependent people; building the capacity of CMC and FD personnel on co-management; and, mainstreaming gender with improved representation in co-management.

## Building Self-Confidence and Leadership Among CMO Women Leaders

USAID's CREL project has been working for equitable engagement of men and women in natural resources management and livelihoods activities to promote gender equality and women empowerment in all tiers of co-management institutions. The project also works to reduce gender-based violence in the household and communities in PA landscape areas. Activities have included women-focused alternative livelihood initiatives, workshops and training to understand gender and CREL gender strategy, organizational management and leadership, gender mainstreaming, building self-confidence for women leaders and organizing spouses (couples) meetings at the village conservation forums (VCF). Several successes have been achieved towards increased empowerment of women.

Now, ten women hold CMC office-bearer positions in 4 regions, 48% of the People's Forum (PF) executive members and 44% VCFs executive members are women. These women won their positions by competing in elections. CREL organized regular training programs to "Build self-confidence and Leadership Development for Women Leaders" among CMOs, PFs, VCFs and office bearers in Cox's Bazar region during April. More than 40 CMO leaders attended these workshops.

Confident women CMO members with better understanding of their role in co-management now raise their voices in meetings, seminar and workshops. They meet with local government personnel, express their concerns and advocate for strengthened protection and conservation of natural resources in their areas.

## Secretary, Ministry of Land Visits Baikka Beel

Baikka Beel is considered the heart of Hail Haor, a major waterbody of fresh water resources in Moulvibazar. Baikka Beel permanent sanctuary was established to serve as the breeding ground for freshwater fish species. Mr. Md. Abdul Jalil, Secretary, Ministry of Land (MoL) on April 29, visited Moulvibazar and discussed the possibility of expansion of Baikka Beel. The meeting was organized at Baikka Beel interpretation center, but due to bad weather, the meeting was rescheduled at Moulvibazar Circuit House. Mr. M. Mokhesur Rahman,

Executive Director of CNRS briefed the secretary of the importance of Baikka Beel expansion. Dr. Paul Thompson explained the importance of wetland co-management. The Honorable Land Secretary appreciated community-based initiatives and expressed his support for the proposed extension. This additional area will be managed by Borogangina Resources Management Organization, a community-based fishermen's organization. Officials from Moulvibazar district administration, local elites and CREL officials attended the event.

