

Sundarbans Management Project (SMP) I & II

Background

Bangladesh's part of the largely undisturbed Sundarbans mangrove forest remains one of the last habitats of the endangered Royal Bengal Tigers, 315 species of birds and two species of rare river dolphins. The 6,000 square kilometres of primary forest, which is, together with the smaller Indian part of the Sundarbans, the largest patch of mangrove forest in the world.

The forest supports the livelihoods of over 4.5 million people and contributes to the high productivity of the Bay of Bengal that accounts for 7% of the entire world's fish catch. Sundarbans conservation is thus also a matter of regional and international food security.

With increasing climate change impacts, the advantages of such a natural buffer cannot be overstated and its conservation is essential to the survival of the coastal population.

Although there are no permanent settlements, human activity continues to affect the Sundarbans. Harmful practices like poison fishing, logging and poaching threaten the biodiversity of the mangroves while in their hinterland, unsustainable agricultural practices and increasing industrial development put further pressure on the ecosystem.

However, the gravity of these harmful factors is yet to be fully understood and consequently, lack of strategic monitoring data is impeding effective conservation of the Sundarbans.

Approach

This project is looking to make the governance system of the Sundarbans more equitable and sustainable empowering the people who are directly dependent on the mangroves. In all of its interventions, women's rights to access natural resources is always an overarching focus.

The Bangladesh Forest Department follows a collaborative management approach around the Sundarbans, engaging forest-dependent communities on its fringes to ensure shared governance between state authorities and the civil society but the system is not yet fully functional.

Key to effective conservation is protecting wildlife and its habitat. Towards that end, the project strengthens the forest department's

Project name	Sundarbans Management Project (SMP)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Commissioned value	9 million Euro
Project region	Bangladesh
Partner ministry	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
Executing agency	Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD)
SDG contribution	Gender Equality (5), Life below Water (14), Life on Land (15)
Duration	May 2015 to April 2022



SMART Patrolling in the Sundarbans



Organisational Development
Training Workshop

capacity in law enforcement and monitoring. The Forest Department has introduced SMART, a monitoring and reporting tool, to ensure accountability and good governance of forest patrols. This software-based tool collects, stores, communicates and analyses data on illegal activities, biodiversity, patrol routes, and management actions, provides meaningful insight and simultaneously evaluates ranger performance.

The Sundarbans Management Project is also developing conservation instruments and mechanisms.

Results/Expected results

SMART

- 34 master trainers were trained, who in turn trained 125 frontline forest officials
- First of its kind in the world, the Forest Department has adopted a standard SMART operating procedure
- SMART patrolling data helps planning and responding to illegal activities
- Increased patrol effectiveness: 650 offenders arrested in 2016-18
- Convinced with SMART, BFD adopted it as national standard for all its forests

Ecological Monitoring

- A long-term monitoring system of the Sundarbans including relevant parameters to be measured, will be developed

- Forest officials' capacity of such monitoring and interpreting the data will be enhanced leading to better assessment and mitigation of impacts in future
- An updated version of the Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) for the Sundarbans (2021-2030) will be available to support managers in their task to ensure sustainable management of its resources

Co-Management

- Out of 1,076 poor villagers depending on the forest, 825 have been included in the Village Conservation Forums (according to survey of 16,823 households of the Chandpai Range)
- Village Conservation Forums and People's Forums strengthened as self-running organisations with democratically elected executive committee, regular meetings and participatory decision-making
- VCF already have dedicated groups under them striving for women's empowerment. The process is ongoing to institutionalise their roles and function within the framework
- Over 1,500 Village Conservation Forum members trained in organizational development, natural resource management, and women's empowerment
- With increasing links to social and public services, villagers are becoming less dependent on the Sundarbans

Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

On behalf of German Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

In cooperation with Ministry of Environment, Forest and
Climate Change (MoEFCC)

As at January 2020

Printed by PATHWAY, Dhaka

Design Ominispace, Dhaka