

Other Sectors

Management of Natural Resources and Community Forestry (MNRFC - Chunati)

Participatory Forest Management and Reforestation in Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary

The Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary on the western side of the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway in southeastern Bangladesh was established in 1986. Its 7764 hectares encompass hills, plains, and forests. The forests of the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, like all the forests in Bangladesh, have been under intense pressure for decades. Over 50% of Bangladesh's forests have been depleted in the last 30 years; forests currently account for only about 6-10% of the area of Bangladesh.

Large tracts of forest in the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary have been denuded: trees have been felled for firewood and timber and the land converted to agricultural uses. Numerous species of flora and fauna have been lost over the last several decades. Soil erosion is widespread. Some 50,000 people live in 70 settlements in and around the sanctuary, and there is considerable conflict over land distribution and use among the different ethnic and cultural groups.

Chunati is a habitat for garjan (*Dipterocarp* spp.), an important timber species under threat, and also contains between 20 and 30 corridors for the movement of Asian elephants in the Hill Tracts and between Myanmar and Bangladesh. These corridors are increasingly blocked by settlements.



Chunati contains corridors for the movement of Asian elephants in the Hill Tracts and between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The Government of Bangladesh is working to restore ecological balance in the country. Both the National Forest Policy (1994) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2005) call for public and private afforestation programs and increased protection of flora and fauna through cooperation with local communities. Bangladesh is also a party to a number of international conventions on the protection of biodiversity. The 2008 Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan views afforestation as central to Bangladesh's climate adaptation strategies and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

Management of Natural Resources and Community Forestry (MNRFC-Chunati), a project of the Bangladesh Ministry of Environment and Forests and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, is implementing pilot reforestation and sustainable forest management measures in Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary based on cooperation between local co-management organizations and the Bangladesh Forest Department.

The Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary already has extensive co-management structures in the form of co-management committees, village conservation forums, and community patrol groups. These were set up by the USAID-supported Integrated Protected Area Co-management (IPAC) project, which is working to improve natural resource management in 26 major wetlands and forest protected areas throughout Bangladesh, including the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, through the Nishorgo Network. The Forest Department, in close cooperation with GIZ, is further strengthening these co-management structures through activities in four different components.

In the first component, the project, in collaboration with the Arannayk Foundation (Bangladesh Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation) is helping to preserve the sanctuary by making local communities less

dependent on unsustainable extraction of forest resources and by increasing their income. In addition to training on various alternative income generating activities, the project has set up small revolving funds that provide interest-free micro credit loans to members of co-management groups for the development of handicrafts, animal husbandry, nurseries, and other activities. Improved cooking stoves that reduce the use of firewood as fuel by 50% are being installed in households in and near the sanctuary, significantly easing the pressure on the forest.

The second component is working to increase forest density on 2000 hectares of degraded forest in the sanctuary by enrichment planting of indigenous trees and natural regeneration management. The Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University carried out a baseline study of initial forest cover, biodiversity, and wildlife in the core zone and will continue to monitor the forest condition during the course of the project. Twelve community patrol groups, including two comprised entirely of women, are patrolling the forest in order to prevent illegal tree felling. The project is also supporting social forestry in 1000 hectares of the buffer zone surrounding the sanctuary: trees and other vegetation are being planted on Forest Department land in collaboration with beneficiaries who



Twelve community patrol groups, including two comprised entirely of women, are patrolling the forest in order to prevent illegal tree felling.

tend the plots and share in the harvest according to Bangladesh's existing social forestry rules.

Component three involves environmental education and efforts to raise awareness among local people about biodiversity, climate change issues, and the local benefits of protecting the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary. Environmental libraries are being set up in local schools and community centers; events such as World Environmental Day are celebrated with the children. Other activities include theater performances, film screenings, and forest walks.

The First Bangladesh Forestry Congress was held in April 2011 to mark the International Year of Forests. Around 600 participants and representatives from government, non-government organizations, development partners, and academic institutions attended the congress, which was jointly organized by the Bangladesh Forest Department, UNDP, USAID, and GIZ. Chief guest Finance Minister AMA Muhith told participants that social forestry and massive tree plantation in each village are required as Bangladesh faces the impacts of climate change.

The fourth component of the project in the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary is assessing the potential for carbon financing and participation in the United Nations Collaborative Initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). Ongoing forest destruction and degradation increases greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while reforestation and a larger forested area would trap carbon dioxide in the air and mitigate GHG concentration in the atmosphere, an important contribution to climate protection. Thus, attempts will be made to develop a model for sustainable forest co-management and carbon financing under the Clean Development Mechanism and/or REDD which can be replicated by the government and private stakeholders in other protected areas of Bangladesh.

Contact: Project Director, Bangladesh Forest Department Head Quarters Dhaka or Mr. Berthold Schirm - berthold.schirm@giz.de