Tales from the Forests
Arannayk Foundation Newsletter

May – June 2015
Editorial

From the Executive Director

Supporting forest dependent communities to improve their livelihoods using activities that do not require deforestation is one of the core strategies of AF. This strategy has seen great success in forested areas such as Inani and Chunati. Within five years, the income of forest dependent communities can increase up to 40 per cent while illegal harvesting of forest resources typically falls by 60 per cent. We have found that when a family receives a good harvest of vegetables, their earning focus shifts to these activities rather than illegal harvesting of forest resources. You can read about one of our project participants in Barisal who was able to harvest 44 pumpkins from one seed (pg. 6, Inspiring Stories). She is shifting her focus to earning her income from vegetable cultivation and reducing her dependence on the forest. All that she needed were the right seeds and the correct agronomic practices.

Across Bangladesh, projects such as these are helping to reduce forest dependence however they do not address issues such as large-scale organized wildlife smuggling that crosses borders. Recently, poachers attempted to smuggle 130 rare species of tortoises out of Bangladesh (see pg. 3 ‘In the News’). In our keynote article, our guest contributor, Mr. Saikat Kumar Basu from the University of Lethbridge focuses on the potential for joint initiatives between Bangladesh and India to tackle some of these transboundary issues. Given the biogeographical similarities between the two countries, there is also the opportunity to share populations of flora or fauna that may be endangered in one country while abundant in the other. Such initiatives would not only address conservation issues that we cannot solve on our own but would also strengthen the ties between the two countries.

I hope that you enjoy this second edition of our newsletter in 2015. A special thank you to Ms Libby Copsey who worked tirelessly on the design of both of our newsletters in 2015.
Keynote Article

It’s better when we work together – Considering Joint Indo-Bangladesh conservation initiatives

Mr. Saikat Kumar Basu, University of Lethbridge, Canada

Joint Indo-Bangladesh environment protection and conservation initiatives can pay big dividends in the long term. Achieving long-term objectives and goals can be extremely challenging in developing countries so short-term steps are vital to achieving success on a longer-term scale.

The governments of both India and Bangladesh have already cooperated successfully on many initiatives such as new highways and railway tracks between the two countries. The biogeographical similarities between the two sister nations means that they can work together on environmental protection and conservation objectives as well. If this cooperation extended to joint border management and forest practices, it would assist in preventing of illegal cross border wildlife trade and poaching practices.

A joint initiative between the two countries could assist in increasing monitoring and surveillance of the border areas. In the long-term this will see a considerable reduction in illegal smuggling of major and minor forest products across the unguarded border posts, and illegal trade in exotic, endemic and endangered wildlife species for black markets of south and south-east Asia and China.

There are also other benefits to a joint approach to conservation aside from better border control. Blue peafowl (peacock) is a widely distributed and a least concern species in India; while this majestic species has become extinct in the wild in adjoining Bangladesh. Reintroduction of Indian blue peafowl into suitable habitats of Bangladesh can help the revival of the species. Such species with excess population could be partly used to repopulate suitable habitats in Bangladesh and distribute the species in parts of their former habitats.

Green peafowl is now extinct in both India and Bangladesh but still exists in bordering Myanmar. An Indo-Bangladesh joint captive breeding program could help in the breeding, reintroduction and repopulation of this beautiful species in both countries. Similar joint initiatives in indigenous species exchange in the Sunderbans and Chittagong Hill Tracts regions (the two most biodiverse regions of Bangladesh) would greatly help both nations to successfully conserve many endangered species. Already in the Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve (covering both India and Bangladesh) such initiatives are already being discussed.

These initiatives could even extend to a joint environmental protection and conservation agreement among SAARC member nations, focusing on issues which transcend national boundaries. Greater cooperation among the SAARC member nations would help to protect the local forests and conserve wildlife more efficiently.

While these conservation goals may seem lofty, small steps will see us move towards achieving them. Cooperation will not only increase socio-economic prosperity but continue to strengthen the ties between the two countries. At the very least, this work draws the attention of governments and citizens of both countries to generate a common platform for better protection and conservation of forests and wildlife of both nations.
New Sunbarbans in Chitrakul
The Daily Ittefaq, 11 May 2015

The area of mangroves in the Sundarbans is increasing. In Bagerhat’s Chitalmari Union (about 100 kilometers from the main area of forest) mangrove trees are growing along the banks of the Chitra River. This ‘mini Sundarban’ spreads across the banks of 10 to 15 villages and there have even been sightings of the Sundarban’s majestic Royal Bengal Tiger and Spotted Deer. The villagers consider this a mixed blessing as wildlife such as snakes and tigers may move to this area of new habitat.

Ecosystem Threatened: Oil Spills and Spreads from Derailed Oil Filled Tank Wagon
Dhaka Tribune, 20th June 2015

On Friday 19th June, a fragile rail bridge collapsed in Boalkhali caused the derailment of a locomotive and three wagons carrying about 90,000 litres of furnace oil. All of the wagons either fully or partially capsized into the canal spilling much of the oil. The spilled furnace oil spread to nearby farming land as well as Halda, upstream of Karnaphuli, due to the high tide. The spill has affected crops and fish in the waterways. It is also anticipated that the spill will severely impact on the biodiversity and ecosystem of the Karnaphuli River.

Monks save trees through ordination
The Huffington Post, 17 May 2015

Phrakru Pitak Nanthakthun, a Buddhist monk living in north-east Thailand has been ordaining trees over the past 25 years. He has been holding ceremonies to “ordain” trees to make them sacred and change people’s perceptions about the importance of trees. In an interview with the BBC, Nanthaktun says that “once a tree is ordained nobody wants to destroy it.” Along with the other monks, Nanthakthun hosts public ceremonies to ordain trees where they tie orange robes around the tree area. This helps people to distinguish ordained trees and is a practical solution in decreasing degradation of forests.

Deer and tortoises saved from poachers
The Daily Prothom Alo, May 2015

A team from Bangladesh’s elite crime fighting squad (Rapid Action Battalion or RAB) rescued 27 deer from two farms in Narayganj along with 130 rare species of tortoises worth BDT 300,000 from Shahjalal International Airport (Dhaka). All of the rescued animals were sent to the Gazipur Safari Park and the poachers were ordered to pay a fine – for the deer alone, the fine totaled BDT 300,000.

Tree Fair held in Agargaon
Banglanews24, June 2015

As an annual national event to encourage people to plant trees, a month-long tree fair was held in June. Arranged by the Forest Department, there were 89 nurseries exhibiting more than 500 species of local and foreign flowers, fruits, timber, decorative and medicinal plant saplings and seeds along with decorative pots and organic and inorganic fertilizers. The fair generated significant interest among visitors and many of them bought planting materials from the fair.
Launch of new environmental education book

Under the Livelihood Development of Forest dependent Communities in and around Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary (LDFC-CWS) project, jointly funded by GIZ and AF, an environmental education book – Amader Chunati Bon (Our Chunati Forest) – has been published. It is aimed at students from Class 6 to Class 10 studying at selected schools near the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary and forms part of the pilot environmental education program. The book focuses on the importance of the forest and biodiversity at Chunati and features simple language along with colorful illustrations of flora and fauna found at Chunati. It is expected that, through this program, the students will learn more about their surroundings and encourage their parents to conserve rather than destroy the forest. To implement the program, a training session was held on 18-20 May for 20 high school teachers from 10 schools.

Inauguration of Multipurpose Community House

The Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) has been working with AF since 2009 on the Swamp Forest Restoration project in the Sunamganj area. To create a permanent place for the community and project participants to meet and discuss conservation issues, a Multi-Purpose Community House named “Gobindapur Forest and Environment Development Agricultural Co-Operative Society Limited” was built. Tahiuna Begum, the Upazilla Executive Officier, inaugurated the house on 4 May 2015. This house will be used for various purposes such as the community’s monthly group meetings, vaccinations, a non-formal school, various religious and cultural events and temporary storage of seasonal crops.

Exchange visit held to help project participant learn new methods

An exchange visit was organized for the AF-funded project ‘Restoration of Hilly Biodiversity through Community Based Bio-resource Management’ at Dighinala, Khagrachari on 24-25 June. Exchange visits are an excellent way of introducing participants to different approaches at different sites, where the success of these approaches is visible. A team of 100 participants were taken to visit the demonstration plots at Barua para, which is one of the most successful areas of the project. The participants learned a multitude of new cultivation techniques from the president and secretary of the Barua Para CBO under the guidance of Anando. The participants will then be able to apply these new techniques to their own plots.

Acknowledging outstanding performances of community volunteers

In the Climate Resilient Participatory Afforestation and Reforestation Project (Component 2), each participating community has a Community Organizing Volunteer (COV) who is responsible for implementing the project at the village-level as well as providing a quarterly progress report to their supervisor. In the southern region, the COV quarterly meeting was held on June 10, 2015 at the Barisal Uttaran Office. Based on their report and performance in the field, the top three COVs received a certificate and trophy in appreciation of their work. Aside from acknowledging excellent performance, the awards serve to motivate and encourage all COVs in their efforts. The top three COVs were (in order) Ranjita Rani Das (Bhola), Hafiza Akhter (Barisal) and Marina Akhter (Golachipa).
Voices from the Field

An interview with local Forest Guards about the Community Patrol Group program

Members of local community groups patrolling the forests themselves is a concept implemented in many AF project areas, particularly in the Chittagong region where Community Patrol Groups (CPGs) are accepted by the community. The intention is to reduce the incidence of illegal tree felling, poaching, grazing and settlement. CPG members patrol the forests under the direct supervision of the local forest officer.

CPGs are an important element in communities where AF is implementing the Alternative Livelihood component of the CRPAR Project. To date, 21 CPGs have been formed with 21 members in each group who regularly patrol adjacent forests accompanied by a forest officer.

The concept is very new, even to the forest officials working in the CRPAR project areas. At the Chargongamoti forest camp in Patuakhali, a group of forest guards were asked about the CPG concept which was introduced in the area in addition to their own patrolling. Overall the guards were optimistic about the concept and appreciated the extra assistance in patrolling. Mr. Gazi Nasir Uddin (Forest guard) said:

“We never thought that we will be getting this much help from the locals for protecting the trees. We lacked manpower before for managing and guarding such huge amount of plantation area, but now as the CPG members are being regular while patrolling in the forest, our hassle of guarding the plantation has minimized.”

Previously there were only six people to patrol the area and it was very difficult for them to manage 20 km² of land with newly planted seedlings. However, the CPGs have made their job much easier.

The forest guard also shared a story of a CPG member (Mr. Sohrab Hossain) who saved a Keora tree from being felled. The introduction of CPGs patrolling regularly has seen the frequency of illegal felling reduced.

According to the forest guards, if the enthusiasm from the local CPG can be maintained then the Forest Department can save the current plantation from illegal felling and plan ahead for future plantations.

Although the CPGs patrol the forests voluntarily, Arannayk Foundation will shortly approve a loan of BDT 200,000 to each group to enable members to implement alternative income generating activities to reduce their own forest dependence.

“We never thought that we will be getting this much help from the locals for protecting the trees.”
Jannat on Her Way to Success

Shatkania is a well-known Upazila in southern Chittagong. In it lies a village surrounded by the forest called Boroduara. This is where Jannat lives with her husband and two sons. Her eldest son is eleven years old and studies in class three while the younger one is seven and studies in class two. Her husband worked as a day laborer while Jannat reared cows and helped with the homestead farming. While these jobs provided an income, it wasn’t enough and the family was struggling. It was very difficult for Jannat to manage her children’s education, buy clothes for them and maintain the house all at the same time. She was also suffering from respiratory problems due to the poor condition of their home.

That was when Jannat heard about AF’s alternative livelihood work as part of the Climate Resilient Participatory Afforestation and Reforestation project. In May 2014, she became a participant and worked hard to save BDT 100 per month. In addition, Jannat received seasonal vegetable and fruit seeds, hens and a stove that needed less wood and produced less smoke. She found that her respiratory problems started to disappear after installing the Improved Cooking Stove as there was less smoke in the cooking area.

Through these activities, Jannat improved her lifestyle. She cultivated pumpkins and was able to sell 44 pumpkins at the market, making a profit of BDT 8,000. She used the money to renovate her house, educate her children and buy them new clothes. In addition, she was able to pay BDT 2,000 to lease some land for vegetable farming. Today, Jannat is more confident in the futures of her and her family.
Thailand visit to learn more about mangroves

This year the Regional UN-REDD Asia-Pacific Exchange program among Civil Society (CSO) and Indigenous Peoples’ representatives and leaders was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 7 – 8 May, 2015 and AF’s Executive Director, Mr. Farid Uddin Ahmed, attended.

The program included both lectures and visits to demonstration sites. At these sites it was shown that mangrove shrimp farming is more profitable than intensive shrimp farming, particularly in a polyculture environment. Almost 20 per cent of the revenue generated by Vietnam’s burgeoning tourism industry in Halong Bay is also paid to a co-management authority to facilitate the protection of forests in the bay. One handy tip that participants learnt was that to remove the smell of ocean fish from your hands, simply wash them in tea leaves and lemon juice!

Celebrating World Environment Day 2015

The theme for World Environment Day (WED) 2015 was ‘Sustainable consumption and production’ with a slogan of ‘Seven Billion Dreams. One Planet. Consume with Care.’ AF and its partner organizations celebrated WED nationwide with rallies, planting of trees, distribution of seedlings and an art competition. Schools in and around the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary organized group activities focusing on environmental degradation and possible solutions to the causes of this.

Message development Workshop at BCCP

A 3 day long "Message Development Workshop" was organized by Climate Resilient Afforestation and Reforestation Project (CRPARP). Along with Forest Department Officials, AF and partner NGO staff attended. The workshop focused on message and material development and how to successfully implement them.

Workshop on Agar wood

AF staff attended a workshop organized by Bangladesh Forest Research Institute (BFRI) on the prospect of Agar in Bangladesh. Attendees included Mr. Md. Yunus Ali, the Chief Conservator of Forests, researchers, academics, development professionals, growers and processors.

The workshop participants discussed their experiences of growing trees and production of agar using traditional techniques along with barriers to export and industry growth. While production techniques were clear (nailing of stem), inaccuracies in this process can lead to lower yield. New production techniques to increase the yield and quality of agar such as the use of nano-technology were also discussed.

Further information about the workshop recommendations can be found on Arannayk Foundation’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/arannayk).

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