

Ramsar Small Grants Fund Project Visit, Bangladesh, January 2010

1. Miss Ann Aldersey, Assistant Advisor for Asia-Oceania, travelled to Bangladesh from the 6th - 15th January 2010 to participate in activities to formally launch the 2008 Ramsar Small Grants Fund (SGF) project, *People acting through social mobilization for the conservation and wise use of the wetlands in the southwest coast of Bangladesh*. The project is being undertaken by the Coastal Development Partnership, an environmental non-government organisation in Bangladesh, with financial support given by the Government of Japan.
2. A meeting with the Bangladesh Ramsar Administrative Authority, the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, was held to discuss the implementation of the Convention in Bangladesh. Discussions covered the management of Bangladesh's two Ramsar sites, the future designation of 3 further Ramsar wetlands, and the cyclone relief efforts underway in and around the Sundarbans Reserved Forest Ramsar site. In particular, further practical support for the SGF project was offered, both from the Ministry in Dhaka, and through the Conservator of Forests in Khulna.
3. A visit was made to the Coastal Development Partnership (CDP) offices in Dhaka, to meet project staff and visit the Wetland Advocacy and Resource Centre, supported as part of the SGF project.



Staff of the Coastal Development Partnership in the Wetland Advocacy and Resource Centre, Dhaka

4. Following travel to Khulna, field visits were made to the Bagerhat and Satkhira Districts with CDP staff, to meet local representatives of the partner organisations involved in project implementation. In the field, it was possible to meet with communities in the project area, and speak with them about their hopes for the project.



Community visits in Bagerhat and Sathkhira Districts

5. Escorted by forestry officers, the group was privileged to be taken by boat into the restricted area of the Sundarbans Reserved Forest Ramsar site. At the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal, the Sundarbans is one of the largest contiguous mangrove forests in the world. A Ramsar site since 1992, the site is a biological hotspot and supports numerous threatened species of flora and fauna.



Sundarbans Reserved Forest Ramsar Wetlands

6. Hosted by Khulna Jano Shastho O Shikka Unnayan Foundation, an evening cultural performance highlighted the different methods of locally communicating the messages of wetland conservation.



Cultural Performance in Sathkhira District

7. To formally launch the Ramsar SGF project, a press conference was held at the offices of the Commissioner of Khulna District, convened by the Deputy Commissioner, the Director of the Ministry of Environment, the Executive Director of the CDP, and the Ramsar Secretariat Assistant Advisor for Asia-Oceania, and attended by 50 journalists and interested citizens.



Project Launching Press Conference. L - R: Mr **S. M. Selim Bulbul**, Executive Director, Conscience; Mr S. J. H. Masum, Executive Director CDP; Ms A. Aldersey, Assistant Advisor Asia-Oceania, Ramsar Secretariat; Mr N.M. Zeaul Alam, Deputy Commissioner of Khulna District; Mr **S. A. Quayum**, Chair person, Citizen Forum; Mr **S. A. Jalil**, Advisor, CDP.

8. To formally commence the project activities, Memorandums of Understanding were signed between the CPD and the five project partner organisations. 14 representatives of the partner organisations were present during the signing ceremony, and stayed for many hours to discuss the upcoming project actions.



Signing the Memorandum of Understanding. L - R: **Dr. Abu Sayeed, Executive Director, Khulna Jano Shostho O Shikka Unnyon Foundation**; Mr Masum, CDP; and Ms Aldersey, Ramsar Secretariat.

9. To increase awareness and garner support for the SGF project, meetings were held with various officials in Khulna, including the Honourable Mayor of the Khulna City Corporation, and the Conservator of Forests Khulna District.
10. Within Khulna, visits were made to the offices of partner organisations, in particular to see activities encouraging communities to find alternative livelihoods to shrimp farming.



Visit to the Rural and Urban Poor's Partner for Social Advancement office, Khulna.

11. Following travel back to Dhaka, a meeting was held with the Country Representative of IUCN to discuss the Community Based Sustainable Management of Tanguar Haor Ramsar site, being implemented by IUCN on behalf of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

12. The Ramsar Secretariat extends its appreciation to the staff of the Coastal Development Partnership in hosting the visit, and to the many individuals and organisations involved in the supporting the itinerary.

-- Ann Aldersey, Assistant Advisor for Asia-Oceania, Ramsar Secretariat. January 2010.