

Recognizing the power of wetlands

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India
Bangladesh



Mangrove nursery in the Sundarbans

A wetland restoration project in the Sundarbans, a protected area shared by India and Bangladesh, is addressing climate change, protecting the coastline from floods while securing food and income for local communities. The Sundarbans host one of the largest mangrove forests in the world, located at the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers between India and Bangladesh. They are home to endangered wildlife, including the Bengal Tiger, the King Cobra and the River Terrapin, a rare turtle once believed to be extinct.

The Bangladeshi section of the Sundarbans is protected under the Ramsar Convention as a “wetland of international importance”, or Ramsar Site, and both the Bangladeshi and Indian parts are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Yet, over the years, various changes in water flows, including the diversion of upstream freshwater for agriculture, have damaged the forest. Climate change is also threatening the area, and the rising sea level could lead to the destruction of 75% of the forest by the end of the century according to a UNESCO report.

In 2011 the Livelihoods Fund, a carbon investment fund created by Danone, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), joined the local NGO Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) in a project aimed at addressing climate change while improving the lives of local communities. The project is planting over 16 million mangroves in the Indian Sundarbans.



The Sundarbans

The mission of the Livelihoods Fund is to support the efforts of poor rural communities in developing countries to restore their ecosystems, which ensures their food security, increases their incomes, and improves their living conditions.

Mangroves have an extraordinary ability to capture and store carbon that, if otherwise released in the atmosphere, contributes to global warming. Those planted in India are expected to capture 671,000 tonnes of carbon over 20 years - translating into carbon offset credits for Livelihoods investors.

In addition, the newly-planted mangroves will reduce the impacts of floods and storms expected to become more frequent with global warming. Their trunks and branches act as natural shields against the waves, protecting people, houses and farmland. In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in South Asia, the journal *Science* cited models showing that 30 coastal trees per 100 square metres might reduce the flow of a tsunami by 90%.

Moreover, restored mangrove forests also act as feeding grounds for fish, molluscs and crustaceans, providing food and a source of income to the local community.

Projects like the one in the Sundarbans demonstrate the importance of wetlands in reducing climate change and protecting communities from its devastating effects.

“I am encouraged that more and more communities, countries and companies are investing in wetlands protection and restoration and making it a key issue in the climate change debate,” said Christopher Briggs, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. “Wetlands play an essential role in a comprehensive global strategy for resilient communities and vibrant, sustainable economies,” he added.

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