

Biodiversity Conservation Project in the Climate Change South-Western Region in Bangladesh.

Project Overview:

The southwestern region of Bangladesh is one of the areas most vulnerable to climate change. The lives, livelihoods, and natural environment of the people in this region are under constant threat due to cyclones, storm surges, increasing salinity, erratic rainfall, river erosion, waterlogging, and rising temperatures. Simultaneously, local biodiversity is rapidly deteriorating as a result of changes to forests, wetlands, rivers and canals, agricultural lands, and other natural habitats.



Against this backdrop, IDO is implementing a project in the southwestern region aimed at biodiversity conservation and addressing the impacts of climate change. The project's primary objective is to conserve biodiversity and natural resources, enhance climate resilience, and ensure eco-friendly and sustainable livelihoods through the participation of local communities. The project is creating opportunities to build capacity for nature conservation and local-level environmental management by engaging the local community—particularly women, youth, and marginalized groups.

The project operates by considering the interdependence between nature and humanity, rather than limiting itself solely to biodiversity conservation. Key aspects of such a project include raising awareness among local populations, ensuring the sustainable use of natural

resources, conserving local biodiversity, fostering climate-resilient livelihoods, and strengthening community-based initiatives.

Key Problems and Challenges:

There are several significant issues regarding biodiversity conservation in the southwestern region. Firstly, the natural habitats of many plants and animals are undergoing changes due to increased salinity and waterlogging caused by climate change. Secondly, the degradation of rivers, canals, wetlands, and other natural resources is adversely affecting biodiversity.

Thirdly, the local population's excessive reliance on natural resources and limited alternative livelihood options are, in many instances, placing pressure on biodiversity. Furthermore, indiscriminate tree felling, the alteration of water bodies and habitats, the excessive use of pesticides and chemicals, the illegal harvesting of fish and other aquatic or wild animals, and a lack of adequate environmental awareness also pose significant challenges.

Another significant issue is that, despite possessing knowledge and participating in biodiversity conservation, local communities often have limited effective involvement in decision-making processes. A lack of coordination among government agencies, local government bodies, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, and the community also hinders sustainable conservation efforts.

Action Required:

To make biodiversity conservation effective and sustainable, it is essential to regard local communities as key partners in the project. To this end, community-based conservation management must be strengthened, and the knowledge, experience, and opinions of local people must be prioritized in planning and decision-making.

1. Inventory of local biodiversity and conservation planning: Identifying the types of flora, fauna, and natural habitats at risk in a specific area and formulating local-level conservation plans.

2. Nature-based Solutions: Planting trees suited to the local environment, restoring native species, conserving wetlands and canals, and strengthening natural defense systems.

3. Climate-resilient livelihoods: Expanding opportunities for agriculture, fisheries, livestock rearing, small-scale entrepreneurship, and other eco-friendly livelihoods that are compatible with climate risks, thereby reducing excessive pressure on natural resources.

4. Engagement of women and youth: Creating opportunities for women and youth to take the lead in biodiversity conservation, environmental education, social awareness, and green entrepreneurship activities.

5. Awareness and Environmental Education: Conduct continuous awareness-raising activities regarding biodiversity and climate change through schools, communities, local institutions, and social organizations.

6. Coordination between Local and Government Institutions: Establish effective coordination and information-sharing mechanisms among Union Parishads, Upazila administrations, government departments related to forests and the environment, local organizations, and the community.

7. Data-based monitoring: Regularly monitoring and documenting changes in biodiversity, climate risks, and impacts on community livelihoods alongside project activities.

Conclusion:

Addressing the impacts of climate change and conserving biodiversity in the southwestern region are deeply interconnected. Therefore, integrated initiatives must be adopted that go beyond mere natural resource conservation to take into account the livelihoods, knowledge, participation, and rights of local communities. In this context, IDO's ongoing project is creating an opportunity to forge an effective link between nature conservation and climate-resilient development by actively involving local people.

To ensure the sustainability of the project's achievements in the future, it is essential to enhance local leadership and ownership, strengthen public-private partnerships, leverage local knowledge, and scale up successful initiatives. This approach will not only boost the resilience of vulnerable communities in the southwestern region but also ensure the long-term protection of the country's vital biodiversity and natural resources.