भारत सरकार
Government of India
पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय
Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change
राष्ट्रीय व्याघ्र संरक्षण प्राधिकरण
National Tiger Conservation Authority

F. No. 7-36/2019-NTCA **Dated: 10th April, 2023**

Sub: Summary record of the Meeting on Transboundary Conservation of Tigers in Sundarban Landscape in India and Bangladesh - reg.

Please find enclosed herewith a copy of summary records/ proceedings of the Meeting on Transboundary Conservation of Tigers in Sundarban Landscape in India and Bangladesh held at Kolkata on 14th February, 2023.

The draft summary record was sent to the Government of Bangladesh for inputs/comments. These inputs were subsequently incorporated into the draft summary record/proceedings and were approved by the Competent Authority for onward circulation.

Encl: As above.

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Distribution:

1. The ADG (Project Tiger) & Member Secretary (NTCA)
2. The PCCF/ Head of Forest Force, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata
3. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata
4. Sh. Dipak Kumar Chakraborty Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt. of Bangladesh (Head of Delegation of Government of Bangladesh)
5. Sh. Anupam Joshi, Senior Environmental Specialist, World Bank
6. The Field Director, Sundarban Biosphere Reserve, West Bengal
7. Dr. Abu Naser Mohsin Hossain, Divisional Forest Officer, Sundarbans West Forest Division, Bangladesh Forest Department

Copy for kind information to:

1. The IGF (NTCA), Hqrs., New Delhi/ Regional Office, Guwahati
2. The Joint Secretary (BM), Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

Summary record of the Meeting on Transboundary Conservation of Tigers in Sundarban Landscape in India and Bangladesh

The bilateral meeting on Transboundary Conservation of Tigers in Sundarban Landscape of India and Bangladesh was held at Kolkata on 14thFebruary 2023. A list of participants is at Annexure-I **Mr Mohammad Sajid Sultan, Assistant Inspector General of Forest**, National Tiger Conservation Authority, MoEF&CC, initiated the discussion by welcoming all participants.

Following the Round of introduction by the participants, **Dr S.P. Yadav, ADG (Project Tiger) & Member Secretary (NTCA),** New Delhi, Head of the Indian Delegation outlined the significance of Southeast Asia as a whole in Tiger Conservation. Further setting the tone of the meeting, the uniqueness of the Sundarbans as the only mangrove habitat with Tigers and the importance of transboundary collaborations was highlighted.

Various related aspects of conservation were touched such as the biotic and abiotic threats the region, the communities in and around, and consequently the importance of protecting the Sundarbans and the associated landscape.

Mr Debal Ray, IFS, PCCF, Wildlife and CWLW, West Bengal presented on the ecological importance of the Sundarbans, the protection infrastructure, management practices, Tiger demographics, threats and challenges faced by the Indian Sundarbans, including the effects of climate change on the landscape and cross-border issues pertinent to management and protection of the area.

Mr Abu Naser Mohsin Hossain, Divisional Forest Officer, Sundarban West Forest Division Bangladesh, presented on the Bangladesh Sundarbans. Various managerial interventions were outlined and new innovations in handling field issues was highlighted. Some of the key aspects of the presentation included the Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan and management interventions, ongoing research activities, and a special focus on the well-being of the widows ie. (who lost their husbands to Tiger attacks). Tiger demographics, protection measures, threats and challenges faced by the Bangladesh Sundarbans including the effects of climate change on the landscape.

Mr Soumitra Dasgupta, IFS, PCCF and HoFF, West Bengal further emphasized the significance of the Tiger in mangroves and put forward that synergy is required in managing the Indian Sundarbans and the Bangladesh Sundarbans as one unified management unit to ensure greater ecological integrity, better ecosystem resilience, improvement of day-to-day management, promotion of tourism, improvement of community livelihoods and knowledge exchange. Thereby, emphasizing the significance of joint collaborations, the need and benefits of a Transboundary Protected area between the two countries were highlighted.

Mr Anupam Joshi, Senior Environmental Specialist, World Bank, presented a brief overview of a new proposed World Bank-supported regional platform "South Asia Regional Platform for Ecological Security" (SHARPER), which will promote Regional cooperation and collaboration for the management of the transboundary ecosystems in South Asia. SHARPER will facilitate knowledge exchange, technical workshops, strategic meetings and capacity building for transboundary ecosystem management that will help address climate vulnerability. Members of both delegations welcomed the idea of the proposed platform and reiterated that this will be helpful in collectively achieving the goals and targets of the newly adopted Global Biodiversity Framework.

Mr Sanjay Gupta, Senior Consultant, World Bank briefed on the four pillars of conservation namely Reducing vulnerability, Climate-resilient livelihood, Biodiversity Conservation and Regional cooperation, and expressed that the World Bank will extend it's support, if a semi-permanent or permanent secretariat on the matter of protecting Sundarbans as the transboundary protected area, is declared.

Mr Istiak Sobhan, Environment Specialist, World Bank, Dhaka Office, reconfirmed World Banks's support to a semi-permanent or permanent secretariat as spoken on before by Sri Sanjay Gupta, and emphasized the inclusion of the people in and around the Sundarbans in the Conservation, reiterating the landscape-based approach to Conservation.

Mr. Dipak Kumar Chakraborty, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Head of Bangladesh Delegation requested to discuss about the conservation of tiger in this meeting as the issues related with the conservation of the Sundarbans would be discussed in the next meeting of Joint Working Group (JWG) on the Sundarbans to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Discussion on Agenda Items	Decision
Agenda 1: Declaration of Sundarbans as a Transboundary Protected Area **<u>Discussion:</u>** India proposed that a Transboundary Protected Area covering both Indian and Bangladesh Sundarban that will ensure a minimum commonality and synergy in Management of Sundarban Landscape. These would include activities such as the Joint Enumeration, Common Protocols for handling tigers, exchange of expertise etc. This will enable a new era in conservation of tigers, better biodiversity management on both sides and further enabling stronger ties between the two countries. India assured that the objective of the Transboundary Protected Area would be in lines of convergence in the field level Management plan which will act as a win-win situation to not only protect the landscape and the People but also will attract International attention and Funding in the region. Formulation of such an area would not require any amendment in existing laws of the countries and will purely be on the Field Management Level. The Nomenclature of the area may be in the lines of "Peace Park or Friendship Park" that can attract popular imagination. Bangladesh appreciated the proposal and recommended that the nomenclature of such a unified management unit be discussed in the next JWG for further deliberations.	1. Preparation of a Plan for such Common standards and Protocols in Management by the Field Director, Sundarban Tiger Reserve. 2. Deliberations and nomenclature finalization is to be taken up in the next Joint Working Group in Dhaka, Bangladesh

World Bank and Global Tiger Forum offered to facilitate such collaboration in declaring a transboundary protected area for the conservation of tigers in the future.	
Agenda 2: Mapping of the Corridor along the Indian and Bangladesh Sundarban Forest and assessment of biodiversity and subsequent preparation of Management Plan **<u>Discussion:</u>** **Mapping of Tiger Corridor:** India described its efforts in mapping all the 32 major Tiger Corridors between the Tiger Reserves of India and proposed the need for such mapping of tiger corridors that exist between the Bangladesh and Indian Sundarbans as it will help in making informed management plans in managing those critical areas and minimize disturbances like illegal fishing, Vessel movement in those areas. If agreed, a scientific protocol for determining the corridor can be devised where both countries can independently work and share the data to a Joint Technical committee. Bangladesh welcomed the proposal to identify the corridors of tiger movement between the countries and suggested methods like Cross-referencing Camera Trap images, Scat Analysis in addition to Radio Collar/ Satellite Collar can be used for mapping of Corridors. The proposal was agreed. **Assessment of Biodiversity:** India also described the assessment of Biodiversity in all the Tiger Reserves of India with the help of the scientific institutions Botanical Survey of India and Zoological Survey of India. In this regard, a long term assessment can be conducted in both Indian and Bangladesh Sundarbans with the expertise available in India. Bangladesh said the proposal regarding Biodiversity assessment may be discussed in the Joint Working Group of Biodiversity.	1. Wildlife Institute of India to prepare the Protocols to map the corridors with the available data and if needed with further data collection and studies. 2. Both the countries shall exchange already collected data with each other as the first step in joint mapping of corridors. 3. Biodiversity assessment shall be discussed in the next meeting of Joint Working Group on the Sundarbans as Biodiversity is part of the Agreed Action Points.
Agenda 3: Elaborate studies of Existing Flora and Faunal Biodiversity with emphasis on Major Species Both India and Bangladesh agreed that the agenda point may be discussed in the biodiversity - Joint Working Group.	1. To be deliberated upon in the JWG meeting, Dhaka
Agenda 4: Periodical Joint Estimation of Tiger Population and Prey-base in the Landscape.	1. Field level officers of the Sundarbans shall prepare a primary

Joint Population assessment of Tiger between Bangladesh and India was last done in 2014 and has not been done since then. A Joint Report is being released with Nepal and Bhutan. A Joint Report about the Population estimation of Tigers in Sundarbans can be released on a periodical basis on the basis of exchange of Data to WII. Bangladesh agreed to the proposal and put forward the suggestion of Synchronized Camera Trap exercise during the coming years as much as possible.	framework to synchronize future collaborative assessments of population.
Agenda 5: Exploring the possibilities of Mutually agreed SOP of Joint Patrolling in Vulnerable areas along the International Boundary. **Discussion:** Both Indian Forest Department and Bangladesh Forest Department have their SOP for Patrolling in their respective areas. In this regard, a Common SOP for Joint patrolling and other Tiger related Management in Sundarbans was proposed by India. Bangladesh responded that different organizations are involved in Patrolling of Sundarbans including BGB, Forest Department and hence this will require consensus between all the concerned agencies. However, the need for Joint Patrolling was emphasized by both the sides wherever possible and the modalities need to be worked out at the earliest possible. A meeting once in three months of the forest officials can be included in the Flag meetings of the Security forces where Joint Patrolling and other information exchange can be facilitated.	1. Formulation of a common SOP shall be deliberated upon in the next Joint Working Group meeting to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Agenda 6: Study of different ecological parameters including research and management in the landscape with reference to the changing Scenario considering the impact of Climate Change **Discussion:** Climate Change is affecting the ecosystem, dynamism in the sedimentation, salinity of the water and other aspects of the Sundarban ecosystem on a large scale. Measuring such changes and the mitigation efforts on either side can be exchanged so as to learn from each other. India provided the information on the Rate of Sedimentation study in Sundarbans and Carbon dioxide Flux study in Mangrove region that is ongoing in India.	1. Both the countries shall work on preparation of Climate/ Weather Monitoring studies and the World Bank will explore funding arrangements for such studies, equipment's and monitoring stations. This issue can be added in the agenda of JWG meeting.

Bangladesh side informed that the Ecological Monitoring Framework had been developed during the Sundarban Management Project (SMP) and would be implemented by the Sundarban Surakhkha Prokolpo (SSP). Abiotic, biotic factors of the ecosystem and different aspects of Habitat Change and Wildlife in Bangladesh Sundarban will be monitored under this project. India appreciated the efforts of Bangladesh and a proposal was put forward to share the data of the existing projects, their proposals so that the same can be replicated in both the sides with the necessary modifications which was agreed by both sides.	
Agenda 7: Explore the possibilities of Incorporating issues of Forest and Wildlife Management in the formal border meets. As this issue was discussed in detail in Agenda 5 both sides agreed that no discussion is required.	
Agenda 8: Sharing of the knowledge on Biodiversity conservation, livelihood improvement, disaster management, mitigation of Human Animal Conflict, Pollution Control including the involvement of the community **<u>Discussion:</u>** Various innovative interventions are taken on both the sides of the Sundarbans and hence sharing of the success models will help in making better interventions for the conservation of the ecosystem. Both sides shared their views in each of the said topics and the corresponding interventions in their respective countries. **Biodiversity Conservation:** India shared the proposals for the Satellite Based and LiDAR based survey to establish the elevation profile of the islands to understand the vulnerability of the islands to sea level rise and make the necessary management interventions in the required islands. India also shared a proposal for a joint Aquatic biodiversity assessment of Sundarbans as a whole that will help in conservation of the aquatic biodiversity. India also proposed a study of the local RET species in Sundarbans. Bangladesh mentioned about the efforts to conserve the Dolphins by the declaration of the Dolphin Sanctuaries in Sundarbans. Both sides agreed that the same will be discussed in detail in the next JWG meeting.	1. The management authorities of both countries may exchange information on query-basis. 2. Both the countries shall work on periodical exchange of knowledge and expertise particularly on aspects related to coping up with oil spills. This issue can be discussed in detail in the next JWG meeting in Dhaka.

Livelihood Improvement:

India shared its pilot study in setting up ID chips in every watercraft that will help in regulating its movement in Sundarbans which can reduce the illegal utilization of resources. India also shared the availability of the Saline tolerant rice variety and increasing Crab Fattening, Cultivation in the village side.

Bangladesh shared their expertise in Crab cultivation, hatcheries in Sundarbans and the Crab collection ban period in the breeding season of Crab in January and February of every year. They also shared about the 3-month fishing ban period during the monsoon month June, July, August. CILS under the IUCN program is supporting the Livelihood development of the people dependent on the forest areas.

Disaster Management:

India shared its efforts in Disaster Management like the Forest Department being the first responder in Sundarbans with relief in times of disaster and in order to mitigate the effects of frequent cyclones 16 crore seedlings have been planted in the past 2 years in Sundarbans. The Ecosystem service provided by the Plantation efforts in the past 3 years is around 1248 Crores annually.

Bangladesh explained about the Strategic Environment Assessment and the Strategic Environment Management Plan which would be one of the basic documents by which Sundarbans will be managed in the future. The Wireless Networks established for Communication during disaster and the Cyclone information system for alerting the fishermen were portrayed.

Mitigation of Human Wildlife Conflict:

India exchanged its success in reducing the Tiger Straying incidences using the nylon net fencing and the compensation regime of India in case of Wildlife Depredation.

Bangladesh appreciated the Nylon Net Fencing approach and shared their compensation regime with respect to the Wildlife depredation. Mother's Canal scheme in Bangladesh for Tiger attack victims and spouses of the victims was appreciated by India.

Pollution Control:

India expressed concerns about the capsizing of the boats carrying fly ash in Sundarbans and the Oil spill in Sundarbans and requested Bangladesh to share the expertise if any in the respective fields.

Bangladesh shared the vision of the National Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCOP) and a localized plan for Sundarbans and expressed the need for a Joint Workshop for the forest officials of both the sides for Capacity building to respond to such Situations in the future.	
Agenda 9: Training and Capacity Building of Field level Forest Officials **<u>Discussion:</u>** India expressed its willingness to share the expertise in Radio Collaring/Satellite Collaring, Capacity Building in Tiger Management, Tranquilization and other aspects to a small delegation from Bangladesh if required. Bangladesh expressed their interest in such training in the future for the officials.	1. Both the countries shall identify specific topics for training and Capacity Building. 2. A communication may be sent to NTCA, from the Bangladesh Government, requesting sharing of expertise on Radio collars and its associated monitoring.
Additional Agenda: **<u>Discussion:</u>** Wildlife Crimes and the exchange of data can be included as a part of the agenda in the next JWG meeting so as to streamline the information flow between the two countries and increase effectiveness of the response.	1. Field Level Day-to-day communication shall be ensured by the field officials. 2. Contacts of field level officials from both the countries are to be exchanged to expedite connection and information exchange.

The meeting ended with a Vote of Thanks to all the participants.

Concluded

Annexure - I

Meeting on Transboundary Conservation of Tigers in the Sundarbans Landscape

Held in Kolkata on 14.02.2023

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Meeting on Transboundary Conservation of Tigers in the Sundarbans Landscape

Held in Kolkata on 14.02.2023

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