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বিষয়: State of Conservation of the Sundarbans বিষয়ক অগ্রগতি প্রতিবেদন প্রেরণ প্রসঙ্গে।

উপর্যুক্ত বিষয়ের আলোকে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, UNESCO World Heritage Committee (44 COM 7B.91) এর ৪৪তম সভায় সুন্দরবন বিষয়ে গৃহীত সিদ্ধান্তের ক্ষেত্রে বন অধিদপ্তর সংশ্লিষ্ট সিদ্ধান্তসমূহের প্রেক্ষিতে অগ্রগতি প্রতিবেদন মন্ত্রণালয়ের অবগতি ও পরবর্তী প্রয়োজনীয় ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণের জন্য এতদসঙ্গে প্রেরণ করা হলো।

সংযুক্তি: বর্ণনামতে।

১৩/৮/২০২৩

(মোঃ আমীর হোসাইন চৌধুরী)
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পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয়
(দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ: উপসচিব, বন-২ অধিশাখা)

State of Conservation Report on the Decisions of 44 COM 7B.91 the World Heritage Committee on the Sundarbans World Heritage Site

Bangladesh Forest Department

August, 2023

1. Introduction

Bangladesh, as a South Asian biodiversity rich country, is committed to preserve and conserve its natural resources. Although Bangladesh is a very low carbon emission country, unfortunately it is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the effect of climate change. Climate Change poses significant risks to the sustainability of the conservation efforts of the Sundarbans as well as to the sustainable development of the country. Despite the threats of climate change induced hazards such as sea level rise resulting salinity intrusion into the Sundarbans, cyclones, droughts and other extremities in climatic variables which has laid immense pressure on the conservation efforts, the country is investing significant amount of resources in the conservation of its as well as the Sundarbans.

Bangladesh is proud of housing the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, and UNESCO World Heritage Center recognition of 3 wildlife sanctuaries as world heritage sites in 1997. The forest spans approximately 6017 sq km. in Bangladesh. It is a famous biodiversity hotspot, harboring 270 species of birds, 35 reptiles, and 42 mammals and protecting threatened and endangered species like the estuarine crocodile, Indian python, and Bengal Tiger. According to the Forest Inventory 2019, the carbon stock of the Sundarbans has increased from106 million tons in 2009 to 139 million tons in 2019, which is 31% of the total carbon stock in the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans experienced almost no forest cover loss from 2001 to 2013. The moratorium on tree logging has been extended up to 2030.Protected Areas have been extended to 53.52% of the total area of the Sundarbans in 2017, which was previously 23%. To protect forest resources and to combat crimes, SMART (Spatial Monitoring & Reporting Tools) and drone-supported patrolling has been implemented since 2015. Six Dolphin Wildlife Sanctuaries have been declared inside and adjacent areas of the Sundarbans for the conservation of the Ganges River Dolphin and Irrawaddy Dolphin. To protect the breeding ground for wildlife and fish and to conserve forest resources, the State Party has imposed periodical banning on collection of all types of forest products and tourism activities for 3 (three) months in each year since 2020. The initiative of ecological monitoring of Sundarbans and preparing a revised Integrated Resources Management Plan (IRMP) has also been adopted. Additionally, local communities have been involved in managing and conserving Sundarbans, and alternative livelihood support programs have been facilitated for their socio-economic uplift.

The conservation of the Sundarbans is one of the most coveted agenda of the State Party not only because of its value as a wonder of immense beauty but also due to its substantial contribution as a natural resource base and in minimizing the impacts of natural calamities. However, being a densely populated country with a small geographic footprint, development in Bangladesh must go together alongside the preservation of global and national treasures such as the Sundarbans. It is the sincere commitment of the State Party to uphold the OUV of the Property amid the futuristic development plan for the region in the coming decades. The different initiatives taken by the State Party are a direct reflection of said commitment and is a showcase of the lengths we are willing to go to the preservation of nature in our development agenda.

2. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee (Decision: 44 COM 7B.91)

2.1. Decision no. 5

Considers that the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the South-West region of Bangladesh should provide an adequate planning instrument to ensure that all future large-scale industrial development in the vicinity of the property will not adversely impact the OUV;

Response

The Strategic Environmental Management Plan (SEMP) and SEA report for the South west region have provided adequate planning instrument for future industrial development in the vicinity of the property. These two documents have clearly recommended the types of industries to be developed in the vicinity of the property. For example, it has recommended to establish low polluting industries at Mongla EPZ area. Overall, the SEA concluded that the future threats to the Sundarbans can be managed provided that:

- The SEMP is fully and effectively implemented;
- There is full and effective implementation of existing environmental and socio-economic safeguards, laws, regulations and guidelines;
- Clean (green) and sustainable technologies is ensured, at least for future developments;
- The Sundarbans Management Plan is updated appropriately to reflect the findings of the SEA and recommendations in the SEMP;
- There is effective liaison and improved cooperation (perhaps through a national level committee) between the Forest Department and other agencies that have activities that impact on the Sundarbans – particularly from shipping, industry and tourism, to ensure that required coordination, management and mitigatory actions are taken.

The SEA and SEMP have been endorsed by the Government, and both documents have been shared among relevant stakeholders. Four information-sharing meetings were organized during January-June 2023, involving all stakeholders, to disseminate the roles and responsibilities of ministries and departments. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has requested all stakeholders to follow SEA & SEMP as future decision-making instruments.

2.2. Decision no. 6

Welcomes the substantial efforts to enhance the protection of the property's OUV through the implementation of various conservation measures, including a new initiative to establish a long-term ecological monitoring system with a view to building climate resilience;

Response

The updated information on the substantial efforts to enhance the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property through the implementation of various conservation measures are mentioned below:

2.2.1. Moratorium on logging for conservation of floral species

Previously commercial logging was permitted in the Sundarbans. For the protection and conservation of the Sundarbans, the government imposed a moratorium on logging in the natural forest, including the Sundarbans, from 1989 until 2022. The moratorium has been extended up to 2030. Moreover, the Government has imposed a ban on trade, transportation and use of two major timber species namely Sundri (*Heritiera fomes*) and Passur (*Xylocarpusmekongensis*) to completely stop the illegal trade of these species from the Sundarbans. It depicts that the Government does not treat the Sundarbans as a source of revenue earning like earlier days but wants to conserve it.

2.2.2. Expansion of Protected Areas:

Three wildlife sanctuaries with an area of about 1,39,699.49 hectares were declared in 1996 for biodiversity conservation and maintain undisturbed breeding ground for wildlife. They are Sundarbans East Wildlife Sanctuary, Sundarbans West Wildlife Sanctuary and Sundarbans South Wildlife Sanctuary, which are also the World Heritage Site (WHS). All types of extraction of forest produces including fish, crabs and other non-wood forest produces are prohibited in the Protected Areas. The area of these 3(three) Protected Areas has been increased to 3,17,950.08 ha in 2017. Moreover, new 5(five) Wildlife Sanctuaries covering an area of 4093 ha. have been declared to conserve the Dolphin in the Sundarbans. Now, the total area of Protected Areas covers about 53.52% area of the Sundarbans. Collection/extraction or harvesting of all kinds of resources is strictly prohibited from the Protected Areas.

2.2.3. Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tools (SMART) Patrolling in the Sundarbans:

SMART (Spatial Monitoring & Reporting Tools) based monitoring system is being implemented in the Sundarbans since 2015. This monitoring system becomes very much helpful to monitor and protect the resources (floral, faunal and aquatic) for the Sundarbans

especially to protect wildlife and prohibit illegal fishing. Due to SMART patrolling, wildlife poaching, smuggling and illegal fishing reduced appreciably. To support the implementation of the SMART patrolling approach in the SRF- BFD and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) of Bangladesh with support from GIZ and inputs from Wild-Team (a local NGO) have jointly developed: 1) a SMART Operating Procedures (SMART-OPs) for Law Enforcement and Wildlife Monitoring in the Sundarbans, and 2) a Handbook for SMART Patrols in the Sundarbans Reserved Forest. The WCS of Bangladesh also helped BFD for developing a configurable data model for data collection via Cyber Tracker-equipped handheld devices.

During January, 2018 to June, 2023, a total of 477 patrols were conducted in 4,42,239 km channels in 3,786 days of patrol effort. During the patrolling, 71,215 sightings of wildlife species were recorded. In this time period total 2,498 offenders were arrested. During the patrolling total 1,169 boats or transports and 1,905 fishing and crab harvesting gears, 344 cutting tools were seized and 78 poison fishing were recorded.

2.2.4. Drone based monitoring in the Sundarbans

For better and updated monitoring, drone-based monitoring system has been adopted in the Sundarbans since March, 2021. Several training sessions on drone operation and data collection have been provided to the staff of the Bangladesh Forest Department. The drone-based monitoring system is very useful to cover very remote and inaccessible areas within a short time.

2.2.5. Initiatives for Dolphin Conservation

Waterways of the Sundarbans mangrove forest supports the Vulnerable Ganges River dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) (IUCN Red List, 2015) and Near Threatened Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) (IUCN Red List, 2015), the last two remaining species of freshwater dolphins in Asia.

For effective conservation and management, based on scientific study and survey 3(three) dolphin sanctuaries (Dhangmari, Chandpai and Dudhmkhi) covering an area of 1070.0 hectares have been established in 2012 at eastern portion of the Sundarbans for conservation of Ganges River dolphin and Irrawaddy dolphins.

In 2020,3 (three) dolphin sanctuaries in and around the Sundarbans a. Shibsha Wildlife (Dolphin) Sanctuary, b. Bhodra Wildlife (Dolphin) Sanctuary and c. Pankhali Wildlife (Dolphin)Sanctuary covering an area of 3,427.00 hectares have been declared by Government. 7 Dolphin Conservation Team (DCT) is working in the field along with Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD) staffs and Co-Management Committee to aware local people for Dolphin conservation, rescue the stuck dolphins and monitor the Dolphin.

Activities for Dolphin conservation: Various activities have been implemented for conservation of Dolphin in the Sundarbans. Some of the major activities are mentioned below-

Introduce an effective management system in the existing PA established for dolphin conservation in the Sundarbans:

For reducing the excessive pressure on the aquatic resources, livelihood support has provided (worth of BDT 40,000 for each) to1,000 (one thousand) households. They have been imparted training based on their choice, experience and willingness. After imparting training by the experts, they are given supports.

Seven Dolphin Conservation Team (DCT) have been formed under the project involving 70 community people living around the Sundarbans. Each DCT has 10 (ten) members for providing information on illegal activity (if there is any) in the dolphin sanctuary.

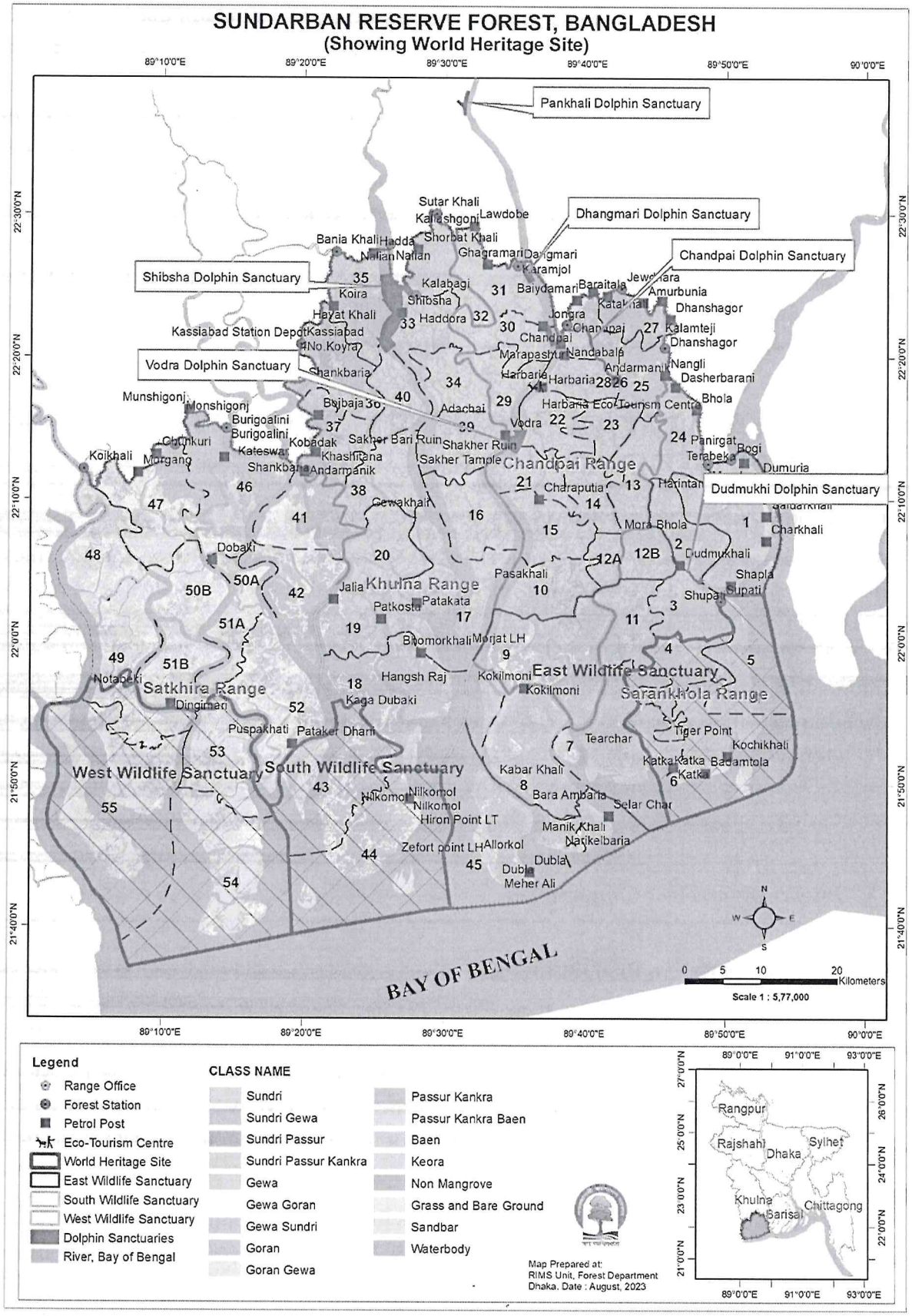


Figure: Map of Sundarbans WHS: Showing Dolphin Sanctuaries in and adjacent Sundarbans

2.2.6 Initiatives to mitigate Human-Wildlife Conflict through compensation

To resolve the issue of Human-Wildlife Conflict, the Government enacted Wildlife Victims Compensation Rules in 2021. Under the rules if any person is injured or killed by tiger or crocodile in the Sundarbans, he/her family or he/she will get compensation from Government. In case of death casualty by wildlife, the family of the victim will get 3,00,000 BDT and in case of severe injury, the victim will get 1,00,000 BDT.

Previously the Compensation rates were 1,00,000 BDT (for death) and 50,000 BDT (for severe injury). This compensation package for Wildlife Victims is helping to reduce the human-wildlife conflict in the Sundarbans Impact Zone.

2.2.7 Initiatives for rewarding the informer for proving information about the wildlife' poachers/smugglers

For wildlife conservation, Bangladesh Government enacted Rules declaring Reward package for the informers regarding the Wildlife crimes in October, 2020. Under the rules, if anyone provides any crime information related with poaching, hunting, trapping, smuggling or other related crime, the informer will be rewarded. For Tiger related crime information, the informer will be rewarded for 50,000 BDT; for crocodile related crime information, the informer will be rewarded for 30,000 BDT; deer related crime information, the informer will be rewarded for 20,000 BDT; and other wildlife related crime information, the informer will be rewarded for 15,000 -10,000 BDT. Through this reward system, now Forest Department is getting more wildlife crime related information which help to arrest the poachers/ smugglers as well as to prevent the occurrences of wildlife crimes.

2.2.8 Initiatives for Tiger Conservation

Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan (2018-2027)

Second generation Tiger Action Plan (2018-27) has been approved by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan (BTAP) is a policy level document that offers a structured approach to achieve long-term conservation of tigers in Bangladesh. The first generation BTAP was for the period 2009 - 2017. It provides a vision, goals and objectives to guide an integrated and focused tiger conservation programme.

The implementation of this BTAP will ensure that the nation attempts to sustain the current tiger occupancy in over 6,017 sq. km. and increase the density in the Sundarbans from the current 2.17 to 4.50 tigers per 100 sq.km. within the next ten years. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of progress against the BTAP goals will be done to enable the adaptation of conservation activities.

National Tiger Recovery Programme (NTRP)

As a party to the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP), Bangladesh had produced its first version of the National Tiger Recovery Program (NTRP) in 2010 and the revised version has been prepared for the period of July 2017 to June 2022, which is currently under updating for the period 2023 to 2034.

In compliance with the NTRP the following steps are taken from Bangladesh Government:

- To reduce the human-tiger conflict, 49 Village Tiger Response Team (VTRT) with 332 community people and a 3-member Forest Tiger Response Team (FTRT) has been formed and working at the Sundarbans Impact Zone (SIZ)
- The GoB has become the member of CITES, GTI, GTF, CBD, CMS, Ramsar Convention, and SAWEN for the conservation of biodiversity in the country including the SRF.
- A Protocol and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the government of India and Bangladesh on 6th September 2011 to conserve tiger and the Sundarbans.
- Through Camera Trapping method the number of Royal Bengal Tigers in Sundarbans was found 106 in the year 2015, where as in 2018 it was found 114. Recently another camara trapping survey is on-going to know the updates on tiger population under a project with an aim to publish report on 2023-24.

2.2.9 Wildlife Rescue and Breeding Centre

A Wildlife rescue and breeding center has been established in 2000 at Karamjal mainly for deer, crocodile and turtle. After collecting eggs from the nest manually the eggs are kept in an incubator in March-April. The hatchlings are collected and kept several pans which are later released in nature. So far 216 nos. of crocodiles have been released in Sundarbans. Batagur baska is also kept in Karmajal Wildlife Breeding Center for the conservation of this reptile MoU has been signed among Forest Department, Vienna Zoo and Parkrity O Jibon Foundation. Now there are 435 no. of individuals in the breeding center. This year, 10 Batagur have been released in nature tagged with satellite transmitter.

2.2.10 Fish ConservationMeasures:

At present fish is the main harvestable resource in the Sundarbans. The following measures have been taken for the management and conservation of the fishery resources:

- Fishing is prohibited all the year round in eight existing wildlife sanctuaries (including 5 dolphin sanctuaries), 18 recognized canals in the buffer zone and the canals less than 25 feet wide within 3 km area of BFD permanent camp office/Petrol office located throughout the Sundarbans. These identified areas have been found suitable as a

breeding ground for fishes and aquatic animals. Fishing is prohibited during Breeding Season throughout the Sundarbans during the months of June, July and August.

- To limit the resource users not more than 12000 Boat License Certificates (BLC) are issued annually.

- Pangas (*Pangasius pangasius*) and Sea bass (*Lates calcarifer*) catching is banned on each alternating year and Ilish (*Hilshahilsha*) fishing is banned in September and October. Catching of Ilish (*Hilshahilsha*) and Pangas (*Pangasius pangasius*) below 23 cm is prohibited.

2.2.11 Crab Conservation Measures:

Crab harvesting is allowed only outside of Protected Areas. Crab harvesting is banned in January and February as well as it is also banned in June, July and August months. After getting permission and paying govt. revenue, the crab harvesters are allowed to harvest crab outside the Protected Areas (PAs) only.

2.2.12 Periodical banning of all types of Forest products and tourism

June, July and August are considered as the breeding season for most of the wildlife of the Sundarbans. For better conservation of the Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) of the Sundarbans, and to maintain an undisturbed breeding ground for wildlife, the Government has prohibited collection of all sorts of forest produces including fishes, crabs, honey etc. for the period of three months (from June to August) yearly. Eco-tourism in the Sundarbans is also prohibited for this period in the Sundarbans. This Government order was enacted from August, 2020.

2.2.13 Reduce the pressure of Eco-tourism in Core Areas of the Sundarbansand development of Eco-tourism facilities in the Sundarbans

A project is under implementation to develop eco-tourism facilities in 4(four) new spots of buffer zone of the Sundarbans. As a result, pressure of the tourists from the core area or world heritage site will be reduced as well as eco-tourism activities will be enhanced in the buffer zone area and lessened in the core zone area.

2.2.14 Restriction on yearly festival Rashmela in the Sundarbans

Every year in the month of November, a fair named "Rashmela" took place inside the Sundarbans at Dublar char island (Alorkol) and thousands of people gathered there for 3(three) days. Considering the disturbances on biodiversity of the Sundarbans, Government imposed some restrictions in November, 2021 to perform the rituals.

2.2.15 *Involvement of Local Community for Conservation and Monitoring through Co-Management approach:*

Co-management activities was initiated in the Sundarbans in 2009-10 to ensure equitable participation and distribution of rights and benefits received from the natural resources. For 3 (three) Protected Areas in the Sundarbans, (viz, Sundarbans East Wildlife Sanctuary, Sundarbans West Wildlife Sanctuary, Sundarbans South Wildlife Sanctuary), 4 (four) Co-Management General Committee (CMGC) as well as 4 (four) Co-Management Executive Committees (CMEC) were formed. Also 211 Village Conservation Forums (VCF), 4 (four) People's Forums (PF), 22 Community Patrolling Groups (CPG), 49 Village Tiger Response Teams (VTRT) and 7 Dolphin Conservation Team (DCT) are working. The Co-management activity is regulated by the Protected Area Co- management Rules, 2017.

2.2.16 *Provisions of Alternative Income Generation (AIG) opportunities of the forest dependent local community*

The resource users of the Sundarbans are identified and provided with alternative income generation (AIG) opportunities to reduce pressure on the Sundarbans. Different Government Organizations and NGOs had been involved in providing AIG supports through projects in the community people living around the Sundarbans. Improved cooking stoves, solar system, pond sand filter, rain rater harvesting units have been set up in the periphery of Sundarbans. Training on AIG activities, kinds and grant have also been provided to the forest dependent people to reduce the pressure on the resources of Sundarbans. So far, 75,840 individuals got training on alternative livelihoods (like training on fish, duck and chicken rearing, handicrafts, vegetable cultivation, crabs & shrimps processing, sustainable resources use, honey cultivation, crab farming, goat rearing, small business tea stall, cloth business, tailoring etc.).

2.2.17 *Pond Excavation and Re-excavation to supply fresh water for wildlife and forest resource collectors*

Recent cyclones named Bulbul, Yash, Amphan along with heavy tidal surges struck Sundarbans and submersed and destroyed most of the ponds which were the only source of fresh water for wildlife as well as for forest resource collectors and FD officials inside the Sundarbans. A project has been implemented in the Sundarbans to excavate and re-excavate the ponds for supplying the fresh drinking water in order to sustainable forest management of the Sundarbans.

2.2.18 Introduction of engine free country boat for eco-tourism in the Sudarbans

Sundarbans is a unique mangrove ecosystem and rich with huge biodiversity, it attracts tourists by it's natural scenic beauty. Every year, thousands of tourists visit Sundarbans and the number of tourists is increasing day by day. Tourists visits Sundarbans by engine-based launches and trawlers. In order to reduce sound and water pollution, in some portion of Sundarbans where water turbulences and wave action is less, engine free country boat for eco-tourism were adopted rather than mechanized engine boat. Subsequently it may be replicated in the other parts of the Sundarbans to promote nature friendly tourism in the Sundarbans.

2.2.19 Ecological Monitoring of the Sundarbans

Government has been decided to conduct ecological monitoring of the Sundarbans. Accordingly, an ecological monitoring framework has already been developed under a project. Several activities are currently under implementation to collect data on terrestrial and aquatic mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles, butterfly and bees, fish, crab, water, soil, plants, lichens etc. and analysis to know the status following the framework is planned under another Government funded project.

2.2.20 Carbon Stock in Sundarbans:

According to the results of Forest Inventory 2019, the carbon stock of the Sundarbans has increased from 106 million tons in 2009 to 139 million tons in 2019 which is 31% of the total carbon stock in the Sundarbans. Next cycle of forest inventory is planned for a duration of 2 years to know the recent status.

2.3. Decision no. 8

Also welcomes the State Party's progress in implementing action points agreed at the first meeting of the India–Bangladesh Joint Working Group in 2016, and requests the States partiesof Bangladesh and India to undertake a coordinated effort, notably to strengthen integration of the consideration of the hydrology of the property and that of the Sundarbans National Park in India in bilateral cooperation;

Response

To improve the trans-boundary cooperation between Bangladesh and India on conservation of the Sundarbans, the first meeting of India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group (JWG) was held in India on 21 July 2016. Bangladesh side took part in various internal meetings regarding implementation of the Agreed Action Points of the 1st meeting of JWG. A proposal was sent to the Government of India from the Government of Bangladesh in 2019 to schedule the 2nd meeting of the Bangladesh & India Joint Working Groupon 17-18 February 2020.The

Government of India wanted to reschedule the proposed date at that time. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government declared a nationwide "lockdown" from 26 March to 30 May 2020.

Bangladesh has planned to arrange the 2nd meeting of the Bangladesh & India Joint Working Group in October 2023.

2.4. Decision no. 10

Further notes with satisfaction that 20 large scale (Red Category) enterprises within the Sundarbans Ecologically Critical Area are under rigorous compliance monitoring and that approved dredging activities on the Pashur River are operating in accordance with the Environmental Management Plans, further welcomes the finalization of the National oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCOP), which includes the provision of funding and human resources for its finalization of the National Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCOP), which includes the provision of funding and human resources for its implementation in order to prevent and mitigate negative impacts from shipping operations, and also requests the State Party to further develop an effective localized contingency plan covering the property to ensure immediate and coordinated actins to mitigate impacts in case of emergency.

Response

In order to address Oil and chemical spelling incident, The Government has already declared the National Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCOP) which was published in February, 2020. Under the NOSCOP, Bangladesh Forest Department has taken steps to prepare an effective Localized Contingency Plan under a project. Multilevel stakeholders' consultations have been conducted and a draft version of the localized contingency plan is currently under review for finalization.

2.5 Decision no. 11

Noting that the 2019 Reactive Monitoring mission report was made available only on 16 June 2021, further requests the State Party to fully implement all the recommendations made by the 2019 Reactive Monitoring mission and previous Committee decision;

Response

All the recommendations made by the 2019 Reactive Monitoring mission and previous Committee decisions regarding the conservation of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Sundarbans, are being implemented by the Government and the measures taken by the Government is stated in the relevant paragraphs in this report.

The Response/Comments and actions taken against the recommendations made by 2019 Reactive Monitoring Mission (RMM) are stated in the table below:

SL no.	Comments of the RMM/ report (page number)	Response/Comments and action taken
1.	Page: 31 Monitor underwater noise pollution (vessel noise) in or near dolphin habitats/sanctuaries created by increased river traffic from coal shipments in the Passur River and ensure that the issue of increasing noise pollution and its impacts on aquatic fauna is considered by the SEA. (R1)	Issues related to increasing noise pollution and its impacts on aquatic fauna is considered in the SEA report and related measures to monitor under water noise pollution is addressed in the strategic environmental management plan (SEMP). Following are the links of SEA and SEMP reports. SEA Report link: http://bforest.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bforest.portal.gov.bd/page/5ce0cc73_df74_4b1b_af91_0ab45ed31640/2023-05-25-04-19-545f819a6dbd4fb80ae70c4e41dd9bef.pdf SEMP Report Link: http://bforest.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bforest.portal.gov.bd/page/5ce0cc73_df74_4b1b_af91_0ab45ed31640/2023-05-24-10-05-1c8e4e0a8b0dfd202dc6a9306c830fa2.pdf
2.	Page: 36 Submit the study on the river dolphins in the Buriswar-Payra (Is it Buriswar or Baleswar?) River with respect to the Taltoli (Barisal) power plant development and its associated increased shipping activities, to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN when available, and ensure any findings of negative impacts are immediately addressed through the implementation of mitigation measures.(R4)	Under a Project of Bangladesh Forest Department, Dolphin population surveys in the Baleswar-Payra river will be conducted during 2023-24 period for developing the base line. All available documents regarding dolphin population, habitat, ecology etc. will be reviewed. Selection of firm to conduct the survey is in process. The survey reports will be prepared and shared among the stakeholders.
3.	Page: 38 Before proceeding any further with the development of the Payra Thermal power plant (also known as Kolapara power plant), develop a Dolphin Conservation Plan to prevent any adverse effects on the river dolphins that are present within	A dolphin survey is going to start in the country including Payra to assess the status. Subsequently, the analysis/results will be used to develop a comprehensive Dolphin Conservation Action Plan to strengthen dolphin conservation activities in the country and mitigate adverse effects on river dolphins. The conservation plan will be shared after development.

SL no.	Comments of the RMM/ report (page number)	Response/Comments and action taken
	the project area, and submit the Plan to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN as soon as it is available. (R5)	
4.	Page: 39 Ensure that shipping and dredging are included as priority sectors in the scope of the SEA, including long-term and least-impact options regarding the continued use of the Pashur estuary as anchor and transfer area, proposed measures to minimize the river traffic and its impact, and options regarding disposal of major and minor dredged materials. (R6)	SEA report has addressed the impacts of shipping and dredging in the South-West region of Bangladesh. Government has already included Mongla Port Authority (MPA) as a priority sector in the SEA study of SW region. Expansion of Mongla Port, increase in the number of ship movement, capital and maintenance dredging, including its master plan and all the existing & future activities are being considered in the SEA and Strategic Environmental Management Plan (SEMP). The SEA and SEMP report is shared with Mongla Port Authority for their considerations in the future planning. This is to inform you that dredged materials from the Passur River are being deposited outside of the forest area. Additionally, the Mongla-Ghasiakhali channel, which is located outside of the Sundarbans, has been dredged, and commercial vessels are now using the route. As a result, the commercial movement of river traffic in the Sela River of the Sundarbans has been significantly reduced.
5.	Page: 40 Clearly address the responsibility of the government to protect the OUV of the property in the National Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCOP), and develop an effective localized contingency plan covering the property in accordance with the national plan outlining measures to prevent any future oil and chemical spill incidents within and in proximity to the property and to ensure immediate and coordinate actions for mitigating impacts on the	The Government has already developed the National Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCOP), which was published in February 2020. The Bangladesh Forest Department has taken steps to prepare an effective Localized Contingency Plan covering the property in accordance with the national plan, outlining measures to prevent any future oil and chemical spill incidents within and in proximity to the property. Initiatives have also been taken to ensure immediate and coordinated actions for mitigating impacts on the property in case of emergencies under the support of a project titled 'Support to the Management of Sundarbans Reserved Forest (SMP-II)' of the BFD. Multilevel stakeholders' consultations have been conducted, and a draft version of the localized contingency plan is currently under review for finalization.

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	property in case of emergencies. (R8)	
6.	Page: 41 Prioritize the completion of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the southwest region of Bangladesh, in line with international best practice and with the support of the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) as appropriate, and in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN. (R9)	All the suggestions were addressed during the development of the SEA.
7.	Page: 41 Once the SEA is completed, ensure that the findings of the SEA become the basis for future decision making on developments in the vicinity of the property. (R10)	The SEA and SEMP have been endorsed by the Government, and both documents have been shared among relevant stakeholders. Four information-sharing meetings were organized during the last three months, involving all stakeholders, to disseminate the roles and responsibilities of ministries and departments. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has requested all stakeholders to follow SEA & SEMP as future decision-making instruments. Once the SEMP Advisory Committee (SAC) and SEMP Coordination Unit (SCU) are established, these two bodies will be responsible for coordinating among the stakeholders and monitoring progresses.
8.	Page: 42 Ensure that key information related to the SEA (including ToRs, outline of the scope, stakeholder consultation timelines and approach, and methodology) is made publicly available, ideally through an online platform, and that the necessary public consultations are undertaken throughout the key steps of the process in an	The suggestions provided were addressed during the development of the SEA report. The SEA report has been finalized and approved by the Government after addressing comments and feedback from all stakeholders.

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	open and transparent manner. (R11)	
9.	Page: 43 Ensure that the SEA not only covers the identified nine economic sectors, but also how they are interrelated and how plans and policies developed for one sector would potentially influence others, particularly what concerns shipping and associated infrastructure and maintenance, and includes a specific assessment of cumulative impacts on the property's OUV. (R12)	The SEA has considered 89 Policies, Plans, and Programmes (PPPs) that have covered not only the identified nine sectors but also all relevant key sectors of the southwest region. It has also fully addressed cumulative impacts.
10.	Page: 43 Ensure that the SEA, while aimed at developing a planning instrument for the South-West region of Bangladesh, also considers in its analysis, other relevant policies and proposed development plans in other areas, including outside the Bangladesh borders. (R13)	The SEA has considered developments in other regions (in country) and countries (outside Bangladesh) to take account of trans-boundary impacts on the SW region.
11.	Page: 43 Ensure that a coordination mechanism, involving all relevant Ministries and agencies, is established to ensure the findings and recommendations of the SEA are implemented across all relevant national and regional plans and policies. (R14)	The SEMP has proposed a SEMP Advisory Council (SAC) chaired by the principal secretary, Prime Minister's office, as the apex body for the sectoral implementation/coordination mechanism. A SEMP Coordination Unit (SCU) has also been proposed for liaison and SEMP progress monitoring of all stakeholders. The government has initiated the formation of these two bodies.
12.	Page: 44 Further strengthen and harmonize monitoring and conservation efforts between the States Parties of Bangladesh and India to improve trans-boundary management of the two World Heritage properties	Bangladesh and India have coordination on trans-boundary management of the Sundarbans. An MoU for Sundarban conservation and a protocol on tiger conservation were signed between Bangladesh and India in 2011, and a Joint Working Group has been formed under the MoU.

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	of "The Sundarbans" and "Sundarbans National Park" through the India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group (JWG). (R15)	• For the 2nd meeting of the Bangladesh & India Joint Working Group, a proposal was sent to the Government of India from the Government of Bangladesh in 2019 to schedule the meeting on 17-18 February 2020. The Government of India wanted to reschedule the proposed date at that time. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government declared a nationwide "lockdown" from 26 March to 30 May 2020. • Bangladesh has planned to arrange the 2nd meeting of the Bangladesh & India Joint Working Group in October 2023 Bangladesh and India also have trans-boundary cooperation on Tiger conservation of Sundarban. • The Second Global Tiger Stocktaking Conference was held in September 2014 in Dhaka. During that conference, Bangladesh hosted the First Bilateral Meeting between India and Bangladesh for the Conservation of tigers in Sundarbans. • The 2nd Bilateral Meeting between Bangladesh & India for the conservation of the Bengal Tiger was held in June 2016 in Sojnekhali, Sundarbans, West Bengal, India. • The 3rd Bilateral meeting was planned for 2020 in Dhaka, but due to the COVID-19 situation, the proposed 3rd Bilateral Meeting between Bangladesh & India for the conservation of the Bengal Tiger was postponed to a later date in 2020. • A meeting on trans-boundary Conservation of Tigers in the Sundarbans Landscape in India and Bangladesh was held in Kolkata, India on 14th February 2023. The next meeting will be held in Bangladesh at a convenient time.
13.	Page: 47 Convene a scientific advisory group/panel consisting of globally recognized experts in the Irrawaddy Dolphin and the	The Government is keen to conserve the Irrawaddy Dolphins and Ganges River Dolphins. For effective conservation and management, based on scientific study and surveys, three dolphin sanctuaries

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	Ganges River Dolphin to provide advice on establishing a baseline and long-term monitoring plan that includes a review of sampling sites and best available methodology including the use of the SMART system (R16)	(Dhangmari, Chandpai, and Dudhmkhi) covering an area of 1,070.0 hectares were established in 2012 in the eastern portion of the Sundarbans for the conservation of Ganges River dolphins and Irrawaddy dolphins. According to expert opinions, including IUCN, in 2020, three new dolphin sanctuaries were established in and around the Sundarbans. They are Shibsha, Bhodra, and Pankhali Wildlife (Dolphin) Sanctuary, covering an area of 3,427.00 hectares. Seven Dolphin Conservation Teams (DCT) are working in the field along with Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD) staff and Co-Management Committee to raise awareness among local people for Dolphin conservation, rescue stranded dolphins, and monitor the dolphins. Moreover, in October, 2021, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has approved: 1.Fund Management Guideline for Dolphin Conservation Team. 2. Dolphin Conservation Action Plan. 3. Dolphin Atlas of Bangladesh. 4. Management Plan for the Ganges River Dolphin of Halda River. Bangladesh is eager to conserve Dolphin following the approved Plan and guidelines and intended to regular monitoring of sample sites, using SMART system involving IUCN and other expertise scientists. The upcoming survey of Dolphin population under the BFD will involve the stakeholders/experts for establishing a baseline and long-term monitoring plan.
14.	Page: 51 Ensure that the SEA includes the water sector as a priority sector in its scope, and determines a range of scenarios for freshwater inflow in function of projected trends and water management interventions; against the corresponding impacts for the integrity of the property. (R 17)	Indeed, water is a key priority sector. Suggestions are addressed during the development of SEA.

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15.	Page: 53 Continue efforts to actively involve local communities in co-management of the SRF, and to provide sustainable alternative income generating (AIG) opportunities beyond the timeframe of the Integrated Resources Management Plans for the Sundarbans (2010-2020). (R19)	The Government of Bangladesh enacted "The Protected Area Management Rules-2017", incorporating active involvement of local communities in the co-management of Sundarbans. In an ongoing Govt. funded project named "Protection of Sundarban Mangrove Forests", each Community Patrolling Group member (186 nos.) engaged in regular patrolling with Forest Department officials is receiving a monthly allowance of 5000/- (BDT) to provide them with sustainable livelihood support. In another ongoing Govt. funded project named "Extension and Development of Eco-Tourism Facilities in the Sundarbans project", several training programs on ecotourism development have been conducted involving local communities. Additionally, 4 (four) new eco-tourist spots have been established, and 7 (seven) existing eco-tourist spots in the Sundarbans have been developed. The project activities have created new opportunities for alternative income-generating activities for local communities through eco-tourism. Furthermore, under the project, 5 (five) new souvenir shops have been constructed where local people can sell their handicrafts and souvenir items to tourists and earn their livelihood. A new project named "USAID Ecosystem/Protibesh Activity" is being implemented, involving the local community and mainly focused on strengthening co-management organizations and supporting sustainable alternative income-generating (AIG) opportunities for local communities. A significant investment project named "Sundarbans Region Natural Capital and Resilience Investment Project" is currently in the formulating stage, and the Preliminary Development Project Proposal (PDPP) has already been submitted to the Ministry. The project mainly focuses on providing sustainable alternative livelihood support to the local community of the Sundarbans.

2.6 Decision no. 12

Welcomes furthermore the efforts made by the State Party to advance the SEA for the South – West region, now scheduled for completion in August 2021, urges the State Party to ensure that the findings of the SEA form the basis for future decision making on development that may impact the OUV of the property, and requests moreover the State Party to submit the final SEA, including the strategic and subsequent examination by the Committee at its 45th session.

Response

Bangladesh aims to reach as developed country by 2041. The major objective of the SEA is to provide guidelines/ suggestions and basis for sustainable development in the Southwest region of Bangladesh to conserve OUV of the property, and the SEA has been prepared accordingly. The state party is enthusiastic to implement SEA as a future decision making instrument. The state party has already sent SEA and SEMP to UNESCO.

13/8/2023

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