

# The Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project

## The challenge

Bangladesh lies in the Bengal Basin, one of the largest deltaic floodplains in the world. Millions of Bangladeshis depend on the main rivers Padma, Jamuna, and Meghna as well as on their numerous tributaries and distributaries. They are an important reservoir for wetland dependent fauna and flora and are of high economic importance for both agriculture and fisheries.

However, the development of agricultural infrastructures altered the natural flow of water into the wetlands. The impact on the wetland ecosystem, including the freshwater fisheries, was in many cases devastating and intense pressure on both land and water resources is the cause that much of the wetland fauna and flora and in particular many native fish species as well as the Gangetic dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), are now endangered.

## Our approach

The Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project (WBRP) aims to restore wetland ecosystems and vital freshwater fish habitats. It intends to increase wetland biodiversity and capture fisheries production and to improve the livelihoods of the wetland dependent poor population.

The project is jointly implemented by the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh (Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock), the

Project name	Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project (WBRP)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Bangladesh
Lead executing agency	Department of Fisheries of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock; Bangladesh Water Development Board of the Ministry of Water Resources
Duration	2009 to 2015

Bangladesh Water Development Board (Ministry of Water Resources), and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

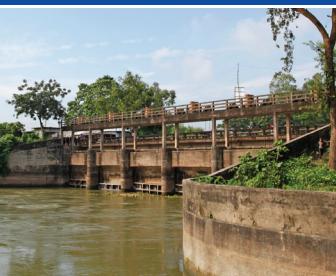
## The benefits

In line with the Bangladesh National Fisheries Strategy (2006), the National Water Policy (1999), and the Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2010), the project stresses the participation of the poor in decision-making and planning for a sustainable co-management of wetlands. Particular attention is paid to the involvement and support of women.



Photo left: Wetland sanctuary.

Photo right: WBRP re-excavation site.



*Photo left: Awareness raising activities ongoing.*

*Photo right: Sluice gate*

## Contact person

Ottolie Mooshofer  
ottolie.mooshofer@giz.de

## Success factors

To restore the wetland ecosystems and to improve the livelihood of wetland dependent people, the project is supporting a range of activities in nine Upazilas of the Rajshahi Division in north-western Bangladesh. Among those activities are re-excavation of silted water bodies, establishment of wetland sanctuaries, an improved management system of sluice gates and the release of locally endangered wetland plants and fishes.

Part and parcel of the project is the establishment of community-based organizations which are capacitated to sustainably co-manage the wetlands. 29 Biodiversity Management Organization (BMO) were formed and its members are trained on Integrated Natural Resource Management Systems (INRMS) specifically developed for wetland resource management techniques. In line with the co-management approach, relationships with relevant line agencies are established and technical and socio-economic services facilitated. As such it was mutually agreed on a ban on fishing during the spawning season and on all illegal fishing devices and methods. To spread these ideas within the community, awareness-raising campaigns as well as community meetings were held in numerous villages.

To cope with income loss during the fish breeding season when fishing is prohibited, BMO members and interested people from the community get the opportunity to participate in training courses enabling them to engage in alternative income generating activities.

BMOs have also received the user rights of the wetlands from the Ministry of Land and the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. Furthermore wetland sanctuaries were established in part of the excavated areas where no fishing is practiced throughout the year which allow fish to survive the dry season.

The project developed policy recommendations for long-term lease of wetlands to community based organizations. In 18 water bodies, silted depressions ("beels") and canals were re-excavated by so far more than 10,000 local laborers on a cash-for-work basis. The aim was to rehabilitate the living and breeding space for aquatic flora and fauna through year-long water availability in the wetlands as well as to re-establish the connectivity between wetlands and the main rivers.

## An example from the field

Sluice gates are a major factor for the increase of agricultural production. The agro-friendly sluice gate management blocked migration routes of fish and other aquatic animals from the rivers into the wetlands. Initiated by WBRP, BMO members are now participating in sluice gate committee meetings representing the interests of fishers. At the occurrence of spawn in the river and taking the existing crops into consideration, the gates are opened for a certain period of time allowing fish spawn to enter the floodplains. This had a detrimental impact on fish populations and biological diversity. The project is working towards the adoption by the government of a policy which institutionalizes this agro-fish-friendly sluice gate management.

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Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany  
Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project (WBRP)

Road 90, House-10A Gulshan 2  
Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh  
T +880 966670 1000  
F +88 02 8823 099  
giz-bangladesh@giz.de  
www.giz.de/bangladesh

### Author(s)

Marianne Scholte, Angelina Cynthia Halder

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Big Blue Communications

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### Addresses of the BMZ offices

BMZ Bonn  
Dahlmannstraße 4  
53113 Bonn, Germany  
T +49 228 99 535 - 0  
F +49 228 99 535 - 3500

poststelle@bmz.bund.de  
www.bmz.de

BMZ Berlin  
Stresemannstraße 94  
10963 Berlin, Germany  
T +49 30 18 535 - 0  
F +49 30 18 535 - 2501