

Project Update: July 2006

Major achievements

The major achievements of the 'Ghodaghodi Conservation Awareness Programme' up to June 30 are as follows:

1. Formation of three focus groups including users of two community forest user groups (CFUGs) with inclusive and participatory approach; conduction of focus group discussions in three awareness camps; conduction of non-formal literacy classes among these groups in three awareness camps about wetlands and birds conservation at Ghodaghodi Lake Area.
2. Institutionalization at local level through formation of four conservation committees entitled 'Adult Friends of Ghodaghodi' at local level and their empowerment through focus group discussion in three awareness camps and non-formal literacy classes at three awareness camps.
3. Identification of resource use pattern, problems and expectations of indigenous *Tharus* for sustainable livelihood; identification of potential options for indigenous *Tharus* to reduce pressure on wetlands and forests and fulfilment of basic needs
4. Formation of volunteer wetland working group of wetland conservationists entitled 'Wetland FRIENDS' in coordination with Institute of Forestry, Pokhara and wetland conservationists; development of website www.wetlandfriends.org and launching; preparation of educational kit series for free download access from www.wetlandfriends.org.
5. Networking of forestry and wetland conservationists in online discussion forum entitled 'Wetland Friends to conserve wetlands...' from August 1st, 2005. The web address of this online platform is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wetland>.
6. Preparation of an educational kit on Ghodaghodi Lake conservation (ongoing)

Reporting from field

Focus group discussion and adult non-formal education were conducted among the users of two community forests (CFs) – Phulbari CF and Tegnawa CF around Ghodaghodi Lake. Three separate focus groups of women, fishermen and local farmers were formed for focus group discussions in each CF. 77 participants were involved in focus group discussion. The major objective of focus group discussion was to identify how the local people perceive the avifaunal value of wetland ecosystem and whether they understand the impact of their day-to-day activities on birds and wetland ecosystem. After focus group discussions, non-formal literacy classes were conducted among the participants to increase understanding on existing and emerging threats from their day-to-day activities and ways of reducing them, to provide knowledge on importance of wetland and forest for bird conservation, and to motivate them in changing their attitude towards conservation. Four conservation committees were formed in two CFs among which two committees consists of only women, one committee with only men and one steering committee including users of both CFs. They were entitled 'Adult Friends of Ghodaghodi'. They were empowered through focus group discussion and literacy classes. The committees made some important commitments towards forest and wetland conservation at the Ghodaghodi area even after the phase out of the project. Pair wise ranking was conducted to prioritise the resource use from the forest and wetland ecosystem. Posters and fact sheets on conservation of birds, wetlands,

forests and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) were distributed among the participants. The objective questionnaire was developed and distributed to the participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in creating awareness on wetland conservation for birds among the participants.

Focus group discussion revealed information on day-to-day activities of local people on forest and wetland, resource use pattern, problems and threats to birds and wetland ecosystem, need of the local people, locally perceived options to enhance local livelihood and to reduce pressure on wetlands, and their perception on value of wetland for birds' survival. We provide education on importance of wetlands for bird conservation, the impact of human activities on birds, wetlands and forests, importance of birds, importance of Ghodaghodi Lake at local, national and international level, role of local people in bird and wetland conservation and future priorities in conservation.

It was found that migrants from adjoining hilly area have better understanding on the value of the wetland for bird conservation. But the case of indigenous *Tharus* was quite different. About 80 percent of indigenous *Tharu* people in the focus groups do not understand the relationship between the birds' survival and wetland ecosystem. About 92 percent of them showed ignorance towards the term 'biodiversity', however, they had good understanding on the value of plants, especially non-timber forest products at and around the lake, in local terms. Participants of Phulbari CF, who were completely indigenous *Tharus* only, showed their dissatisfaction on that the outsiders (funding agencies and elite-dominated community-based organizations) used to discriminate them in conservation, development and awareness activities. They have practiced rotational grazing on four small blocks of community forest land to reduce the grazing pressure on the forest. They have faced problem in extraction of the timber, fuel wood and fodder from the forest because the operational plan of the forest has not been renewed even after five years. It has prevented them in using the forest resources especially timber. They are highly interested in establishing a community based nursery to produce seedlings for plantation in marginal and private lands. The participants demonstrated their need of programs to promote agro forestry so that they can reduce the dependency on the forests for fuel wood and fodder. The major non-timber forest products in the area were bamboo, rattan, kurilo (*Asparagus racemosus*), citronella (*Cymbopogon winterianus*), amala (*Phyllanthus emblica*), palmarosa (*Cymbopogon martini*), Pipla, marich and mentha (*Mentha arvenses*). They have not obtained trainings and manuals on cultivation and management of non-timber forest products. If managed properly providing technical support to users, these NTFPs could generate local income and employment. The users are facing the problem of marketing even if the CF holds significant amount and diversity of NTFPs like pipla, bamboo etc. The users have interest to contribute in Ghodaghodi lake conservation for wise use of wetland resources, but it could not happen because the outsiders (funding agencies and active community-based organizations) have not adopted inclusive and integrated approach to include the Phulbari CFUG members for the conservation of the lake.

The case of Tegnawa CF users was somewhat different. The government authority had relocated about 15 households from the shore of the lake during last few years but still they have not been paid the compensation for the relocation. It has created nuisance on daily subsistence to some of the users and they have fear that the government authority may

relocate them again to another place even though they are far from the lake (below the highway). They do not want to go anywhere from there habitation again due to their dependency on wetland resources including water for irrigation from the lake. The relocated area has now been planted with grass species and fodder trees. Local women groups have managed this area. The users of Tegnawa CF are highly benefited from irrigation of agricultural land. The source of irrigation is Ghodaghodi Lake. Use of catapult for hunting of water birds by kids and cattle herders was a problem in this area. The problems of NTFP management training, nursery establishment and community forest operational plan renewal were reported as in Phulbari CF. Collection of fodder, fuel wood and poles was observed as the major activity in the forest. Fishing, irrigation and collection of wetland plants such as lotus seeds were the major activities in the lake area.

Almost all of the participants showed positive attitude towards focus group discussion and non-formal literacy classes. However, more than 75 percent of participants demanded more facilitation in making them able to conduct focus group discussion themselves per month. Almost all participants agreed that focus group discussion and non-formal literacy classes have improved their understanding on effects of their activities on wetland ecosystem and birds. The participants reported decline of vultures in the Ghodaghodi lake area and showed their interest to know its cause. The participants expected and welcomed replication of the similar programs to enhance their knowledge on birds, wetlands and forests.

My research at Ghodaghodi Lake (funded by Oriental Bird Club, UK) last year revealed that the species diversity was always high in winter at the Lake Area. As it will ensure the occurrence and identification of bird in winter, the school students will be carried to the lake area in this winter for bird watching after school teaching. We could not reach the project site in April because the transportation was halted by national political strike. At that time we develop the website and prepare educational kits for free download access. In this way, we have arranged the project activities.

We have made coordination with the following institutions and organizations.

Institute of Forestry, Pokhara

Shelf Help Environmental Awareness Camp (SHEAC), Pokhara

Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), Pokhara Branch

Ghodaghodi Area Conservation and Awareness Forum (GACAF), Ghodaghodi

Phulbari Community Forest User Group (CFUG), Ghodaghodi

Tegnawa CFUG, Ghodaghodi

Ramshikharjhala Village Development Committee (VDC), Ghodaghodi

Darakh VDC, Ghodaghodi