

Project Update: December 2016

With the tourist season catching up in the Sunderbans, our villages are abuzz with activities. This time, we have integrated "business" with our awareness programmes, through additional livelihood options. These are not only aimed at supplementing the income generation of our beneficiaries but also to educate the tourists on the do's and don'ts of forest conduct. It has been observed that certain visitors create disturbances and noise in the jungle by playing loud music, dancing, shouting or littering the rivers, streams and forests with throw away as plastic bags, glass bottles among others.

AWARENESS WORK THROUGH CULTURAL TEAMS: This time, we managed to link our cultural teams with some of the tourist lodges in the villages. We have developed two such teams comprising 11 members each. They were earlier involved in our awareness campaigns across our target villages through group songs, dances and skits based on the existing folk culture and rural tales of wisdom.

Cultural programmes are now being performed by these folk artistes before the tourists. We have prepared few posters with awareness messages that are put up at the performance sites for the tourists to read and follow.



Folk artistes performing in lodges, watched by visiting tourists

AWARENESS THROUGH WOMEN AND SELF HELP GROUPS - Our four self-help groups of women and tiger widows are also generating additional income in the tourist season with a cause. We have two groups that pick up waste littered by the tourists from our mangrove sites and river banks. They have been trained to create "wealth" out of this colourful waste of plastic

throw away into items of daily use, which are sold to tourists, with a message of keeping river banks clean.



Selling baskets & items of daily use created from waste with a message for buyers

Next, we have developed two more groups that are adept at needle work. They assemble together after completing their household work in the afternoons, embroidering flowers and motifs on bed sheets, pillow cases and covers while sharing their day to day conversations. We are happy to state that these items are being appreciated and purchased by the tourists who carry them as souvenirs from Sunderbans.



Finished bed sheets put up for sale for tourists

THIS ADDITIONAL INCOME INVESTED FOR RAISING POULTRY: Some of these women from our self-help groups have recycled this additional income for raising hens and poultry in the homes, which is supplementing their income further.



Hens & poultry being raised by some of the women self-help groups

MANGROVE CONSERVATION COMMITTEES (MCC) CONSTITUTED: Apart from this, we have formed our Mangrove Conservation Committees (MCC) in eight villages. During our last update, we had mentioned of their initiation. This time, we have them ready, each comprising 4-5 members selected by their respective villagers in local meetings. MCCs are local supervisors that review and monitor the ongoing work of the project and its quality at the respective village levels. They also spread awareness on mangrove and tiger conservation.

The MCC members will participate in time to time local exchange programmes with the other grassroots organisation to enhance their conservation skills and understanding.



A MCC meeting in progress

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PONDS: After the monsoons, the villagers are also into digging the next set of ponds in their villages. We plan to manually desilt at least three ponds in the first phase, in the villages of Kaagmari, Parasmoni and Tipligheri, for crab and fish culture that will be self-sustainable, owned and managed by the beneficiary families. Mangrove ecosystem has endowed the local villages with naturally occurring ponds and water bodies. But over the years they have become shallow, silted and rendered useless.



Manually desilting a pond at Tipligheri



An upcoming community pond in Kaagmari village