

**Activity Report of ACT(Association for Conservation and Tourism) –
Sundarban,India,Year: 1stApril 2005 to 31st March,2006**

1.Community Health Project

Beneficiaries: The project which was initially funded by Vasant J Sheth Foundation-Mumbai, has been able to provide general and emergency medical facilities to as many as 3000 poor families of extremely remote and inaccessible areas of Sunderbans where poverty, risky livelihood, man-animal conflict and absence of basic medical facilities are harsh realities. Villagers from Bali 2,Bali 1,Bali 9,Bali 4,Bali 5,Bali 6,Bali 7,Bali 8 Birajmoni,Satyanarayanpur, Saterkona, Amlamethi, Rajabazar,Bijohnagar,Mathurakhanda areas have received free medical treatment and medicines through this project.

36 camps have so far been organized in the aforementioned areas during the period August 2004 to February 2006 to support the local community. There will be at least 2 more camps by 31st March,2006.This is an all-time record that has surpassed expectations and predictions of all concerned. Free medicines worth Rs.4, 20,000/-, collected from individual and institutional patrons, through our “Medicine Bank” programme, have been distributed.

Awareness: Awareness Campaigns have been organized on regular basis by our active Health Volunteers, particularly to address problems with drinking water, sanitation, immunization. Local School-Teachers, members of Eco Development Committees, Nature Club members of the local schools, members of other local NGOs have been involved in the awareness programme. Women Self-help groups and families having school-going children are especially encouraged to take leadership.

Training: Three volunteers have received training from professionally qualified medical practitioners to provide emergency medical attention and administer vaccines.

Infrastructure and Equipment: The following infrastructure has been developed and the following equipment have been purchased from the fund donated by VJSMF:

1. Permanent Medicine store has been developed in Help Tourism-BNWCS campus 2.Solar system has been installed to conduct awareness programme in schools, village houses, community halls.
- 3.Dedicated Cycles and Van Rickshaws have been made available to improve the mobility of our Health Volunteers and also to transport patients suffering from acute ailments.
- 4.Public Address System has been introduced to extend the benefit to as many villagers as possible.
- 5.BP, Weight- Machine, Stethoscope, Inspection Table, Beds etc. have been purchased.
- 6.Almirahs,Torch,Solar Lanterns, Umbrellas, Stretchers have been purchased.

Expansion: ACT requests STR to support and provide guidance to its proposed expansion of the project to extend medical facilities in further remote areas such as Samshernagar near the Indo-Bangladesh border and Jharkhali Island on the South-West part of Sunderbans.

Sustainability: The Community Health Fund, which was created with small contribution from the beneficiaries in 2004-2005, has registered a healthy growth and has been utilized under strict supervision to run the camps. A fund of roughly Rupees Fifteen Thousand was raised during the period August 2004 to February, 2006 and the amount has been spent towards petty expenses such as hiring Battery set and Cycle Rickshaws for campaign and awareness programme, doctor's fees etc. To make this project self-sustained ACT has submitted proposals to potential partners for the following schemes and is about to implement few of those:

- A.** Encourage and form Self-help groups to identify alternative livelihood models (such as Organic Farm Produces, Local Crafts, Ecotourism, Rural Tourism through Home Stays, Repairing shops for small plants and machineries used in the villages, Cultivation of Medicinal plants and Mushroom) to minimize the environmental impact and health hazards.
- B.** Encourage and form Self-help groups to develop Health Service Enterprise Models such as Dispensaries, X-Ray kiosks, Oxy-Bars, in remote islands where medical facilities are absent.
- C.** Approach agencies like Sulabh International or Gramin Bank or UNDP or NABARD to help the local communities develop Community Sanitation facilities. Local self-help groups will run and maintain such facilities against collection of nominal fees from the beneficiaries of the project.
- D.** Initiate Community Health Insurance Scheme and extend insured health services to this remote delta by engaging trained volunteers or developing enterprise models through self-help groups.
- E.** Organize Training and Workshops to help local villagers cope up with Snakebite cases. Lot of people die out of fear and also due to their lack of knowledge about the first-aid.

2. Education Project

Beneficiaries:

A. Book Bank Project: ACT has provided new books to more than 100 poor students from different local schools in the academic year 2005-2006. A fund of Rs.20000 was raised from individual donors and patrons for this scheme and the entire fund has been utilized to benefit the deserving students-recommended by the Head Teachers or Teachers-in charge of the concerned schools.

B. "Adopt a Scholar" Project: Under this scheme ACT is supporting 4 poor and meritorious students in continuing their studies. A monthly scholarship is being provided to the beneficiaries to help them pay off their tuition fees, books, tutor's fees, hostel fees and admission fees. The beneficiaries will continue to get this scholarship until 2007 April. 6 more such scholars have been short-listed by the local schools. ACT's Governing Body is considering supporting them until April 2008.

3.Awareness, Environment and Conservation Projects

ACT, in association with Bali Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society, WWF(WBSO) organized the following events in 2005-2006:

- A. Road Show, Poster Campaign and Plantation programme on the World Environment Day and also during the Wildlife Week.
- B. Plastic collection drive and 'No Plastic Campaign' in the villages.
- C. Vaccination programme for the Street Dogs.
- D. Workshops on Capacity Building and Ecotourism Products.
- E. Survey, conservation and monitoring of Lesser Cats and various venomous and non-venomous snakes that exist in the villages.
- F. Survey and monitoring of wintering Waterfowls in the wetlands between Jharkhali and Amalamethi along the Bidya river.
- G. Wildlife rescue support to local forest office.

4. Garments Bank Project

Roughly 300 poor villagers have been benefited by this scheme. The patrons and members of ACT provided new blankets, warm clothing, new dresses etc. to them.

5. "Support and revive Rural Sports & Culture" Project

With the initiative and support of ACT the age-old Dukhe Yatra or Bonobibi Pala has been revived in the village of Bali and this is directly supporting 20 villagers by creating avenues for additional income. The traditional Boat Race was organized in October,2005 having number of worthy prizes been awarded to the winners. ACT seeks the support and patronage of STR to make it an annual national tourism event by ensuring participation from the other islands and media support from National and International Television Channels and Travel Guide Publications. ACT is also trying to support the existing local handicrafts and develop new products by imparting training and education to the women's self-help groups by the experts.

Proposed projects in collaboration with STR and EDCs:

ACT seeks the support and guidance from STR in implementing following small projects/events in Sunderbans:

- Ecotourism awareness for the existing and upcoming lodges, resorts, hotels and motor vessels of Sunderbans. Regular workshops and field training programmes are proposed to involve the tour/lodge and boat operators in the promotion and advancement of ecotourism and environmentally responsible tourism in Sunderbans. An ecotourism audit and certification process may be thought of to identify and support genuine ecotourism practitioners followed by annual publication in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, GOI. Certified tourism organizations will be responsible to contribute a percentage of tourism profit to a common fund- to be utilized towards conservation and community development activities and managed by an independent committee having representation from various NGOs working in Sunderbans.
- Further training and capacity building of the Nature guides so that they can identify common flora and fauna of Sunderbans and can provide proper interpretation to the visiting tourists. Basic communication skill needs to be improved and a crash course in spoken English for them could be a good idea.

Medical project in collaboration with the EDC or FPC in Shamshernagar and Jharkhali area.

Projects visited/ appreciated by:

Roughly 1800 distinguished and responsible visitors across the globe have so far visited and appreciated our projects.

Prominent amongst those were:

1. Shri. Jogesh Chandra Burman, Hon'ble Minister In Charge, Department of Forests, Govt. of West Bengal.
2. Mr. K.K. Singh, IFS, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Chief Wildlife Warden, Govt. of West Bengal.
3. Mr. A.K. Raha, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forest and Director-Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve.
4. Mr. Pradeep Vyas, IFS, Field Director-Sunderbans Tiger Reserve.
5. Mr. Nilanjan Mullick, Deputy Field Director-Sunderbans Tiger Reserve.
6. Mr. V.K. Yadav, IFS, Conservator of Forests (Wildlife)
7. Mark Tully and his wife Jullien Wright
8. Eurig Scandtrett from Friends of the Earth-Scotland
9. James Smith and his crew from BBC-Natural History Films Division
10. Bikram Singh Grewal-famous Ornithologist from Delhi Bird and Trustee, WPSI.
11. Sumit Sen-famous Ornithologist from Kolkata birds
12. Vikram Singh from Wildworld India
13. Peter Thomas from Wildlife Worldwide
14. Captain Richard Pike from British Airways
15. Francois Balde-the world famous musician from France
16. Patrique Braquinne-President of Belgacom of Belgium
17. Dr. Sekhar Raha-Secretary General of Rajiv Gandhi Foundation
18. Ananda Banerjee from Earth Matters Foundation
19. Carrine Peyriere from Journal de Science et la vie
20. Andrew Preston from DFID-British Hi Commission
21. Christin Mackay-Chief Curator of UK Museums Initiative
22. Stefan and Renate Loose-famous German writers
23. Dr. Puspam Kumar from Institute of Economic Growth
24. Prof. Dr. N.G. Sculte Nordholt from Technology and Sustainable Development-University of Twente, The Netherlands
25. Anderson Tepper from Vanity Fair
26. Francois Xavier Delmas from Les Palais Des Thees
27. Mannika Chopra from Boston Globe
28. Arti Oberoi from Calcalling
29. Pietro Girolamo from Avventure Nel Mondo, Italy
30. Parikshit Laxminarayan from Enchanting India
31. Abhijit Gupta from Outlook Traveller
32. Neilli Grass-A famous social scientist and Daughter of Nobel Lauriet German writer Gunthar Grass
33. Kishore Sen-Petroleum Biologist from Canine Corporation, Canada
34. Shyamal Datta from Green Frontier, USA
35. Michael Maharik-Historian from Israel
36. Stefanie Coustasfis from Geographic Expeditions Worldwide, USA
37. Anjan Mitra from INTACH
38. Dr. David Butcher-CEO, WWF, Australia and Mrs. Amanda Butcher
39. Wim Ellenbrock, WWF, Neatherlands.
40. Tsewang Wangchuk, WWF International
41. Ms. Anjana Panth, WWF India
43. P.K. Sen, WWF India
44. Ms. Sejal Worah, WWF India
45. Ravi Singh-Secretary General and CEO of WWF-India
46. Sudipto Chatterjee, WWF India
47. Ms. Archana Chatterjee, WWF India
48. Dr. Swayam Prabha Das, WWF India
49. Dr. Sandip Behera, WWF India
50. Michael Picard, Lafarge International
51. Neeraj Akhouri, Lafarge India
52. S.R. Banerjee, Lafarge India
53. Ms. Suchetana Bhattacharya, Aranyak
54. Dr. V.L. Chopra, Member, Planning Commission, Govt. of India
55. Dr. R. Mandal, Advisor, Planning Commission, Govt. of India

- 56.D.P.Jana,IAS,Joint Secretary and Member Secretary,Sunderbans Development Board,Govt.of West Bengal
- 57.Dr.Tanmoy Choudhry
- 58.Ajoy Roy from Associated Press Television News
- 59.Srikant.Sharma-Chief General Manager of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited(Bengal Circle)
- 60.Soumya Roy-General Manager of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited(Bengal Circle)
- 61.Ashish Mukherjee-Vice President of Exide Industris Limited
- 62.Rahul Gupta-Vice President of Usha Martin Limited
- 63.Sanjay Behera- Bureau Chief, India Today
- 64.Dr.Ravi Chellam, Director, UNDP Livelihood Project.
- 65.Ardhendu Sen, IAS, Principal Secretary, Sunderbans Development Affairs
- 66.Kushal Mukherjee, Secretary, Prakriti Samsad and Member of National Wildlife Advisory Board.
- 67.Pankaj Seksaria-Social and Conservation Activist from Kalpavriksh
- 68.Michael Fox,USA-World Famous Ecotourism Expert and Consultant.
- 69.Toby Sinclair-Conservationist and Wildlife Expert.
- 70.Ms.Payal Narayan-Project Manager of WPSI
- 71.Dr.A.K.Chakravary,Senior Scientist,Minsitry of Information Technology,Govt.of India.
- 72.Dr.Kumar Prasad Gupta and friends-A group of World famous Physicists.
- 73.Marcus Bauer- Sustainable Tourism Expert from Germany.
- 73.Mandip Singh Soin,FRGS-Chairman, Sustainable Tourism (PATA-India Chapter) and Initiator of Adventure Tourism in India.
- 74.Ms.Alka Kohli-Regional Director,India Tourism(Eastern Region).
- 75.Anil Mulchandani- Conservationist, Columnist and Travel Writer.
- 76.Mohit Aggarwal-Conservationist and Managing Director of Asian Adventures.
- 77.Dr.B.C.Chowdhury-Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.
- 78.John McCarthy- Hon'ble Ambassador of Australia to India.
- 79.Maggie White- Director, Tourism Australia(South Asia).
- 80.Syed Liyakhat- Coordinator, EQUATIONS, Bangalore.
- 81.Judi Kloper-India Program Coordinator, Journeys of the Heart Adoption Foundation.
- 82.Keven Fitzgerald- Columnist and Managing Director of Rough Guide Publications.
- 83.Leigh Graves- British Airways, UK.
- 84.Mrs.Madhury Bose, United Nations, Nairobi, Kenya.
- 85.Samir Mehta, BEAG(Bombay Environment Action Group)
- 86.Mrs.Kirsten Conrad- Cat Specialist from Asia Cat
- 87.Yadira Gómez Hernández, a noted Herpetologist from Manejo de Fauna Silvestre, Mexico
- 88.Diane Schutz-Producer,Zero Point Zero Productions, Discovery Channel.
- 89.Dr.Asish Ghosh, Zoological Survey of India.
- 90.Dr.Fritz Jantschke, Producer, DOC TV,Germany
- 91.Deepak Leslie,Dravidian Productions,National Geographic Channel
- 92.Madhusree C Bhowmik, The Telegraph

And the list continues.....

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We are also thankful to Shri.M.A.Wohab and his SHIS team of volunteers and physicians , ,Dr.Ajibar Rahman,Dr.Supada Mandal and all our patrons and supporting members who have contributed to these project in so many ways.

Report prepared by Asit Biswas on behalf of the Governing Body of ACT.