



Fact Sheet – Environment

Bangladesh has rich but dwindling biodiversity

Aquatic and floodplain ecosystems continue to be severely degraded. The wetland ecosystems have lost connections with larger water bodies (rivers and canals) due to siltation and land filling or draining for agriculture and homestead use.

More than 50% of seasonal and perennial wetlands have been affected by growing unplanned urban and agricultural land use.

True forest habitat is less than 6% of total land area and is declining rapidly.

Massive deforestation has resulted in loss of biodiversity and productivity of tropical forest resources.

Bangladesh is situated within the linked Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GMB) river systems, the second largest river system in the world, which drains an area of 1,086,000 square kms from China, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. Because of this unique geophysical location, the country has been endowed with rich biological diversity, hosting a rich variety of species evolved to populate the ecosystems of the country.

However, due to the various pressures of a growing population (with an already existing base of 145 million people), development interventions, gaps in policy and legislation, and conflicting institutional mandates, 95% of Bangladesh's natural forests and 50% of its freshwater wetlands are lost or degraded.

Bangladesh now has among the smallest areas of protected and intact forest in the world, consisting of 1.4% of its landmass. Many terrestrial wildlife species have been lost during the last 100 years. In addition, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in 2000 classified 40% of Bangladesh's freshwater fish species as threatened with national extinction.

Bangladesh – the most vulnerable country to global climate change

Being the largest delta in the world located at the downstream of the second largest river system, the country is subject to a series of climatic events. The probable impacts of global climate change (GCC), particularly sea-level rise and

the associated impact on ecosystems and economic loss, adds to the already daunting array of environmental issues.

Climate change will alter the physiography and demography of Bangladesh. By 2050, 70 million people could be affected annually by floods; 8 million by drought; up to 8% of the low-lying lands may become permanently inundated. In addition to direct inundation of a large population, the sea level rise will certainly result in increased frequency and severity of flooding along the major estuarine rivers. Saltwater intrusion problems will also intensify in coastal aquifers.

Some impacts manifesting in erratic weather patterns and unexpected extreme climatic events have already been evident. The most recent cyclone, Cyclone Sidr, hit Bangladesh on November 15, 2007 with an enormous intensity. Winds of 220-240 km/hr and the cyclone's width of 600 kms caused over 3,000 deaths and projected costs of \$2.3 billion dollars due to widespread devastation to houses, infrastructure, and livelihoods.

In Bangladesh, poverty and natural resource dependence are strongly linked

70% of Bangladeshis depend on natural resources (wetlands and forests) for their livelihoods. Poverty is mainly rural (53%, 37% urban). 77% of rural households say they are at break-even or deficit status. Within this bracket, 18% comprise the absolute poor who are always in deficit. The rural poor are traditionally the most natural resource dependent and landless communities whose lives are totally dependent on natural capital.

Degradation of natural capital and biodiversity has a serious and direct impact on the food security, nutrition and income of the poor. The people of Bangladesh have a historical dependency on the floodplain system for their livelihood security.

An estimated 70 million rural households rely on food and income from the wetlands to survive in one of the world's poorest countries. Around one million people are estimated to fish full time, and 11 million are involved part time – and four out of every five rural dwellers are dependent to some extent on aquatic resources. These resources are estimated to supply between 60% and 80% of the animal protein needs of the country, as well as being a key source of essential minerals, vitamins and fatty acids which are vital factors in child development and adult health.

Between 1995 and 2000, freshwater fish consumption fell by 38% among poor wetlands inhabitants. Open water fish that used to supply 80% of the animal protein consumed, in particular by the rural poor, now supply less than 60%. Sustainable management of the bio-diverse natural capital is, therefore, central to poverty reduction in the Bangladesh context.

Resource - USAID