

## Role of Community Youths in Conservation of Forests and Protected Areas of Bangladesh

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**Abstract :** Community living adjacent to forests and Protected Areas, especially in South Asian countries, have a common practice in extracting resources for their living and livelihoods. This extraction of resources, because the way it is done, destroys the biophysical features of the area. Deforestation, wildlife poaching, illegal logging, unauthorized hill cutting etc. are some of the serious issues of concern for the sustainability of the natural resources that has a direct impact on environment and climate as a whole. To ensure community involvement in conservation initiatives of the state, community based forest management, commonly known as Comanagement, has been in practice in 6 South Asian countries. These are -India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Involving community in forestry management was initiated first in Bangladesh in 1979 and reached as an effective co-management approach through a several paradigm shifts. This idea of Comanagement has been institutionalized through a Government Order (GO) by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of Bangladesh on November 23, 2009. This GO clearly defines the structure and functions of Co-management and its different bodies. Bangladesh Forest Department has been working in association with community to conserve and manage the Forests and Protected areas of Bangladesh following this legal document. Demographically young people constitute the largest segment of population in Bangladesh. This group, if properly sensitized, can produce valuable impacts on the conservation initiatives, both by community and government. This study traced the major factors that motivate community youths to work effectively with different tiers of comanagement organizations in conservation of forests and Protected Areas of Bangladesh. For the purpose of this study, 3 FGDs were conducted with 30 youths from the community living around the Protected Areas of Cox's bazar, South East corner of Bangladesh, who are actively involved in Co-management organizations. KII were conducted with 5 key officials of Forest Department stationed at Cox's Bazar. 2 FGDs were conducted with the representatives of 7 Co-management organizations working in Cox's Bazar region and approaches of different community outreach activities conducted for forest conservation by 3 private organizations and Projects have been reviewed. Also secondary literatures were reviewed for the history and evolution of Co-management in Bangladesh and six South Asian countries. This study found that innovative community outreach activities that are financed by public and private sectors involving youths and community as a whole have played a pivotal role in conservation of forests and Protected Areas of the region. This approach can be replicated in other regions of Bangladesh as well as other countries of South Asia where Co-Management exists in practice.

**Keywords :** community, co-management, conservation, forests, protected areas, youth

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