Mainstreaming Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Conservation into Production Sectors in the East Godavari River Estuarine Ecosystem (EGREE), Andhra Pradesh

Background

The East Godavari River Estuarine Ecosystem (EGREE) encompassing Godavari mangroves is the second largest mangrove area along the east coast of India. It is rich in biological diversity and generates significant ecological and economic benefits such as protecting the shoreline; sustaining livelihoods and providing carbon sink services. There are 35 species of mangroves, including one nearly threatened species (*Ceriops decandra*). The EGREE region is an important nesting site for migratory turtle species, notably the endangered Olive Ridley turtle. It also serves as spawning grounds and sanctuary for the growth and development of numerous fin and shell fish. It is an Important Bird Area with a recorded population of 119 bird species, of which 50 are migratory. In recognition of its national and global biodiversity significance, a part of the EGREE is gazetted as Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary. The last few decades have witnessed rapid economic changes and emergence of large-scale production activities in EGREE such as fisheries, aquaculture, salt pans, and manufacturing activities such as oil and gas, fertilizers, cement, tourism and ports. In addition, local communities are dependent on the mangroves and marine resources for their sustenance. These activities impact the overall ecological integrity of the EGREE, particularly the mangrove ecosystems in Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and adjoining areas, with associated impacts on the livelihoods of local people.
About the project

Financed by the Global Environment Facility, the project aims to mainstream biodiversity conservation into the production sectors of EGREE through:

- Cross-sectoral planning in the EGREE that mainstreams biodiversity conservation considerations
- Enhance capacity of sector institutions for implementing biodiversity-friendly sector plans
- Improve community livelihoods and sustainable natural resource use

The aim is to mainstream biodiversity conservation in production activities underway in 80,000 ha of the EGREE, in turn improving the conservation prospects of several globally significant species apart from contributing to the socio-economic well-being of the region. The project successfully completed its Mid Term Review in early 2015. The independent evaluators for the MTR gave the project a satisfactory review.

Developments so far

- EGREE Foundation has been established under the Andhra Pradesh Society Registration Act 2001. This Foundation is a cross-sectoral platform to facilitate implementation of biodiversity conservation initiatives through the production sectors operating in the EGREE.

- In-house library and biodiversity laboratory established in the EGREE Foundation for supporting research and conducting water quality assessments in the region. Government of Andhra Pradesh has also proposed EGREE Foundation as ENVIS centre under coastal and marine theme.

- A separate chapter on Marine Conservation has been included in the proposed Wild Life Action Plan of India (2017 to 2031) with the successful intervention of the project. This is a first for India.

- Sectoral plans have been prepared for oil and gas, tourism, aquaculture and fisheries sectors. Best practices recommended by the Fisheries, Tourism and Aquaculture sectoral plans are under implementation. Key recommendations of the Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors have been incorporated in the AP State Fisheries Action Plan. The recommendations of the Tourism Sector Plan has been incorporated in the Smart City Proposal of Kakinada, which has been selected as a Smart City.

- Micro-plans for 41 villages in the EGREE Region completed and implemented for strengthening SHGs/Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in natural resource use and sustainable livelihoods.

- Trainings conducted regularly for forest department, coast guards, fisheries department, customs department, and other production sectors on conservation of coastal and marine biodiversity.

- Corporate sustainability reporting and biodiversity workshops organized and strong support obtained from industries operating in the region for integrating biodiversity concerns into their practices.

- Training in hospitality management conducted regularly for local communities. Trainings provided to local people working as Nature Guides in the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary on biodiversity conservation.

- Livelihood activities, skill development trainings such as shell handicrafts, coir making, tailoring, embroidery, pickle making etc. undertaken especially focusing on local women. SMART “(Skills for Manufacturing of Apparel through Research and Training) Centre set up to strengthen livelihoods of local women, with support from Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.

- Nesting habitats of the Olive Ridley Turtle have been protected and data reveals increase in the nesting vs hatching ratio

- Three new species of bird and one snake have been recorded in the EGREE region by the project. Also EGREE region recorded (73-92 number) highest concentration of fishing cats in India.

- Community Based Eco Tourism centers were established with the support of Tourism and Forest Departments of Andhra Pradesh.

- Eco Tourism support to Coringa Tourism Point helped in 16 folds increase in the revenue of Sanctuary, which is again plowed back to management of sanctuary and support community. Longest mangrove wooden board walk in India for 4 Kms is major attraction to the Sanctuary.

- Effectively implemented 61 day fish ban in EGREE Region which resulted in 20% increase in the income to fisherman.

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