

USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project



Key drivers of USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project are sustainability, resiliency to climate change, natural resource management, and scaled-up impacts. CREL activities bring together women and men from resource-dependent households in targeted landscapes, civil society groups, and the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) to collectively conserve, protect, and manage forests, wetlands, and critical ecosystems. This engagement at multiple levels – from people at the grassroots to key decision-makers at the policy level – is underpinned by targeted initiatives that support policy reforms, institutional strengthening, and alternative livelihoods and incomes for the poorest and most vulnerable. The objective is to create an enabling environment for sustainable communities and ecosystems, by improving capacity to co-manage natural resources, adapt to climate variability and change, and diversify livelihoods.

CREL has scaled-up and adapted successful Co-Management models, improving the ability of resource management institutions to foster environmental stewardship and biodiversity conservation. The team works in Protected Areas (PAs) and Ecologically Critical Areas (ECAs) in four different regions, including the Sundarbans, with communities and multiple government counterparts (ministries and departments). Key areas of work include: the conservation and expansion of PAs and ECAs; advocacy and research for policy reforms; and increased resilience to climate change through community-based planning, preparedness, and income generation. The project is currently expanding activities to new areas and additional beneficiaries.

CREL Strategy

CREL brings together market-based climate-resilient livelihood solutions and improvements in co-management capacity to better protect and conserve natural resources. Impoverished resource-dependent people will not have the time, energy, and inclination to protect natural resources and adapt to the vagaries of a changing climate. CREL's strategy combines planning and policy reforms with initiatives designed to strengthen Co-Management Organizations (CMOs) and address local needs and vulnerabilities. Landscape-level planning and policy changes are helping to expand and improve co-management in protected areas and wildlife corridors. This connects forests, wetlands, and critical habitats, improving biodiversity conservation

and natural resource management. Leveraged private-sector investments are also promoting eco-tourism and eco-friendly enterprises to increase job opportunities and incomes for local people.

CREL's integrated and multi-level approach is supporting stronger and more viable communities and families, which no longer need to rely on unsustainable extractive practices. It is reducing pressure on natural resources and ecosystems, as well as increasing climate change resilience, and income and livelihood options for the most marginal households in targeted landscapes – thereby building the necessary basis for climate-resilient ecosystems, livelihoods, and communities.

GOB Partners of CREL

Ministry of Environment and Forest
Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock
Ministry of Land
Department of Fisheries
Department of Environment
Bangladesh Forest Department

GOAL

More than 700,000 beneficiaries are better able to respond to the effects of climate change and variability

- 350,000 stakeholders with increased capacity to adapt to impacts of climate variability and change
- 500,000 people with increased economic benefits
- 90,000 metric tons of CO₂e reduced or sequestered as a result of USG assistance
- 2,000 ha of natural resources showing improved biophysical conditions
- 475,000 ha under improved management
- 4,800 stakeholders using climate information in decision-making



Intermediate Results (IRs) and Cross-Cutting Activities

IR 1 Improved governance of natural resources and biodiversity:

Adjustments in policies and rules are needed to secure enduring co-management rights and responsibilities. CREL is working with and through the GOB and CMOs to improve functional and financial capacity, identify revenue sources, increase institutional ownership, and secure greater legal and strategic backing for co-management. The project has identified 14 key policy reforms needed to support co-management institutions, and increase biodiversity in climate-resilient ecosystems. An improved national framework for protected area management will help to ensure greater institutional and environmental sustainability.

IR 2 Enhanced knowledge and capacity of key stakeholders:

CREL's curricula are designed to strengthen capacity for co-management implementation, natural resource management, and climate resilience. These customized training modules are increasing the knowledge of different stakeholders (e.g., CMO and Village Conservation Forum members, as well as local government officials), including landscape-level approaches to resource management and land-use planning, climate change adaptation and mitigation, organizational capacity strengthening, financial and entrepreneurial literacy, and context-appropriate tools and technologies. Technical assistance, mentoring, and small grants also fund research and ensure scientific rigor in measuring biodiversity as well as participatory monitoring and assessment of environmental impacts. In addition, CREL is supporting professional development and collaboration among national and local resource partners.

IR 3 Strengthened planning and implementation of climate-resilient NRM and climate-resilient adaptation:

CREL is strengthening co-management in biodiverse landscapes by improving the ability of local institutions to plan, protect, and restore ecosystems, including strategies for increasing preparedness and resilience to climate change. Working with CMOs and local government, CREL has expanded these activities in targeted landscapes and coordinated efforts to identify co-financing opportunities. Participatory Climate Vulnerability Assessments (PCVAs) are helping to integrate climate-resilient adaptation strategies in PA (forest and wetland) management plans, based on threats and risks identified by communities and CMOs.

IR 4 Diversified, sustainable, and climate-resilient livelihoods:

CREL is promoting environmentally-sustainable climate-resilient livelihood options for people living in or near PAs and ECAs. These households are highly-dependent on natural resources. They also tend to be located in areas which are most vulnerable to natural disasters and the effects of climate change. CREL is working with these "hard-core" resource-dependent households and communities to identify viable alternative livelihoods and different incentives for protecting resources. This includes landscape-level assessments and value chain analyses for creating market links, increasing enterprise and business development services, and building partnerships for economic growth. The aim is to reduce dependence on natural resources and end extractive practices that threaten biodiversity and PAs.



Cross-cutting Activities

Youth engagement, gender equality, and women empowerment are integrated into all CREL activities. The project views these as essential to the health and sustainability of communities and ecosystems, as well as the best way to ensure more effective engagement and better overall results. CREL's commitment to gender equality, women empowerment, youth engagement, and eliminating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is expressed in its Gender Strategy and woven into its policies, approaches, targets, and outputs. All of which are monitored and evaluated to assess implementation and results.



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