



South Asian Forum for Environment

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World Wetlands Day 2012, at East Kolkata Wetlands...

South Asian Forum for Environment, SAFE on the occasion of World Wetlands Day celebration voices for more support to save the fast vanishing East Kolkata Wetlands, EKW only Ramsar site of West Bengal, India. Important synergies between the environmental, economic, social factors have always been missing in case of EKW; World Wetlands Day is a unique opportunity to bring the synergies into the conservation aspects and work with a community based integrated approach.

For first time, members of 47 fisher committees united to formalize its first, 'East Kolkata Wetland Fishermen Federation', under a cooperative movement driven by SAFE. Community based conservation approach of SAFE have played an important role in combining the 47 isolated fishermen committees under one large Federation, with over 10,000 farmers.

All united to announce their Federation on WWD 12 and like every year wetlands community's, dignitaries present celebrated through a day long cultural milieu and fish fiesta.

Local M.L.A and Vice Chairman of Municipal Body and Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation, HIDCO, Mr. Sabyasachi Dutta, members of East Kolkata Management Authority, EKWMA, fishery expert Mr.S.Ghosh, and Chair, SAFE, Dr.Dipayan Dey, with other eminent dignitaries were present on the occasion addressing to the current crisis of East Kolkata Wetlands.

Mr. Dutta said, "Urgent action from the government side will be taken. We shall extend all support in dredging the blocked



canals and soon install the silt removal machines so that fishery can be started soon again in the bheries that are now dry due to heavy siltation". Mr. Ghosh said, I have been working in the area for long time, nothing has happened, it is unfortunate that no significant efforts have been taken to conserve the EKW". Dr. Dipayan said, "It is no longer enough to beg for some willful measures, government must get involved and policies have to be more clearly thought through with proper participation of the community. Currently, the new governments seem to be preoccupied with financial problems, but it will be fatal to neglect a long-term, coordinated policy towards East Kolkata Wetlands conservation".

The 12000 hectares of land, declared as Ramsar site in year 2002, recycles 980 million litres of sewerage per day provide major supply of fish and vegetable to city's market. East Kolkata Wetlands sustains the food security of a million people.

Heavy siltation is filling up acres of wetlands on a massive scale within EKW, resulting in damage to the wetlands fishery, having devastating effect on the livelihood of thousands of poor fishermen of EKW. A huge size of wetlands is lost every year,



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and long apathy at policy level has paved way for unscrupulous encroachments resulting in damage to the EKW ecosystem. The world's largest natural recycling ecosystem known as 'kidney', of Kolkata will vanish soon bearing the rate of pollution, siltation and illegal encroachment.

In year 2009 on 2nd Feb WWD; SAFE successfully completed India's first 'Biorights', project based on the concept of conservation and poverty alleviation. This has been showcased in the 4th TEEB report of UNEP as one of the best environmental practice and in year 2010 received the coveted Earth Care Award



for the success of Biorights. A number of projects under the 'Biorights'

model, like eco-tourism, endemic fish conservation, waste recycling, and wetlands based micro enterprise on paper mache and vermicompost have been started by SAFE to create alternate means of livelihood, and sustain the conservation efforts of community at EKW.

SAFE gratefully thanks the Ramsar Secretariat for its consistent support and encouragement in saving the vanishing EKW from the map of Kolkata.

We thank our partners, EILM University, Intelligent Infrastructure Limited, Vodafone Essar Limited, for your kind support.

For past seven years now, with limited resources in hand we are striving hard to save the East Kolkata Wetlands. The poor



communities, who have been till date exploited for various political interests, have today united under an independent Federation. Such is the apathy that eminent Ramsar site like East Kolkata Wetlands have not been incorporated in the national atlas on wetlands. SAFE is preparing a comprehensive report on the current status of Ramsar sites of India.

Authorised Signatory

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