

# Integrated Management of the Sundarbans Mangroves and the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Swatch of No Ground in Bangladesh (SoNG)

The project SoNG is aiming to strengthen marine conservation in Bangladesh by improving collaboration and developing capacity of responsible authorities and other stakeholders, and by engaging with fishermen, women, and youth in the coastal communities adjacent to the MPA.

## Context

The northern Bay of Bengal serves as a key fishing ground for over 13 million Bangladeshis. Its high fish production contributes significantly to the country's food security and coastal livelihoods. The upto 1,340 metre deep underwater canyon "Swatch of No Ground (SoNG)" extends from the south of the Sundarbans (world's largest closed canopy mangrove forest) into the Bay's deep-sea region. This area hosts an impressive variety of marine life due to its nutrient-rich water, including tuna, sailfish, sharks, several different dolphin species, Brydes' whale and other cetaceans.



Despite the strong protection for the Sundarbans mangrove forests, marine conservation in Bangladesh is still in its nascent stage. In 2014, the "Swatch of No Ground" was declared as a Marine Protected Area (MPA) to safeguard the cetaceans, sea turtles, sharks, and rays. About 170,000 ha fall under the Wildlife Act (2012) and hence under the management of the Forest Department (BFD), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). The BFD is currently not prepared and fully equipped to manage an offshore marine area.

Under the Marine Fisheries Act (2020) the Department of Fisheries (DoF), Ministry for Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL) is traditionally responsible for managing marine resources. DoF is increasingly also focusing on sustainable fishing, protection of small-scaled

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Implementing partner	Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC); Department of Fisheries (DoF), Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL)
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fishermen and marine conservation. The knowledge of the DoF on the marine ecosystem and its close relation with the fishing sector are essential success factors for an effective marine conservation.

Concerns over overfishing, biodiversity loss, lack of active conservation management and industrial waste threaten the region. Proper management of the "Swatch of No Ground" is essential for the conservation of the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hence, a coordinated effort involving all key stakeholders along with





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a comprehensive understanding of the connectivity of the land and sea ecosystems is crucial for safeguarding biodiversity and preserve ecosystem services for millions of people.

## Objective

The objective of this project is to strengthen the coordination of relevant actors for the protection and sustainable use of the Sundarbans and Swatch of No Ground (SoNG) Marine Protected Area by building up planning and surveillance capacities, enhancing the scientific monitoring and engaging active participation of fishermen, women, and youth in marine conservation.

## Our Approach

The methodological approach includes skill development in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Marine Protected Area management for all stakeholders, advanced application of Remote Sensing, SMART technology (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool), and citizen science as well as raising awareness and advocacy of fishermen, women, and youth for conservation. The latter is only possible if there are options for livelihood within or outside the fisheries value chain and better access to education.

Main target groups are staff of BFD, DoF and other authorities (Coastguard/Navy) and, particularly, the marginalised small-scale fishermen, women, and students of selected communities in Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Barguna and Patuakhali.

## Expected Results and Main Activities

At the end of the project, there should be a clear coordination mechanism established and a certain level of exchange of relevant data between BFD and DoF. Furthermore, the awareness and support of coastal communities should be significantly increased.

The project comprises of three main outputs reflecting three levers of change.

**Output 1:** Planning and monitoring capacity for marine conservation of relevant staff of different authorities is enhanced and model mechanisms are established for effective collaboration. Selected activities:

- To establish marine Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) in the SoNG area
- To conduct commonly training on Marine Spatial Planning and Marine Protected Area management for BFD and DoF
- To visit national and international learning sites for inspiration and good practice of coordinated management and marine conservation

**Output 2:** Knowledge-based decision making is strengthened by digital skill development for citizen science, expertise in advanced remote sensing and system approaches. Selected activities:

- To foster citizen science by inclusion of fishermen and communities
- To establish a digital Decision Support Tool and enhance the use of Remote Sensing techniques
- To support the science network and conduct studies on the ecology and ecological services of the Sundarbans and the Swatch of No Ground

**Output 3:** The awareness for marine protection and the support of conservation measures among people in the coastal communities. Selected activities:

- To sensitise fishermen and coastal communities for values of sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity
- To foster the engagement of youth in marine conservation
- To support women in general skill development and options for income generation
- To train fishermen and coastal communities in post-harvest techniques

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