

## ***“Healthy wetlands provide clean water and fish for our livelihood while also building our resilience towards floods, cyclones, and droughts”***

Tampara is a freshwater wetland, spanning the Rishikulya coastline in Odisha, India. This wetland serves as a habitat to 61 avian species, 23 species of fish, and a diverse variety of flora and fauna. Tampara is a source of water for over 10,000 households and supports the livelihood of community fishermen. The wetland area is also being developed as a tourism site and receives over 25,000 tourists every year. It acts as a flood, cyclone, and drought buffer, protecting habitation in its landscape.

In recent years, the Tampara wetland has suffered immense degradation due to anthropogenic pressures. The area of the wetland has been reduced due to construction and agriculture activities. The hydrological connectivity within the Rishikulya River has been lost as inflowing streams have been diverted to agricultural fields or have been choked with garbage. Wetland degradation has also led to a decrease in the number of fish species found in the wetland.

To combat wetland degradation and biodiversity issues, collective community action has been initiated under the project focusing on wetland restoration. These actions fall under the Tampara Management Plan, which was developed through a participatory approach involving community members to restore the wetland. The initiatives taken by community members with the support of Wetlands International South Asia and a local CSO (Netcoast) are listed below:

- Community task forces have been organised in 9 target Panchayats to act on conservation through awareness drives, adopting sustainable livelihood practices, and encouraging the use of indigenous knowledge to devise solutions.
- Training of stakeholders on wetland conservation and sustainable livelihood practices was organised to empower them to take decisions towards the sustainable use of the wetland and improve their livelihoods.

- Conservation actions such as the cleaning of wetland channels, waterways, inlets, and outlets; the removal of invasive water hyacinth; the monitoring of wetland health and organising local wetland champions to spread awareness on wetland and biodiversity conservation are ongoing.
- A total stretch of 5.5 kms of wetland inlets and outlets has been cleaned by the community members so far. To regulate pressure on Tampara wetland for water abstraction, a total of 30 village ponds have been selected for rejuvenation, which includes cleaning, nutrient regulation, and re-stocking of fish fingerlings.
- Indigenous and traditional practices such as making organic fishing gear and nets, and the plantation of local plant species are being encouraged.
- Awareness-raising among community members and youth on Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) practices are also being organised benefiting over 18,000 community and CBO members in the basin.



Figure 1: Wetland learning centre at Upper Primary School near Tampara to foster youth engagement in wetlands conservation  
Photo Credit: Dhruv Verma / Wetlands International South Asia

**Mr. Lokanath Behera**, Humara Village - Odisha is a local fisherman who has been making organic fish nets using bamboo. He strongly believes in traditional practices such as these to promote local crafts and also lower dependence on plastic nets that are harmful for the wetland. Photos: Eco-DRR project /Netcoast .



**Namita Behera and Jharana Behera** of Humara village - Odisha are among the many women who participate in the project activities such as plantations. They have been involved in plantation drives along the wetland to restore its ecological value. They are motivated to act on saving their wetland as they feel they depend on it for many reasons, like freshwater, fishing, and crop cultivation. Photos: Eco-DRR project/Netcoast.



**Ejuamin Khan** from the Chatrapur Notified Area Committee (NAC) has been working towards making Tampara plastic free. Along with his fellow community members, he organise drives to collect plastic waste left behind by tourists around the wetland. He and his team are also engaged in making tourists aware of this degradation for halting further pollution of the wetland. Photos: Eco-DRR project/Netcoast.



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