



BRIEFING NOTE

Fish pond excavation in the East Kolkata Wetlands

Last year, following an NGT order, some climate-friendly and beneficial work was done by the Department of Environment and East Kolkata Wetlands Management Authority (EKWMA). The outcome of that work, which constituted re-forestation of the East Kolkata Wetlands with an inbuilt livelihood component, was helpful in building a positive acceptance of the community regarding the presence of the state in terms of environmental governance and promotion of well-being

This year is a special year, marking the completion of two decades of recognition of the Ramsar status of the East Kolkata Wetlands. To build an even stronger record of environmental governance for public good, it will be most prudent to try to excavate a batch of bheris/ fish ponds that can help improve the ecological health of this unique large scale waste-water treatment wetlands that have drawn the attention and appreciation of the international community.

As a starting point, we need to focus on bheris which are willing and with whom we have previous work experience, when plantation was being done. The criteria on the basis of which the bheris are chosen are:

1. Have a number of fishworkers employed in the bheri, depending on it fully or partially for their livelihood.
2. Has a secure source of supply of sewage.
3. Willing to maintain good production practices for a period of five years at least after the re-excavation work has been done.
4. Willing to provide written consent to work.

FEASIBILITY AND WORKING METHOD

The Departmental budget can be used for this and the actual work can be done in convergence with the Department of Fisheries, that has prior expertise in doing the work. Alternatively, it will be even better if existing schemes are used where the financial support is already available.

This work, if done, will also send a positive message to the courts, that have been asking for more effective environmental protection of Ramsar sites. Most important of all, this will provide a strong incentive to the wetland community that does the actual conservation work, and help prevent encroachment.