

Evaluation of the Wetland in Yancheng, China

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The wetlands of China are components of hydrological systems that, when well managed, provide water in periods of shortage, important flood controls in periods of heavy rain or snowmelt, food for millions of people, and breeding and feeding habitat for many wild species. In July 2006, I participated in a monitoring and evaluation mission of a UNDP-GEF project on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in China. The project in Yancheng aims at establishing wetland biodiversity conservation as a routine consideration in national, provincial and local government decision making and action. Started in June 2005, the project ends by the end of 2007. The evaluation team reviewed the progress achieved so far and identified implementation problems.

The evaluation team is composed of a wetland specialist from Malaysia, two specialists from Wetland International in Beijing and myself. The methodologies

include interviews, site visits, and document reviews. We interviewed project staff, a UN volunteer, and the project coordinator, visited the project site and project office, held meetings and discussions with local stakeholders, and reviewed project report and other relevant documentation.

We found that the implementation of project at Yancheng is going well although there are delays. In January 2006, The project Leading Group was established and, Mr. Li Yihao, Vice-Secretary General of the Yancheng served as head of the group. The Leading Group consists of twelve local government agencies, including Forestry Bureau, Land Use and Planning, Environmental Protection and so on. The stakeholders expressed support for the project. The project staff held interviews with officials from sixteen local government agencies. They also conducted research along the coastal wetland areas. The information they collected proved to be valuable for their further work.

Other accomplishments of the project include a training workshop and the setup of a website. In late February 2006, the first wetland protection community training workshop was organized. Thirty-eight people participated in the workshop. Some participants are farmers, fishermen, or village officials and, some are management staff from the nature reserve or officials from the city Forestry Bureau. Experts on wetland biodiversity and wild animal protections provided the training. The

workshop enabled people living in the area understand the role and function of the wetland and increased their awareness of the wetland biodiversity protection. In addition, to strengthen public education on wetland protection, the project team has established a website on wetland biodiversity and the environmental protection in China. The website also includes the different functions of the Yancheng wetland and the threats the wetland faces. To inform the public about wetland functions and value, and the responsibilities of government and individuals in maintaining them, the project team has held discussions with the officials from the Education Bureau and the Education Division of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The project team works well together. Mr. Li, the project coordinator, is quite good at the coordination of different government agencies. The national UN volunteer, a 4th-year college student in environmental protection, has been trying hard to contribute to the project. He also expressed frustration on the slow work pace of government agencies. The international UN volunteer has prior international development work experience and has been doing a good job at Yancheng.

The most significant problem in Yancheng is the mudflat reclamation in the upper tidal zone. Other problems include conversion of land use, for example, from reed farm to fish or cotton field, industrial development and pollution, over-harvesting, especially near shore fisheries and mudflat shellfish, and alien species invasion

such as Spartina. To address the problems, it is important to better coordinate among relevant agencies and balance the policies for development and conservation. Other possible solutions include strengthening scientific research to address the alien species problem, moving fishermen to other jobs, improving enforcement of laws and regulations and promoting ecotourism.

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