

## Summary

The story of Dhamra Port is the story of a major corporation and a global environmental organization working together to ensure that the construction of a large deep sea industrial port in India would not harm a significant population of endangered sea turtles. From a development perspective, the site was perfect. But from a conservation perspective there were questions about its location close to one of the world's largest nesting site of the Olive Ridley turtle, protected under Indian law. The collaboration between DPCL-Dhamra Port Company Limited (then a joint venture between Tata Steel and L&T) and IUCN shows that development and conservation can co-exist, and that there are ways to develop in a responsible manner that meets both the needs of people and the needs of nature. Lessons learned from this partnership can be applied to other projects that will have similar positive outcomes for people and for nature.

## Classification

[to be provided]

## Location



The location of the port is 15 kilometers crow fly towards north west from Turtle nesting beach Gahirmatha in District Bhadrak, Odisha, India.

Lat: 20°49'17.24"N, Long: 86°57'51.39"E

## Desired behaviour change

The desired behaviour change was to make key stakeholders realise that development and conservation can happen simultaneously. This behaviour change was desired particularly in both private sector entities as well as NGOs. IUCN mobilised the best scientific expertise available on the subject and constituted a team of experts to showcase how this can happen with successful on the ground models.

## Challenges

The major challenge to this project was ensuring the success and continuity of safeguards to protect turtles from being severely impacted by port construction and ensuing long-term port activities. However, there were other challenges related to the desired behavior change. These included:

- Resistance of concerned actors to the project; and
- Reputational risk for key stakeholders.

In terms of ensuring the protection of Olive Ridley populations in the long-term, enhancing community awareness about the importance of turtles was also important, including changing community fishing practices that contributed to turtle mortality.

## Main stakeholders

- Olive Ridley Turtles

- DPCL
- Tata Steel
- IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)
- Fishers and local communities

## **Building blocks**

1. Strong partnerships and open communication
2. Science and technical expertise
3. Governance and community outreach

### **1. Strong partnerships and open communication**

A major building block that led to the success of this project is the strong collaboration and trust between the partners and the open lines of communication established within the partnership and with the public.

This was a challenging project, and the partners needed to work through complex issues together and to understand each other's perspectives. It helped that the partnership facilitated the assembly of a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary team.

The private sector is commonly described as being blind to environmental issues. The reality, however, is that the private sector is heavily invested in biodiversity. The project was an opportunity for companies to deepen their understanding of environmental issues and to develop the corporate habit of thinking beyond the bottom line. Less obviously, it is an opportunity for environmental specialists to deepen their understanding of business and development dynamics and to acquire the habit of injecting bottom line analysis into their own evaluations.

Robust communication practices went hand in hand with the partnership. Because of the sensitivity around the issue among environmental organizations and other sectors, the approach toward the project was to make information transparent and publicly available. The partners described very clearly what they were doing and what they were not doing – and why. Information was made available through fact sheets and the project website, and by engaging in public discussions and meetings. A number of other efforts were made to ensure information was flowing freely between the key stakeholders. For example, in early 2009, IUCN held a Consultative Technical Workshop on Dhamra Port in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, followed by a trip to the port site. The interactive forum brought together a diverse mix of government representatives, the private sector, leading local and international scientists, technical experts, academics and local community representatives. Work with the press ensured that messages were disseminated at a national level. These efforts encouraged participation and helped to dispel confusion.

### **2. Science and technical expertise**

At the outset, IUCN organized a scoping mission to review potential impacts of the proposed Dhamra Port development on the environment. The scoping mission found that the major environmental issues were dredging and lighting. However, these issues were not unique as there were a number of examples around the world where similar problems were effectively addressed.

Dredging, recognized as a serious threat to the marine turtles, was identified by IUCN as a priority. IUCN, with experts from the Species Survival Commission's Marine Turtle Specialist Group designed and developed a dredging protocol to be followed during port operations. These included installing turtle deflectors on all dredger drag-heads to help ensure turtles were not pulled into the dredger. Trained observers were assigned to all dredgers to monitor this process. These observers would check screens on inflow and overflow pipes on a 24/7 basis. These measures (deflectors, screens, and human observers) were put in place to ensure that the dredging was "turtle friendly". Such measures were the first to have been put in place in the history of dredging activities in India.

Lighting was the second major threat identified because excess glare is known to distract turtle hatchlings as they instinctively move towards brightly lit areas and away from the sea. For this, the IUCN Commission experts provided specific guidelines for the port's lighting plan, which was adopted by the port authorities. IUCN further supported

Tata Steel in identifying the right design for these lights. Today, Dhamra Port is the first and only port in India to have installed “turtle friendly” lighting.

To address other environmental impacts, IUCN supported DPCL in developing an Environment Management Plan (EMP). This plan was scientifically robust and practically implementable, going beyond the existing legal requirements. Most importantly EMP was designed in such a way that it becomes the integral part of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of DPCL. This makes it different from other EMPs.

### **3. Community outreach and governance**

IUCN entered into the Dhamra port project because of concern about the port harming Olive Ridley turtles. As IUCN dug into the problems, however, it learned that the mortality rate of the turtles had already increased dramatically. A report prepared by the Wildlife Institute of India indicated that turtle mortality had increased from a few thousand a year in the early 1980s to more than 10,000 by the mid 1990s. Mechanized trawl fishing and gill net fishing were seen to be responsible for the mortalities.

Local community awareness regarding the value of the turtles was low. To address this, the IUCN team engaged in community sensitizing activities, including creative educational programs, as well as traditional outreach. DPCL also established a community training centre so that local villagers could develop skills which would prepare them for jobs arising at the new facility.

IUCN also identified that the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) could be helpful in reducing turtle mortality due to trawl fishing, one of the biggest problems in the areas. The devices weren't new to fishers in the Dhamra area – Indian NGOs and scientists had tested them with the fishers in the past – but they weren't being used. The IUCN DPCL team consulted extensively with local fishing cooperative officers and communities to better understand the issues. A training workshop was organized and a number of practical trials of the TEDs for fishers in the area were facilitated. Changing the practices of local fishing communities remains a major priority, but will require long-term education programming combined with policy solutions.

The last obstacle to be tackled in this public arena was governance. In the beginning, local authorities seemed more concerned about fishers' rights than turtle safety. However, as understanding spread, government agencies became partner advocates for the holistic, long-term solutions. There were alternative livelihood trainings to provide income generating options to the community besides fishing.

### **How do the building blocks interact?**

Through the three project building blocks, a holistic solution toward the challenge of balancing development with conservation was reached. While each block addressed a different aspect of the project, the combination of all these helped to consolidate mutual trust and collaboration among the stakeholders and actors, enabling engagement, dialogue and understanding for both the short term outcome and for long-term sustainability.

### **Impacts**

Dhamra port is an example of a successful partnership between a private sector company and a conservation organization, in a project that deals with company core business and not just minor corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

As a result of the partnership and with assistance from IUCN, DPCL drafted an Environmental Management Plan (EMP). The EMP addresses regulations, policy, planning, implementation, operations and management as well as quality assurance and monitoring. It details the procedures needed for change management, and the development of a corporate culture that prioritizes safety, environmental protection and the promotion of positive community relations.

To fund ongoing research and intervention, a trust, proposed by IUCN, is being established to support long-term conservation in the area. DPCL and IUCN have now initiated the process of establishing the “Dhamra Conservation Trust”.

The Trust will focus on turtle conservation along the coastline of Odisha; improving the quality of life through alternative livelihoods; promoting opportunities for women; and empowering villagers.

On the broader scale, the project has led to a deeper understanding among private, public and civil society actors that much can be done to address both development and environment at the same time, in a sustainable manner, using good science. The outcomes of the project are changing perceptions not just on the business side on environmental sustainability, but also on the side of environmental organizations about the role they can play in enabling similar breakthroughs in sustainable business practices.

## **Story**

The story of Dhamra Port is a story of misunderstandings, technical difficulties and conflict. But it is equally a story of determined individuals, enlightened companies, innovative approaches and mutual benefit. Despite the challenges, it is a story that resulted in a happy ending, both for the Olive Ridley turtle and for the people of Odisha.

Early on, a number of environmental organizations in India voiced strong opposition to the development of the port. Fortunately Tata Steel was committed to establishing whether a port could be built in this area without harming the turtles.

They asked IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, to advise on the project. IUCN brought in its global experts on sea turtles who worked with the company to help implement significant mitigation measures. IUCN accepted that this was a challenging engagement from the beginning. There was major resistance and debate within the environmental community about whether IUCN should be involved. And Tata Group knew that once they had engaged with IUCN, there could be significant cost associated with the organization's recommendations.

IUCN's participation in the Dhamra Port project sparked heated conflict among environmentalists. The issues were many and complex. There were many criticisms and misunderstandings, including accusations from external bodies and from NGO members within IUCN, which clouded the discussion. There were also factual gaps and misinformation about the potential impact of port development.

There was significant internal debate among IUCN members and even within the organization as to whether or not IUCN should be engaged in the project, and as to whether or not the port could be built without harming this important population of a vulnerable species.

"Many in the IUCN India National Committee felt that since the port was going to be built anyway it was important to provide scientific advice if possible. However several members did voice serious opposition to IUCN's engagement with the port at all," recalled Meena Gupta, IUCN Regional Councillor for South and East Asia.

For many, this was a project to save sea turtles. There was international evidence to show it was possible for ports and turtles to coexist, provided that standard operating procedures were followed. And by mobilizing its international network of experts, IUCN could bring much needed objective science and commitment to conservation to the table. "We have a golden opportunity to engage industry and help them get it right," said Nicolas Pilcher, co-chair IUCN Species Survival Commission - Marine Turtle Specialist Group.

IUCN is mandated by its Members to engage with the private sector. But as direct as the mandate is, it is porous enough for debate. In spite of the IUCN Council approved Business and Biodiversity Strategy mandating work with these "large footprint" industries, some IUCN Members still felt that industries – like mining – had such serious environmental consequences that IUCN should not engage with them. Some groups outside IUCN objected to the project loudly, and ran campaigns against IUCN. Others emphasized taking a long-term view, arguing that compromises were worth it, considering the potential for influencing a large-scale development project and mitigating its impact on a valued species, not to mention setting an international example.

The international science community by and large supported this position, concluding, on the basis of global best practices, that environmental damage could be adequately mitigated. In the end, the organization stood firm in its belief that it could act as a neutral and impartial partner in the project, using the best science to ensure that the best outcome was achieved for the turtles. IUCN also viewed the project as an important test case and learning opportunity around engaging with business in ways that provide the best results for nature and local communities.

Over a period of several years, the two organizations worked together through many challenges to demonstrate that development and conservation can co-exist, and that there are ways to develop in a responsible manner that meets both the needs of people and the needs of nature. Dhamra Port helped establish trust between IUCN and the Tata Group, and this led to other subsequent forms of engagement, all of which demonstrated that biodiversity protection can be a core principle of a large-footprint industry. Speaking about this partnership, Ratan Tata, Chairman Emeritus Tata Group said, "I am pleased that the Tata Group's tradition of corporate social and environmental responsibility continued in the development of Dhamra Port. We have appreciated the partnership with IUCN in achieving this together."