

Uttaran

Environment and Social Protection Policy

Community Mobilization

Poverty Eradication

Environmental Justice

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Date: November 2020 Approved by on behalf of executive board	Shahidul Islam Director	Sarder Md. Rezaul Karim Chairman
Update - 1 Date: November 2023 Approved by on behalf of executive board	Shahidul Islam Director	Sarder Md. Rezaul Karim Chairman
Update - 2 Date: January,2026 Approved by on behalf of executive board	Shahidul Islam Director	Sarder Md. Rezaul Karim Chairman
Recommended by	Haridas Malakar Coordinator (Finance & Accounts)	


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Introduction

Since its inception in 1985, Uttaran has been working in the south-western coastal region of Bangladesh, constantly being fighting to uphold the human rights of the local people with special focus on women, the marginalized section of the society.

This part of this country is constantly being stuck by the recurrent disasters. But from the beginning of 21st century a new problem “waterlogging” arose in south-west coastal region of Bangladesh, is a pressing concern at the backdrop of climate change that becomes worsens for the people of southwest Bangladesh. The prolonged waterlogging has caused significant displacement presenting humanitarian challenges in safe water supply, sanitation, shelter, food security, and employment opportunity. A variety of reasons like natural changes in river flow; increased sediment in riverbeds due to reduced sediment deposition on floodplains protected by embankments; and a lack of proper operation and maintenance of sluice gates of the polders circular embankments is liable for waterlogging. Uttaran has therefore taken numerous unique initiatives to address these issues which are based on the local people’s knowledge.

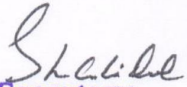
Moreover, Uttaran aims at conservation and protection of an environment commensurate to the unique characteristics of the tidal wetland. Uttaran is now working in 205 Unions of 40 Upazilas under Satkhira, Jessore, Khulna, Bagerhat, Rajshahi, Bhola, Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Noakhali, Feni, Laksmipur, Cox’s Bazar and Jamalpur districts.

Among its multi sectoral activities, Uttaran has been undertaking programmes for protection and conservation of environment through institution building, conscientization, economic activities, afforestation, resource centre, publication, advocacy and lobbying, networking of NGOs/CBOs, action research, legal support, promotion of regenerative agriculture, prevention of water borne diseases, safe water and sanitation, low cost housing etc. Additionally Uttaran feels along with environmental protection, social protection and cultural conservation is needed to attain optimum Sustainable development goals and to ensure maximum participation of our working communities.

For better results and impacts it is necessary to consolidate above activities and with that end in view of this policy document has been prepared to address environmental activities and social protection actions within the organization and also in the national level.

Today’s world is facing a very serious environmental crisis which is as old as the civilization itself. But it has become a major concern in the last few decades. It is the product of the development of civilization and in fact a price for the progress. Key environmental problems include pollution (air, water & soil), global warming, overpopulation, natural resource depletion, waste disposal, climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, ocean acidification, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, water pollution, urban sprawl, public health issues, genetic engineering etc. We think that this crisis is likely to have catastrophic effects in the future. Even today, the


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negative effects of the crisis are evident in the form of growing deserts, increased rates of cancer, and the loss of plant species which could hold out cures for diseases for diseases such as AIDS etc.

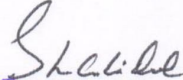
In line of this crisis country like Bangladesh faces several environmental issues which threaten her resources, including groundwater metal contamination, increased groundwater salinity, cyclones and flooding, sedimentation and changing patterns of stream flow due to watershed mismanagement. Some of these, such as the changing patterns of stream flow and presence of lead in groundwater, can be directly correlated with human activity and industrial processes, while others, such as cyclones and flooding are naturally occurring issues. Many of these issues are further exacerbated by climate change, which causes increased occurrence of storms and cyclones and rising sea levels. According to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index, Bangladesh is the 43rd most vulnerable country to the effects of climate change, and the 37th least prepared country to address these effects.

On the other hand, the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh is considered to be unique and sensitive in terms of ecology and environment. It is very rich in natural resources and biodiversity, and one of the most fertile regions in the world. Tidal flood plains with mangrove forests are considered a very complex eco-system, which has the highest production of organic subsistence. River estuaries are very much productive and rich in fish, aquatic and marine species and it is one of the prime fishery and aquatic resource for Bangladesh.

But during the 1960s, the Government of East Pakistan implemented a project called Coastal Embankment Project (CEP), with an objective to convert brackish water zone to fresh water zone and cultivating more crops not considering its unique eco-system. As a result, the project design failed to comprehend the environmental and ecological consequences of an embankment construction and within a few years, the negative impacts of the project began to appear. The project largely excluded community' participation. The biodiversity of the region became degraded, river flows were affected and many rivers silted up, affecting navigation. By 1990, over a hundred thousand hectares of land in Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts became waterlogged, and agriculture became impossible. Rather the regenerative rivers of this area are being dead one by one. Hamkura, Apar Sholmari, Horihor, Burivodra, East Shalta, Amtoli, Shalikka rivers have already died. Moreover, Jhopjhopia, Haria, West Shalta, Gunakhali, Kopotakkho, Betna, Morichhap, Haora, Gutiaxhali, Kakshiali, Ichamoti rivers are at the stage of dying. In these circumstances, 5 million people's lives and livelihoods are under threat.

Therefore, waterlogging, annual inundation of massive areas has become a recurrent and chronic environmental disaster. It directly affects a million people, submerges massive area for five to seven months every year, for more than a decade and indirectly affects the whole region, resulting in breakdown of economy, education, livelihood of the whole area.


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Besides, climate change related problems like frequent cyclones, sea level rise, tidal surge, increased intensity of flood and draught etc. are increasing day by day. The situation is worsening with every passing second. For more than a decade local people had been forced to migrate from the area creating massive social problems and cultural degradation. If necessary immediate steps are not taken, the migration will be worsened and may go out of control.

In view of this scenario, Uttaran develops this policy document to minimize the environmental impact of its activity, ensure positive social and cultural norms are intact and maximize people's participation in its development activity to avoid any sort social risk and conflicts. Uttaran committed to ensuring that all its rights-based development work will be implemented in an environmentally sustainable way by understanding the environmental impact of it. Moreover, Uttaran committed to mainstream this environment policy in every faces of the organization activities.

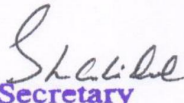
In Bangladesh, 'Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF)' is primarily responsible for environmental protection. It was created in 1989. The MOEF has taken some steps to control the environmental pollution of Bangladesh.

In recent years, the government has taken some important steps towards protection of the environment, environmentally sound use of natural resources and pollution control, Adoption of National Environment Policy and formulation of National Conservation Strategy and the National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) are some of the measures undertaken by the government to integrate environment with development in a policy framework. NEMAP provides a guideline for promoting effective management of resources, raising awareness among the people and improvement of environmental degradation.

The government of Bangladesh has modified environmental acts, rules and laws to improve environmental condition. Environment court has already been established to take prompt legal action against environmental pollution. The Environment Conservation Rules 1997 has also been passed by the Parliament. The DOE has been empowered to punish the offenders of environmental rules.

Recently the DOE has taken some measures to carry out surveys on identification and control of polluting industries, protecting habitats, examining the use of compressed natural gas in industries, setting environmental standards and controlling river and automobile pollution on environmental management. It also conducts vehicular emission measurements at Dhaka city.


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Uttaran's Position

Waterlogging is the most devastating problem in Jashore-Khulna-Satkhirathat has been going on for a long time. The problem started during 80s of the last century. However, the degree of intensity to this problem has been known very recently. FrequentCyclones, flood, increase of the height of the sea surface and excessive salinity together with the water logging problem has pushed the situation to a very risky level. In this circumstance, all socio-economical sectors are being affected directly or indirectly by this problem. As a result, gradually the area is becoming unsuitable for living and people are being migrated.

In this circumstance, Uttaran came forward to solve the problem of this area. It organized people and formed a committee popularly called 'Pani Committee'. It is a two tier committee- Central Committeeand UpazilaCommittee. There are 11 Upazila Committee consisting of 31 members each and 1 Central committee having 52 members.By the authorization of Upazila Committee3 representatives from each Upazila committee will be the member of Central Committee.

The mission of this Pani Committee is to develop the capacity of the community of south-west region and to act as a bridge between the responsible authorities and the community in the protection of their environment. Moreover, it establishes partnership among the community especially on preserving the biodiversity of wetlands, ensuring optimum use of water, conserving biodiversity, saving Sundarban and in other development activities.

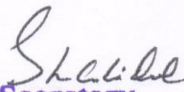
Definition

The environment is a system consisting of natural and artificial elements that are interrelated and which are modified by human action. It's the environment that affects the way of life of the society, including natural, social and cultural values that exist in a place and time. Living beings, soil, water, air, physical objects made by man and the symbolic elements make up the environment. The conservation of this is essential to the sustainable life of current generations and generations.

Natural resources are useful raw materials that we get from the Earth. They occur naturally, which means that humans cannot make natural resources. Instead, we use and modify natural resources in ways that are beneficial to us. The materials used in human-made objects are natural resources such as air, animals, coal, minerals, natural gas, oil, plants, sunlight and water.

Climate change refers to the long-term changes in the Earth's climate, or a region on Earth, and includes more than just the average surface temperature. For example, variations in the amount of snow, sea levels, and sea ice can all be consequences of climate change.


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Carbon footprint defined as the total amount of carbon dioxide or other equivalent gas emissions into the atmosphere caused by individual, event, organization, country, product etc.

Impact considered as possible adverse effects caused by a development, industrial, or infrastructural project or by the release of a substance in the environment.

Biodiversity defined as the variability among living organisms from all sources including, among other things, terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part. This includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Sea level rise refers to an increase in the volume of water in the world's oceans, resulting in an increase in global mean sea level. It has been rising over the past century and the rate has increased in recent decades. It continues to rise at a rate of about one-eighth of an inch per year. The two major causes of global sea level rise are thermal expansion caused by warming of the ocean since water expands as it warms and increased melting of land-based ice such as glaciers and ice sheets.

Weather is the state of the atmosphere at a particular place and time as regards heat, cloudiness, dryness, sunshine, wind, rain, etc.

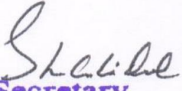
Disaster is a sudden calamitous event that seriously disrupts the functioning of a community or society and causes human, material and economic or environmental losses that exceed the community's or society's ability to cope using its own resources. Though it often caused by nature, disasters can have also human origins.

Flood is an overflow of water that submerges land which is usually dry. Flooding may occur as an overflow of water from water bodies such as a river, lake, or ocean, in which the water overtops or breaks levees, resulting in some of that water escaping its usual boundaries or it may occur due to an accumulation of rainwater on saturated ground in an areal flood.

Tidal Surge defined as an unusual or tend to destructive rise in sea level above normal high-tide level in a coastal area caused by a combination of low atmospheric pressure and strong onshore winds during a storm.

Global warming refers to gradual increase in the overall temperature of the earth's atmosphere generally attributed to the greenhouse effect caused by increased levels of carbon dioxide, chlorofluorocarbons, and other pollutants.


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Ecosystem includes all of the living things such as plants, animals and organisms in a given area, interacting with each other and also with their non-living environments like weather, earth, sun, soil, climate, atmosphere etc.

Pollution is the process of making land, water, air or other parts of the environment dirty and unsafe or unsuitable to use. This can be done through the introduction of a contaminant into a natural environment but the contaminant doesn't need to be tangible. Things as simple as light, sound and temperature can be considered pollutants when introduced artificially into an environment.

Livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life. A livelihood is sustainable when it enables people to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses such as natural disasters and economic or social upheavals and enhances their well-being and that of future generations without undermining the natural environment or resource base.

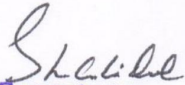
Poverty defined as the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support, condition of being poor.

Tidal River Management (TRM) is an age-old indigenous water, sediment and river basin management practice in southwest coastal region in Bangladesh perfected by local communities over generation. The estuarine rivers in southwest coastal region witness two cycles of tides in every day. The high tides bring in muddy water flow with a thick concentration of sediments. The local communities cut the embankment in an appropriate point to let the river flow enter a floodplain. The natural high tide enters the floodplain and leaves a part of the sediment to be deposited on the floodplain and goes back to the ocean. TRM is the most effective method to raise land and make it cultivable, mitigate water logging crisis, increase navigability of river, reduce salinity and used as the most effective climate change adaptation strategy to protect the region from sea level rise. It is implemented at the initiatives of local people is such a method which can be used to raise land low cost and keeping the natural process unaffected.

Conservation refers to a careful preservation and protection of something; especially planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect.

Sustainable Agriculture considered as the production of food, fiber, or other plant or animal products using farming techniques that protect the environment, public health, human communities, and animal welfare. This form of agriculture enables us to produce healthful food without compromising future generations' ability to do the same.


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Environmental sustainability is the rates of renewable resource harvest, pollution creation, and non-renewable resource depletion that can be continued indefinitely. If they cannot be continued indefinitely then they are not sustainable. The maintenance of the factors and practices contribute to the quality of environment on a long-term basis.

Greenhouse Gas refers to any gaseous compound in the atmosphere that is capable of absorbing infrared radiation, thereby trapping and holding heat in the atmosphere. It traps heat and make the planet warmer. Human activities are responsible for almost all of the increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere over the last 150 years. The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities is mostly from burning fossil fuels for electricity, heat, and transportation. By increasing the heat in the atmosphere, greenhouse gases are responsible for the greenhouse effect, which ultimately leads to global warming.

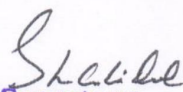
Coastal Region refers to a zone where interaction of the sea and land processes occurs. It is an important part of a local ecosystem: the mixture of fresh water and brackish water in estuaries provides many nutrients for marine life. Salt marshes and beaches also support a diversity of plants, animals and insects crucial to the food chain. The high level of biodiversity creates a high level of biological activity which has attracted human activity for thousands of years.

Environmental Crisis of this region

Bangladesh is thought to be one of the most vulnerable countries of the world to Climate Change and Sea Level Rise and it is a matter of great sorrow that the south-west region of this country is the most disaster prone area. The following environmental issues and problems are hindering the development of this region.

- **Waterlogging:** Riverbed siltation along with back water effect due to sea-level rise and high tide is leading to prolonged water-logging in south-west region. This prolonged water-logging has caused significant displacement presenting humanitarian challenges in safe water supply, sanitation, shelter, food security, and employment opportunity. There are areas where people are compelled to live in waterlogged condition for nine months in a year; even many cultivated crop lands are permanently inundated losing valuable agricultural production especially rice. Therefore, socio-economic and agricultural activities have largely been hampered due to water logging.
- **Cyclone:** The tropical cyclone is one of the most common hazardous events in south-west coastal area. A major cyclone hits this coastal area almost once in three years and creates most dreadful effect on people's lives. It has direct and indirect impacts on general public health, livelihoods, infrastructure, the economy and socio-cultural foundations. It affects access to food and drinking water, and increases the transmission


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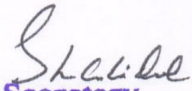
risks of infectious diseases, such as diarrhoea, hepatitis, malaria, dengue, pneumonia, eye infections and skin diseases, thus contributing to the interruption of livelihoods. Surface water, the main source of drinking water in coastal regions becomes contaminated by saline intrusion and poor sanitation systems. Though open latrines and poor sanitation are common in rural Bangladesh and coastal areas but cyclones make this situation worse. The lack of safe drinking water may be the most important cause of the spread of waterborne diseases after a cyclone. Other causes are through indirect impacts such as damaged infrastructure, population displacement, reduced food production and the release of contaminants into the water from storage and waste disposal sites.

- **Salinity:** Salinity is such an environmental problem which is exacerbating by climate change and sea level rise. The south-west coastal region is characterized by tides and salinity from the Bay of Bengal. Salinity intrusion due to a reduction of fresh water flow from upstream, salinization of groundwater and fluctuation of soil salinity are one of the major concerns of the coastal area of the country. The higher salinity levels have adverse impacts on agriculture, aquaculture, and domestic and industrial water use and so.
- **Shrimp culture:** Over the last three decades in the coastal zone of Bangladesh commercial shrimp culture has been dramatically expanded. The reason behind such expansion is high demand of shrimp in international market and its potential for making quick profit. But shrimp cannot be cultivated in fresh water. Salinity intrusion in the freshwater zone of the coastal area has opened the door to shrimp farmers to cultivate shrimp in the area. Vast number of land area is converted to saline water field day by day for cultivating it. Horizontal expansion of shrimp farms by replacing crop fields are degrading the local ecosystem and impacting the livelihoods of local marginal peoples. Now days, salinity intrusion due to shrimp farming not only upholding this sector as a controversial one but also threatening the sustainability of the local environments.

Social Crisis of this region:

Constant change in the environment, severe impacts of climate change migration over the past decades has gradually developed social and cultural crisis across the coast. Additionally, development activities are largely excluding community participation, social structure and cultural understanding creating conflicts between communities, communities with authorities and relevant development activities.


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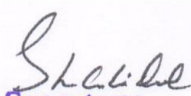
Objectives of the Policy

- ✓ To give a clear idea to Uttaran's staff, volunteers, partners, Donors and other stakeholders about Uttaran's stand regarding environmental issues, social protection and cultural conservation in the region.
- ✓ To give a guideline to Uttaran staff and committee member in formulation of policy for programme intervention;
- ✓ To ensure the use of all natural resources is used in a sustainable and environmentally sound way.
- ✓ To guide Uttaran personnel involved in project planning and implementation;
- ✓ To promote an effective system for monitoring the environmental and social impact of Uttaran's approved work;
- ✓ To minimize the environmental impact of our operations with the urge to fulfill our mandate and financial affordability;
- ✓ To minimize social conflicts and protect cultural heritage
- ✓ To ensure that this policy is adequately notified and understood;
- ✓ To ensure that all its rights-based development work will be implemented in an environmentally sustainable way by understanding the environmental impact of it;
- ✓ To build rapport with suppliers who operates with environmentally sustainable goods and services;
- ✓ To reduce our carbon footprint;
- ✓ To help other organizations working with the environment to frame their own policy.

The Environment and Social Protection Policy of Uttaran

- ✓ Adhere to all applicable legal and other environmental requirements.
- ✓ Ensure community participation at all stages of development intervention
- ✓ Ensure no community involuntary actions are taken
- ✓ Protect all cultural tangible assets and positive intangible values
- ✓ Mainstream environment in every faces of the organization activities.
- ✓ Development of an effective resource centre for use of development activists, researchers and educationalists.
- ✓ Minimization of our greenhouse gas emission.
- ✓ Promotion of efficient transport solutions for staff commuting and implementing initiatives that reduce our air pollution.
- ✓ Engaging our staff, volunteers, supporters, suppliers, contractors, interested third parties and the public, in encouraging participation in environmental sustainability and social protection.
- ✓ Revival of the grazing and breeding lands for marine species to promote biological productivity.


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- ✓ Advocacy and lobby for conservation of tidal wetland.
- ✓ Conservation of the Sundarbans through reducing dependency on it by creating alternative income sources of the dependent.
- ✓ Incorporation of coastal environment into the non-formal education curricula used by NGOs as well as to provide an orientation to the teachers and students of Govt. educational institutions.
- ✓ Protection of cultural heritage and land rights of the out-caste minority people.
- ✓ Advocacy against large scale shrimp farming on monoculture basis and assist to promotion of mini scale multi-farming in brackish water for protection of bio-diversity as well as protecting the land rights of small and marginal farmers.
- ✓ Implementation of waste management initiatives.
- ✓ Massive employment creation through vertical integration (labour-adding) of the natural resources.
- ✓ Advocacy for amendment of existing laws which are against the interest of the people and detrimental to the unique ecosystem.
- ✓ Undertake research activities from socio-economic, biological, geomorphologic and anthropological perspective and dissemination of the findings to the development organizations and Govt. as well as educational institutions.
- ✓ Relief and rehabilitation for the victims of waterlogging and undertaking necessary steps for removal of water.
- ✓ Development of an environmental sustainable procurement policy.
- ✓ Promoting networking of NGOs/CBOs.
- ✓ Environment education for the NGOs working in the regions so that they give more preference to the regional problems.
- ✓ Alliance building with national level apex bodies like ADAB, CEN, VHSS for strengthening advocacy/lobbying on tidal wetland issues at the national and international level.
- ✓ Publication of documentaries, newsletters, bulletins and research works.
- ✓ Reduce the vulnerability of the area as one of the largest zones in the country for trafficking of women and children.
- ✓ Rehabilitation of the families displaced by big shrimp farming and waterlogging.
- ✓ Conscientization of the people who became victims of development interventions in the region so that they can raise their voice against such activities.
- ✓ Promotion of organic/regenerative agriculture.
- ✓ Promotion of Saline-tolerant agriculture.

Implementation Strategy of Environment and Social protection Policy

At organizational level:



- ✓ Continue training, workshops, seminars, rallies and discussion meeting for raising consciousness about environment issues and for changing the traditional outlook of the people at group level. Efforts to be taken to reflect their learning at community level.
- ✓ Emphasis on environmental and social protection issues in designing training courses of the organization.
- ✓ Priority on providing credit support on environment friendly IGAs.
- ✓ Arrange special training for the programme participants to increase scope for using wetland resources and enhance their indigenous skills. Priority will be given in forming alternative institutions of people involved in environment friendly occupations.
- ✓ Develop one environment cadre (EC) in each organized group with existing health, legal aid and education cadres and assist the other local NGOs to do the same. Ensure EC's representation at union, area and in the central committee of the groups. Priority given to proposals of federations which are in line with our environment policy.
- ✓ Incorporate environment issues into the curriculum in its formal, non-formal and technical education. Lobby to GOB to incorporate environment education in the formal education curriculum and syllabus.
- ✓ Ensure Gender equality in all project's activities where necessary
- ✓ Collect and disseminate environmental information among the staff members.
- ✓ Orientate all staff members on the environment and social protection policy.
- ✓ Conduct necessary action research and develop a information bank in the resource centre.

At local level:

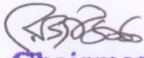
- ✓ Provide environment education at community level to raise their consciousness and to strengthen their capacity for bio-diversity conservation.
- ✓ Promote community participation at all stages of project's intervention
- ✓ Exchange and share ideas and views with local administration and local government representatives to encourage them to undertake environment friendly activities and ensure community participation.

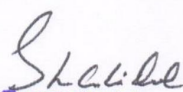
At national level:

- ✓ Exchange and share organizational experience, in the national environmental forum, to follow the existing environment laws, and lobby for new policy formulation.
- ✓ Lobbying the mass media for more media coverage of environment issues and social participation, through the broadcast of education programmes.

At international level:

- ✓ Keep close contact, exchange and share experience with UN bodies and all international organizations are working in the environment field.


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- ✓ Pursuing for advocacy at international level against environment damaging projects and programmes.

Monitoring and reviewing of the policy

We will monitor and review the policy within the policy framework. All the staffs of Uttaran will adhere to this policy in their daily activities and it will be ensured by our designated officer/focal person who will be guided by Uttaran's Director. On top of that, Managing committee of Uttaran are accountable for maintaining this policy.

Designated Environment and Social protection Officer

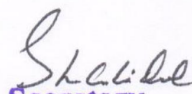
Designated environment and social protection officers are responsible for handling reports or concerns, about the protection of environment, wildlife, natural resources, social protection and cultural conservation appropriately and in accordance with the procedures that underpin this policy

The Head of HR will act as the lead officer who will be assisted by the 2 other officers for Environmental Protection and Social protection.

The designated officers are responsible for

- monitoring and recording environmental and social concerns
- ensuring referrals to the relevant authorities happen without delay
- updating environmental and social awareness training for all staff
- ensuring this policy is reviewed every 3 years or earlier if necessary
- ensuring it is implemented throughout the organization and environmental protection training given
- ensuring monitoring and recording procedures are implemented


Chairman
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Secretary
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