

Jhaki Sikari stands out as the woman for mangrove conservation in Sundarbans

Special tribute on International Women's Day

Jhaki Sikari taught us once again that the bond between nature and humans is not merely dependent on economic value. She comes from the distant village Meriganj 2 in Sundarbans and before taking her duty as a mangrove guard for the Danone-NEWS Mangrove Afforestation & restoration project she was merely a veil clad countryside housewife. One of the few women forest guards appointed, she was lone responsible for protecting the afforested mudflats of Nikarighata. Fiercely protecting her plantation sites, Jhaki conveyed the conservation message to her fellow villagers in this mangrove delta. Jhaki imbibed the fact that her native delta and its inhabitants survive on the existence of mangroves and that she is not only doing a forest guard duty but also defending their own land. Jhaki stubbornly denies the famous regional proverb, where they say 'protector itself is the killer'. She says, "It does not necessarily mean that I will exploit the forest for my needs just because I have the access as a protector."



She was involved in the plantation process from beginning and started raising awareness among the villagers on conserving forest. She had no particular duty hours yet she managed to stay at her plantation site for more than 12 hours. She used to visit house to house and explain that firewood does not need to cut a tree but only its parts or leaves could be used as fuel. "She would always stand by the trees even when we would go for

a surprise visit – that is how dedicated she was." says Keshab Ghosh, zone coordinator from NEWS. Jhaki still continues to protect the Nikarighata plantation site with same enthusiasm even after Phase 1 of the project has completed and guards' salary was stopped. She nurtures the forest as her own carrying the message to her fellow villagers. Pointing towards a rapidly growing green lustrous mangrove forest not far – Jhaki Sikari happily shows - "that is my side of the Piyali river bank



forest and I will uphold." Andharia plantation site miserably stands on the other side of the river degraded with illegal fisheries encroachment seeking for the help of another Jhaki.