

Improving Floodplain Management: Participation of the poor in planning and governance

- Participatory planning that is inclusive of the poor is a vital first step in improving natural resource management. For this Participatory Action Plan Development is a proven effective method leading to understanding of divergent views, consensus based plans and collective action.
- Community Based Organisations can through networking and peer pressure strengthen the participation of poor men and women in making decisions and addressing their needs with pro-poor resource management.

“Improving Floodplain Management through Adaptive Learning Networks” is undertaken by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, Middlesex University Flood Hazard Research Centre, and Banchte Shekha, with support from the Canadian International Development Research Centre. “Integrated Floodplain Management” is undertaken by the same three partners plus Center for Natural Resource Studies and MRAG, with support from the UK Department for International Development’s Research Into Use programme. The projects work with about 250 existing Community Based Organisations (CBOs) formed by previous projects for fishery or water management, to facilitate networking and a structured learning process between CBOs. The CBOs have identified and tested a range of measures to improve their management of natural resources, and have also improved governance and participation.

Participation: Missing Element From The Wider Picture

Floodplain resource management in most developing countries has been characterized by a top down and sectoral approach where people have not been involved in planning or project management. Recently the trend has shifted to a more people oriented approach despite the various challenges in accommodating the concerned stakeholders. Complexity arises from the multifunctional nature of floodplain natural resources. Beside this resources and their use vary according to the spatial, temporal and bio-physical context. Ahmed (1997) found that use pattern, rights and benefits derived from floodplains have been changing over the years. But Hardin (1982) concluded that lack of information and trust will lead to inevitable decline of natural (floodplain) resources. Hence methods are needed where actors can work together to build trust, share knowledge, and achieve common desirable goals.

Challenges of participatory floodplain resource management: Bangladesh context

1. Bio-physical environments are complex and floodplain systems including waterbodies tend to spread over administrative and sectoral boundaries. This raises issues concerning the administrative levels for multi-sectoral management.
2. Socio-economic environments are complex: there are many different stakeholder groups with different and seasonally-shifting livelihood needs.
3. There is little tradition of accountable government organizations. Their mandate is poorly understood by the rural population and civil institutions are not particularly strong.

Many past participatory approaches failed

1. Stressed the need to focus on the ‘problems’ as determined by the resource users and failed to accommodate divergent perception and interests of different resource users at local level.
2. Approaches to co-operative action to manage common pool resources historically assumed that participating communities are socially homogenous with their members having common interests and norms.
3. Historically in Bangladesh there has been a tendency to design and evaluate development interventions on the basis of net returns, many of which have accrued to wealthier sections of the community.
4. Segregated approach rather a holistic one.



Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) - A Consensus Building Method

PAPD is methodology for building consensus among multiple stakeholder groups on the sustainable management of natural resources. A system, action or intervention sustains only when a sense of ownership grows among the stakeholders. The PAPD process takes both individual concerns and community concerns into account and provides an enabling problem solving environment.

PAPD uses different participatory tools to seek consensus amongst the different stakeholders using a floodplain on actions that are needed to address common problems, including those related to natural resources. It is not a conflict resolution mechanism but does encourage community participants to respect each others' concerns and to appreciate:

- their dependency on the floodplain resource base, and
- the function and values of the flood plain resource systems.

The key steps in a full PAPD are:

1. Problem census (with each individual stakeholder group separately).
2. Compilation of problem rankings by facilitators (combining stakeholder group rankings).
3. Plenary with stakeholders and local leaders (to review and agree on main problems for solution analysis).
4. Solution and impact analysis (with each individual stakeholder group separately).
5. Plenary with stakeholders and secondary stakeholders (to present the process, identify feasible solutions, discuss institutional arrangements and next steps).

PAPD benefits

- Actively encourages participation by the poorer members of the community, through the process of shared learning.
- Empowers disadvantaged stakeholders with greater control over the change process.
- Creates scope to evolve an internally driven agenda by ensuring all have a voice.

Sultana and Abeyasekera (2008) found that PAPD led to more efficient formation of CBOs, saving time and resources in the process leading to actions. CBOs mostly implemented plans prepared through PAPD and took up more conservation related interventions and faced fewer conflicts than CBOs that did not benefit from PAPD.

Participation In Floodplain Resource Management

Participation at different levels

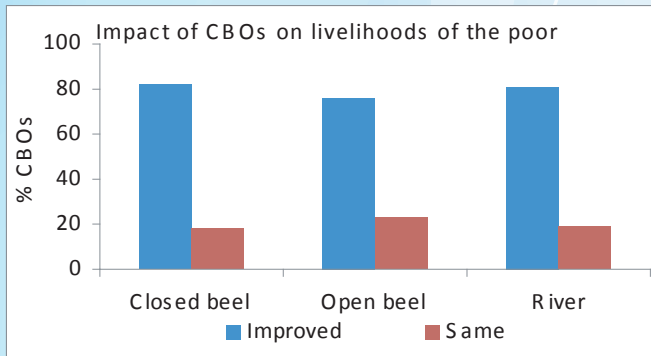
Up to 250 different CBOs in different regions of Bangladesh that were formed under other 'already phased out' projects have participated in an adaptive learning network since 2007. In many cases neither the CBOs nor the plans and actions they had taken in floodplain management were based on PAPD. In a number of these PAPD was modified to help in broadening the view of the CBOs to consider integrated floodplain management and the issues faced by poorer men and women in the floodplain.

In addition the adaptive learning network of CBOs encourages through sharing of lessons and good practices CBOs to improve their governance. This includes strengthening the role of the poor and women in their internal management, increasing membership of women, consulting further with local stakeholders, and following transparent practices. Moreover the network has been formalised as the "Society for Water Resources Management", organised by regional and a central committee, and considerable emphasis has been placed on elections among the CBO leaders in this association. Learning and capacity development have been supported by a newsletter comprising of articles written by CBO leaders and exchange visits.

However, lessons and practices shared among leaders may or may not be passed down to the practices of individual CBOs. To monitor the achievements and procedures of the CBOs, each year the project research team has conducted assessments of each CBO based on the CBOs' records and interviews with leaders and others in the community, and covering indicators ranging from financial management to participation of the poor and women. The following section makes use of some of the evidence from these assessments.

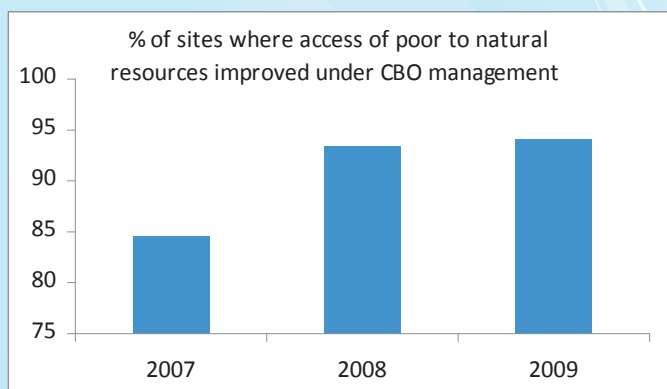
Participation outcomes from adaptive learning

In about 80% of locations where CBOs are active and members of the adaptive learning network, local people report that the CBOs have improved the livelihoods of poor people, and this is consistent



across floodplain environments. In part this coincides with the access of the poor to resources.

Most of the poor floodplain dwellers depend on fish, aquatic plants and other natural resources to a greater or lesser extent. Not only has access of the poor reportedly improved in most sites since CBOs started (for example allowing the poor to do subsistence fishing, or ending exclusion imposed by previous leaseholders), but more CBOs are seen as having protected or improved access for the poor since they became involved in adaptive learning. Local poor people are also becoming empowered that is evident in their position in CBOs. On average 2.2 of the office bearers of the CBOs are poor (owning under 0.5 acres (0.2 ha) of land).



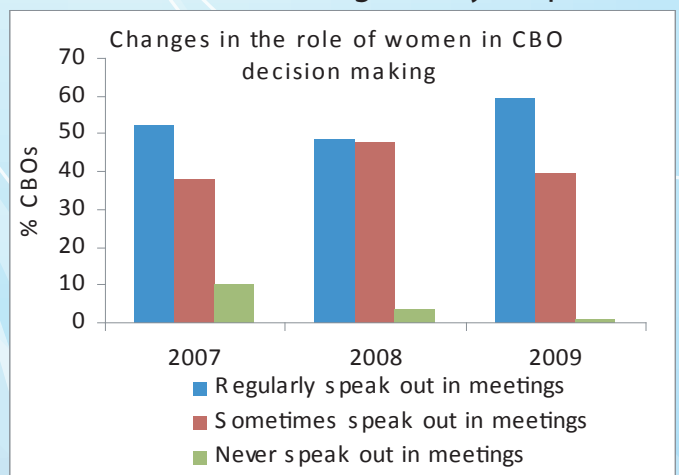
Through the adaptive learning process another level of participation has also been encouraged. The process involves CBOs through their leaders directing the choice of interventions to test, and discussing within their CBO membership problems and lessons raised by other CBOs. To take up good practices and test innovations, the CBOs

have been able to access small grants. To do this they have to show how an action has been planned with and approved by the members of the CBO. Moreover the CBOs bear 10% of the intervention cost in cash or in kind, and have to account for use of grants to their members. Where individuals will benefit from an action, the CBOs select potential poor members and make agreements on benefit sharing. These principles have enhanced participation and a concern to benefit the poor.

Case study: swamp forest restored and participation rewarded

Finding that 90% of swamp forest and 50% of perennial wetlands had been lost in the "haor" environment of the northeast region, CNRS took up a project in the late 1990s. CNRS facilitated PAPDs where local wetland users reached consensus to protect and restore freshwater swamp forest in areas they identified. Following their action plans about 400 ha of swamp forest and about 10 ha of wetlands were restored in 1999. Ten years later the CBO members are still benefiting from increased fish yields and species diversity with a resulting improved diet. Environmental benefits include habitat for wild birds, aquatic plants and animals, and the trees protect homesteads from wave erosion in the monsoon.

Overall membership of women in CBOs is modest at 16-20%, but in CBOs that had PAPDs in 2008-9 women's membership rose from 17% to 21%. More generally adaptive



learning has helped several CBOs that had neglected women's role to realize that women are playing an important role in other CBOs and could enhance their efforts. In 50% of CBOs the participation of women has strengthened over two years. Now CBO executive committees are more likely to consult with poor women before

taking any important decision, and women are more confident and speak out more often in CBO meetings.

Take up of PAPD

The partners in developing PAPD and Integrated Floodplain Management: Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), Flood Hazard Research Centre, and Banchte Shekha have adopted PAPD. Notably CNRS has used this approach widely in a number of projects in Bangladesh floodplains. In addition the approach has also been adopted by:

WorldFish Center in fisheries in Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Practical Action in riverine charland communities.

The *World Conservation Union (IUCN)* in wetlands, hills and forests.

Alternative Development Initiative in aquaculture.

Comprehensive Disaster Management Project in local disaster preparedness planning.

Policy Recommendations

1. Community based management has proved its effectiveness in improving management of common pool resources through participation and consensus amongst multiple stakeholders.

2. Participatory planning is a necessary first step before any intervention related to management of natural resources in floodplains and needs to follow an inclusive approach.

3. PAPD is a proven effective approach for participatory planning that was developed in Bangladesh floodplains, it enables the voices of the poor and disadvantaged to be heard.

4. PAPD can be used both for initiating community actions and for broadening the focus of existing CBOs to take a more integrated approach to managing natural resource systems. It should be adopted by a wider range of agencies.

5. CBOs are an appropriate structure for collective action to improve floodplain management. Good practice in participation should be established for example in elections of leaders, in holding annual general meetings, in reporting on finances to general members, and particularly in annual reviews and plan development based on consultation with major stakeholders who might not be heard such as fishers and women who are not CBO members.

6. Continued advice, encouragement and peer pressure is needed to ensure that not only during but also after projects end, the institutions they establish are pro-poor, inclusive and gender sensitive.

7. CBOs should become more pro-active in resource mobilization.

8. Participation of women in executive positions in CBOs can enhance their voice and improve resource management.

Further reading

Ahmed, M. (1997) Socio-economic and policy issues in the floodplain fisheries of Bangladesh. pp.89-98. In: Tsai, C. and Youssouf Ali, M. (eds.) pp.75-88. *Openwater Fisheries of Bangladesh*. University Press Ltd., Dhaka.

Hardin, R. (1982) *Collective action*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Steins, N. A. and Edwards, V. M. (1999) Platforms for collective action in multiple-use CPRs. *Agriculture and Human Values* 16(3)

Sultana, P. and Abeyasekera, S. (2008) Effectiveness of participatory planning for community management of fisheries in Bangladesh. *Journal of Environmental Management* 86(1): 201-213.

Sultana, P., and Thompson, P. (2004) Methods of Consensus Building for Community Based Fisheries Management in Bangladesh and the Mekong Delta. *Agricultural Systems* 82(3): 327-353.

Sultana, P., and Thompson, P.M. (2008) Gender and local floodplain management institutions -- a case study from Bangladesh. *Journal of International Development* 20: 53-68.

Prepared by: Md. Ehsanul Hoque, Paul Thompson, M. Mokhlesur Rahman, M. Anisul Islam and Ashitava Halder

For further information: Ashitava Halder, Center for Natural Resources Studies, House 14, Road 13/C, Block E, Banani, Dhaka-1213
Dr Paul Thompson, Flood Hazard Research Centre, Middlesex University, Trent Park, Bramley Road, London, UK, <paul@agni.com>