

## Institutional Capacity Development of Forest Department and Local Stakeholders

*Ishtiaq Uddin Ahmad and Kazi M. A. Hashem*

Capacity development was to be a central feature of the Nishorgo experiment, and included training and capacity building opportunities for the relevant staff of the Forest Department (FD) as well as those stakeholders directly engaged in co-management of the five Nishorgo pilot Protected Areas (PAs).

By early 2004, a number of core institutional capacity priorities had been identified as central to improving the Forest Department's ability to advance in co-management of pilot PAs. In memos and meetings in January 2004, the Nishorgo team recommended two urgent actions in particular, both of which make clear the institutional capacity at the time in PA management.

The team called first for urgent posting of Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) level officers to the Nishorgo pilot sites. At the time, there were no fully dedicated ACFs with authority to take PA-level decisions concerning the Nishorgo PAs, leaving only Range Officers at the PA level and the more distant Divisional Forest Officers at divisional headquarters, usually far from the PA. Without leadership by the FD at site level, it was clear that project interventions would be seen as distinct from the Government and would be poorly coordinated with the FD.

### Starting Assumptions and Subsequent Adaptation

#### Assessing Needs for Capacity Development for Nishorgo

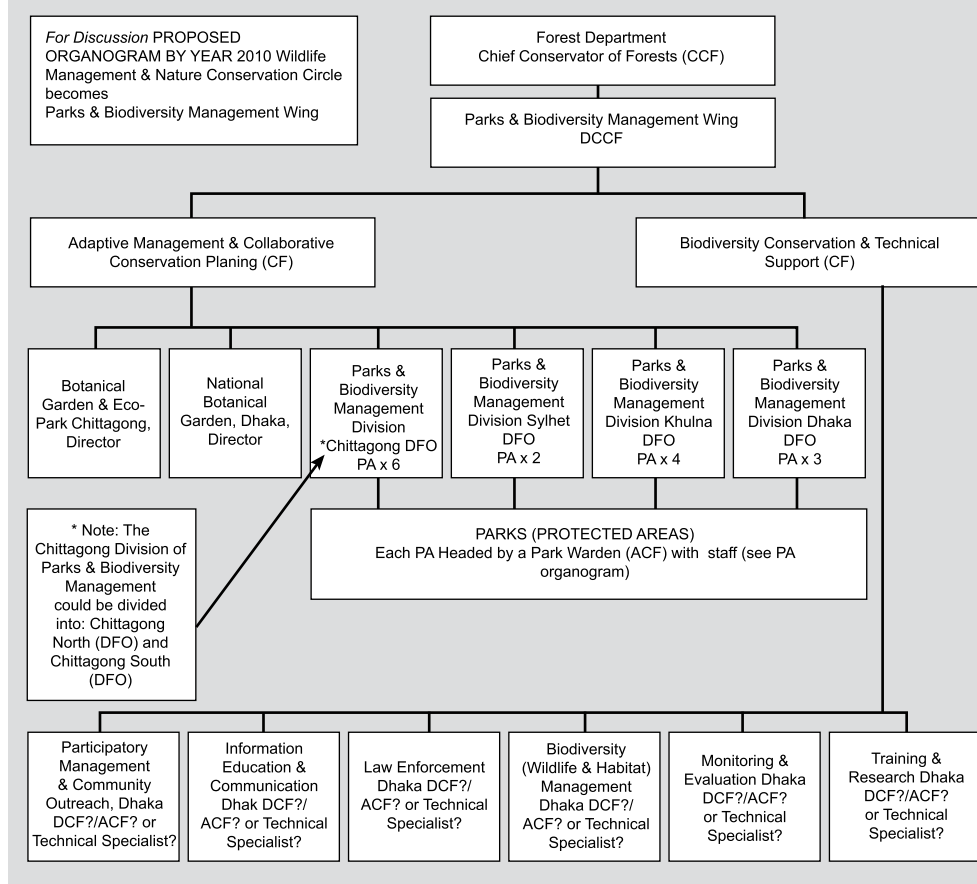
Recognizing that such gaps in capacity and institutional structure required a more comprehensive assessment, a team led by Drs. Arthur Mitchell and Khairul Alam, supported by Abdul Bari, conducted an assessment of the FD's institutional organization and capacity to manage the PA system. Mitchell et al. (2004) presented the following priority recommendations to the senior staff of the Forest Department:

- The FD should consider changing the name of the "Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Circle" to "Protected Area and Biodiversity Management Circle."
- The Resource Information Management System (RIMS) within the FD should be made capable of supporting GIS needs at field and regional level, in addition to its then current capacity to work at Dhaka level.
- Specific budget codes should be included in the FD revenue budget for PA management, a practice which was not in place at that time.

- There should be a designated staff member in FD's headquarters responsible for PA system finances.
- Management plans should be prepared for all PAs.
- PA co-management activities should be initiated in PAs without waiting for change to the Wildlife Act.
- Twenty percent of PA gate fees should be held for local community benefits.
- The FD should reach out to environmental partners (such as IUCN and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association) for legal support.
- The Wildlife Advisory Board could be renamed the "Protected Areas and Biodiversity Advisory Board" to emphasize the broader mandate of PA management.
- The FD should work to promote joint forest protection forces with local stakeholders.
- Work in information, education, and communication should be added to the curriculum at the Forest Academy.
- Each winter, the FD should organize a "Protected Areas Day" as a parallel and complementary event to the annual June "Tree Planting Day" that has been so successful.
- The FD should support participatory monitoring by local participants in co-management.
- The FD should ensure that greater attention is given to public-private partnerships for improved PA management.
- The FD should pursue a sustainable financing strategy, including a legal provision for local retention of PA revenue.
- The FD should recruit the technical specialists to provide cross-cutting support to the PA network.
- The FD (with the Ministry of Environment and Forests) should ensure that existing staff positions at PA level are filled.
- The FD and MoEF should agree to a revised organizational chart (see below).

The preceding organizational chart was proposed by Mitchell et al. (2004), but was not taken up by the Ministry of Environment and Forests nor the Forest Department for active consideration. The Department had just completed the long process of adding a Social Forestry Wing to its organizational structure, and staff at the FD knew that it would be a long and time-consuming process to add another new wing, especially so early into testing the co-management approach. Accordingly, the decision was made to focus on implementing co-management at field sites as effectively as possible, and only later returning, if possible, to proposing a new organizational structure within the Department.

Proposed shift in structure from Wildlife Circle to a Wing for Wildlife within the FD, from Mitchell, Alam and Bary (2004).

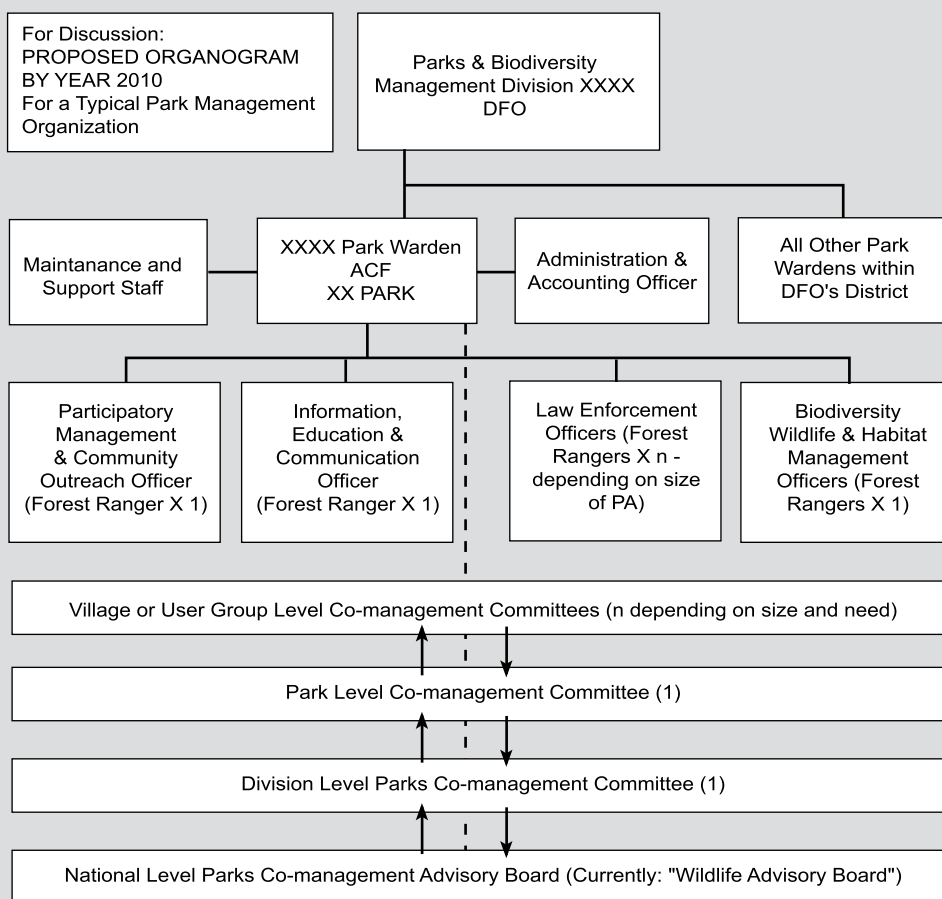


Of the 17 other recommendations made by Mitchell et al. (2004), those concerning internal system changes to the FD were not, in general, implemented. Those recommendations included changes to the Revenue budget accounts for PA management, as well as changes to the formal names of the Wildlife Circle and the Wildlife Advisory Board. In spite of these gaps, the majority of recommendations were followed. In addition to the recommendations included there, a range of capacity development and training exercises were undertaken by the Nishorgo team, including those reviewed below.

## Cross-Visit to Protected Areas in West Bengal State, India

In light of efforts in West Bengal State to pilot co-management, and the geographical and linguistic proximity of West Bengal, a number of cross-visits were organized there, taking more than 100 Nishorgo participants over multiple trips by bus to enter in dialogue with colleagues in West Bengal (Huda 2006).

Proposed structure for a typical PA, from Mitchell, Alam and Bari (2004).



Visit to PA co-managers in Indonesia gave some perspective about progress in Bangladesh. [Nishorgo Support Project]

This was a co-learning process as the key community stakeholders, Forest Department implementing officials, and Nishorgo Support Project staff members constituted the teams together. A substantial number of people were exposed in a cost-effective way to co-management in a similar setting to Bangladesh.

These West Bengal cross-visits provided the inspiration for women in Bangladesh to begin patrolling their own forests in place of the male patrols that had previously been

organized. During the debriefing after one trip in 2005, one of the women from Rema Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary CMO said that: “If the women in West Bengal can come forward despite the obstruction from family and motivate their husbands, then so can we. Our forests belong to ourselves and we will save them.” It was not long after that event that women took a greater role in Nishorgo, not least in the patrolling process.

## **Wildlife and Protected Area Management Diploma Training**

The Nishorgo team recognized the need to improve training opportunities for FD staff at ACF level in particular, as officers of this level were expected to directly manage the PAs. Without any appropriate diploma level training in Bangladesh, the Nishorgo team reached out to explore the one-year diploma in Wildlife Management from the Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun. The one-year program, at a cost of approximately USD 8,500, proved to be a cost-effective means of expanding the number of FD officers with awareness of PA management issues, including issues pertaining to people and visitor management, an area of expertise that was quite new to the Department at the time. Seven ACFs were funded to take this diploma course by the Nishorgo Support Project.

## **Study Tour to Indonesia on PA Co-Management**

To further improve the co-management approach being applied in Bangladesh, the Nishorgo team determined that a cross-visit to a country in which similar co-management had been tested might be an effective way of adding momentum to co-management efforts. Indonesia had achieved a number of interesting results in this area, most notably in Bunaken National Park, but also in other protected areas. The objective of the 2007 study tour to Indonesia was thus to learn from the experiences of co-management and to adapt lessons learned to Bangladesh. A secondary objective was to make networking contacts at the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) that might support regional research and knowledge-sharing on the Bangladesh PAs.

The participants in the study tour, all from the Forest Department, observed co-management and PA management at Bunaken National Park near Manado; Kayan Mentarang National Park, near Balikpapan; Gunung Gede Pangrango National Park in West Java; and the Krui Forest Zone with Special Purpose. In addition, the team visited CIFOR and ICRAF in Bogor, for meetings with scientists working on forest and PA management.

## **Nature Tourism Training for the Forest Department: Targeted to Assistant Conservators of Forest (ACF) for Tourism Micro Plan Development**

Recognizing the importance of tourism pressures on the PAs, the Nishorgo team organized nature tourism planning courses for PA-related staff. The course was for two weeks and 21 ACFs in six groups eventually prepared six nature tourism micro plans for Lawachara National Park, Satchuri National Park, Rema Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary, and Modhupur National Park. Facilitated by a planner from the Wildlife Institute of India, the course helped to generate plans that incorporated zoning for use and access; identified natural, cultural, physical and historical attractions; and predicted

probable impacts at each attraction (if nature tourism was promoted), including mitigation measures.

## Nature Tourism Training for Eco-Guides

In early 2005, Nishorgo Support Project searched for a local expert who could help develop an eco-tour guide training course to initiate a conservation-based employment. However, it was not possible to find relevant expertise, and ultimately, the Nishorgo team developed a six-day training course (which also included basic bird identification linked with the bird monitoring program – see Chapter 10).



*The Forest Academy at Chittagong hosted this two week course on ecotourism planning. 21 Assistant Conservators of Forest (ACF) attended the course, taught by a tourism expert from the Wildlife Institute of India. [Md. Tarek Murshed]*

The objective was that an eco-guide could use interactive methods to reveal information and messages about biodiversity and/or cultural heritage of the PAs and neighboring attractions to tourists. In addition, these guides would take part in the process of monitoring select bird species as indicators of forest health. The training in Srimongal in April 2005 is believed to be the first such training course in eco-tourism held in Bangladesh.

By August 2006, the Nishorgo Support Project had trained 74 eco-guides in four batches, of which 43 remained active. The active eco-guides went through an assessment by national level professionals where nine secured green cards (distinction), 31 blue (pass), and three failed. Amongst the nine green card holders, six came from Lawachara National Park. Visitor numbers there have increased rapidly and the eco-guides are now able to earn a good income based on their training and status.

## Eco-Cottage Management Training with the Radisson Hotel

The owners and managers of seven eco-cottages received training and help in business development by trainers from the five-star Radisson Water Garden Hotel of Dhaka. In this week-long hands-on training, they learned about room preparation, reservation tracking, hygiene, food preparation and service, toilet/shower cleanliness, and many other aspects of hotel management. The training was able to show the owners and managers of the cottages how to deal with visitors.

## Capacity Development in Governance for Collaborative Management Organization (CMO) Members

As noted in chapter 6, there were considerable challenges in developing good governance and support for participation by the poor in the new institutional arrangements of CMOs. A two-day workshop held separately in the northern and southern regions helped the CMOs in formulating plans and setting short- and long-term goals. Before formulating their goals and plans, the CMO

members reviewed their constitutions, the aims and activities of the Nishorgo approach, their past activities, participatory monitoring processes, and financial management.

A planning tool was developed by the Nishorgo team to simplify the planning process. Known as “SOAR” (Stakeholders, Output, Activities, Resources), the tool provided a framework with which participating field teams would focus their planning on the fundamental steps of identifying critical stakeholder groups, fixing expected one year expected changes (outputs), identifying necessary programmatic activities, and determining the resources required (DeCosse et al. 2005). This tool, however, was targeted to the Project field teams and not to the CMO themselves. However, it was found that effective capacity development only occurred when CMOs were actually doing their own planning, such as at meetings for preparing “Annual Development Plan” (ADP), at which time each CMO would review FD plans for their PA. At such meetings, the CMO members were far more engaged and the learning environment was more effective.

## Skills Development for Alternative Income Generation

Training courses were conducted for local poor people to develop new enterprise skills. Among the topics covered were tree nursery development; bamboo propagation and management; bamboo and cane product making; weaving; nature tour guiding for rickshaw pullers; improved stove making; and cattle, pig, fish, and poultry rearing. These training courses were to improve the income earning potential of the participants.

## Co-Management Training Course for Protected Area Field Staff

Efforts began in 2005 to build the capacity of field-level FD staff to take part in collaborative management. Three-day training courses were conducted in batches in 2005 for a total of 50 Range Officers, Deputy Range Officers, and Beat Officers, while two-day courses for 63 Forest Guards in four batches continued through 2006. The courses allowed for frank discussion between FD staff and their superiors, who typically led the training courses, about the role of people in the process of PA management.



*A trainer demonstrates use of simple techniques for measuring basal area – and thus standing wood volume – within the Lawachara National Park. [Philip J. DeCosse]*

## Identification and Selection of Trainees

These and other training courses for Forest Department field staff (Range Officers, Beat Officers, and Forest Guards) were less effective than they might have been, principally because those staff members who attended courses were too often not the same staff members directly engaged in co-management at the pilot sites. At the heart of the problem was the process for selecting trainees for courses within the FD. The standard procedure is for the Divisional Forest

Officers (DFO) to identify and propose candidates from across their full Division. Training opportunities are a sought-after opportunity for FD staff, and the opportunity to name trainees is consequently an important power or authority of the DFO. Normal operating procedures do not permit a Conservator of Forests (senior to the DFO) or even a Project Director to strictly require the DFO to name certain individuals for training courses. Without this direction, the DFOs in many cases selected staff for training on co-management that did not work in pilot PA sites. Even when staff from pilot sites were included, it often happened that they were transferred to other locations soon after training was completed. It would have been more effective to have a database of all those potential staff trainees at pilot sites from which the DFO could have selected appropriate staff for training. Had training support gone to staff who then worked throughout the Nishorgo effort in PAs, the quality of work supporting co-management might have been higher.

## Lessons Learned

It is evident that the recommendations of Mitchell et al. (2004) are still appropriate for capacity building of the FD and local stakeholders. Based on experience a number of lessons can be drawn.

*Changing the mindset of the FD field staff is not enough -- they also require technical capacity in conservation management:* The Nishorgo Support Project provided co-management orientation to the field staff but expected that they would already be capable of developing the technical aspects of PA management plans. This was not the case. Providing an “Operations Management Course for PA Co-Management” would be one step toward producing better results. Before that, new internal job descriptions for field staff need to be issued that specify detailed roles and responsibilities associated with PA co-management, including: the wider landscape, community management, CMOs, community-patrolling groups, alternative livelihoods, conflict management, and conservation.

*Organize Joint Training on Co-Management to Include CMO Members Together with Assistant Conservators of Forests and Divisional Forest Officers:* There is a risk that FD staff will prepare or implement PA management plans without involving CMOs or disregard plans developed by CMOs. Experience from training on nature tourism planning indicates that the key officials as well as CMO members should participate in the process.

*Provide Nature Tourism Training to All Concerned Forest Department Officials:* As nature tourism will increasingly be a major issue in PAs, FD staff, particularly ACFs and DFOs, need to have a good understanding of it if they are to work effectively with CMOs in developing site-specific plans. In addition, other lower grade FD field staff (from Range Officers downwards) need training so that they can understand and effectively implement these plans.

*“Seeing is Believing” – Exposure Visits Show the Way:* The cross-border exposure visits to co-management sites within West Bengal state in India contributed a high value compared to their low costs. Participants had the opportunity not just to observe the ways in which the West Bengal Forest Department and communities approached community-based conservation, but also had the chance to work as a group to develop approaches that might be tried in Bangladesh.

*Junior and Mid-Level Officials of Forest Department should take an in-country Diploma Course on Co-Management of Protected Areas for Biodiversity Conservation:* A diploma course should be developed by involving universities and experts based on experiences from the Nishorgo effort and other similar experiences. The course, which could be offered for staff below the level of DFO, would create appropriate knowledge, skills, and behaviors among officers for collaboration with local stakeholders rather than traditional top-down production-oriented forestry. Such a course would help in three ways: 1) It would be cost-effective compared with overseas training, not least because it could be easily replicated for multiple batches; 2) Domestic universities would be enriched and faculties would be properly utilized; and 3) With some training of trainers, diploma graduates would be able to train other colleagues.

*The existing “Forest Academy” should be made fully operational to support the capacity building needs of the Department:* During the nature tourism training for ACFs—conducted at the Forest Academy in Chittagong—FD participants and resource persons found that the physical and support services of the Academy were of poor standard. If similar courses are to be organized, the training center would need upgrading. With enough courses operating this would generate funds to maintain a suitable standard. The Academy would also be enriched by collaboration with local universities and regional/global academic and training institutions.



*Young men and women from areas neighboring the PA took part in Eco-Guide training courses, led by wildlife experts from leading universities. [Nishorgo Support Project]*

*Set up a training database for all levels of FD staff:* It would be helpful for the Department as a whole and the DFOs in particular (since the DFOs typically select trainees within the Divisions) if a training database were maintained. In addition to including those who have already received training, the database should also include those who, due to their position, should receive training. Local level training information should not only be held at divisional level but also consolidated at head office level. The information would assist managers to adopt modern and systematic human resource development approaches.

*Skill Development for Grant Proposal Preparation within Co-management Organization (CMO) members can be Led by the CMO Members Themselves:* The CMOs were developed and implemented small projects using Landscape Development Grants. And, while CMOs received orientation and training in how to write these and other grant proposals, some CMO members complained at times that the proposed grant activities were too heavily influenced by project staff. Evidence from implementation of the LDF process demonstrates that CMO members have sufficient capacity at different sites to develop their own proposals. CMO members may be targeted and financed to act as trainers for other CMOs.

## Conclusion

Among the opportunities identified in the Mitchell et al. (2004) report, one of those that stood out was “the FD’s willingness to change its approach and priorities towards greater environmental protection, including strengthening PA and biodiversity management throughout the country.” With this willingness, the Forest Department can be expected to learn from the Nishorgo experiment

## References

- Mitchell, Arthur H., M. Khairul Alam, and Abdul Bari. 2004. Assessment of the Forest Department’s Institutional Organization and Capacity to Manage the Protected Area System. Dhaka: Nishorgo Support Project of the Forest Department.
- Huda, Khawja Shamsul. 2006. Visit to West Bengal: Learning from Joint Forest Management of Selected Protected Areas. Dhaka: Nishorgo Support Project of the Forest Department.
- DeCosse, Philip J., Khawja Shamsul Huda, and Kazi M.A. Hashem. 2005. The SOAR Approach for Supporting Participatory Protected Areas Management: Elements and Experiences from a First Application in Bangladesh. Dhaka: Nishorgo Support Project of the Forest Department..