Governance through Protected Area Conservation Co-Management Committees: A Case Study at Lawachara National Park

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Abstract

Bangladesh has one of the lowest ratios of per capita land under protected areas (PAs) in the world. Nonetheless, these remnants of forest support the livelihoods of a large number of neighboring populations. Moreover, the Bangladesh Forest Department (FD) has recognized that the exclusion of local people from PA management has actually contributed to the steady loss of valuable biodiversity. In response to this realization, the FD initiated the Nishorgo Program as a broad-based institutional platform for collaborative management of PAs. This platform provides for the inclusion of FD officials as well as other key stakeholders in PA management; creating space for active participation in the sharing of benefits, decision-making and power; and making representatives accountable for their responsibilities and for fostering a transparent institution. This study of co-management implementation in Lawachara National Park reveals that five years is enough time to launch a successful project, but not enough to make a new institution self-sustaining. Moreover, the shift from a strict conservation approach to a co-management approach requires the strong commitment of all parties. Despite some inherent challenges, responses from diverse local stakeholders and representatives reveal a strong potential for local co-management institutions to ensure good governance in the management of Lawachara and other PAs.

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Introduction

Sustainable protected area (PA) management requires the participation of local people in decision-making processes, the devolution of power, the equitable sharing of benefits, and institutions that are both transparent and responsive. These are key principles of good governance. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID 2000) views good governance as "the competent management of a country's resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to the people's needs." Collaborative management (co-management), a process of sharing responsibilities and decision-making power with multiple stakeholders, has the potential to contribute significantly to good governance. Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.* (2000) define co-management as "a situation in which two or more social actors negotiate, define and guarantee among themselves a fair sharing of management functions, entitlements and responsibilities for a given territory, area or set of natural resources."

The Nishorgo Support Project (NSP) is a comprehensive program aimed at improving the management and governance of PAs in Bangladesh. NSP is jointly implemented by the Forest Department (FD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It is a five-year project (2004-2009) that focuses on building partnership among the FD and key local, regional and national stakeholders. The communities living in and around the NSP sites represent heterogeneous groups of people from diverse backgrounds and geographic origins, with unequal status, interests and power. NSP faces the challenge of uniting these diverse groups into a single institution through the creation of a common local institutional platform for the management of forest resources in PAs. This platform, known as the "Nishorgo Co-Management Institution", is a three-tiered structure comprised of a Protected Area Conservation Council (hereafter called "Council"), a Protected Area Conservation Co-management Committee (hereafter called "Committee"), and forest user groups (FUGs). The Committee plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable biodiversity conservation through facilitating effective collaboration among these and other actors.

The involvement of multiple stakeholders forms the basis for effective natural resource management regimes and good institutional governance. For example, the

Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) of India's Joint Forest Management program in West Bengal address the immediate survival needs and benefits derived from non-timber forest products. This focus on direct benefits to FPC members has helped to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Joint Forest Management system. Similarly, community forest user groups (CFUGs) in Nepal have proven to be successful institutions for community based natural resources management. The CFUGs provide an effective local institutional platform to manage and regulate the use of forests adjacent to settlements (Springate-Baginski *et al.* 2000). Many CFUGs have consolidated their role as resource management institutions and are now branching out into wider community development activities in an effort to reduce social and gender inequality. Indian FPCs and Nepalese CFUGs have proven that concerted struggle and the mobilization of poor local forest communities can ensure their rights. These institutions thus serve as effective multi-stakeholder resource management models. Co-management has also been successfully practiced on a limited scale in the Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry (MACH) project of Bangladesh to promote the conservation and sustainable management of critical floodplain and wetland habitats (USAID 2006).

This paper focuses on the Protected Area Conservation Co-management Committee of Lawachara National Park (LNP). The Committee is composed of 15 to 20 members selected from the Council with representation from ethnic communities, community-based organizations, local government officials, non-government organizations, local elites, resource-owning groups, law enforcement authorities and government departments. Representatives of the FD serve as conveners of this multi-stakeholder body. The Committee faces the great challenge and responsibility of bringing conflicting stakeholders to consensus. This study uses a framework of good governance characteristics to evaluate the potential of the Committee for ensuring effective forest governance. Understanding and mobilizing this potential is critical for promoting the functionality of a new multi-actor management regime in a sector that was previously managed by the FD alone. This research concludes that the Committees have the potential to ensure good governance for sustainable conservation of biodiversity in LNP and other areas of Bangladesh.

Background

The Bangladesh FD first introduced community-based social forestry programs in the early 1980's with a view to alleviate poverty and regenerate forests in both denuded and encroached reserve forests and other ecologically marginal lands. At the end of the twentieth century, social forestry has become the dominant strategy in the country's forestry sector, with remarkable success (Niaz 2001). This success has influenced policy-makers and development partners to introduce collaborative forest management in five protected areas of the country under the framework of NSP. The Forest Policy (1994) emphasizes a shift in forest management objectives from timber production to four joint objectives: (a) preservation of ecological functions; (b) conservation of biological diversity; (c) meeting the consumption needs of local people; and (d) provision of other important forest services (Sharma *et al.* n.d.).

The FD, which has statutory authority over the management of Bagladesh's forest resources, suffers from insufficient manpower and lacks modern firearms to combat organized timber poachers. Local communities have also accused FD officials and staff of being complicit in the process of forest destruction (Huda n.d.). The command-and-control policy approach of the FD restricts the role of communities in forest management, as well as their ability to reap benefits from forests. As a result, deforestation continues unabated. In 2004, the FD introduced the Nishorgo Program, which has focused on implementing co-management initiatives in five pilot PAs by building equitable partnerships between the FD and other key local, national and regional stakeholders. This program is assisting the FD to conserve biodiversity through the development of facilities, management capacity and strategic partnerships.

LNP is a PA comprised of semi-evergreen and mixed deciduous forests in Moulavibazar District. The park covers 1,250 hectares of low hills with a unique biodiversity comprised of approximately 167 flora species, 246 birds, 4 amphibians, 6 reptiles and 20 mammal species (Mollah and Kundu 2004), including the hoolock gibbon as a flagship species. The park was created in 1996 under the Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act of 1974. There are a total of 16 villages surrounding the park (within 5 km of its boundaries), consisting of approximately 2,255

households (NSP 2005). The park is home to the Khasia, an ethnic community found in northeast Bangladesh and India. A few Bengali villages lie adjacent to the eastern side of the park and two Khasia villages are located within its boundaries. Six tea estates border the park on the north, west, south and southeastern sides. The reserve forests along the southern border with Habigonj and Moulavibazar Districts contribute substantially to the national timber supply.

Nishorgo has identified all the major stakeholder groups and included their representatives in the first tier of the of co-management institution: the Co-Management Council. Among local stakeholders are approximately 10 to 12 influential *mahalders* (timber traders) from Criminal Bazaar and 15 to 20 from Bhanugach Bazaar. There are also 9 sawmills located in Kamalganj, and 12 in Sreemongal. These industries engage local people in the illegal removal of trees from the national park and adjoining forests. At least 35 influential people from the local government and from the elite class (including local politicians, mahalders and sawmill owners) exert influence on the PA through their membership in the Council itself (Nishorgo 2005).

According to NSP, the Council forms the first tier of the Nishorgo Co-management Institution and is responsible for management of the PA landscape. A broad-based structure, it should consist of about 50 members from different socio-economic strata of the local communities. However, the Council members are not directly elected by community members. The Committee forms the second tier and is comprised of up to 20 members who are elected by and from the Council members themselves. The Committee plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable biodiversity conservation by facilitating effective collaboration among stakeholders. The FUGs, the third tier, represent local grassroots organizations. In all, there are now 43 FUGs formed in and around Lawachara National Park, with a total of 609 general members.

About the Committee

The Committee of LNP received its legal status via a gazette notification from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (Government of Bangladesh 2006). The government promulgated this order exclusively for the five pilot PAs under NSP, including Lawachara. The gazette notice emphasizes that the Committee will act as

an executive body that is accountable to the Council. It also stipulates that members of the Committee will be elected for two-year terms, except for the secretary and representatives of law enforcement authorities. Table 1 below illustrates the actual (current) number of representatives from each of the designated stakeholder groups on the Council and the Committee, as well as the designated number of members from each group on the Committee.

Table 1: Actual and designated number of representatives from each stakeholder group in the Co-management Council and Co-Management Committee of Lawachara National Park

Stakeholder group	Actual No. of Council members	Designated No. of Committee members	Actual No. of Committee members
Local government	12	4	4
Local elites, including Journalists	7	2-3	4
Resource owning groups	5	2	2
Forest user groups and federations	9	2	2
Local youth	2	1	1
Indigenous/ethnic communities	3	2	2
Law enforcing authorities	2	1	1
Forest Department (ACF/RO)	2	1	1
Local NGOs/CBOs	5	1	2
Other government agencies/departments	4	2	0
Total members	51	18-19	19

Note: The Upazilla Nirbahi Officer, UNO acts as President of the Co-management Council and Advisor (*ex officio*) of the Co-management Committee.

Specific responsibilities of the Committee as per the 2006 gazette notice are to:

1. Act as the executive body of the Council and be accountable to the Council for its activities;
2. Serve as a liaison between the FD officials/staff and the local people in the management of the PA;
3. Distribute shares from the benefits derived from the PA among the groups involved according to the procedures developed by the Council;
4. Assist the FD in deploying laborers from the forest user groups in development activities undertaken by NSP;
5. Prepare and submit proposals to the respective authorities pertaining to the development of the PA and its landscape zone;

6. Develop work plans for spending funds generated locally from the management of the PA, and participate in the expenditure process approved by the concerned Divisional Forest Officer (DFO);
7. Maintain income and expenditure accounts of locally collected funds, and solicit audits with a firm prescribed by the advisor;
8. Undertake necessary measures for forest protection and other purposes in the PA according to the instruction of the DFO; and
9. Facilitate resolution of conflicts among local people, the FD, and other government organizations and NGOs.

Good governance principles and conceptual framework

The Fifth World Parks Congress identified effective governance to be "central to the conservation of protected areas throughout the world" (WCPA 2003). International conventions, treaties and protocols, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the World Heritage Convention, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Significance, and the Man and Biosphere Program of UNESCO all suggest that local-level, multi-stakeholder institutions are vital for effective PA management. Though it is difficult to define good governance principles, Graham *et al.* (2003) have identified five principles based on characteristics recognized by UNDP. Similarly UNESCAP (2007) identified eight major characteristics of good governance regimes: inclusiveness, participation, consensus-orientation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and adherence to rule of law.

Table 2: Characteristics of good governance (based on Graham *et al.* 2003)

Characteristic	Corresponding UNDP & UNESCAP principles	Four characteristics used in this study
Performance	Responsiveness, inclusiveness, effectiveness & efficiency	1) Inclusiveness – institutions & processes try to serve all stakeholders
Legitimacy and voice	Participation, consensus-oriented	2) Participation either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions
Direction	Strategic vision	--
Accountability	Accountability, Transparency	3) Accountability–decision-makers are accountable to the public as well as to institutional stakeholders, 4) Transparency– free flow of information
Fairness	Equity and inclusiveness, rule of law	--

The principles of good governance overlap and strengthen each other. This paper focuses on four of these governance principles: inclusiveness, participation, accountability and transparency. These categories were selected after a review of the literature (see Table 2) and defined based on the terminology used by the UN agencies mentioned above. A brief description of these four principles follows.

Inclusiveness implies that a society's well-being depends on ensuring that all of its members feel they have a stake in the process of co-management and do not feel excluded or otherwise marginalized. This requires that all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their own well-being.

Participation is the cornerstone of good governance. It ensures that all men and women have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediary institutions or representatives. Such broad participation is built on the principles of freedom of association and free speech, as well as a belief in individual capacities to participate constructively.

Accountability implies that decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies according to whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general, an organization or institution should be accountable downward to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and rule of law.

Transparency means that decisions, and their monitoring and enforcement, are carried out in a manner that follows existing rules and regulations. It requires the free flow of information and easily understandable forms of communication and media. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.

Methodology

This study focuses on the Committee of LNP and seeks to determine whether implementation of its activities and programs is in harmony with both nature and the aspirations of local people. I conducted an in-depth study to observe how the Committee was formed, its legal foundations, its implementation mechanisms, and its influence on management of the PA. I evaluated the Committee according to the four major principles of institutional good governance described above: inclusiveness, participation, accountability, and transparency. Above all, I assessed the effectiveness of the Committee as the nodal body of Nishorgo institutions.

I chose LNP as the study site because it is one of the five pilot PA sites of the Nishorgo program. Prior to beginning the study, I visited Lawachara to learn about the biophysical conditions of the park, and to familiarize myself with the administrators and other actors who influence its management. From January to June 2007, I conducted open-ended, interactive interviews with Committee members, Council members, user group members, key informants and Nishorgo officials. I analyzed responses from the interviews and from focus group discussions qualitatively. I also attended Committee meetings and Council meetings to understand the interactions among official members and representatives. I discussed the Nishorgo Program with forest villagers of different ethnic groups, with villagers from Dolubari, and with members of a patrol group. I also reviewed the minutes of my Committee meetings, Nishorgo documents, scientific journal articles and relevant web sites during the course of the study. Since I am an employee of the FD, the interviews are not free from bias. However, I tried to minimize partial or misleading information from the interviewees by cross-checking with other respondents as much as possible. Discussions with Committee members and key informants were based on a checklist, which included questions concerning the co-management of PAs, the legal basis of Nishorgo institutions and the Committee itself: its functionality, sustainability and the extent to which it complies with the four good governance principles outlined above.

Results and discussion

This study reviews the legal and operational support available to the Co-Management Committee, and evaluates its functionality as a co-management institution according to the four characteristics of good forest governance. It also focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions with respect to conflict resolution, involvement of local stakeholders in formulating the Annual Development Plans (ADPs), dealing with corruption, facilitating NGO involvement, and ensuring the sustainability of the Committee in the long term.

Legal and operational support to the Committee

The existing Forest Policy (as of 2004) calls for the expansion of PAs to 10% of national forest lands by 2015, but does not recognize multi-stakeholder or "collaborative management" of the PAs. In 2006, the third year of the Nishorgo program, the Government of Bangladesh made a gazette notification for the formation of specific NSP institutions – namely the "Co-management Council" and the "Co-management Committee" – which established the legal basis for co-management in the PAs. However, these bodies have been involved as informal institutions since the beginning of NSP in 2004. The notification is limited to NSP sites and the duration of the project. However, ongoing policy support is critical for the sustainability of these institutions at LNP and the four other NSP pilot sites after the project ends in 2009. The Nishorgo Program is assisting the Committee to obtain registration under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. This registration will allow the Committee to operate like an NGO and to seek funds from different sources to ensure its long-term viability.

Functionality of the Committee

Since its initiation in early 2006, the Council has been comprised of 51 members, with the Committee consisting of 19 members elected from the Council, as shown in Table 1. According to the gazette notification of 2006, the Council and Committee are assigned specific responsibilities. The Committee holds regular monthly meetings, as well as separate meetings for special purposes, such as the preparation of ADPs. The meetings are held at the Committee office, located inside LNP. The executive body of the Committee, the Council, has a group charter outlining its

duties, as mentioned above, but there are no position-specific responsibilities noted for individual Committee members. This lack of individual mandates impairs the effectiveness of Council members in implementing NSP activities and makes it difficult to assign specific duties to individuals.

To align the FD as a stakeholder in the Council and the Committee, local FD officials, such as the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), the Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF), the Range Officer and beat officers, should be incorporated into the Nishorgo institution. At present the ACF/Range Officer is acting as the secretary of the Committee, but the DFO and field-level beat officers are not included in either institution. However, the DFO, ACF, Range Officer and concerned beat officers should all be members of the Council. For instance, the ACF could be the member secretary of the Council and the Range Officer could be the member secretary of the Committee.

Inclusiveness

The inclusiveness of an institution refers to the extent to which every section of the community is included in the process of resource management, and the extent to which their welfare and access to resources are addressed. The Committee on National Parks and Protected Area Management identifies "the inclusion of a diverse range of people and interest groups" as the best means for promoting public participation in PA management and decision-making processes (CNPPAM 2002). Hence, making the Nishorgo program more inclusive requires that representatives from all stakeholder groups are included in the co-management process. This applies particularly to those groups who are typically marginalized by the management interventions, such as women, children, and the poor. NSP documents have identified the FD as the statutory authority of LNP and have also specified other key stakeholders, as listed in Table 3 below. Some resource user groups are not well represented in the Committee, resulting in the lack of participation by some important primary stakeholders, particularly fuelwood collectors.

Table 3: Key primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders at Lawachara National Park

Primary stakeholders	Secondary stakeholders	Tertiary stakeholders
• Poor people living inside the forest (i.e., ethnic communities- Khasia, Tripura,etc.) • Collectors of fuelwood, bamboo and other housing materials (mainly women and children) • Illegal timber fellers • Timber traders	• Sawmill owners, • Brickfield owners • Furniture shop owners • Mahalders*	• Local government representatives (Union Parishad) • Law enforcement authorities • Laborers from tea estates • Land encroachers

*Note: Mahalders are timber traders who bid to harvest portions of reserve forests on site (Source: Nishorgo 2005)

NSP was well received at the beginning of the co-management process, and the Committee members (respondents of this study) are also satisfied with the selection of stakeholders – none mentioned any omissions or inconsistencies in stakeholder identification. On the other hand, a large segment of local people from ethnic communities and neighboring villages are either seldom heard from or negatively affected by NSP initiatives. For example, one patrol team member from a Khasia village argued that they have been required to conduct more intensive patrolling since NSP was begun. The Khasia forest villagers used to accompany FD patrol teams to help prevent the illicit removal of timber and other restricted forest products, even before the initiation of NSP. However, this collaboration leaves the Khasia less time for betel leaf cultivation, which is their main income source. Furthermore, their access to *jhum* (forest fallows) for collection of mulch is more restricted now.

Forest villagers also reported that field-level forestry officials and experts from both International Resources Group (IRG) and Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS)[1] – a collaborating NGO that is engaged in social mobilization to conserve forest resources and biodiversity – display a negative attitude towards betel leaf cultivation. In fact, one NSP document identifies betel leaf cultivation by Khasia communities as a threat to forest resources and ecosystem integrity (NACOM

[1] The International Resources Group (IRG), a contractor of USAID, provides technical support for designing and implementing the co-management model in association with the FD and other stakeholders. Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) is a local NGO working as a sub-contractor of IRG for field implementation.

2003, Feeroz and Islam 2000). From the point of view of good governance, the inclusion of Khasia communities in NSP co-management has not improved their well-being, but rather hampered their means of livelihood. My interactions with the Khasia headman (*montri*), as well as with the larger Khasia community, revealed that he is a vulnerable member in the Committee and cannot freely raise this issue. Since the FD and USAID have adopted co-management as a strategy for management in LNP, they remain the Park's sole custodians. As a result of their negative attitude towards betel leaf cultivation, members of the Khasia community are suffering a loss of livelihood means.

In short, Committee members still do not have clear ownership over decisions concerning LNP, as they and the FD personnel are merely managers of the resources. Consequently, Committee members are not seriously engaged in decisions about the Park. The FD and NSP authorities lead all major management efforts and decisions, whereas Committee members only participate in their execution.

Participation

Participation is viewed as a process involving local stakeholders in the formulation, implementation and benefit-sharing of a program or policy. In principle, it acknowledges the use of local capacities and rejects the setting of priorities by external parties. At LNP, the major stakeholders, through their representatives in the Committee, have the potential to enjoy the responsibility of shaping their own futures. Committee members are all elected directly from the Council. However, they confirmed that the basis for their inclusion in the Council was their awareness of the situation at LNP and their involvement with NSP since its inception. All of the Committee members were selected from among local elite; no representatives of grassroots constituents were included. Despite this fact, Committee members assert that they represent diverse groups of stakeholders, including the grassroots group of primary forest users.

However, Committee members have demonstrated the attitude that grassroots-level forest users have little influence and are unable to contribute to society, even if they are trying to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of other local people. In reality, the most forest-dependent users are often excluded from decision-making

processes and have little chance to be elected to these positions. Although the 19 stakeholders identified by NSP were selected through a transparent and systematic process, representation of all of their interests through the Committee is not yet apparent in the meetings or the interviews, and the voices of the marginalized are yet to be heard. For instance, although poor local fuelwood collectors have a major stake in LNP, they have no representation on the Committee.

It is hard to trace the actual change in forest management during the shift from a command-and-control system implemented by the FD to a co-management approach with representative committees. The change has not occurred spontaneously through local peoples' own aspirations, but rather via prescriptions from above and outside the local community. These prescriptions are imposed by the donor agency through the FD in order to promote effective conservation, but the changes that have taken place so far are largely superficial. Although there is significant scope for change, and many responsibilities to distribute among the local stakeholders, the system is clearly lacking in terms of devolution of both administrative and financial powers.

The Committee has held regular meetings on various issues. Like other discussion forums, a few members are always vocal, while others have their views suppressed or simply observe the flow of the meeting. In the end, the decisions typically come from the NSP or FD representatives, or from the meeting chair. It seems that these authorities hear the views and complaints of the participants of the meeting, and usually conclude the discussions with a polished and/or very technical remark, which is often so bureaucratic that it is meaningless to most participants. In some cases, the discussion turns into accusations against NSP or the FD, which are usually struck from the meeting minutes. The members have voiced their reservation about the quality of documentation of discussions in the minutes. Although the Committee members affirmed their unified efforts for the sake of LNP during individual interviews, I found that personal conflicts and interests sometimes came to the forefront in Committee meetings.

Furthermore, there is currently no mechanism to link the Committee members to the communities they represent. Hence, local people are seldom aware of NSP activities and decisions. Since the representatives in the Committee are all elites – either from society and the local administration or from local political groups – the

voice of marginalized groups remains unheard. Interviews with women and NGO representatives showed that they do not even know the constituencies they represent, or the full scope of their responsibilities. The Committee members are not provided with specific written responsibilities, nor are they aware of the Committee's general scope of work. As a result, the representatives do not serve the interests of their constituencies or provide them with any direction concerning the conservation of LNP. In some cases, the participation of local representatives appears to be passive. In one instance, a member of the Committee accused the Committee's leadership of acting merely to approve all decisions taken by the FD and RDRS. This individual felt that they have no say in decision-making and that their recommendations are intentionally excluded from meeting minutes.

While cross-checking the remarks from interviews with elite individuals with Committee members, I found that elite members of the local administration and politics often became involved in NSP activities in order to retain their social status and prestige. They feared losing their long-standing influence if they were not associated with NSP and felt their inclusion in the Committee was the best way to influence the new administration to maintain their vested interests.

Accountability

Following the Durban World Parks Congress, Borrini-Feyerabend (2004) identified co-management of protected areas as a new type of governance based on "who holds management authority and responsibility and can be held accountable according to legal, customary or otherwise legitimate rights". The Durban Congress sets accountabilit' as a good governance principle and defines it as "having clearly demarcated lines of responsibility and ensuring a transparent flow of information about processes and institutions" (IUCN 2004).

I studied institutions like the FD, NSP, RDRS and the newly formed Committee to evaluate their accountability in the co-management process at LNP. Formation of the Committee is identified as a positive step toward a good institutional framework for forest governance. Official documents show that the Committee is accountable to the Council, the first tier of the Nishorgo institution. However, discussions with Committee members and key informants revealed that there is no clear sense of to whom the Council is accountable. Moreover, the Committee lacks

a clear process of accountability to the Council, and individual Committee members are in no way accountable to the constituents they are intended to represent.

NSP has yet to develop a bridge to narrow the gap between the Committee representatives and their communities. The role of the facilitating NGO, RDRS, is primarily to build the capacity and awareness of the Committee members and to organize communal meetings. Furthermore, the specific responsibilities (i.e. terms of reference) of individual Committee members, including the devolution of adequate administrative and financial power, need to be elucidated in management documents. Meetings of the Committee often overlook the urgent needs of the people. For example, the Khasia community routinely asks for irrigation facilities and *arot* (warehouses for wholesale dealers) for betel leaf production and marketing. These requests could be channeled through the Khasia community's own *dorbar* (community hall) meetings to the Committee via their montri.

The Co-management Committee should also represent the poor female fuelwood collectors from villages inside and surrounding LNP. However, the sole female representative on the Committee has no contact with local women and thus cannot raise their concerns to the Committee. Due to such weak or non-existent downward linkages between Committee members and their constituencies, the broader needs of the community remain unheard and local people do not respond to the Committee's directives. There is a strong sense of urgency, both within the Committee and among its constituents, to clarify the responsibilities of individual Committee members and to build greater accountability into their scopes of work. Several leading scholars have stressed that the effectiveness of local governance depends on the degree to which local government authorities involve FUGs in decision-making processes, and the extent to which they are downwardly accountable to the user groups (Blair 2000, Agrawal and Ostrom 2001, Larson 2004, Ribot 2004). Some have also stressed that, as long as FD representatives in the Committee and their staff are not fully accountable to the Committee, there is no effective mechanism for conflict resolution. This affects the functionality of the Committee in particular, and of good governance in general. If forestry personnel are involved in the illegal removal of forest products, the Committee has no legal recourse to make the FD accountable and can merely report to the concerned authority, the department's own DFO. Furthermore, the FD has failed to build sufficient rapport

and trust with the Committee by not taking effective action against dishonest staff members. At the same time, some remarkable progress is now visible in the accountability of the FD's practices. For example, in timber poaching cases, the FD used to arbitrarily identify poor local people as the poachers and deal with them according to their own protocols, whereas they now give the Committee a say in what should be done with arrested timber poachers prior to filing a police case against them.

The FD, Nishorgo and RDRS have yet to work out the details of their collaboration for the management of LNP. With the advent of multi-stakeholder management, FD personnel believe that they are now less accountable for the loss of trees since the local community now shares this responsibility under NSP. On the other hand, local forest users and the poor are largely unaware of the program's activities. RDRS is in a position to facilitate the formation of an institution where all the parties are both enabled and accountable. Currently, the Committee is neither efficient nor fully accountable to its various constituents; not only in terms of whether particular services are available (e.g., serving as liaison between officials/staff and local people, preparation of proposals for development work, maintaining income/expenditure accounts, and resolving conflicts among stakeholders), but also in terms of how and by whom these services are provided.

Transparency

Transparency is recognized as the central pillar of good governance (World Bank 2000). It can serve as a strategic entry point for improving governance of local institutions. Promotion of transparency in resource management enhances the participation of local stakeholders, the responsiveness of local institutions, and the accountability of public representatives. Conversely, the lack of transparency in resource management initiatives aggravates the situation of the poor and marginalized communities that depend on the resources. UNDP (1997) defines transparency as a component of a system that, "Allow[s] stakeholders to gather information that may be critical to uncovering abuses and defending their interests. Transparent systems have clear procedures for public decision-making and open channels of communication between stakeholders and officials, and make a wide range of information available."

Transparency does not occur in traditional command-and-control approaches to PA management, whereby local people are kept out of the management process. Through co-management, NSP has created access to information for all stakeholders. Transparency also facilitates the sharing and development of ideas and plans among stakeholders for PA management. A transparent program can easily sway people to support its process and promote joint efforts for responding to common priorities and concerns. However, the Committee at LNP has yet to prove the financial transparency of its executive members.

In Committee meetings, neither representatives of the FD nor RDRS responded to the members' questions about the total budgetary allocations for development of the park during the 2006-2007 period. However, the Committee soon realized the importance of the issue and followed up on the matter. While conducting an interview at the office of the secretary of the Committee, I found the latest ADP (2007-08) and the allocated budgetary information posted on the wall. In contrast to the previous year, FD and NSP experts guided the Committee members in preparing the 2007-2008 ADP for Lawachara.

At the inception of NSP, local authorities assured the local poor, especially those involved in the illegal removal of trees, that they would rescind any cases currently filed against them. This verbal declaration was made to solicit their participation in patrolling teams. In good faith, the people came forward and joined the teams, but NSP did not deliver on its promise. As a result, the appreciation and credibility that NSP earned as the project that successfully brought 'poachers to protect [the] forest' (Reuters 2007) is being lost. Similarly, the Committee hopes to be able to capture at least 50% of locally-generated funds in order to ensure its own long-term sustainability. Indeed, the initial NSP proforma (2003) affirmed that "50% of parks revenues, including entrance fees, would be retained locally and reinvested in PA management and local community development efforts according to the prescription worked out by Co-management Committees." However, the government has yet to implement this revenue-sharing scheme, even in the final year of the NSP project. The pro forma was formally approved by the Government of Bangladesh in 2005, and the information therein has already been disseminated among local stakeholders, so it is imperative that steps be taken to address this oversight as soon as possible.

Other observations

Conflict resolution – Increased competition by multiple stakeholders with diverse interests can result in conflict over managing resources. In light of this, the institution responsible for management should anticipate and respect the needs and aspirations of all key stakeholders whose livelihoods are dependent on the resources. So far, the FD, as a statutory authority, has not fully given up the command-and-control approach and continues to exclude people from the management process. Previously, there were conflicts between the FD and other stakeholders, but now new forms of conflict are evolving among the different local stakeholders. The hope is that the Committee has brought all relevant parties into a single institutional platform and that all have consented to work together in this changed context. However, the Committee must still identify specific responsibilities for each member, strengthen their capacity and empower them. The Committee can also play a constructive role in conflict resolution, as illustrated by the resolution of conflicts between LNP patrol team members of Lawachara Punji and Radhanagar village.

Formulation of ADP 2007-08 for LNP – In a meeting involving the FD, NSP and RDRS, technical experts of the project assisted the Committee members in preparing their ADP for June 2007 to May 2008. Their participation in four working groups to prepare the ADP demonstrated their active engagement and sharing of responsibility for the management of LNP. This session contributed significantly to the building of the Committee members' capacity for preparing their own development plans and prioritizing their needs. In the future, they should be involved in all stages of the development, planning and implementation of programs.

Handling of corruption by FD personnel – Open-access natural resources often encourage corruption by officials and policy makers, while the resource base remains inadequate to meet local demands. A similar picture is reported by Dr. Ajit Banerjee of the Forest Integrity Network (2002): "We are trying to motivate some of India's top political leaders to fight corruption through citizens' watch activities." He emphasized two types of crimes involving local officials: complicity in wood smuggling and use of government funds for personal gain.

Committee members are aware of the involvement of local forest staff in the illicit removal of forest products at LNP. However, the Committee and Council cannot take any legal action against such activities, and high officials in the FD have not made any effort to resolve the issue. The Committee has introduced a joint team of FD staff, forest villagers and local people for patrolling in and around the park. This multi-party patrolling team provides a system of checks and balances (i.e. the members prevent one another from being involved in the illicit removal of trees) and has brought positive results in controlling illegal activities in the park.

The role of RDRS in NSP initiatives – Some of the major duties of RDRS include mobilization of stakeholder groups, awareness-building, organization of local campaigns, and provision of training for alternative income-generating activities (AIGAs). Local RDRS officials expressed their satisfaction in bringing about remarkable social change, with support from the FD and local stakeholders. RDRS is actively working to develop a sense of resource ownership among local communities by assisting local institutions in preparing their own development programs. However, my fieldwork revealed two shortcomings of RDRS: failure to link NSP endeavors with local people, and inappropriate selection and implementation of AIGAs. To address these deficiencies, established micro-credit NGOs should become involved in the funding of AIGAs.

In consultation with other representatives, I found that there is still a substantial communication gap between the Committee members and the people who they represent. RDRS, as the facilitating organization, could help ensure that the Committee members consult with their respective communities and constituencies before the Council/Committee meetings; and also disseminate the decisions of the meetings to their communities. This effort could be introduced within the tribal communities. Both Committee members and AIGA recipients expressed their frustration with the AIGA support provided by NSP and called for better integration of the process with local communities' needs and aspirations. For instance, the montri could hold community meetings before and after the Committee meetings. This would help to ensure broader participation by the community members. Furthermore, RDRS should support AIGAs in a more strategic and concerted way through extensive participation, training and supervision.

Sustainability of the Committee – Forests in Bangladesh, particularly PAs, are under intense pressure and face constant threats to their sustainability. The Bruntland Commission (1987) defines sustainable development as development that "meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In this context, the FD and associated institutions, especially the Committee, are responsible for meeting the long-term needs of people living in and around PAs. At this stage, the institutional sustainability and effectiveness of the Committee – an organization responsible for the conservation of biodiversity in LNP – is questionable. In light of this, the general opinion of respondents is to take the following actions:

1. Resolve the cases filed against the patrol teams, according to the prior commitment of the FD and Nishorgo officials;
2. Create a revolving fund (equal to 50% of park revenues) for the stakeholders by raising revenue from eco-tourism activities in LNP (This fund would both receive income from eco-tourism and disburse funds to spend on development of additional tourism facilities'); and
3. Extend NSP for a few more years so that the Committee has more of an opportunity to strengthen itself and ensure its own institutional sustainability.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the Committee, along with the FD management staff, has the potential to ensure good governance for sustainable conservation of biodiversity in LNP. Since this Committee is only two years old, it is too early to fully judge its functionality and compliance with the four good governance principles: inclusiveness, participation, accountability and transparency. The temptation to make a grand display of short-term, site-specific successes such as "poachers protecting the forest" should be avoided. However, as a co-management institution under NSP, the Committee could serve as a viable platform for a multi-party resource management regime, comparable to Joint Forest Management in India and Community Forestry in Nepal.

Despite its apparent promise, there are still many issues, concerns and potential barriers to the effective implementation of co-management in LNP. First, the

Committee platform lacks broad-based policy support. Second, co-management in Bangladesh is still a top-down process, since the local institutions remain dependent on external funds, and co-management is not an outcome of local initiatives. Third, the Council and the Committee follow a weak democratic process in the selection of their members. Fourth, these co-management bodies are yet to be freed from the command-and-control mentality and from domination by local elites. Fifth, the Committee lacks adequate participation and representation by certain stakeholders, such as female fuelwood collectors. Sixth, accountability of Committee members to their constituents remains inadequate. Seventh, there is no clear delineation of the responsibilities of individual Committee members or the devolution of administrative and financial powers. Finally, and above all, there is no clear mechanism in place to effectively phase out NSP. To make co-management sustainable with sufficient trust among all parties, its institutional structure needs nurturing for a few more years with (1) adequate material and technical support; (2) a well-defined and equitable sharing of responsibilities; (3) the further devolution of power from the FD to the Committee; (4) a strong commitment by the FD to provide adequate space and support for Nishorgo institutions to flourish; and (5) the realization of all promises delivered to its stakeholders;

UNESCAP (2007) notes that good governance is an ideal that very few countries or societies have come close to achieving. However, to ensure sustainable development and conservation, actions must be taken towards achieving this ideal with assistance from various development partners. The Bangladesh FD has demonstrated commendable success in its mangrove reforestation program in coastal areas, and in its social forestry program in degraded reserve forests and marginal lands. In line with these successes, the FD's commitment to promoting co-management in the country's PAs has great potential to empower members of local communities to share in the responsibility and promise of conserving biodiversity.

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