



## Management of Aquatic Ecosystems Through Community Husbandry (MACH)

# MAKING LOCAL GOVERNANCE WORK FOR WETLANDS



Local Government Committee ( LGC<sup>1</sup>) Meetings

Upazila Fisheries Officer Abdur Rouf smiles warmly, as the members of the Jhenaighati Local Government Committee of MACH enter the meeting room in this remote corner of Bangladesh near the northern border. “We’re all friends here,” he says. “I think MACH is a good project and I want to help in anyway that I can.”

As in all the MACH working areas, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock has authorized formation of this committee in Jhenaighati Upazila (sub-district), to coordinate and oversee work to restore wetland productivity. But this is not just a committee of government officers. Chaired by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (the senior local administrator), with the fisheries officer as member-secretary, it also includes the elected chairmen from all of the Union Parishads (local councils) where improved wetland management is being introduced. It also includes as voting members the leaders of all three MACH-established RMOs (Resource Management Organizations) in the Upazila. Each quarter the committee meets to review the plans and activities of the RMOs, and to discuss and resolve any problems they may be facing. Md. Nuruzzaman, chairman of Bailsha beel RMO explained “now we meet face to face regularly with officials and councilors who listen to us and try to solve the problems that we face. Now we have status in the community and we have a way of getting support from the administration.”

1. MACH has tried to formally link the Resource Management Organizations with the local government through the LGCs. The leaders comprise all the RMO leaders in an upazila, the respective Union Parishad Chairman and the relevant government official of the upazila. They meet regularly to coordinate management over the whole wetland system in their area.



Members of the committee have gained local recognition through habitat restoration works in their areas. They visit the wetlands and help check on the quality of RMO programs such as excavation and the release of fingerlings, ensuring that plans are implemented. Local government has also provided access and made agreements for tree planting in public lands, and helps the RMOs enforce their fishing rules for the good of the community.

Upazila Fisheries Officer inaugurating beel restoration works



These good practices are set to continue after the project ends. Central government has approved plans to formalize the committee as an Upazila Fisheries Committee. The committee will use the annual returns from an endowment fund set up through USAID to finance small-scale habitat restoration and wetland management each year. Already the RMOs submitted proposals for small works. The committee has reviewed these, taken its decisions, and is now planning how to supervise the works. In the committee meeting of October 2005 Mr. Swapon Kumar Gosh UNO for Jhenaighati welcomed this initiative and told the committee “we must take up the challenge of operating the endowment as it is a new concept for Bangladesh and we must ensure that we use this fund wisely”. In the same forum the RMO chairmen breathed a sigh of relief, they had been concerned for the future of their good work after the MACH project ends. Now they are confident that not only will there be some funds, but through the co-management committee they and local government will jointly ensure that the money is well spent. The future of the local communities' work and these new institutions is secure, says Abdur Rouf. “If we all work together, we will surely succeed.”



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