



STAKEHOLDER'S POLICY BRIEF 4

POLICY ISSUES FOR EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL CAPITAL

BACKGROUND

The paper contains policy reflections of MACH stakeholder representatives from all three project sites¹ on the issue of *Policy Issues for Effective Conservation of Natural Capital*. The stakeholder views were generated through a workshop held in Sreemangal during the Co-management Convention in May 2006 jointly organized with another USAID environmental project, the Nishorgo Support Project. This Stakeholder Policy Brief, along with five others in this series, summarizes the workshop findings of just the stakeholders from the MACH project sites. The workshop participants included Upazila government officials, Union Parishad Chairmen, RMO² and FRUG³ representatives. This document aims to inform future practice, planning and decisions at policy, program and project levels based on the experience of those actually involved in living and undertaking Community Based Co-management, and to guide formation of new local organizations for natural resources management.

POLICY ISSUES FOR EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL CAPITAL

1. Fishing rights in wetlands and the lease system

- ▶ The present general policy allows the fishers only to gain management rights over *khas* wetlands (*jalmahals*) bigger than 20 acres under leasing arrangements. Even then the complex leasing process for *jalmahals* and need for the actual fishers to gain access through a cooperative utterly limit the effectiveness of this policy as a means of benefiting actual fishers.
- ▶ No leasing for flowing rivers implies open access to fishing for everyone. But, in reality who enjoys the right to fishing? In most cases influential or rich people have more power over the poor and practice *katha* fishing (brush pile) in open rivers. MACH experience shows that the RMO in Kaliakoir though it received government approval for managing sanctuaries in Turag River, cannot set limits on fishing in that area as the rest of the river still remains open access. This overexploitation of the open access river also affects fish migration.

Key Reflections

- The Government should identify actual fishers and provide long term lease to them on soft terms. The fishers should be encouraged to get access rights through a community based fishers' organization; particularly, MACH style Resource Management Organizations (RMOs) should be scaled up in other water bodies.
- The government should update demarcation of the boundaries of *beel*, *khal* and rivers along with RMOs and UPs and keep them free from encroachment.
- To ensure that the leaseholders are obeying fishing regulations, a committee should be formed⁴ comprising Upazila Fisheries Officer, UP Chairmen and the RMOs for monitoring.

2. Fisheries resource management and conservation activities

- ▶ *Jalmahals* are commonly leased out for three years. The lessee remains unsure about the renewal of the lease agreement for the next period. Subsequently, the focus of the leaseholders is basically on how to maximize the profits from the lease within the current tenure. As a result, the issue of conservation is ignored as it would incur short term costs for the lessee.
- ▶ Pile fishing is a conservation strategy and is mandatory for leased out *jalmahals* according to the present laws. But it has not been practiced effectively.

Key Reflections

- The government should introduce long-term leases. For example, as the RMOs have been awarded a ten year lease through the MACH project, they have taken suitable measures for conservation of the *jalmahals* like the establishment of sanctuaries, resulting in increased fish production and species diversity.

1. Hail Haor in Sreemongal, Turag-Bangshi river and wetlands in Kaliakoir and the Kangsha-Malijshee basin in Sherpur.
2. Resource Management Organization.
3. Federation of Resource User Groups.
4. The composition of the Local Government Committees already existing in MACH sites.

- As the government collects lease fees regularly from these *jalmahals*, part of that income should go into developing the quality and production of those *jalmahals*.
- The government should make it mandatory by law to create at least one sanctuary in every suitable wetland. Sanctuary management should be included in the government budget.
- Appropriate implementation of the “Fish Act” should be supported by strengthening the administrative system.

3. Use of wetlands and water

- ▶ Wetlands are gradually being silted up and converted into croplands. In many areas aquaculture is being practiced by building embankments, bamboo fencing (Bana) and nets around the wetlands, that reduce the area of natural habitat for fish. As a result fishers of these areas are losing their fishing rights.
- ▶ Though illegal, fishing by dewatering of *beels* is a common harmful practice among leaseholders.
- ▶ The habitat for fish in *jalmahals* shrinks during the dry season (winter). At times, the tiny area of water in the *beels* in the dry season is used for irrigating the *boro* fields. As a result, the amount of brood fish for the next season is much reduced.

Key Reflections

- Farmers should be trained on using different crops which need less irrigation but are more profitable than *boro* rice.
- The government should use the revenue earned from *jalmahals* to re-excavate the silted up *beels* and rivers so that they can contain more dry season water.
- The RMOs with local government representatives and NGOs should create awareness on the Fish Act through various awareness building programs during observance of wetland and environment days.

4. Management of wetland and its adjacent areas

- ▶ The productivity and quality of a wetland is due to regular water flow, clean water, and the level of siltation that largely depend on the condition of the adjacent areas (watershed). For example, the vertical method of pineapple cultivation in the adjacent hills of Hail Haor causes severe siltation in the haor. In Kaliakoir where the MACH project is working, untreated waste from local factories is discharged into the Turag River and Mokesh Beel that harms the fish and wetland a great deal.

Key Reflections

- Adequate tree plantation and conservation can prevent riverbank erosion and thereby limiting siltation in the wetland.
- The Department of Agriculture should encourage the pineapple farmers to adopt the contour method of cultivation which has decreased siltation levels at the demonstration plots in Hail Haor.
- The RMOs with help from the Local Government Committees (LGC)⁵ should involve themselves in advocacy with the Department of Environment to persuade the factory owners in Kaliakoir to stop discharge of toxic effluent in the adjacent waterbodies.

5. Co-ordination between institutions

- ▶ A lot of individuals and institutions have relations with wetland resources. To ensure the sustainable and productive management of wetlands, communication and coordination among these individuals and institutions is needed.

Key Reflections

- Union Parishad (UP) should be the key institution to prevent harmful activities in wetlands with an active participation of RMOs.
- MACH formed Local Government Committees (LGCs) with representation from the RMOs, resource users, local government officials and elected chairmen of Union Parishad in order to increase coordination between institutions and individuals.
- Government should identify clear roles of different central and local institutions in relation to wetlands with Department of Fisheries largely responsible for oversight.
- A clear policy should be formed to make coordination compulsory between public and private organizations for socio- economic and infrastructural development.

5. MACH has formally linked the RMOs and FRUGs with local government through the LGCs (Local Government Committees). The members comprise the leaders of all of the community organizations - the RMOs and FRUGs - in an upazila, the respective Union Parishad Chairmen, and the relevant government officials of the Upazila, including the Upazila Nirbahi Officer and Upazila Fisheries Officer.

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