



STAKEHOLDER'S POLICY BRIEF 6

ACCESS RIGHTS FOR THE POOR

BACKGROUND

The paper contains policy reflections of MACH stakeholder representatives from all three project sites¹ on the issue of *Ensuring Access Rights for the Poor*. 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 only the stakeholders from 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.



ENSURING ACCESS RIGHTS FOR THE POOR

Two objectives of ensuring access rights to fisheries for the poor were identified: to prevent exploitation of the poor, and to increase their incomes by increasing the share of returns from fishing going to the poor. But, as the resource is limited this needs to be complemented by measures to limit access and reduce dependence on fishing.

Key Reflections

- There is need for a clear definition of the term *fisher*. The government should provide long term low cost leases of jalmahal to actual fishers. Particularly, they should encourage fishers to organize and obtain leases through community based resource management organizations.
- Fishing fee (toll) amounts should be fixed through prior discussion with the fishers.
- The resource management organizations should also include local influential people who would protect the interests of the poor, but simultaneously they should not outnumber the poor fishers in the organization.
- Access of poor fishers to local authorities should be made easy in order to avoid interference and exploitation from middlemen. Formation of MACH style of Local Government Committees (LGCs)⁴ can act as the conduit.

1. Hail Haor in Sreemangal, Turag-Bangshi river and wetlands in Kaliakoir and the Kangsha-Malijhee basin in Sherpur.

2. Resource Management Organization.

3. Federation of Resource User Groups.

4. MACH has tried to formally link the RMOs and FRUGs with the 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.

- The resource management organizations (RMOs) should increase communication with respective Union Parishad (UP) chairmen. In the monthly meeting of UP, the RMO representative should present their problems and talk about potential solutions.
- The fishers' organizations like the RMOs or fisher cooperatives should maintain contact with other local NGOs and advocacy institutions. With the help of these institutions the resource management organizations can create rights related awareness among the poor fishers to be able to assert their rights.
- The RMOs should increase the level of awareness among the wider community about the importance of wetlands by courtyard meetings and seminars.
- The government should take an initiative to provide an easy term loan or micro-credit to fishers for generating alternative employment through training and free the poor from the clutches of traditional money lenders.
- Indiscriminate, unplanned and over fishing is very common in open access water bodies. The government should develop clear policies, set new rules and regulations on fishing in consultation with actual fishers and involve the local government bodies to enforce the regulations. Further, the local officials of Department of Fisheries (DoF) should be briefed on proper implementation of the "fish conservation acts".
- Some landowners constructed embankments on their lands in the floodplain area of Hail Haor impeding the poor fishers from fishing. The government should take measures to put a ban on: changing the land class through constructing embankments, illegal encroachment, use of harmful gears, dewatering the beels, catching of brood fish and fish fry and production of harmful gears.
- In order to prevent corruption and ensure that the interest of the poor are reflected in the organization's work, the local fishers organizations or resource management organizations should maintain a system of accountability, for example presenting the income and expenditure and progress report of work at annual general meetings.
- The RMOs should prepare in advance for renewal of lease. For example, they should collect the required documents from the respective authorities and submit the papers in time for lease renewal.



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