



***Governance in Co Management institutions,
Experience of Nishorgo: Issues and concerns***

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Experience of Nishorgo: Issues and concerns***

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Prepared by:
Utpal Dutta

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Table of contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Table of contents..... | 1 |
| Introduction:..... | 1 |
| Governance of Protected Area (PA), present scenario: | 1 |
| Nishogo's intervention and governance: | 2 |
| Issues and concerns for improved governance: | 4 |
| Conclusion: | 5 |

Introduction:

In Bangladesh, Governance and Good Governance is an issue of all sector; is also extensively discussed among the national and international donors, media, civil society and obviously now a days in the government. Particularly from 1/11, everyone from village to town, peasants to industrialists is concern about it. Off course, corruption is a vital issue while government is trying to improve the governance of all sectors. Through media and other sources we have come to know that already government has taken number of visual actions to reduce corruption.

Governance can be defined as a process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. Improving governance means establishing good governance. And obviously, governance and good governance both the term always move together and we can not detach them from each other. However, following characteristics¹ could be considered for understanding the good governance:

- transparency
- responsibility
- accountability
- participation
- responsiveness (to the needs of the people)

Governance of Protected Area (PA), present scenario:

The scenario of governance in Protected Area management is similar to other sector of the country. Not only the Protected Areas but the forest resources as a whole are governed by the Government; and on behalf of government, Forest Department (FD) is authorized and responsible for the management of the resources. Participation of other stakeholders or parties is quite restricted in present governance process. Local people do not have any authority and responsibility to interfere in governance process of the protected areas. Government retains full ownership and control of the area; Government is committed to consult or inform other parties regarding management decisions.

As the Protected areas already managed by the government agency (FD), all the decisions have been taken by the FD head quarter and finally implemented by the PA managers. Practically, through this top-down approach PA managers have to responsible and answerable to head quarter. The process excludes people's need, excludes Poor's voice and at the same time accountability to people. Hence, People always stay in dark regarding all sorts of decisions for forest conservation; on the contrary, some times they stand against those decisions. The whole governance process of Protected Areas resulted isolation, autocracy, ambiguity and finally corruption. However, analyzing the existing PA governance process, the following features could be portrayed:

¹ The Commission of Human Rights in it's resolution 2000/64 identified the key attributes of good governance.

1. Government owned and controlled;
2. Exclude peoples participation;
3. Ignorance of Poor's need;
4. Accountability to head quarter;

Nishorgo's intervention and governance:

Nishorgo Support Project of Forest Department has introduced the idea of Co Management in Protected Area management process since 2003. Although this is a new approach in forest resource management in Bangladesh but already adopted by some other countries of Asia and Africa. In Co Management Approach, local people who are dependent on forest resources included in management process. According to IUCN Co management is a situation in which two or more social actors negotiate, define and guarantee amongst themselves a fair sharing of the management functions, entitlement and responsibilities for a given territory, area or set of natural resources². That means this approach includes the local people in decision making process of PAs; at the same time it allows the people for sharing the benefit of forest resources.

Forest Department is piloting the approach in five protected areas of the country. The project already developed and formalized a Co Management model for protected areas. Government of Bangladesh approved the model through a gazette notification³.

Community living in and around the PAs has been included in co management body. The principal policy is that all the stakeholders will take part in management of PAs; FD who had the sole authority to carry out the management responsibility earlier will have only one position in co management body.

Through this body local stakeholders together with FD take decisions for better forest resource management; people, particularly poor people have the role in decision making process and the body is responsive to the need of the poor.

Resource management restricts exploitation of resources, Livelihood of the poor may jeopardize; that's why livelihood need more attention. As the co management body includes the poor in decision making process, able to pay more emphasis on it. And finding alternative income opportunity for poor is one of the major activities of co management body.

According to the model, there are two stratum management bodies for each PAs. One is named as co management council which includes 55 members from different categories of stakeholders. Council is functioning as the general body of the management structures. Another one is Executive body, consists of 19 members. The body is called co management committee.

Practically, all the decisions have been taken by the executive committee (EC) of the particular PA and implemented by them. EC is accountable to general body of the PA. Thus, for the Protected Area management sort of bottom up decision making approach adopted where all the members have the right to take part actively.

² Borrini Feyerbund, IUCN: 2000

³ Gazette notification No PABAM/PARISA-4/Nishorgo-64/(Angsha-4)/112, Dated- 15/5/2006

Members of the co management council agree to include 10 women in their council. So, 10 must be women out of 55 councilors. At the same time one fifth of the total EC member should be women. The decisions have been given a great opportunity to the women for taking part in decision making body. Besides, women are getting more attention in all activities related to income generation and forest protection. The main attributes of the model are:

1. Inclusion of all stakeholders together with poor, women and ethnic minority in governance;
2. Priority on livelihood of local stakeholders particularly poor;
3. Emphasizing on good governance;

Co Management Committee followed a bottom up planning process

At the end of the fiscal year 2006/07, members of the co management committee discussed about the plan for the year 2007/08. As co management committees are established at all five sites, Forest Department decided to prepare site level Annual Development Plan (ADP) involving all committee members.

Hence, reviewing all related documents like management plan, project proposals etc. CF wild life division discussed the issue with all the DFOs and asked them to initiate and participate in site level annual planning sessions.

As per decision, half day sessions were held in all sites. Local FD personnel and Co Management Committee members participated in the sessions. After elaborate discussions based on management plan, committee members prepared a holistic plan for each protected area and sent to CF wild Life.

According to planning framework CF Wildlife reviewed the field recommendations and put his suggestions to update it.

The updated ADP again presented in a regional planning session at Cox's Bazar and srimongal. President, Member Secretary and Vice president of the co management committee participated in those sessions. CF Wild life and concern DFOs were also present in those sessions. Participants put their comments and suggestion on that updated ADP.

CF Wild Life reviewed their recommendations.

The updated ADP then presented at national planning session, Dhaka in presence of FD personnel, President and Member Secretary of the co management committee. It was well discussed by the participants.

Annual Development plan finalized⁴ and sent to CMC for implementation.

A bottom up planning process was followed by the co management committee first time.

⁴ NSP only facilitated the planning process.

Issues and concerns for improved governance:

Co management approach added new values in forest resource protection of the country; also it has instigated a new dimension in governance. Basically, it has radically changed the traditional governance process of protected areas; it has included the local stakeholders, particularly voice of the poor in the co management institutions which absolutely absent earlier. Although, co management structures itself reflect the improvement of governance, but still experience shows that it need to focus on few more issues for it's improvement.

All the stakeholders i.e. representative from local administration, representatives from local government, representatives from land owners, brick field owners, saw meal owners, poor and ethnic community are included in Co Management body. This is a quite heterogeneous body which is represented by poor to rich people. Practically, such heterogeneous body suffers difficulties while it needs to take unanimous decisions. All members can not opine comfortably in such type of body or people from weaker sections can be suppressed by the powerful people. Obviously, this is a big challenge for co management body. That's why It will have to create a democratic environment where everybody will feel to speak comfortably and willingly. Poor people will get more space; women will have to give preference in all aspect.

In our society every one has freedom to put his opinion, we expect it for PA management, and people's collective effort will help to protect forest degradation. So, all the members of the body should respect each other, should show respect to others opinion.

FD initiated the co management approach for forest resource management, for it's success they have to take initiative and leadership, they have to nourish the approach continuously. FD needs to decentralize the authority to the co management body for smooth implementation. All financial and non financial documents should have to transparent and open to everybody; co management body need to accountable to local stakeholders.

Image of FD personnel need to improve rapidly, visible punishment for crime and corruption and benefit or reward for excellence should be introduced. As a leader of the management body they need to show up and nourish patriotism, love to fellow colleagues, nationalism etc. Thus the co management bodies will be more effective and efficient and at the same time image of the department will improve.

However from experience it reveals that following issues need to give more attention in the implementation stage. The issues are:

1. Democratic atmosphere in co management institutions;
2. Transparency and accountability;
3. Decentralization of authority;
4. Sustainable Financial resources;
5. Forest Departments initiative and leadership;
6. Visible award and punishment;
7. Access to information;
8. Consensus on major decisions;
9. Nourish Basic values like patriotism, love for fellow citizens. nationalism etc;

Conclusion:

From the very beginning, Forest Department carried out the sole authority and responsibility of forest resource management. Only last few years, department adopted co management approach for its protected area management. This is a big step to improve the governance of natural resource management. Co management institutions need to practice and nourish the 'good' to establish good governance, otherwise these institutions will also be a burden for the country.