

Report on

Second assessment of public awareness
about wetland resources and bio-diversity
conservation, MACH project



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September 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the current awareness situation of the community people on key issues related to natural resource management and habitat conservation over an entire wetland ecosystem in the MACH project area. The results of the awareness situation survey 2006 were compared with the follow-up and baseline surveys conducted in 2005 and 2004 respectively, to determine if awareness of the community people has been changed by MACH project interventions, and to understand the effectiveness of different communication strategies adopted by the project.

This time the study was conducted on two categories of respondent those includes community people and the local government committee members. As many as 315 community people participated in the survey that included 225 project participants (RMO and RUG members) and 90 general villagers. Structured questionnaires were administered among the respondents of the project area to gather information.

Major Findings

The community respondents included 69% male and the rest 31% were female. About 40% respondents were found illiterate or can sign only. A good proportion of respondents (37%) had secondary and above level of education. About 30% of the respondents were found to be self-employed¹. Another 27% of the respondents were found to be engaged in agriculture as their primary occupation followed by business and fishing.

Almost all respondents acknowledged the improvement of wetland in the last few years. The major improvements include: wetlands environment, sanctuary establishment, forestation along the side of wetlands, increased fish production, and stopped fishing of spawn & brood fish. The respondent also acknowledged MACH and its program partners including RMO and RUG for making this improvement happen. Most of the respondents were aware about MACH project. Many of them had participated more than one activities of MACH such as RMO and RUG meeting, sanctuary establishment, rallies, plantation and excavation etc. However, participation of general villagers was found quite low in comparison to the project participants. Although, the situation has improved slightly from the follow-up survey of 2005.

As far as MACH awareness message is concerned, 58% respondents (as against 52% in 2005) could recall 1-3 messages, 24% (as against 20% in 2005) recall 4 and more messages. 18% (as against 28%) could not recall any message – 68% of whom general villagers and rest 32% are project participants.

Regarding awareness on MACH objectives, a progressive improvement is evident. The comparison of awareness among the project participants had showed a significant improvement (74%) in 2005 from the baseline (2004) but the level was at below average level ²(1.98). This time the improvement is 31% from 2005 and their awareness level has increased to above average level (2.60) as far as MACH objectives are concerned. The awareness situation of general villagers (1.25) about MACH objectives remained static since 2005. Among the project participants, RMO members' average level of awareness (2.67) was found slightly higher than that of RUG members (2.51). Education status of the respondents seemed not having significant influence on awareness level. Gender wise male has fairly better level of awareness than those of female.

RMO member's awareness level of regarding their organisation and responsibilities had increased significantly (62%) in 2005 and since then the improvement has dropped little (12%) down.

¹ Self employment included homestead based agriculture, tailoring, home-based poultry, livestock, nursery and fish culture, vaccination, mechanic, boatman, hawkers etc.

² Scale interpretation of objective level responses: 0 = Not at all, 1 = Very Little, 2 = Average, 3 = High, 4= Very High

Likewise, RUG members' awareness on their organization had increased by 92% from 2004 to 2005 and now has increased only 23% in 2006.

MACH communication activities were targeted mostly to the project participants but some were also to the general villagers. The assessments of 2005 and 2006 revealed a steady growth of awareness level of MACH communication activities across the board. The results of surveys had reported a significant growth in 2005 in comparison to 2004 baseline. But since then the pace of development has slowed down. In the baseline, overall awareness level among the project participants was very low which had increased in 2005 but yet in 2006 remains below average. Similarly, awareness level among the general villagers was almost non-existent in 2004, which had enhanced to some degree in 2005 and since then no substantial improvement has been observed. As far as the effectiveness of various communication interventions were concerned, exhibitions, courtyard meeting, live drama, folk songs and miking were found to be the most effective among all the communication interventions. Besides, rally/day observance and community level meetings were seen to be quite effective. The project recently introduced some RMO led communication interventions. Among them RMO gathering was found somewhat effective and other types of interventions are yet to create significant public attention.

MACH used different communication materials to disseminate awareness raising information. MACH communication materials mainly included posters, signboards, booklets, handbills and other educational materials on wetland resources. Very recently, RMOs have also introduced few communication materials such as leaflets, newsletter etc. The awareness level of various communication materials has improved progressively to a certain extent among the project participants as well as among the general villagers. Yet the current awareness level still remains below average level. Awareness level of project participants was found far better than the general villagers. Regarding the effectiveness of materials, signboard, educational materials and posters/folders were the more effective materials than other materials. However overall effectiveness of MACH material was found at below average level though some progressive improvement had been observed in 2005 and 2006. The awareness and effectiveness of RMO introduced materials were not even found very encouraging.

The study team also looked if gender had any implication on level of awareness. The data from the surveys (2005 and 2006) showed that gender had bearing on the level of awareness as well as effectiveness about communication activities and materials. Male respondents had higher level of awareness than the female respondents. Likewise, male respondents found the MACH communication activities and materials were more effective than the female respondents. However, the difference was not very significant, as both male and female still had below average level of awareness on the MACH communication interventions/materials and its effectiveness.

The study revealed that there was a strong correlation existed between the educational attainment and the awareness level of the respondents. This relationship held true across all three-project sites for communication interventions and materials. The lower the education attainments lower the awareness level. Illiterate people were found very little aware about MACH communication interventions and materials.

Besides the community people, the current study also interviewed 10 LG members involved in MACH project implementation. Government officials (UNO and UFO) and local UPs were asked about their awareness of MACH project. The overall awareness of LG members was found to be high about the project and in particular about the various awareness interventions. There has been observed a significant improvement of the awareness level of LG members since 2005 survey. The LG members expressed that their increased participation in project implementation can contribute to the long-term sustainability of MACH project benefits.

The consultant have also analysed the issues and comments made by the project participants, villagers and LG members during the course of study and found that some of them are key issues that might need attention from the MACH project. These include:

Good Governance: It has been increasingly felt by the project participants to ensure equitable benefit from the project in particular to the poor. Corruptions and lack of law enforcement are causing serious impact on the poor.

Dominance of Elites and vested interest group: The benefits of MACH project are continuing to be distributed disproportionately among various groups of people. Elites are still skimming from the project leaving the poor far behind from accessing equitable economic opportunities.

Livelihoods and supplementary income: Livelihood of the poor fishermen still at risk during non-fishing period though the project has introduced supplementary income options through credit and training. Interest rate also perceived as high to the respondents. Credit coverage may go far beyond the RUG members to include even the general poor villagers.

Awareness development: MACH has made significant strive for awareness building of the community people. However, there is a clear need for more awareness development activities from the community people but it needs to be focused on specific groups and tailor made approaches.

Conclusions and Recommendation

A steady improvement of awareness is evident among the project participants over the years. In compare to the baseline and follow up awareness study, the third awareness study shows significant improvement of awareness particularly among the RMO and RUG members. The increase of awareness among the general villagers was found less significant during the last year. However, lot more awareness development is needed if the community-based management of the wetland has to sustain.

MACH had introduced a number of new communication and awareness development activities. Many of these activities were initiated locally by the RMOs such as exposure and exchanged visit, RMO gathering, RMO produced leaflet etc. So far these activities had made limited impact though the potentiality of these activities were said to be great by the RMO leaders.

Relative awareness on MACH is seen to be much higher among the RMO members than the RUG members. In other words, RUG members are falling behind from the main spirit of MACH project. Rather they tend to be more interested with savings and credit activities. There is a need for balancing act to establish complementarities between MACH project activities and IGA programs in particular for the RUG members.

Awareness level of the general villagers has increased but only marginally. They are yet to be integrated within the project frame. They continue to remain on-lookers to the project. Effective integration of the villagers who constitute majority of the population around the wetland remains the key issue for sustainability of the project. RMO as an emergent local institution can take an ever-increasing role to effectively integrate the general villagers with MACH project where FRUG can play a complementary role.

Way Forward

The study team have reflected on the overall findings of the second awareness assessment compared to baseline situation and first awareness assessment - by the same team in 2005. Based on the reflections and the experience with communication strategy development, the consultants following recommendations are made for the MACH project management.

Interactive and locally accepted communication method and materials: The project has number of interactive communication approach already in place like drama. To be more effective the dramas could be bolstered by introducing locally acclaimed stories, characters, and dialects.

The communication events particularly the interactive one should be implemented in an iterative manner so that the participants can deepen their understanding on the issues. One of an event will not be much helpful.

Special program as well as focus is necessary for the general villagers to enable them to effectively collaborate with the project participants. Appropriate communication methods including selection

media and adequate intensity will be needed to bring their awareness compatible to the project participants.

Advanced RUG and RMO members can be used as effective communication channel for awareness development of the poor villagers. Such members can be trained to work for MACH.

Government officials, public representatives and local opinion leaders have great potential to work as change agent and facilitate mobilization and awareness building. MACH project can devise specific role for them to work on various awareness building activities particularly at RMO level programs and events.

SECTION –IV: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues related to MACH project and suggestions

The study made an attempt to get views of the respondents about the pitfalls and limitations of MACH project and get suggestions on how the limitations can be overcome. Both the project participants and the general villagers expressed their opinion and shared their concerns with the survey team. They also provided with suggestions to overcome the current project limitations and pitfalls. The respondent did not keep their views within the project boundary; rather they shared wider problems that they faced with the wetland resources including issues related to MACH project. Following matrix gives the views and opinions of the project participants as well as the general villagers.

Table-27: Respondents perception of the limitations of MACH and their potential solutions

	Major Limitations of MACH	Suggestions
Project Participants (RMO & RUG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corruption in the beel leasing process (35%) ▪ High lease amount of beels that goes beyond the reach of poor (34%) ▪ Insufficient and damaged sanctuaries (29%) ▪ Flood plains management is dominated by the elites (25%) ▪ Villagers are still not aware or awareness program to be strengthened (23%) ▪ Lack of enforcement of laws (19%) ▪ Lack of supplementary income opportunity (18%) ▪ Repayment conditions are not pro-poor and Loan interest is high (18%) ▪ Lack of training and credit coverage (16%) ▪ Water Pollution – factories and people also (13%) ▪ Theft of fish during prohibition period or from sanctuaries (11%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proper enforcement of laws and motivate govt official not to indulge with corruption ▪ Sanctuaries to be managed and digging to be continued in the dry session ▪ Develop policy/rule so that poor gets preference in taking lease of wetlands ▪ Increase awareness on water pollution ▪ Discuss with factory owners about pollution ▪ Develop sustainable sanctuaries ▪ Create more supplementary income opportunity for the fisherman ▪ Arrange strong guarding in the haor/beels ▪ Extend credit coverage and training opportunities for the poor ▪ Strengthen awareness program – change old signboards
General villager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of supplementary income and training opportunities (42%) ▪ Lease amount of bill is high (34%) ▪ Siltration of sanctuaries (22%) ▪ Illegal possession of wetlands by the rich and vested group (21%) ▪ Lack of participation of general villagers in RMO & RUG meeting and village politics (16%) ▪ Current net is still being used (12%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Form more RUG and provide training/credit to poor people ▪ Stop use of current net for fishing ▪ Excavation of beels and canals ▪ Ensure the participation of general villagers in RMO & RUG meeting ▪ Pro-poor policy to be made and steps needed to free wetland from vested groups

The table/matrix has raised some of the key issues that need urgent attentions. The consultant have analysed the issues mentioned in the matrix and found that some of them are key issues that might need attention from the MACH project. These include:

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Areas for Improvements and suggestions by LG

The LG respondents mentioned some limitations and also put forward some corresponding recommendations. They mentioned awareness activities are not very strong in such a time bound project. They also motioned that there should be limited structure at the field level that is gradual withdrawal of project management support. They particularly opined that RMOs are not enough capacitated that they can sustain. The LG members, particularly the UNOs suggested that project should take initiative for institutional strengthening of RMO.

The LG members reiterated that social development activities to be further strengthened including incorporation of education component. They also felt that project does not share adequate financial information with the LG members. The project may examine and consider the limitations and recommendations as expressed in the table below.

Table-33: Limitation of MACH and subsequent suggestions made by LG

	Limitations	Recommendations
UNO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High cost project – cost – benefit analysis is not properly done and financial information is not shared in the meetings ▪ Responsible and literate persons of the society do not show interest ▪ Awareness activities are not strong ▪ Lack of social and educational aspect in the project ▪ Limited and time based project – every doubt about sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthen awareness raising and bring social and educational activities ▪ Involve Fisheries officer in local policy and implementation ▪ Local government and responsible persons to be involved in implementation ▪ Local institutions require more management support ▪ Extend and mainstream before closing of project – limited structure has to be there for another three years ▪ A long-term plan (10-15 years) has to be made for the protection of wetland involving local government
SUFO/ UFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bill board/signboards have become old and they are no more attractive ▪ Lack of proper coordination and information sharing about project activities in LGC meeting ▪ Time cost of govt officers is not taken into consideration ▪ Most of time project ask for endorsement on their decision ▪ Illiterate people cant read the message and signboards ▪ Too much message oriented and signboards have become illegible ▪ Implementation and line of control to be systematic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This project is relatively more effective than other collaborative project but still much to be done to make it sustainable ▪ Involve local officers in implementation and policy decision as they know more about local situation ▪ Make communication materials more visual ▪ Street drama to be organised frequently ▪ LGC meeting to made more active and decision oriented not just sharing ▪ Media coverage /TV program require further attention and extension

	Limitations	Recommendations
UP Chairmen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Message and campaign are still not adequate and they are not reaching to the right person – involved in illegal fishing ▪ Local government are not adequately involved in the RMO management and MACH implementation ▪ Not adequate support of local elite/influential people in the project activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Change bill-boards and make messages more visual ▪ Develop mechanism to reach and motivate those who are involved with illegal fishing ▪ Increase participation of people representatives in project activities ▪ RMO activities to be monitored regularly by the fisheries department. ▪ RUG members need more training and loan ▪ Extend loan program for sustainability

The signboards carrying important messages have become scribbled – almost all types of LG members mentioned it during interview. It is a common desire from all the LG members interviewed that they expect project should involve them more frequently. Increased participation of LG members, particularly the UFO and local government functionaries may contribute to the longer-term sustainability of MACH.