

Protected Area Co-Management

Where People and Poverty Intersect: Lessons from Nishorgo in Bangladesh

Co-management can be defined as 'a situation in which two or more social actors negotiate, define and guarantee amongst themselves a fair sharing of the management functions, entitlements and responsibilities for a given territory, area or set of natural resources.'

Borrini-Feyerabund,
IUCN 2000

Scheduled for publication in November 2008, this book aims to summarize lessons learned from a five year project to introduce collaborative management (co-management) to five forest Protected Areas in Bangladesh. These forest areas are significant for biodiversity conservation, including Asian Elephants, Hoolock Gibbons and many of the 650 bird species found in Bangladesh, and also for recreational use. The five Protected Areas (PA) cover 23,000 ha and are under the statutory authority of the Bangladesh Forest Department. The Project has been jointly financed by USAID and Government of Bangladesh.

The book includes topical chapters prepared by one or more of 15 participants in the co-management effort during the past five years.

Nishorgo in Brief: A Timeline

2003	Project design, start up and naming
2004	Site appraisals and planning; Government of Bangladesh approval
2005	Co-Management Committees (CMC) recognized under Government Order; participatory management plans approved for pilot sites
2006	Cross-visit of CMC to West Bengal
2007	1 st Annual Development Planning (ADP) at PA-level with CMC participation.
2008	1 st Visitor Interpretation Center opened. CMC granted opportunity for managing 1 st Student Dormitory. 2 nd ADP sessions.

This brief follows the structure and chapters of the book itself. Each chapter is summarized, with one or two lessons highlighted. Drafted chapters are now being posted for comment to the Nishorgo website (www.nishorgo.org) as are other Nishorgo documents. Comments on this draft are welcome up to 31 October 2008.

Comments may be sent to: Philip J. DeCosse at pdecosse@irgltd.com or to Ms. Sumaiya Firoze at nishorgo.lessons@gmail.com.



Nishorgo Support Project
Forest Department
Ministry of Environment and Forests
Government of Bangladesh



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

www.nishorgo.org

Context for Forest Co-Management in Bangladesh

1. Institutional and Policy Context

Bangladesh has 19 formally declared Protected Areas covering 245,813 ha or 1.6% of the country's surface area. A Wildlife Act was enacted in 1974, at a time when large blocks of forest still remained, but the Act allows no formal role for local residents in PA management or benefits-sharing. In 2003, other than sporadic patrolling and arresting of suspects of timber theft, the Forest Department had no strategy for managing the Protected Areas. A Wildlife "Circle" was created in the 1980s, suppressed, and then re-activated again in 2001, but the Circle is hamstrung by a lack of authority, staff and opportunity for professional advancement.

2. Socio-Economic Context

Bangladesh has the highest population density of poor people in the world. As population nears 140 million, tree cover has fallen to 4-6% of surface area. Deforestation and conversion of wetlands damage the livelihoods of the very poor most as they depend to a significant extent on collection of plants and fish for consumption and sale. These losses also damage ecosystem services to the whole population. Yet traditional "management" of many forest areas has benefited local elites and business interests who are behind systematic theft of trees.



3. Genesis of the Co-Management Experiment

The Forest Department had developed experience from the 1980s in social forestry with benefit sharing models in degraded forests adjacent to Protected Areas, and was looking in 2002 for ways of expanding participatory models to the more complex challenges of Protected Area management. USAID had successfully supported co-management of wetlands and hoped to adapt the model to upland forests.

Social forestry plantation



Co-Management Committee Meeting



Heavy Visitor Pressure, Lawachara NP



2005 2008
Regeneration in Lawachara



Sales Outlet for Co-Management Committee

Elements of Co-Management: Governance, Planning and Policy

4. Development of the Co-Management Model

A formal model was required, since it needed to be approved and included in Government documents. After dialogue and analysis, a two tiered governing body for co-management of each PA was agreed to, with a broadly representative Council including 55 members and a smaller Committee with 19 members. Membership in both was set by categories, including local government, resource users, ethnic minority and others.

5. Pace, Nature and Logic of Empowerment

The pace of empowerment has been slower than expected. The structure of the Co-Management Councils and Committees (CMC) are not as conducive to active participation by poor, women and minorities as intended. But even the better educated and elite of CMC members have been slow to stand up and assert new authority. This is partially due to a history of strict authority asserted by Forest Department over such stakeholders. The project has now recognized the importance of creating a separate and complementary body allowing the marginalized an opportunity to voice their issues and needs.



6. Protected Area Management Planning

Formal and exhaustive PA management plans were required in order to obtain Government approval of PA site activities. These were simplified and translated so that communities could engage in management decision-making. Still, though, management planning is driven by budgets of FD and project support. An Annual Development Planning (ADP) process at PA level has been the most effective means of joint engagement of FD and stakeholders in management planning in the CMCs.

7. Monitoring Change and Impact

The approach included four main types of indicators for monitoring forest impact: (1) illegal felling; (2) geo-referenced photo points; (3) a measure of the standing tree volume through basal area measures; and (4) 8 selected indicator bird species. Bird species dependent on different forest micro-

habitats were selected. Three annual bird transect surveys have now been completed, and suggest improved undergrowth. Community involvement in monitoring impact was limited, as was community interest in such monitoring. This was due not least to uncertainty of the authority and role being conferred upon them.



Puff-throated Babbler

8. Role of Remote Sensing and Spatial Analysis

Although initial recommendations from FD had been to use either SPOT or Landsat images, the project instead developed maps using Indian IRS pan images combined with IRS LISS III images. The approach proved cost effective and more than sufficient. Obstacles were encountered in discrepancy between FD PA boundary maps and geo-referenced points on new maps. For selected areas higher resolution Quickbird images were obtained to test their application. Generally, resources at FD for image processing and analysis are limited, and FD and external applied researchers are not effectively engaged for such analysis.

9. Policy and Legal Framework Changes

At the regulatory level, the project targeted approval of a Government Order for Committees. An amendment to the Wildlife Act has been under process for three years but there is minimal political commitment for modification of the Act in any substantive way. The framework for PA management now suffers from conflicting legal documents, including an Environmental Conservation Act that creates "Ecologically Critical Areas" including forests but has no relation to the Wildlife Act. Generally, project efforts to reform policy and legal framework fell short of the need.

10. Government Sanction for Capture of PA Revenue by Co-Management Committee

For more than three years, the FD and project struggled to obtain formal approval for PA entry fees and other revenue to be directly shared with the Co-Management Committees. Although approvals have come at multiple levels, the final process of entry fee sharing has not yet been approved. Bangladesh's history of highly centralized revenue management has slowed this process, although senior Government officials recognize the validity of the approach. At FD level, approval has been given for CMC to manage a student dormitory, but this is tenuous and not yet formalized.

Elements Of Co-Management:

Alternative Incentives and Livelihoods

Photo: Sirajul Hossain



The threatened Hoolock Gibbon at Lawachara

11. Approach to Stimulation of Alternative Incentives

The FD expected the project to provide microfinance and technical advice to the poor in PA buffer areas as an alternative to livelihoods dependent on forest extraction. The project team took the position that there are too many poor to be addressed by the project alone, and that general support was unlikely to dissuade beneficiaries from forest extraction. Accordingly, the approach adopted attempted to more closely link the receipt of alternative or new incomes to PA conservation, either directly or indirectly.

12. Participatory Plantations, Assisted Regeneration, and Landscape Management

At the heart of Nishorgo's approach was the allocation of rights for capturing forest resource benefits to local poor groups, with an emphasis on those involved in community patrolling. Over the past four years, new participatory plantations have benefited such groups, but hesitancy by the FD to allocate rights to communities has remained strong. Further, FD land outside but adjacent to the PAs is not under the management authority of the Wildlife Circle, making it difficult for even committed FD PA officers to influence the allocation of benefits from such lands in favor of local poor stakeholders.

13. Incentives for Community Patrolling and Protection

Officially sanctioned joint community and Forest Department patrolling has reduced theft of trees and projected a visible image of the changes under co-management. Patrols need to be more closely overseen by co-management bodies, however,

and the poor need clearer incentives – either access to livelihood support or direct payments from visitor revenue – to participate. Without approved entry fee sharing with the CMC or clear processes for sharing other PA benefits (such as buffer plantations, periodic off-take), it will be difficult to sustain such community protection.



A Joint Patrol at Lawachara

14. Household Income Generation Initiatives

The more common project assisted household income generation activities – chicken rearing, goat fattening, milk cow management, vegetable gardens – are of great interest to local households. Whether households receiving such benefits are more likely to conserve the PA is not clear, however. Income generation activities with more plausible linkages to conservation were introduced, including support to micro nursery enterprises, bamboo replication enterprises and low cost fuel wood sapling distribution.

15. Nature Tourism Enterprises

The special challenge here was to increase community-level revenues from tourism in ways consistent with conservation. Target activities included training young Eco-Guides, stimulating launch of a network of locally-owned "Eco-Cottages", starting locally owned elephant ride operations, and orienting both FD and CMCs to tourism planning. A rapidly increasing demand from visitors not used to the norms of conservation sites highlighted the need for careful planning.



Eco-guide examination prior to certification

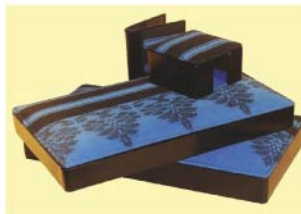
Elements Of Co-Management:

Alternative Incentives and Livelihoods



16. Branding and Market Value Chain

The project aimed to add value to traditional weaving by the Tripura ethnic community, through branding that stresses their role in PA conservation. Accordingly, the "Tripura Gift Collection" is managed privately with outlets in Dhaka. Similar branding was attempted for the "Nishorgo Eco-Cottage Network". Such innovations needed substantial support to develop local people's capacity to deliver appropriate quality products.



Tripura weaving and "Gift Collection" samples

17. Carbon Sink Projects as a Revenue Source

A forest carbon sequestration project was prepared for the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, a degraded forest that is home to migratory Asian Elephants and a large nearby population of poor, as a means of generating revenue for the local CMC. Although carefully packaged and Clean Development Mechanism-compliant, marketing of the project led to expressions of interest but no firm purchase commitments. Private buyers have been hesitant to purchase forest credits, even where poverty and biodiversity are ancillary benefits, in part because they expect endorsement from the Government's Designated National Authority, which is now inactive.



Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary

18. Grants to Communities for Collective Benefits

As a complement to the household-focused benefits generation activities, the project initiated "Landscape Grants" to the CMCs under which they would fund projects generating benefits for a larger proportion of community members. The hypothesis was that even small benefits accruing to a large proportion of the community would assist in generating a positive image of conservation and of the CMC that was providing the resources. Funded projects include access roads, bridge repairs, causeways, libraries and plantations. Managing the funds has raised the profile of the CMC, although expectations about their ability to administer grants were not entirely realized.



Fuel efficient stoves for domestic use

19. Fuelwood Consumption and Energy Technology

Nearly all of the households and organizations around PA use fuelwood extracted from PA for cooking. The project aimed to stimulate small-scale enterprises to extend and sell low-cost (~US\$8) stoves to reduce household fuelwood demand and expenditures. Stove technology refinements attracted adoption by some 4,000 households. To address institutional fuelwood consumption, the project brokered purchase by two large madrasah (>500 resident students) of night-waste biogas plants, under agreement that mullahs would also extend the technology.

Elements Of Co-Management: Supporting Approaches and Institutions

20. Capacity of Forest Department and Local Stakeholders

Capacity-building and orientation efforts for both FD and local stakeholders focused on short-term (<7 day) programs. For the FD, the value of training was compromised by internal transfers of staff soon after training and by the lack of a separate wildlife cadre in which capacity could accumulate. For local stakeholders, training was most effective for those lower income participants in targeted training programs for nurseries, eco-guiding, eco-cottage management and least effective when aiming to stimulate empowerment and active governance by CMC members.



Study visit to West Bengal for co-managers

21. Image and Perception of Wildlife Staff at FD

The project attempted to reorient the external image of wildlife management in the FD and distinguish it from the traditional territorial and plantation management image. Developments included a new vision (NishorgoVision 2010), a new name for wildlife conservation and PA management (the Nishorgo Program), new less militaristic uniforms, public outreach (posters, television), and a Code of Conduct developed for and by wildlife staff. The new image has been slowly taken up, but wholesale reorientation has been hampered by the lack of fundamental restructuring of the wildlife activities into a Department Wing, and extension of that wing to all PA in the country.



Launch of Nishorgo Program in 2004

22. Applied Research and Knowledge Management

The project aimed to stimulate international and national PA research through compilation of hundreds of hard to find documents and maps in free digital reference CDs. Marketing and distribution of these outputs was, however, limited. Two rounds of applied research grants and month-long "WriteShops" with university and FD staff succeeded in building capacity and buy-in to the Nishorgo approach and generating useful outputs, but only reached 19 researchers and lacked a permanent institutional research partner.



23. Architectural Design and Infrastructure

The project team aimed to raise the standard of architectural design and construction for the 25 planned buildings and many trails, bridges and smaller-scale interventions from a US\$2.5m construction fund. A privately-financed national competition generated new concepts for interpretation centers, while new guidelines were set for small-scale construction within all PA. In many cases, new architectural designs were not implemented precisely as designed because of either lack of understanding of local FD officers of environmentally appropriate design or their outright corrupt intervention in the construction process.



Winning design for Nature Interpretation Center

Elements Of Co-Management: Supporting Approaches and Institutions

24. Presenting Interpretive Information

Interpretive information was lacking in PA and some visitors made recreational use detrimental to wildlife. Across the five PA, some 64 new interpretive signs or markers were installed, including interactive exhibits for three Nature Interpretation Centers. Technical capacity and financing to maintain and update interpretive information, however, is unlikely to develop within the current structure of the FD. The public visibility of these exhibits has encouraged several private firms to offer to finance the process, but such offers are constrained by lack of engagement of government in public-private partnerships.



are slow to accept this perceived loss of power and control. With commitments from numerous private partners to support conservation, Nishorgo was able to conduct proof of concept, but sustained implementation and scaling up remain constrained.



Chef of Radisson hotel training eco-lodge owners and managers

25. Communication Tools and Strategies

Nishorgo succeeded in informing the environmental community in Bangladesh that a new way of managing forest PAs had been established. Use of a new name (Nishorgo), new logo, nearly 500 newspaper articles, and TV documentaries assisted in the effort, which led to a rapid increase in visitation at some PA. But the goal of establishing a new nationally-recognized image of a "PA system managed by and for the people of Bangladesh" has yet to be achieved. That will require complementary policy reforms and building a broad base of constituents in favor of an expanded and integrated PA system.



Community theatre as outreach

26. Partnerships with Private Sector and Civil Society

A history and ethos of exclusive control of forest PA lands by government civil servants severely constrains development of constructive and mutually-beneficial partnerships with the private sector and civil society at any level other than locally. Although official Government policy in Bangladesh explicitly supports such partnerships, many civil servants

27. Facilitation of Co-Management Process

The project team assumed that Co-Management Committees would seize opportunities to exercise new powers and authorities formalized in Government Orders and government-approved management plans. That not being the case, facilitation and empowerment at site level became more important, but there was a lack of qualified facilitators. The FD Assistant Conservators and Range Officers generally had little orientation or interest in this empowerment role. Qualified NGO staff members usually do not want to spend time in the field, in part because this is perceived as of low status. In future higher salaries for field postings will be needed and reinforced networking of local support services.



Facilitation of CMC meeting at Chunutai Wildlife Sanctuary

Summary Analysis

Lessons Learned and Recommendations in the Bangladesh and Global Conservation Context

The final chapter synthesizes the lessons learned, points a direction for Bangladesh PA management, and attempts to place Bangladesh experiences in the context of global conservation challenges. The challenges being faced today in Bangladesh from population pressures, poverty and PA governance may be a harbinger of what will soon be faced in many countries. These final reflections include the following:

From “self-defined” communities to “PA-defined” communities

The idea that conservation management challenges can be addressed through dialogue with “the community” at a PA is no longer a fitting construct in Bangladesh, and may not be elsewhere. With such large populations near PA, the only logical definition of “community” is that which is defined by use and interest in the PA itself. Conservationists may increasingly need to define the communities involved in co-management, rather than assuming those communities will already have an internal integrity.

Gradual social fragmentation and loss of indigenous knowledge

Sad though it may be, it is fair to say that traditional societies in and around PA in Bangladesh have fast been losing social cohesion and traditional knowledge. For example, the Tripura community around Nishorgo’s northern PA have lost much of their knowledge of forest plants, not to mention weaving, dress and cultural practices. In spite of efforts of many around the world, we can expect this same process to happen universally so long as opportunities for economic advancement lie in the mainstream society. PA-linked enterprises may offer a last opportunity for traditional societies to profit from their remaining indigenous knowledge.

From win-win to us-against-them

One of the overall lessons from Nishorgo was that social consensus at sites of high population density, cultural disparity, high levels of extraction, and significant business interests is unlikely and probably unrealistic. With such diversity of interests, unsustainable exploitation (for example some 50,000 people directly exploit Teknaf Game Reserve alone), and limited benefits from conservation, there is no way to achieve consensus around the table. Conservation planners need to accept these structural conflicts are a part of conservation, and work to manage conflict in a transparent process.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE