



STAKEHOLDER'S POLICY BRIEF 1 OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO CO-MANAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

The paper contains policy reflections of MACH stakeholder representatives from all three project sites¹ on the issue of *Overcoming Challenges to Co-management* including issues related to female participation. 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, on issues related to the processes, problems and impacts of co-management, summarizes the workshop findings of just the stakeholders from MACH project sites. The workshop participants included Upazila government officials, Union Parishad Chairmen, RMO² and FRUG³ representatives. The stakeholder reflections have been assembled into a policy brief with the aim of informing 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.



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO CO-MANAGEMENT

Key Reflections:

1. Project implementers should concentrate on enhancing the capability of Resource Management Organizations (RMO) in areas such as organizational management, accounts keeping, leadership abilities, awareness of legal rights through providing training, participation in meetings and seminars, organizing events and issue based negotiations/advocacy (e.g. pollution abatement) with local government officials while a project is still running.
2. Strengthening linkages with Union Parishad, Upazilla and Zilla offices for various purposes seems to have improved skills and confidence among the RMOs. Accessing the local government officials for project approval and implementation under the endowment fund⁴, international day observance and organizing trainings have resulted in increased confidence and ability for many.
3. The constitution crafted by the RMOs under the MACH project pin points keeping the local organizations untainted by party politics. More specific/clear regulations should be included in the constitution stressing the non-political entity of community organizations.
4. Informing the general community members in RMOs about the important factors of the constitution is important in order to hold the executive committees to account. RMOs with the help of local NGOs can disseminate information through various communication initiatives e.g. posters, folk songs/drama, discussion.
5. The RMOs should consult the local resource users prior to finalizing major management decisions, e.g. toll collection, fishing contract.

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. With approval from the Government of Bangladesh MACH has set aside some funds for use by LGC and RMOs to improve the wetland resource base that are managed by the local government committees.

6. A system of accountability and transparency should remain between the RMOs and the Local Government Committees (LGCs)⁵. Just as the LGCs monitor the performance of the RMOs, the RMOs should also maintain a score card of LGC performance and periodically present the findings at LGC meetings.
7. The LGCs should manage the endowment fund introduced by MACH efficiently. In case of irregularities or delays on the part of the LGCs, the RMOs should have the leeway to raise an emergency fund through alternative means in order to implement the project on time, informing the LGC Chairman and the Member Secretary. The LGC guideline should incorporate this option as a provision.
8. The different representative groups should strive to maintain mutual trust and harmony within the LGCs. The government officials, elected chairperson and RMO representatives should extend acknowledgement to each other in trying to keep the committee effective.
9. The RMOs should maintain regular contacts and inform and seek unconditional help from the local government officials and the elected chairmen during critical times or crisis.
10. The member secretary of the LGC will provide proper orientation to any new government official joining the LGCs about the purpose of the committee, its function and his/her duties as a member.
11. Department of Fisheries will instruct any new official joining an LGC about their extra responsibilities and also include the duties in their Terms of Reference (ToRs).
12. The RMOs should invite and ensure participation of requisite local government officials and elected representatives at all wetland related events, for example *World Wetland Day* or *Environment Day*.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO FEMALE PARTICIPATION

13. Currently none of the LGCs in MACH project sites have female representatives. The implementers have to include female participants in the LGCs within the project tenure.
14. Female participation in the RMOs and FRUGs in MACH project areas is low and there is no participation of women in the highest leadership positions, for example, the president or secretary. The project implementer with the help of RMOs should concentrate on how to increase female participation in the RMOs and FRUGs and bring them to the forefront in leadership positions.
15. The project should seek help from the RMOs to create enabling conditions to encourage female participation. Further, they should create awareness about the benefits of female participation at the family and community level.
16. The project has to be involved in the empowerment of female participants through training on building leadership skills, accounts keeping, awareness of legal rights, gender issues and enabling exposure to important meetings at the community and upazila level.
17. The project should develop special information packages for women and be careful as to have all information available to women.
18. The RMOs should involve the women in programmes like fingerling release, fishing and increase their participation in sub committees such as guarding plantation and earth work. To increase participation the government can also consider providing leases to fishers through women's groups.
19. The project communications should publicize successes of women achievers in order to provide them with the acknowledgment and encouragement for more participation.

5. 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.



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