

Conference Paper 22

A green horizontal band with silhouettes of people and a heart. The silhouettes are in a darker shade of green, and the heart is a lighter shade. The background of the band is a medium green color.

Community Management as Part of the Bangladesh Inland Capture Fisheries Strategy

Arne Andreasson*

*Senior Adviser, Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh
Email: arne.andreasson@areman.eu

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has had comprehensive experience of community based management for inland capture fisheries from several projects (revenue and externally funded) over the last 10 to 15 years. The lessons were extensively used for the elaboration of a strategy and a programme, which will seek to consolidate gains in and expansion of community based management linked to institutional and legal reform and a recognition and strengthening of the roles of civil society and the private sector.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock adopted the National Fisheries Strategy in January 2006. It had been developed by the Department of Fisheries over an extended period through a consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders. The strategy sets out to guide the implementation of the National Fisheries Policy, the PRSP and the Road Map for PRSP.

The strategy covers eight areas (“sub-strategies”); inland capture fisheries, marine capture fisheries, aquaculture, aquaculture extension, shrimp culture, quality control, human resources development, and monitoring and evaluation.

The strategy has a pro-poor focus and guiding principles are people’s participation for community based resource management, decentralization of planning and decision making, conservation and enhancement of fish stocks, protection against habitat destruction, pollution, and degradation of bio-diversity. The strategy emphasizes the need for reform of access rights (lease systems) and institutional development for decentralization and effective public sector service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The National Fisheries Strategy was adopted by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock in Bangladesh in January 2006. Subsequently the Department of Fisheries also prepared an Action Plan for implementation of the strategy. Through a parallel process, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock developed a Road Map for implementation of fisheries aspects of the Bangladesh Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The Road Map was also approved in 2006. The approaches in the three documents are the same and they cover the same issues.

The Road Map and the National Fisheries Strategy identify threats to the inland capture fisheries from overexploitation, habitat destruction and pollution, and devise measures to overcome the challenges for the benefit of poor fisher households and other resource users. Both advocate the promotion of community based fisheries management as a poverty reduction approach in line with aims to decentralise management, as well as giving genuine resource users a say in management matters. The Road Map emphasizes the role of inland capture fisheries for poverty reduction.

The Department of Fisheries is at present preparing a Programme for Inland Capture Fisheries Development for the implementation of the strategy and Road Map. The 15 year programme will address priority issues for inland capture fisheries development and management. It has ambitious aims and targets for the expansion of community based inland capture fisheries in Bangladesh.

The National Fisheries Strategy, with a focus on the Inland Capture Fisheries Sub-strategy, and the Programme are briefly presented in this paper. Further details on the strategy and action plan have been published in a report by the Department of Fisheries (2006).

THE NATIONAL FISHERIES STRATEGY

The National Fisheries Strategy was developed by the Department of Fisheries through a consultative process involving and engaging a wide range of stakeholders and considering the then ongoing preparation of the PRSP. The strategy has eight sub-strategies addressing

- inland capture fisheries
- marine capture fisheries
- aquaculture
- aquaculture extension
- shrimp
- quality control
- human resources development, and
- monitoring and evaluation

Objectives

The main objective of the National Fisheries Strategy is to: *“Encourage the various partners and agencies utilizing or supporting the management of the fisheries resource to promote its sustainable use in order to meet the objectives of the National Fisheries Policy and other policies guiding the development in Bangladesh.”*

The strategy also sets out to formulate a mission statement or vision for the Department of Fisheries and its role in this process: *“To provide support to the sector so that Bangladesh’s fisheries resources can be managed sustainably for optimum economic and social benefits through the cooperation of all stakeholders.”*

There are key concepts which apply to all sub-strategies, such as long term objective planning, decentralization, people’s participation, coordination and collaboration of all stakeholders, the regulatory framework, focus on the poor, gender, alternative income generation and environmental management.

Community based approaches to fisheries management figure prominently in the sub-strategy for Inland Capture Fisheries, with the following objective: *“To attain sustainable*

management of the inland capture fisheries for the local fishing and user communities through collaboration of all concerned partners.”

LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Attempts were made during the preparation of the inland capture fisheries sub-strategy to capture lessons related to community based fisheries management from earlier and ongoing development interventions, such as CBFM-2, funded by DFID and implemented by the Department of Fisheries and World Fish Center; MACH project funded by USAID; Fourth Fisheries Project (which ended in 2006) funded by World Bank, DFID and GEF; and Oxbow Lake Project (phase 1 funded by IFAD and phase 2 by Danida).

Other donor funded projects and programmes which have contributed to the lessons are the IFAD funded project working on community management of water bodies in Sunamganj District and the Agriculture Sector Programme Support, Phase 2, sponsored by Denmark, with field components in Patuakhali, and Noakhali and support to institutional strengthening of the Department of Fisheries.

In addition to these there have been projects funded by the Government of Bangladesh, which have addressed issues of community involvement in fisheries management. Among these are the ongoing Creek and Beel Management Project in Western Bangladesh and the Jobai Beel Project Naogaon and Fisheries Management in Water Bodies under the New Fisheries Management Policy (1999 – 2004). International experiences were considered through desk studies and participation in workshops and seminars.

Considerations

These projects have demonstrated the feasibility of community based fisheries management, which gives the users a say in management, gives them direct benefits, leads to improved management and consequently higher production and income for the users. Further, community based management has been effective in addressing habitat destruction, biodiversity and pollution, and ensuring sustainable use of renewable resources.

Thus the feasibility of community based fisheries management has clearly been demonstrated. However, there are issues with long-term sustainability of the community based organisations. They are under constant threats like being captured and/or manipulated by the local elite and they may become dysfunctional because of internal conflict. The projects providing the lessons have recently ended or are about to end and there are few examples of community based organisations continuing their functions without project support.

The strategy identifies a set of crucial issues to achieve the objective of sustainable management. These include a reform of the lease and access systems to promote sustainable management of resources as well as community based management.

Decentralization is a key issue to work effectively with communities and support them to establish their management systems. The strategy advocates the establishment of Upazila Fisheries Committees, which will have a say in resource allocation and the approval of management plans for water bodies and strengthening of the Department of Fisheries to deliver public goods. This will support the engagement and strengthen the role of local government. It also emphasizes technical management through sanctuaries, control of fishing effort, and habitat restoration. Support services like extension and research as well as the need for alternative income generating activities are elaborated in the sub-strategy.

Specifically for community based management the strategy stresses empowerment of fishing communities to take a leading role in management decisions. This will be achieved through an expansion of the number of community based fisheries management organisations, which have been granted long-term access rights to the resource. Through these organisations the users will have legal resource user rights. This in turn demands that the organisations are properly registered either under the provisions of the Social Welfare Department (larger wetland management) or as co-operatives (smaller, well defined, fisher based organisations).

The strategy recognizes that there is a need for flexibility with regard to the organisations and the appropriate type of organization will vary between locations. They may be member based (fishers) or an organization representing different stakeholder groups. A key element is the Upazila Fisheries Committee, which should have powers to administer the fisheries where community based management is feasible. The government will support community based management through different means and Upazila Fisheries Officers should be given training in inland capture fisheries and community management. The role of NGOs in community mobilization is stressed as well as the establishment of linkages and networks between community based fisheries management organisations to have a voice in decision-making.

INLAND CAPTURE FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The tasks for inland capture fisheries management and development are ambitious. Community based fisheries management needs considerable investment in community mobilization and organization as well as technical management measures. It is however anticipated that the initial high costs should be compensated by lower management costs in the longer term (for example through self-policing of management measures).

The Government of Bangladesh has allocated revenue funding for fisheries management as well as special funding through the Annual Development Fund for projects. While the government's commitment and funding is the backbone for the implementation of the strategy, there is need for additional external funding. The Department of Fisheries is at present (early 2007) preparing a programme for inland capture fisheries development. The programme is based on the priorities in the sub-strategy.

The lessons from interventions show that the issues are multifaceted and complex including the legal framework, institutional development, community mobilizations and technical management measures. The programme takes this into account and proposes a series of interventions, which have been grouped in interdependent and interactive themes or components.

The starting point for the programme is the lesson that the establishment and expansion of community based fisheries is a time consuming process and demands a long term commitment. Sufficient time should be allocated for identification of sites and mobilization of communities before actual interventions can be effective. The programme has therefore been designed for 15 years in three phases.

The overall objective as stated in the draft outline is: *“to ensure sustainable community-led management of inland capture fisheries resources and equitable distribution of benefits”*

There is also the need to address central institutional issues before further expansion of community based fisheries management. These have been outlined above and include:

- the legal framework (discussed in another paper presented at the CBFM-2 conference)
- lease system and access rights to promote sustainable management and empowerment of genuine resource users.
- the establishment of Upazila Fisheries Committees.

The issues differ between different types of water bodies, in particular beels and similar water bodies, where there will be nominal lease fees and priority will be given to community groups, rivers, where there is now open access and a need to establish access control and private floodplains where there is need to ensure sustainable management of the resources.

Programme support for institutional development includes support to networking between existing community based organisations, human resources management and development in the Department of Fisheries and NGOs. The programme outline also recognizes the need for strengthening the Inland Capture Wing and the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Fisheries.

A key task requiring substantial resources is an inventory of inland capture fisheries resources in Bangladesh. There has been constant destruction of habitat because of natural reasons but also through reduced dry season flow of water from neighbouring countries, the development of infrastructure, agriculture, industry and housing. The status of the resource today is not known and an inventory is essential for planning purposes including the identification of critical areas to maintain fish resources and prevent further decline.

The uncertainties regarding the longer term sustainability of community based organisations were discussed above. There are now some 250 such organisations and a need for consolidation. One theme is monitoring, support and action research related to the organisations and their functions. The research topics may include sustainability factors, equity issues, gender, decision making and conflict resolution and more technical issues like fish stock development, biodiversity, impact of protected areas management, as well as habitat destruction and pollution.

There are some 10,000 to 12,000 jalmohals in Bangladesh, many with good potential for community based fisheries management. At present, as stated above, only some 250 community based fisheries management organisations have been established. A key priority is therefore an expansion of community based management. An ambitious target has been set in the draft programme to reach 2000 community based organisations in 15 years. These will be in major river systems, where the experiences of community management are limited, in major wetlands of national and international importance, and “other water bodies”, which in the context of the project include baors, creeks, and beels (up to 1000 ha).

Fisheries management inevitably means restrictions of access and fishing effort, closed seasons and areas (sanctuaries) and gear control. In the short term poor fishers will suffer during closed seasons and need compensation for loss of income. In the longer term there will often be a need for permanent reduction of fishing effort and thus a reduction of the number of fishers. These impacts of fisheries management measures should also be seen in the light of fish resources often being the last resource for otherwise marginalized poor people. The programme will address the livelihoods of poor fishing communities and the need for alternative income generation activities.

The final component of the programme in its present form is technical management measures. This is intended as a “fund” being accessible by the Upazila Fisheries Committees. The funds should be used for investments in sanctuaries, habitat restoration and other enhancement measures, beyond what is provided during the phase of establishment of community based organisations and the implementation of their initial management plans.

CONCLUSIONS

The formulation of the Inland Capture Fisheries Sub-strategy, its Action Plan and the drafting of the Programme for Inland Capture Fisheries Development have shown the importance of looking beyond the direct community management issues, with mobilization, organization and training. The legal environment enabling the development of community based fisheries management must be in place and the long term access to the resource by genuine resource users must be ensured. The existing access rights and leasing system are not conducive to community management and proper management of the resource.

Decentralization is a key element in the promotion of community based management to effectively use limited resources. This includes an increased role of the local government as well as the proposed Upazila Fisheries Committees. This will also redefine the role of the Department of Fisheries and demand new approaches and modes of operation to be effective.

There is a danger that an adopted strategy becomes a rigid instrument for development. It is important that the National Fisheries Strategy and in the context of this paper the Inland Capture Fisheries Sub-strategy, are constantly monitored, regularly evaluated, reviewed and revised, and that the learning during implementation is effectively captured. The strategy was adopted in 2006 and is now being implemented. A regular review process should be initiated not later than the second half of 2008 with the aim of having a revised strategy adopted by the end of that year. The process should follow the same pattern as during the preparation of the strategy that is being inclusive, consultative and participatory to capture experiences and lessons gained.

Already at this stage it is probably safe to state that there is one area in which the sub-strategy is weak: gender. The present role of women in the sector and their potential role have not been sufficiently analyzed. This is one area to which the next revision of the strategy should pay attention in order to formulate concrete actions to give full recognition to the role of women in fishing households.

Another area where the strategy needs further elaboration is the human resources development sub-strategy. There are strong arguments to widen the scope to human resources management of which development is only one, but a crucial, part.

The proposed programme is ambitious but will give considerable benefits to the target group. The 2000 community based organisations will allow more than 0.5 million people to be part of the decision-making process on management. The fishing area will cover some 800,000 ha and provide an additional production of 120,000 tonnes per year at an estimated value of US\$ 85 million.

The implementation of the programme depends on lessons learnt from earlier interventions. The implementation mechanisms must be efficient and effective and the approaches and modes of operation rationalized to make best use of all existing channels and sources of support.

The donor community pays more and more attention to alignment of their support with Government policies, strategies and procedures in line with the Paris Declaration. The National Fisheries Strategy is a clear expression of the Government's priorities and will strengthen the Government of Bangladesh in its negotiations with donors.

REFERENCES

DoF (2005). The Inland Capture Fisheries Strategy. Department of Fisheries, Matshya Bhaban, Ramna, Dhaka. 15p.

MoFL (2006). Fisheries Sub-Sector Road Map for Implementation of PRSP Policy Recommendations, 2006 – 2015. Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Planning and Evaluation Wing/ Policy & Planning Support Unit