

COMMUNITY BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

INLAND FISHERIES-BANGLADESH

Pallavi Wats

Nithya

Overview:

Country: Bangladesh

Resource: Inland Fisheries

System: Community Based Resource Management System called Oxbow Lakes Small-Scale Fishermen Project initiated by the IFAD in 1989

Carried out in numerous small fisheries in South Bangladesh

Introduction:

Bangladesh possesses the largest multi-species fisheries ecosystem in the world. With the network of 230 rivers and their tributaries with a total length of 24,000 km, Bangladesh practices sustainable Inland Fisheries Management. Thus, fish and fisheries constitute an integral part of lives and livelihoods of the millions of people in Bangladesh. Inland fisheries are critically important to sustain livelihood for almost 80 per cent of the rural households of Bangladesh.

Government Management before 1990s:

The independence of Bangladesh in 1971 created hopes for genuine poor fishers, who claimed it through formation of cooperatives. These cooperatives were formed by both poor and rich members of the profession. The Government of Bangladesh managed the inland fisheries by leasing lakes to fishers' groups by auction on an annual basis. In order to participate in the auctions for lease of water bodies, people were required to obtain formal registration from the Department of cooperatives. The auctions were monopolised by the wealthy people in the community. Poor people remained where they were before independence, working as share-catchers, which limited their rights to 25 percent of their catch. Rich people started receiving more than they invested. This led to an unequal relationship between share-catchers and patrons. The condition of poor fishers worsened. The system of lake management did little to sustain and improve the livelihoods of poor people. Before 1980s, the Government control of the lakes didn't work well for poor people.

In mid 1980s, with the support of World Bank, the Government tried to improve the system by taking full control of some of the lakes in the 1980s. However, this approach proved to be unsustainable. It relied on

continual maintenance and fish-stocking using government funds, and the management system was open to corrupt practices. The productivity remained as it is. A long term strategy was needed to set within institutional framework with strong policies that would improve the livelihood of poor fishers.

After the failure of Government in maintaining balance between the rich and poor sections of fishers groups, IFAD initiated the Oxbow Lakes Small-Scale Fishermen Project in 1989, using a social fisheries approach at 23 lakes in South-Western Bangladesh. The project aimed to rehabilitate Lake Infrastructure and decentralise management of the resource by offering long term leases to groups of poor fishers. The further objective was to give the fisheries management in the hands of fishers themselves by creating appropriate institutions and mechanisms for guaranteeing security of tenure. Various fishers' groups were formed to assume the leases and manage the lakes based on equal sharing of costs and benefits among group members.

Community Management:

The establishment of Common Property Regime in an oxbow lake fishery in Bangladesh depends on the co-management arrangements, where long term security of tenure is considered as a precondition. The sustainability of such CPR in an oxbow lake fishery depends on

- fostering cooperation between fishers by providing incentives;
- maintaining equity in benefits and cost sharing;
- ensuring democratic rotation of leadership;
- and monitoring of all operations by the fishers themselves.¹

Fisheries enhancement and community participation both are necessary in order for inland fisheries management to be socially and environmentally successful. Fingerling stocking, fish sanctuaries and habitat restoration, arrangements for security of tenure and appropriate legislation concerning catches, gears and sanctuaries are activities included under fisheries enhancement while under community participation all the stakeholders share responsibility collectively in decision making and equitable distribution of benefits.

Governing levels can vary from government control to self-management by the fishers i.e the stakeholders. Under co-management fisheries participation increase with decreasing government control. Under this system it is important that the stakeholders be guaranteed security of tenure. This includes two aspects:

(a) Security for the long-term fishing rights is awarded to the fishers' group through lease arrangements in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, thus safeguarding exclusive access to the fisheries; and (b) security of the long-term membership of each individual fisher through annual licensing is also provided thereby safeguarding individual fishers from removal from the membership list by government or NGO officers.

Local governing body:

An efficient well defined governing body is crucial to the success of any common property regime. The governing body in this system called the Lake Management Group (LMG) is also crucial in maintaining and monitoring the common. The entry criteria to become an LMG fisher shall be defined as a person who is a

fisher and rural poor who personally owns less than 0.5 acre (0.2 ha) of land or earns less than Tk 10000 yearly. Specifically their role included protecting the rights of the fishers, coordinating the activities of the fishers at a specific lake, Monitoring the efficient working of the system, organising group awareness and rules for the systematic management of the lake and increased fish production and deciding the annual budget and monetary requirement for the fishers. They were also responsible for preparing a stocking and harvesting plan and establishing and maintaining a savings account for maintaining funds and group expenses. Regular meetings were organised to discuss progress problems and trainings and seminars were held for the fishers for achieving the goals of general awareness and self-reliance. Lastly they had to maintain unity in the group and promote and establish self-respect and self-reliance in the community to make t free from exploitation.

Sustainability of CPR in the LFTs of OLP II depends on four policy decisions:

- (a) Fostering cooperation between LFT members, whether they be traditional Hindu fishers or unskilled Muslim landless labourers, coming from various villages around the lake;
- (b) Maintaining equity in labour inputs and benefits in order to maintain cooperation in the long run;
- (c) Institutionalizing rotation in leadership through annual democratic elections for office bearers of the LFT; and
- (d) Supporting the development of self-monitoring systems whereby the LFT members monitor all activities and deal with any irregularities themselves.’²

Incentives to cooperate:

Traditionally cooperation was at low levels in the villages of Bangladesh. Thus it became increasingly important that as a part of implementation of CPR incentives must be provided to foster cooperation between the different embers of the newly formed Lake Management Groups so that they would forego short-term benefits fir common long-term benefits. Other incentives are the prospect of infrastructure work, and credit for stocking fingerlings.

Equity in income and cost sharing:

There are various ways of achieving equity besides dividing cost and income equally. Equity was thought of as equity of access to fishing. At present the sharing of income usually depends on actual participation in fishing: 50% of the total day's income of all fishing teams is deducted for costs to be paid out of the central fund, and the rest is equally distributed among all those who participated in that day's fishing as this is a more fair way of distribution. Another technique was to divide the skilled fishers among the fishing teams, thereby minimizing differences in catch per unit of effort between teams. Rotation of days and places for fishing is also practised by the fishing groups.

Rotation of LFT leadership through elections ⁴:

Leadership of each LFT and of the constituting fishing teams rotates because office bearers may not serve successive terms. Initially the election by-laws allowed individuals to stand only once for elections, but later

this rule was abolished. It is traditional in Bangladesh for local leaders to hold onto power as long as possible, so rotation was initially much resented. It helped, however, to create large group of people within each LFT who were experienced in handling LFT affairs with the outside world. It was further found that very few office bearers got themselves re-elected after having been out of office for years.

Monitoring by group members:

Monitoring mechanism are a must for the success of any Common Property Regime. LFT (the local governing body) group members need to keep close watch on the office bearers of their LFT committees, who are responsible for stocking, harvesting, handling the LFT's accounts and distributing funds to the members. In the beginning, fingerlings were often released without notice and with no fishers present, and occasionally even at night. However, incidents of this type decreased after strong protests by some LFT members. Number of monitoring systems have been developed by the LFTs to circumvent the initial monopolization of fish sales by office bearers and few other important fishers. One method is to auction the catch at the landing site, in the presence of everyone. Another method is to rotate the groups taking the fish to market, which allows the members to gain from any benefits due to wholesale commission.

Thus various conclusions can be drawn for the above for successful management of community resources. Incentives for cooperation are required so that individuals forgo short. There are various methods of achieving equity besides equal distribution of cost and income. Self-monitoring is enhanced through democratic rotation of leadership. Monitoring is necessary for proper stock checking and marketing practices which would help maximise fishers income share.

Setting up fishers' groups:

'Security was a key to forming the groups – the security of long-term leases increased the confidence of groups to invest in the lakes, and the security of individuals as members of a group, with equal rights and responsibilities, strengthened their confidence to participate. Transparent procedures enabled members to monitor key transactions, such as fish stocking and sales, and ensured that new knowledge was not monopolised by a few but was spread widely throughout each group'.³ Membership was weighted in favour of poor fishers. There were many local elite who tried to obstruct this process. It took time but one of the lakes were successfully transferred to fishers' groups – a process that took over two years to complete. The project was successfully established over 2,000 fishers' groups of various sizes, involving some 45,000 fishers, as well as bringing major reforms in lake leasing arrangements. Still, several problems stood in the way of fishers. There were many difficulties and delays in leases and fees, solving social conflicts when forming groups, offering credit to groups without collateral, and providing adequate support for institutional and infrastructure development. The project did fail in providing fishers access to water bodies. Then, a second IFAD-funded project was initiated in 1998 to scale out the experience. Its main focus was on community participation in order to ensure empowerment and access to water bodies for the poor fishers. National and local NGOs were reappointed to form new groups for 740 hectares of lakes, and to work upon the links between groups, line agencies, the private sector and NGOs in order to enhance technology transfer and open access to markets.

Women assume more responsibility:

Since the first project was predominantly occupied by men, user rights were very difficult to secure for single poor women. Though additional rules sought to encourage women's participation there weren't enough inputs and benefits provided. However in the second project women were specifically targeted thus almost half of the new groups were managed by women. Though this usually took place in communities where fishing was fish culture was not regularly a male activity it still represented an institutional shift in pond management. This resulted in greater income and influence over expenditure for the women pond managers. While families have benefited from this increased income and the new influences in the home, communities are benefiting from the improved productivity of scarce resources. Institutions like IUCN are helping women raise voices, by holding workshops and training sessions.

CONCLUSION:

Although long-term leasing was a central feature of the first project, there are now doubts about pursuing leasing rather than user rights in subsequent activities². The user rights need to be protected, else fishers might be subject to market pressures that would lead to takeovers by more powerful economic forces. If this happens, it would defeat the objectives of poverty reduction and improvement in productivity level through this project. Though, this pioneering experience in the fisheries sector has many lessons for the management of other common-pool resources for the world. 'In Bangladesh, multi-stakeholder platforms have brought together community members and local government officials. This has provided poor and excluded sectors of society with a real voice in local decision-making.'⁵This project shall provide global lessons on the transfer of common-pool resources to group management systems.

References:

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