

Promotion of Sustainable Institutions for Integrated
Floodplain Management

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C. POLICY BRIEF (In English)

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INTEGRATED FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

These lessons on barriers to inclusive and pro-poor Integrated Floodplain Management (IFM), and prospects and challenges for the future are drawn from a recent DFID research project "Integrated floodplain management-institutional environments and participatory methods (R8195)". Lessons have been drawn from various recent and ongoing fisheries, water and environment projects, which are here, termed IFM projects. The emphasis is on what not to do: "replicating past approaches will replicate past mistakes".

INTRODUCTION

Many recent Natural Resources Management (NRM) projects have emphasized **increased local participation**, mainly through Community Based Management (CBM). They have established community based organizations and committees for resource management, here termed "Resource Management Institutions (RMI). But evidence suggests that most of them have failed on two counts: **pro-poor outcomes** and **sustainability**. The process and institutions need to be more inclusive and focus on achieving equitable benefits through collective action (see figure 1).

In this paper, lessons are presented in the form of problems to be overcome.



Figure 1. An idealised cycle of inclusive and pro-poor IFM

BARRIERS to IFM

COLLECTIVE ACTION LESSONS: PROBLEM - SHORTAGE OF LOCAL SUPPORT

1. Pre-initiative indifference: It can be due to lack of community knowledge of project objectives among community members (found generally but more so in environmental projects with diverse activities, or through real exclusion of the poor (as in some fisheries).

2. Post initiative decline in support for institutions: It can arise if certain stakeholders are disenfranchised or alienated (for example in Fourth Fisheries Project executive committees held too much power discouraging wider participation) or if the opportunity cost for participation is regarded as too high.

1. Floodplains are wetlands with multiple resource systems used by different stakeholders including fishers and farmers. IFM focus on balanced use of water for fish, crops and vegetation in the system to ensure sustainability of the goods and services we get from floodplain wetlands.

FACILITATION LESSONS: PROBLEM - WEAK FACILITATION

1. Declining dialogue and interaction: Participation tends to be an early focus [for example as an early stage of the project cycle in water sector projects or to sensitize residents in Community Based Fisheries Management 2 (CBFM2), Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry (MACH)] but later interaction between primary stakeholders and supporting agencies (e.g. project staff, Agencies, Local Government Engineering Department) becomes less frequent.

2. Gaps between objectives and understanding: The level of support for new initiatives aimed at benefiting the wider community for the long term depends on residents understanding of project objectives, institutions and activities, but process documentation revealed gaps.

3. Poor linkages: Poor linkages and ineffective coordination between government agencies and Development NGOs at national and local level give rise to conflicts and result in poor participation. Government agencies tend to focus on technical aspects and production, while NGOs are seen as

responsible for livelihoods and equity. For example, local Government has not been formally involved in most project activities, and this is a missed opportunity. MACH strong link with a suitable local government committee for community-based management of wetland resources produces positive results.

4. Lack of NGO Capacity: Poor skills of NGOs and their staff in facilitating local RMIs have failed to maximize participation and develop effective organizations. Fourth Fisheries Project (FFP) evidence suggests that smaller NGOs were less effective (by late 2004, 74% of sites where small NGOs started work were unsuccessful in establishing community based fisheries management).

"Institutions" are defined here as "regular patterns of behaviour" or ways of getting things done". They include formal institutions (e.g. organizations or committees) and informal institutions (e.g. culture, power relations and religious norms).

EQUITABLE OUTCOME LESSONS: PROBLEM-INEQUITABLE POVERTY OUTCOMES

1. Resource capture by non-targets: Resource capture by elites and the workings of local power structures can result in benefits being channeled away from the poor. New opportunities that arise from IFM interventions are most readily accessed by the wealthier who can afford investment in time and money. The problem is more acute where interventions, such as fisheries management in several projects, are based on subsidy (provision of access rights and inputs) without due concern for mechanisms to assure preferential access to the poor.

2. Unrestricted access to RMIs: Community organizations open to all create an opportunity for the powerful to join committees, influence decision making and take control of resources (as in the early stages of FFP), Approaches that limit elite capture, while including some elites who can help influence opinion positively need to be fund.

3. Limited understanding of constitutional arrangements: Constitutional arrangements (voting rights, eligibility for different posts, etc.) governing the operation of the RMIs need to be established early of there is space for elite dominance as in several fisheries where there is a past history of cooperatives that lacked transparency.

4. Influence of pre-existing power structures: Often the distribution of benefits is influenced by pre-existing power structures (e.g. Upazilla Parishad chairman, mosque committee members, samaj), for example Oxbow Lake Project (OLP) and Jalmohal Project identified mastaans (local musclemen) as a major problem. However, MACH has invested in building linkages to local, formal institutions. UP chairmen may act as arbitrators when conflicts or discrepancies occur.

5. Unwillingness to challenge local elites: NGOs have generally been unwilling to challenge local elites in fear of post project adverse reaction. NGO skills and commitment to helping the rights of poor people, challenge local elites and overcome conflicts cannot be assumed.

6. Fuzzy property rights regimes: This problem arises when the local reality does not correspond with predefined IFM objectives. In some cases this can be incorporated for the benefit of sustainable and equitable IFM, for example local access to local poor people in beels and encourage agreement on and compliance with conservation measures.
7. A sectoral focus to IFM: It can introduce conflict and polarize the positions of different user groups, for example in some CBFM sites only fishers have been supported when there are multiple stakeholders. Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) has been successfully used to develop mutual awareness and consensus between farmers, fishers and other interest groups.
8. A structured orientation to Natural Resource Management (NRM): It should move away from a focus on technical service provisions. So far IFM has not empowered the beneficiaries on awareness of rights and entitlements, which would enable them to counteract exploitation or exclusion by powerful interests. For example, in CBFM1 the needs of fishers were interpreted as rights to fisheries (leases), the supply of inputs (fish stocking, credit), and mitigation measures (sanctuaries). Several projects use production increases as their success indicator but the poor may be excluded in the process of raising production.

CONSENSUS LESSONS PROBLEM - LACK OF WIDESPREAD SUPPORT

1. Intervention induced conflict: Unfortunately, IFM interventions have tended in several cases to alienate some groups, widen differences in interest and create conflict. This probably relates to the difficulty in achieving collective benefits available to a wide range of stakeholders. Conflict has been less in some sites where PAPD was used.
2. Lack of strategic communication and policy influencing: Lesson learning and policy influence have been ad-hoc and unstructured. There was no uptake to research findings and lessons learnt from projects to create widespread support or scale up IFM neither in the policy arena nor for transferring this for new programmes. Donors and projects are increasingly aware of this and projects such as CBFM2 and MACH include communications for policy influence

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Collective Action

1. The purpose of IFM institutions must be clearly explained before interventions, and project messages must be easy to understand.
2. Activities and objectives should impact a range of groups in a range of ways so that benefits can be realized by all stakeholders.
3. Cost-effectiveness for participants must be ensured, and the wider community and members of RMIs should expect transparency and accountability from their representatives.

Facilitation and Action

1. Project staff should maintain dialogue and disseminate the project's message throughout its life-span.
2. Cooperation among government agencies and NGOs is crucial. Forging links between RMIs, local government and the local administration is critical for sustainability of new RMIs.
3. The experience of NGOs recruited to develop and support RMIs should be assessed carefully. Training needs of NGOs and their staff should be assessed at the time of recruitment.
4. Local NGOs should be backed up by close support and mentoring from experienced field based technical assistance staff, or a more experienced NGO team.

Key Lesson on Barriers to IFM

A greater awareness of informal institutions (e.g. samaj, salish) and an understanding of how they may hinder or help objectives is required by implementing agencies, donors and local facilitating staff. Many informal institutions influence access to floodplain resource and distribution of benefits. In fact, these institutions interact so closely with formal institutions interact so closely with formal institutions (e.g. Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh Water Development Board, NGOs) that it is difficult to discuss the function of one without the other.

Equitable Benefits

1. Ensure early inclusive planning and increase staff awareness of power issues.
2. Avoid strongly subsidized inputs for production and access rights; instead start with low cost smaller actions.
3. Formalizing (registration with social services or cooperative) RMIs can help improve the prospects of sustainability but is not sufficient to ensure appropriate institutions.
4. The needs and proper representation of fishers should be incorporated in all IFM projects.
5. **A full understanding of the role of the key informal institutions should be achieved prior to any intervention.**
6. **Inclusive and participatory decision making (PAPD)** can provide a role for the elite in supporting IFM initiatives.
7. Facilitators need to adapt to existing local access arrangements and fully understand them in relation to the livelihoods of the poor, particularly the opportunities they provide at certain times of the year.

It is important that progress and problems are reported and discussed as projects are implemented and that lessons continue to be learned during and after project support. In this regard, the study developed process documentation methods for IFM institutions. Implementing agencies should consider training and adoption of such methods.

Key Literature

Detailed findings are available in: Lewins, R. 2004. Integrated floodplain management institutional environmental and participatory methods. Project R8195 Final Technical Report.

8. Some form of social reconnaissance should attempt to map informal NRM mechanisms.
9. By adopting a more integrated approach including different livelihoods groups, new IFM can build relationships and linkage between those groups.
10. Project design should incorporate elements of empowerment and awareness of rights.
11. A process approach can build capacity through flexibility and adaptability of project activities.

Projects should try to identify local champions (elites, opinion leaders and local representatives that are less exploitative and are sympathetic to the interests of poor user groups). Such people can provide a valuable link with existing local institutions and troubleshoot for the RMIs when NGO support is withdrawn.

Consensus and Enthusiasm

1. Implementing agencies should be aware of the bottlenecks that tend to appear and of strategies to avoid them.
2. Dispute or conflict resolution should be seen as an integral part of RMIs.
3. The capacity of each project to consider these issues is limited. National policies are starting to stress cross-sectoral links, with calls for integration at ministerial level.
4. A structured approach to communication for policy influence should be incorporated in new IFM initiatives.
5. Because floodplain management performance (outcomes and impacts) relate very closely to approach and objective, IFM agencies should carefully consider their future role and approach in the light of lessons learnt from past experience.



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