R8495: Promotion of Sustainable Institutions for Integrated Floodplain Management

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Better Local Institutions for IFM: A Practitioners Guide

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Better Local Institutions for IFM: A Practitioners Guide

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Purpose and Scope of this Guideline

This guide is targeted at the key actors in Government of Bangladesh Departments, specially the Department of Fisheries, NGOs and other agencies involved in sustainable and pro-poor co-management of floodplain fisheries and other resources through building local institutions primarily comprising of the resource users. This guideline is also targeted at those who are instrumental in formulation of related national policies.

The guide aims to enhance understanding on institutional issues and processes thereby improving the formation, strengthening and evaluation of the performance of local institutions in IFM. The guide offers suggestions for building better IFM institutions based on practical lessons learned from studying various local institutions engaged in floodplain management under different development projects.

Finally, this guide also provides sources of further information and detailed practical processes for undertaking these activities.

Section 1
Introduction

Floodplains in Bangladesh play a vital role in the economy as a source of food, including rice and fish; as a source of income, employment and food for poor people; and as a source of foreign currency earning. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2003-04) the fisheries sector contributes 5.7% of total export earning and 4.9% of GDP. About 12 million people are directly or indirectly involved in this sector. Labour employment in this sector has been increasing at approximately 3.5% each year[1]. Overall the importance of these vast floodplain resources is immense to the livelihoods of the people in rural Bangladesh as well as to the national economy.

Property rights and entitlements in these floodplains are complex. Many stakeholders are involved here either within the locality or from outside. Dimensions of resource systems include physical/spatial, seasonality and use patterns. But the government policies for wetlands still generally ignore access for the poor and sustainability of the resources. The revenue-oriented policies invite competitive bidding for use rights among influential people. This ultimately encourages resource mining in a completely unsustainable manner by individuals who oust poor fishers and other aquatic resource users from their entitlements to common pool resources. Technical and administrative interventions from government and private investments have so far been focused on irrigation, drainage and flood control for agriculture (particularly rice).

> **What are institutions?**
> "Institutions" are defined here as "regular patterns of behavior" or "ways of getting things done". They include formal institutions (e.g. government - DOF and community – CBO bodies) and informal institutions (e.g. culture, power relations and religious norms).

With a changing attitude in favour of pro-poor sustainable floodplain resources management, recently, the projects and agencies involved have recognized the need for local institutions. They are expected to ensure the sustainable integrated management of these resources and ensure that the benefits go to the poor. But evidence suggests that most of them could not make much progress (or have failed) largely 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 actions. This may be firstly, due to the similar notion of the agencies that ignores poor users or could not make any advancement in this regard; secondly, emphasising mainly on technical issues. Even where pro-poor institutions were formed, their strengthening and sustainability were ignored or less emphasized.

> **Some guiding principles**
> 1. All resource users should be well represented in the Resource Management Institution.
> 2. Poor resource users who are entirely dependent on the wetland should be given priority.
> 3. Powerful individuals with vested interests in the resource should be avoided.
> 4. Existing conflicts should be addressed.
> 5. Establish institutional linkages with potential government agencies and NGOs.

On the other hand the diverse resource system also demands the participation of all levels of stakeholders – certainly all the resource users and other stakeholders for a system based consensual management regime, which is important for sustainability of the resources.

To this end this guideline tries to highlight the issues starting from the formation of a local institution, its strengthening and the phasing out process.

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[1] Md. Nasir Uddin Ahmed, DG, DOF (2005), *Souvenir, National Fish Fortnight-2005,* Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh

<table>
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How to build consensus in Integrated Floodplain Management (IFM)
Given the fact that a floodplain comprises multiple resource systems being used and managed by multiple users under a complex and dynamic management and access arrangements that again vary over the seasons, consensus building among the stakeholders and users has been considered to be vital in achieving sustainable IFM.

Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) is a method for building consensus among multiple stakeholder groups. It uses participatory tools in a structured way to identify commonly agreed problems and actions needed for the sustainable management of natural resources. Participation in a shared learning process that is not controlled by vocal or socio-politically influential, is pro-poor especially as some key steps actively encourage participation by poorer members of a community (Figure 1).
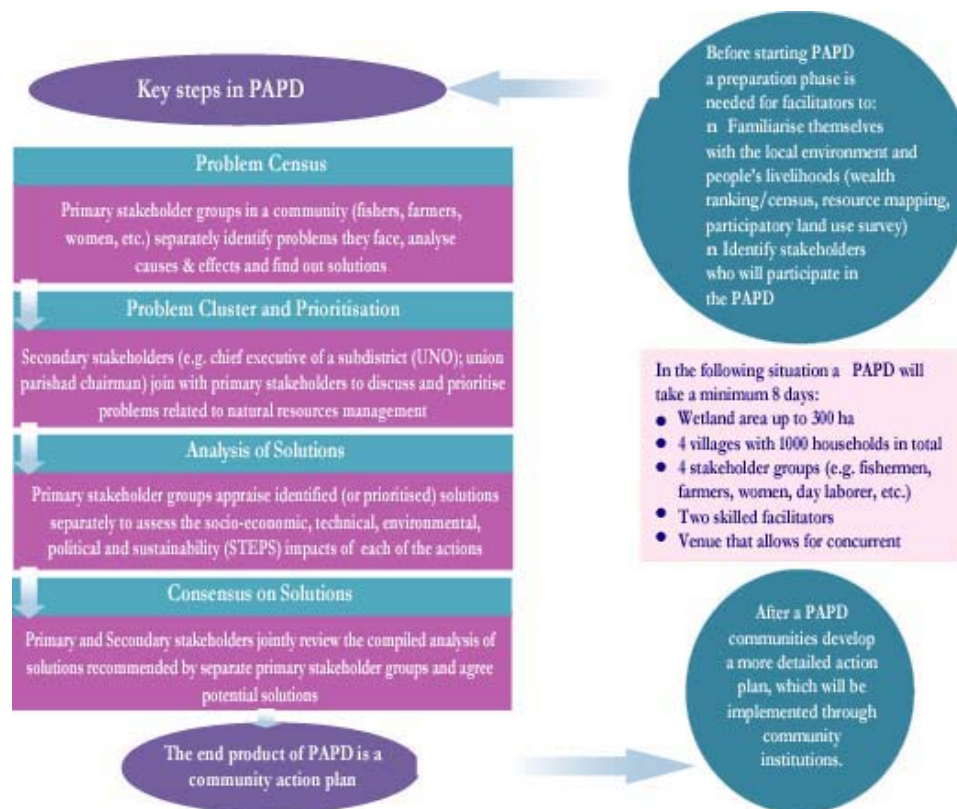

Figure 1: PAPD Process

The process of consensual problem identification, prioritization, finding solutions and their impact analysis creates a notion of collective action among the PAPD participants. The need and structure of a local institution is often an outcome of the process. Converting this notion of collective action into an institutional shape depends largely on facilitation skills. PAPD is a first step in a dynamic process; there are no immediate solutions. A continuous process of action and reflection is needed to further develop a community action plan as livelihoods and the natural resources base changes. For this a local institution that will carry forward the activities through a process of action and reflection is needed.

Section 3
Information needed for institution building

Why information is needed for institution building?

People have been using floodplain resources for many years under some local institutional arrangement, whether it be formal or informal, or a combination of the two. These arrangements, whether good or bad, have strong footing in the local community. Any resource management initiative new to an area must thus Formation of local institution needs different information to be raised in front of the stakeholders and elaborately discussed. This will help them to what their institutions it should be (extent, scope and functions) and how they could be strengthened so as to play a leading role, functioning as a sustainable local Resource Management Institutions (RMIs). Some basic information needed is mentioned below.

Information on user communities:

1. Who are the primary users?
2. What are villages they live in?
3. Who among them are entirely or largely dependent on the floodplain resources and where do they live?
4. What is the existing power structure among the user societies?
5. What are the conflicting issues among the communities?

Information on resource systems:

1. What will be the physical and political boundary of the floodplain?
2. What are the resources harvested, what are the agricultural practices?
3. What is the present situation of the resources?
4. What are the major problems/issues concerning the sustainable use of the resources?

Structure of the Institution:

1. Who will be included in the institution and how? Who will not and why?
2. Who will be in the executive committee? What will be size of the EC?
3. What will be the mandate and functions of the institution?
4. Is there any need for an advisory committee? If yes, who will participate?
5. Would the institution be registered with a government authority?

Other Information needed:

1. Who are the NGOs/CBOs working in the area?
2. Which are the government departments they normally provide assistance?

The facilitators need to keep notes on all these, along with other area-specific questions and should proceed accordingly. Answer to most of these questions will come out in the process of PAPD, reconnaissance social surveys, household census, baseline etc., or through formal and informal discussion with resource users. If there exist a well-accepted and suitable CBO within the community, activities may start based on this, remodeling it as per community need. Otherwise the participants may decide to form an institution, as per their need and expectation, which may better suit the local context.

Section 4

Building on existing institutional set-up

Building on existing institutional set-up

Through interactions with the local people, the facilitator will come to know about the existence of any formal or informal CBOs within the community. These institutions may be a samity, professional group, water resource management group, farmers' field school, Mosque or Mandir committee (important in a single religion community) etc. If a suitable and well-accepted CBO is present within the community whose members are willing to undertake resource management activities, it may not be require to form another CBO. It has been experienced that there are many organizations working in rural areas that are forming separate formal or informal institutions, and there are local institutions too; many people are member of 2/3 such institutions at a time. In this situation peoples transaction costs become higher; considering this developing an existing institution is thought to be better. Review of the organizations is more important, as this can reveal the eligibility and willingness of the CBOs, as well as identify areas for improvement. During the organizational review process of the existing CBOs with local people, in formal and informal sessions, the facilitator should find out their organizational validity and review the following:

1. mandate/objective
2. structure
3. representation
4. transparency
5. acceptability within the community.
6. most importantly, whether the existing members are willing to under take changes and new responsibilities.

Based on the information collected, if a suitable CBO is found within the community, the next step would be to restructure the CBO in cooperation with existing members and the community. The objectives will be the same and process will also be more or less similar to that of forming a new CBO. It is expected that reformation of an exiting committee may reduce transaction costs as opposed to forming a new CBO. Community representatives will restructure the CBO into a RMI, based on information collected (Section 3) and their expectations (Section 5). These might require:

     a. adopting a new mandate;
     b. change in membership;
     c. change in organizational structure;
     d. change in organizational norms and values;
     e. change in activities to perform and sustain etc.

Section 5

Forming local institutions

The Institution Formation Process

Based on the collected information the facilitators will start the formation process of the resource management institutions. For this purpose discussion and sharing meetings need to be organized at different levels for all different social and occupational groups, including women. Individual contacts, *Uthan baithaks* (courtyard meetings), *Para* (part of a village) and village level meetings will be required to conduct on the issue.

Experiences suggest that the formation of such community based institution starts from selecting village level representatives. In a formal meeting, resource users will discuss the need for conservation and better management of their resources and the need to form an institution to do this. To this end it is important that all stakeholders relevant to the resource system should be present at the meeting and get an opportunity to share their views and contribute in deciding the RMI formation processes.

During the first stage of the RMI formation process, in the village meetings, the villagers will select their representatives for the RMI based on different criteria they feel appropriate for running the institutions, as well as managing their resources effectively. These village level representatives will form the general body (GB) of the Resource Management Institution. The village census or well-being ranking data will be useful for the facilitator; in ensuring that people from all social and occupation hierarchies are present and have representatives in the RMI general body.

Considering their knowledge, skills and interest, the representatives will decide among themselves who will be given what responsibilities in managing their local institution, keeping in mind sustainable and equitable management of their natural resources. The role of the facilitators here will be to assist them to give shape to their institution through identifying and deciding the right persons for each of the office bearer positions. This office bearers committee is usually termed as the 'Executive Committee' (EC) of the RMI.

The EC is vested with all responsibilities from their representative members (GB and villagers) to decide upon and carry forward the day-to-day activities of the RMI as per constitution, and by principles defined and agreed by the RMI members.
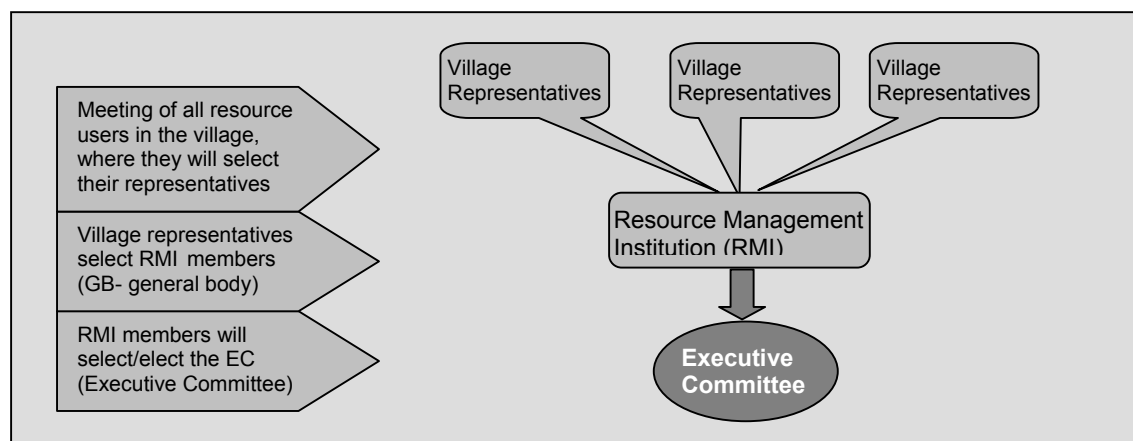

Figure 2: RMI formation process

Section 6

Local institutional structure

What will be the local institutional structure

For smoother running of the RMI and better implementation of their activities an institutional structure should be in place (Figure 3). This illustrates the relationship with the secondary stakeholders, who will be instrumental in determining the access rights and providing institutional and technical assistance, and includes local government, local administration, technical departments and agencies (UP, Upazila, DoF, DAE, BADC, other NGO etc.). A central body of RMIs, may be regional body will also be important.
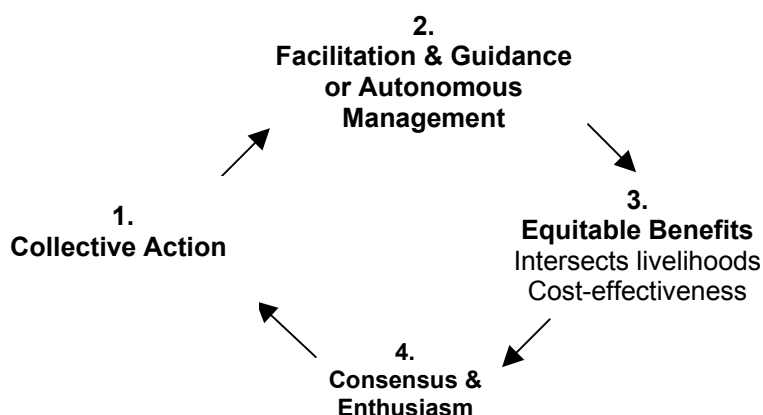
Figure 3: Local Institutional Structures for Wetland NRs Management
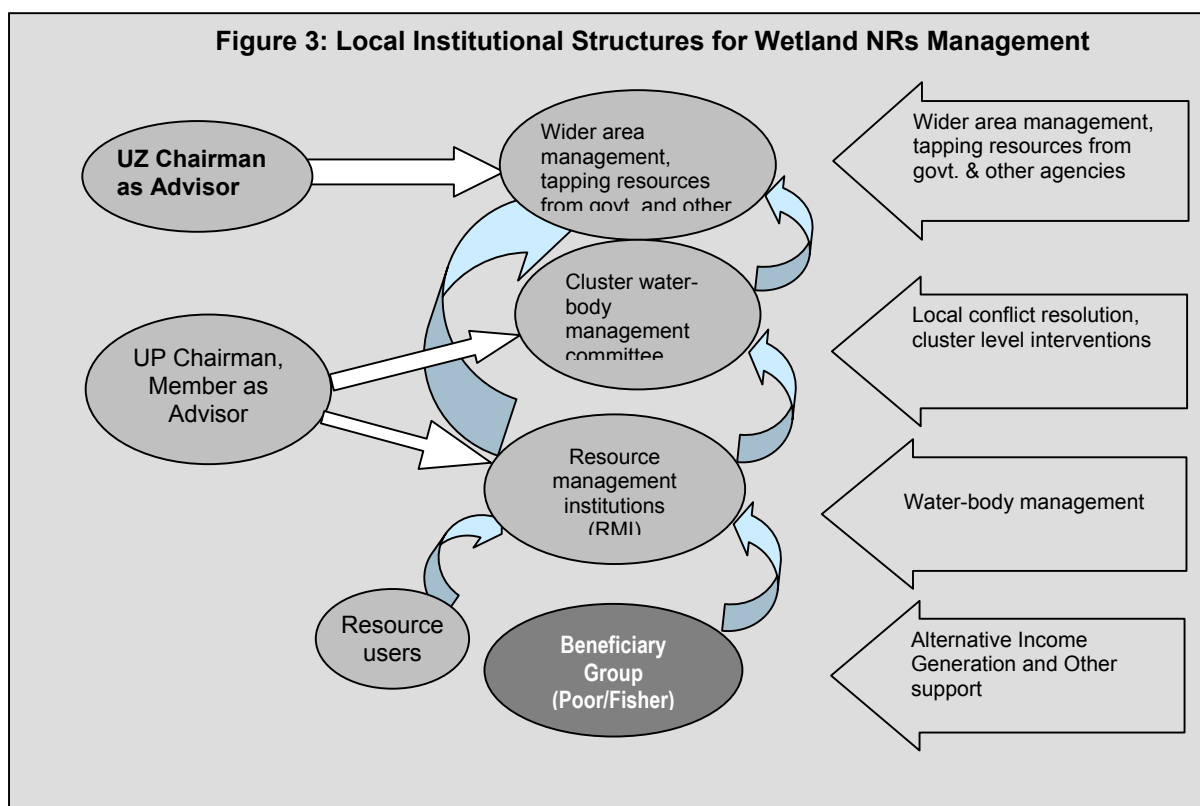
Section 7
Indicators for assessing institutions

What are the indicators to assess institutions

To assess the viability and success of local-level institutions, a framework of indicators is needed. In order to make the framework more relevant, it is first necessary to define the context within which the institution is to be judged. There are four assumptions on which the sustainability and institutionalisation of resource management institutions (RMIs) are built (Figure 4).

Figure 4: An idealistic cycle of inclusive and pro-poor IFM

2.
Facilitation & Guidance
or Autonomous
Management

3.
Equitable Benefits
Intersects livelihoods
Cost-effectiveness

1.
Collective Action

4.
Consensus &
Enthusiasm

Stage 1: Collective support is key to both the initial uptake, and long-term sustainability of any institution. Adherence to the rules and ideas set forth by the institution is essential, whilst participation creates a sense of ownership, and thus a personal stake in the outcome of the intervention, increasing the likelihood of success.

Stage 2: The implementation of the intervention can take place either autonomously, or with the assistance of an external body, depending on the nature of the intervention.

Stage 3: The distribution of benefits is a crucial aspect of the design of an intervention. Well-distributed benefits, intersecting a wide range of stakeholders, can be key to the success and sustainability of an intervention. Where community groups distribute benefits, the participation of a range of stakeholders can ensure outcomes that are more equitable. Ideally, the benefits reaped by each member would outweigh the opportunity cost of participating.

Stage 4: Community consensus and enthusiasm, built through the perception and belief that an intervention is beneficial to a range of stakeholders, creates collective support, ensuring the sustainability of an intervention.

In order to assess the impact of IFM, and to improve sustainability of aquatic resources, a number of criteria, activities and methods are needed by which an RMI can be held accountable to the community in which they work. It would be useful to standardise and internalise such monitoring activities, for their sustainability beyond the life of the project, so that stakeholders have a forum in which to air any grievances with the RMI, and to allow meaningful comparison between different IFM project sites. There are a number of criteria

and methods by which field-level institutions can be internally monitored and assessed, general to all projects, not just IFM. Some criteria for successful integrated floodplain management institutions, as identified by primary stakeholders (committee members, and lead stakeholder groups), are given below (Table):

Table: Indicator and sub-indicators for assessing a RMI

Indicators	Sub indicators
Represents the poor	✓ Community wide and pro-poor ✓ Capacity-building for members ✓ Traditional (full-time) fishers in the RMI
Decisions / transparency	✓ Participatory and consensual decisions are made (all members can raise their concerns and issues); ✓ Local rules for IFM; ✓ Meeting resolutions properly written, maintained and duly followed up; ✓ Committees' financial process and activities are transparent and it is accountable to the members; ✓ Adaptability (re decisions, rules, agreements and leadership); ✓ Adaptability to risk; environment, fees.
Leadership	✓ Honest unbiased, non-political and just in decision-making; ✓ Interested, enthusiastic, educated and of respected quality.
Constitution / status	✓ RMI registered; ✓ Fund available for RMI; ✓ Specific responsibilities for each RMI member; ✓ Agreed constitution of RMI; ✓ Flexible rules; ✓ Structured RMI (re-selection members possible); ✓ Set criteria for membership; ✓ Local government-NGO coordination; ✓ Local support from government / NGO; ✓ RMI leases water bodies.
Regular meeting/decision	✓ Regular/timely meeting; ✓ A fixed place for meeting; ✓ Early decisions (plan ahead).

Based on their learning and experiences, the members identify organisational development, such as registration and fund raising for the RMIs, followed by governance – the decision making and election process those the RMI follow, and whether the executive body is transparent and accountable, adaptable and able to create consensus among the general members and wider community. Other key criteria for success, according to the RMI members and local community are that: the leaders are honest, interested, and unbiased; meetings are held regularly; and all stakeholders / interest groups are included.

However, to move to a framework through which field-level institutions can be internally monitored and assessed, it is preferable to develop monitoring tools based on objectively verifiable indicators.

Section 8

Tools for verifying institutions

What are the tools for verification

Focus group discussions (FGDs): FGDs are a common tool for assessing stakeholder attitudes, issues, and intentions relating to a project intervention. Small groups (usually less than 20 people) meet and discuss any project related matters with NGO staff, who can then facilitate and advise as necessary. The interactive, dynamic nature of FGDs makes them an invaluable tool, used widely in GO/NGO projects.

Process diary: A new tool, applied under IFM with some success, is a process diary. Stakeholders are encouraged to keep a diary of events and changes that have taken place over the course of a project intervention, any problem encountered, and how they were solved. Participants were also encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings on the project. Through this, the real change in people's attitudes can be assessed directly, as can thoughts on the project that may not be voiced in other forums, such as focus group discussions.

Report card: One tool that is of particular use when the criteria for judgement are not verifiable is report cards, to assess how members of the community perceive a given intervention. These have been developed, in various forms, under a number of projects.

These tools are used in conjunction with field visits and observations to develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and progress of a project. Potential pitfalls, such as disagreements between stakeholder groups, can be identified early and thus mitigated through mutual discussion (facilitated by project staff) before they threaten the success of the project. In addition, it has been the experience that if the opinions of stakeholders are actively sought and valued, participants feels a greater sense of ownership over the project, thus increasing sustainability. Here regular monitoring with certain intervals is important to capture the significant changes.

What will be the phasing out process

Phasing out of project is another critical but important area. It is expected that the RMIs will continue their efforts towards pro-poor sustainable natural resource management for a long time, but the projects will end after a certain period. That is why the phasing out process should inbuilt in the project from the beginning. The aim here will be to make an RMI self-sustaining within the project period. The following things should be achieved within project period:

1. Introduction and establishment of a democratic system within the RMI. So that the change of office barriers and decision-making process is regular, unbiased, not influenced by any body.
2. A practice of transparency and accountability is established.
3. Poor members right is established needs are met.
4. Trust worthy linkage with important lined agencies and NGOs established.
5. RMI fund and office. The RMI can develop their fund through fees or other agreed means or project can provide, may be an endowment fund. The project can also help them to build an office provided a land is managed by the RMI.

Section 9

Reference and further reading

Reference and further reading

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