

# Project Overview and Findings

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## R8103: FTR - Annex A

Project R8103

***Consensus for a Holistic Approach to improve Rural-livelihoods in  
Riverine-islands of Bangladesh (CHAR)***

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### Acronyms and Local Terms

ADC	Additional District Commissioner
<i>beel</i>	A shallow lake-like waterbody that may be seasonal or permanent.
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (large NGO)
CARE	Co-operative for American Relief Everywhere (large NGO)
CBOs	Community Based Organisation
<i>char</i>	<i>Riverine sand islands</i>
<i>charlands</i>	<i>Char areas, especially of North East Bangladesh</i>
<i>choura</i>	<i>Spontaneous civil uprising</i>
CLASP	Charlands Livelihoods Project of DFID
CMS	Community Monitoring System (participatory monitoring within this project)
CPR	Common Property Resources
DFID	Department for International Development (UK development agency)
E C	European Commission
GO	Government Organisation
<i>gusthi</i>	A clan group
<i>jalmohal</i>	A discrete waterbody, registered by MoL for the purposes of leasing and rent generation
<i>jotedars</i>	Richer peasants
<i>kabiraj</i>	Traditional healer
<i>khas</i>	Government owned land
<i>masjid</i>	Mosque committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PAPD	Participatory Action Planning for Development (a consensus-building methodology)
PME	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
PTD	Participatory Technology Development (a key approach of ITDG)
RCE	The ITDG Rural Community Extensionist – trained to deliver specific types of or services on behalf of wider community
RMO	Resource Management Organisation (a generic term for local institutions managing NRs)
<i>salish</i>	A locally-legitimate, informal judicial system for the resolution of minor disputes
<i>samaj</i>	An informal but pervasive local institution – a type of “brotherhood” that exerts power and influence by emphasising social and religious duty
STEPS	Social Technical Economic Political Sustainability – planning exercise
UACC	Upazila Agricultural Coordination Committee
UNO	The Upazilla Nirbahi Officer, selected from the Union Parishad Chairmen and.
UP	The Union Parishad, the lowest tier of government, consisting of twelve elected members
Upazila	The lowest <i>bureaucratic</i> tier of government – previously termed Thana
WBMC	Waterbody Management Committee (group elected to manage jalmohal stocking in this project)

### Introduction

A previous NRSP project, R7562 (*Consensus building in CPRs*), designed and tested a consensus building method (Participatory Action Plan Development - PAPD) for use in the integrated improvement of floodplain management. This project tested this method in a new floodplain location (i.e. riverine sand islands or *Chars*). Through sustained engagement with local authorities and poor people, the project worked to build and embed a model in which the consensus building instrument can bring poor people into local decision-making processes over the allocation and management of the natural resources on which they depend.

### Development and science objectives

This project adapted the PAPD method to the situation of char communities. It evaluated whether participatory action plans can receive the active support of local elites and marginalized people, the form of institution needed to oversee the implementation of action plans, and, whether char development agencies will respond to this institutionalized demand with the provision of services and/or resources. The research sought answers to several questions. What adaptations, if any, need to be made to the way in which the PAPD method is developed? This question was addressed in Output 1 of the project: **PAPD adapted and promoted in two sandbar sites**. Do processes for technology-related changes in resource management provide an opportunity for building co-operation within and between interest groups towards PAPD? This question was addressed in Output 2 of the Project: **Six technical solutions adapted and promoted**. What methods can best be used for monitoring these processes? This was considered under Output 3, **Participatory M and E established and practiced**. Are marginalised communities able to internalise and sustain the PAPD process? This is considered under Output 4 **Increased human and social capacity to increase representation**. What are the prospects for policy level adoption of PAPD? This is looked at under Output 5 of the project: **Policy stakeholders using consensus-building methodologies in charland development**.

### Addressing the DFID meta purpose - Poverty Eradication

*Poverty alleviation is about reducing the incidence of poverty via individual processes of graduation and successful incorporation into existing social arrangements and patterns of distribution. Poverty eradication relies upon the principle of structural change, and is about the cohorts of the poor confronting power and inequality.* (Wood, 2003, 462)

In pursuit of DFID poverty reduction goals through the NRSP programme, the above observation seems best to describe the change in focus and approach being promoted by this research project. ITDG Bangladesh, the implementing partner, has embarked on a process of graduating from “poverty alleviation” to “poverty eradication” and researching the potential of PAPD to bring forward groups of poor people to challenge institutionalised injustice has been an important contribution to the process. The research was focussed on identifying pathways for the institutional embedding of Participatory Action Plan Development. A concern of ITDG Bangladesh in food security projects has been to change extension practices from being “expert driven” to becoming “farmer driven”. The case of PAPD is potentially no different, with NGOs in Bangladesh often taking as much of a “top-down” approach to

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programming as government. The search was therefore undertaken to find ways to maximise the opportunities for leadership of the PAPD process to emerge from local institutions and from within communities.

PAPD, which is designed to include poor and marginalized social groups in community-level dialogue and negotiation has key potential advantages over explicitly rights-based approaches to tackling institutional injustices in the Bangladesh context. The PAPD does not present any immediate challenge to influential resource holders, given the existing state of power relations within communities, and is thus more attuned to the real situation of the poor than confrontational options. It can be put into operation within the patron-client situation described by Wood (2003, 455) in which “poor men and women are dominated by dysfunctional time preference behaviour in which the pursuit of immediately needed security places them in relationships and structures which then displace the longer term prospects of a sustained improvement in their livelihoods”. Potentially, PAPD can gradually open a pathway to social action for poor groups embroiled in patron-client relations.

The following two examples show the difficulties of direct and unmediated challenges to local elites in Bangladesh. BRAC was forced to withdraw a series of posters after failing to engage in dialogue prior to its campaign. As part of a human rights education campaign, BRAC fixed 700, 000 posters on the theme of women’s rights throughout Bangladesh. This met with opposition from religious organisations. The opposition was found to be in response to interpretations of the posters based on the Koran and Islamic practices, and a perceived intrusion into the professional territory of religious organisations, which affected the socio-economic interests of these organisations’ representatives (Rafi and Chowdhury, 2000)

Secondly there have been long running attempts to fight for the land rights through court battles, whose toll on the poor themselves has been very high:

*For more than three decades, the ownership status of the land in Beel Kuralia has been disputed: in 1956 the government acquired the land, but this ownership was challenged by the jotedars (rich peasants). Subsequently, many contradictory rulings from different government quarters have been issued; and fighting over the land has caused a lot of hardship, not least to the poor fishermen and farmers in the area. A lot of law suits have been filed., the landless have spent about Tk. 150000 on court cases and other expenses for the movement. Besides, the landless have been in and out of jail for years. (Westergaard and Hossein, 1999, 93)*

The project therefore introduced the PAPD within a framework of institutional and social risk assessment. We suggested a strong correlation between the level of conflict generated by an issue and the investment of time and effort required to build a new consensus around it. Issues that are the source of deeply entrenched grievances between social groups are referred to as High Risk issues. Any rush by outside facilitators to raise challenges around High Risk issues might lead to a violent backlash against the poor, or the breakdown of relations with patrons which are vital to their security. With High Risk also follows the potential for high pro-poor returns. If the PAPD can be applied successfully to create new pathways for dealing with entrenched conflicts, its likelihood of becoming an embedded practice of local governance is greatly enhanced. At the other end of the spectrum are Low Risk issues for which there is a latent consensus for action, with the PAPD process generating the necessary momentum to deal with this. Low Risk interventions are necessary to build the confidence within the poorer socio-economic groups - this is

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where ITDG's experience in a range of simple food production technologies underpins and creates a positive context for consensus building work on more entrenched issues. Nevertheless continually dealing with Low Risk issues will not produce any shifts in the perceptions or behaviour of the local power holders. Any Medium/High risk PAPD workshop should instead be seen as the tip of an iceberg building upon underlying, Low Risk processes of confidence building and group formation within the community.

### Particular challenges and opportunities presented by Charlands.

- *Char population:* An estimated 7 million people live on the chars and associated flood and famine-prone areas, that is approximately 5% of the Bangladeshi population.
- *Physical volatility of char-land:* Unlike in the mainland, land in char areas is physically volatile. It is subject to continuous erosion and flood. These natural hazards shape the way of life of the *chouras* and have a profound effect on defining and securing ownership and user rights.
- *Difference between chars in northern and southern regions:* Although chars are subject to regular erosion and flooding, chars located in the northern region of the country are less fertile, along with lower density of population and a lower incidence of conflicts and violence compared to chars of the southern region.
- *Poor communication:* In general, road communication does not exist between charland and mainland, causing major constraints to the movement of people and goods. Although most char villages can be reached within three hours from the nearest district town, the chars are perceived to be cut off and remote and socially alien by the majority of Bangladeshis. Within the constraints of a \$300 per capita economy, provision of government services tends to be exhausted long before reaching the chars.
- *Distance from 'formal government':* Although government departments are present at upazila level and the UP operates at Union level, UP and government officials hardly ever come to char areas on a visit. Char people have difficulty in accessing essential services of health and education. The absence of banks or government credit systems, and the weak services offered by government agriculture, livestock, fishery and forestry departments make little assistance available to enhance the people's income or to help protect their assets.
- *Poor coverage of NGOs:* National NGOs have little presence in charlands and are only very recently showing an interest in such areas in response to the announcement a major DFID programme for the northern char areas. NGOs have limited commitment to the more vulnerable chars due to the difficulties and risks of working there.
- *Lack of access to health and education:* Char areas are deprived of education and health services. In most places, diseases associated with the normal monsoon cycle are reported to be a greater cause of death than floods. The level of literacy is extremely poor and lags far behind the national average.
- *Very low income levels:* More than 80% of char dwellers earn less than one dollar per day. Out migration is very high and over 60% of households are female

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headed for most of the year. In villages surveyed by ITDG, it was found that the majority of households survive on 10-15 cents per day. In other words they are below the international poverty line by a factor of ten.

- *Seasonal Flooding.* A feature of chars is that they may be submerged for over two months of the year. Accumulation of physical assets in these circumstances is extremely difficult.

### Key Findings Summary

- ⇒ Livelihoods constraints in the chars largely relate to political and institutional isolation.
- ⇒ Service providers can ameliorate problems associated with environmental setting and factors related to production.
- ⇒ Catalytic opportunities around agricultural technologies are relevant for releasing energies among the poor for participatory planning
- ⇒ To bring about the essential “livelihood boost” which releases the energies of marginalised communities for planning, a dedicated public resource for NGO capacity building and programme outreach is required
- ⇒ The purpose of PAPD in the charland context should be to form links with external institutions in order to release future support and collaboration.
- ⇒ Local authorities were found to be passive in the planning phase of PAPD
- ⇒ Once the time and costs of local planning had been invested by communities and by ITDG as the facilitator, local officials from Union Parishad and Upazila authorities stepped in to assist implementation using their formal and informal political ties and influence.
- ⇒ Prior knowledge or reconnaissance and institutional mapping is required to uncover receptive individuals at critical points in the institutional system.
- ⇒ Local informal institutions (the *gusthi*, the *samaj* etc.) strongly influence levels of participation, consensus and PAPD success in char villages.
- ⇒ PAPD methodology less suitable for very new/young char settlements where insufficient trust exists between *gushti* groups to sustain a village level plan.

### Key Findings from Output One: PAPD adapted and promoted in two sandbar sites

In 2001, two villages were selected for testing of PAPD. Various criteria were involved in their selection. Firstly Jamalpur, the selected district, was within the five districts selected by DFID and was considered strategic in terms of potential influence on its bilateral charlands programme, DFID CLASP which was under development at the time. Secondly the programme manager for the ITDG Food Production programme, Mohammad Ali is a highly respected member of the community in Sarishabari, Jamalpur, so a conscious decision was taken to select

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chars in the vicinity of Sarishabari. Since this was the first intervention by ITDG in Jamalpur, the presence of a known and trusted individual to secure the support of influential leaders was considered vital to give the PAPD research space and time to bear fruit. Then two villages were selected at different ends of the spectrum in terms of settlement maturity, in order to be able to compare the impact of PAPD in two different sub-contexts within the charlands. The initial hypothesis of the project research team was that the younger and more isolated char context would be more propitious for rapid progress in reaching consensus for action planning. Firstly, the community would be more homogeneous in terms of dependence on crop based agriculture, therefore reducing the likelihood of clashes between livelihood groups over natural resources at different points during the seasonal cycle. Secondly, the inherent hardships and pioneering spirit of new settlement might endure to produce more intense solidarities and interdependencies. It was felt that the mature attached char was more socially complex and riven by decades of conflict over access to and management of the water bodies which are left behind by dead river channels, making progress on consensus building much more painstaking.

### *Nadagari village*

Established in 1992, the village is roughly 7-8 kilometres from the Madarganj upazila town which is 32 kilometres from Jamalpur district town. There is no road in the village. During the dry season, most people walk 7-8 kilometres to reach Madarganj town, often travelling on uneven surfaces and make-shift roads and have to wade across ankle-deep water in two or three places. Before reaching Madarganj town, people have to cross a tributary of the Jamuna river by ferry boat or wade through the water when it is knee-deep. Estimated area of the village is about 16 square kilometres with a population of approximately 8,800 people (1960 households). About 50% of the population are female. Since the village is an isolated char that emerged from the river-bed approximately 30 years back, there is hardly any resource other than land which is mostly sandy and not fertile. Catkin grass is commonly found in most places and banana plantation is also quite common in many households. Rice, millet, chilli, potato and groundnuts are the most widely grown crops. Lack of resources and dependence of the population on agriculture have limited the number of professional groups. Most people are engaged in agriculture either as share-croppers or agricultural labourers with some owner farmers and there is a moderate number of migrant workers in the village. The village has no market and earlier there were attempts to set up one without success. There is one primary school in the village. Most people are illiterate. There is no doctor, no medical shop or dispensary. People for minor illness depend on village doctor or Kabiraj (traditional healer).

### *Nandina Village*

Nandina or Char Nandina, is a medium-sized village 15 kilometres from the Sarishabari town. It is classified as an attached char because it is adjacent to the riverbank away from the active river channel and is separated from the mainland only by a seasonal channel. The char has been in existence for more than fifty years and although the land is stable, the village is not easily accessible. One has to walk 3 kilometres from the village to reach the mainland from where it is connected to Sarishabari by a metal road. During the rainy season, the only available means of communication is by traditional or engine-propelled boat. It has a very small market that caters to a few needs of the people but for all purposes villagers frequently travel to the Shaymganj-Kalibari market 18 kilometres away. There is no electricity in the village. Tube-wells are few in number. Sanitary latrines are available in a few houses that belong to the elites of the village and the practice of open defecation is

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widespread. The population of the village is about 3500 comprising approximately 600 households (ITDG-B 2002). The number of people with sizeable landholdings is few and most are poor. The number of landless households is also large and almost the entire village population is dependent on agriculture or agriculture-related activities. Besides the predominance of agriculture, some people are also involved in petty trading and fishing. Because of landlessness and lack of non-farm activities, a large number of poor people regularly migrate to towns and cities for a living. There is one large and some small water-bodies (jalmahal) in the village that provide sustenance to a section of the people. However, conflicts over management and leasing arrangements have prevented full exploitation of their potential.

### **PAPD as originally developed and tested in Project R7562 (1997-2001)**

PAPD was intended as a tool to build local consensus by uncovering co-dependencies and developing greater understanding between stakeholders. It was also meant to highlight opportunities to facilitators and options for future management, especially in a project context. Technically, PAPD draws on several existing methodologies (stakeholder analysis, problem census and business approaches to dispute resolution, for instance), but the overall theme is to stress that problem-solving may result in unexpected solutions and outcomes. This is, in part, because the problems themselves are not pre-determined by the facilitator but are the output of joint-discussion.

The aim of PAPD in the project context is to develop agreement and collective action on future management strategies which address the needs of all groups and their interests. There are three phases:

- a scoping phase which attempts to uncover local institutional issues and identify key participants through stakeholder analysis
- a participatory planning phase which comprises the workshop proper and uncovers key issues and potential solutions
- and finally, an implementation phase in which agreements are converted into action through appropriate management and institutional design.

Stakeholder analysis deconstructs the “community” and acknowledges that distinct groups exist with differing (but over-lapping) livelihood concerns and interests. The aim is to represent the diversity of these interests within the workshops and normally this follows some form of local reconnaissance where key informants provide context on the types of livelihood activities and related issues.

#### **Stage 1** Stakeholder analysis, problems census, prioritising & filtering

The initial stage of the PAPD workshop centres on a problem census held with each stakeholder group in isolation. The participants list and rank problems that impact their livelihoods together with tentative solutions and these are filtered into natural resource management (NRM) and non-NRM issues by facilitators.

#### **Stage 2** Individual/joint discussion of problems/solutions including STEPS

Feedback from each group is then presented back to all stakeholders before potential solutions are worked through in more detail. A key activity at this stage is STEPS analysis which examines social, technical, environmental, political and sustainability issues for each proposal.



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### **Stage 3** Public plenary to state agreed solution & seek external commitment

Finally, the findings of each group are presented and discussed publicly with all stakeholders and agreement is reached on the way forward. Ideally, this culminates in the setting up of an implementation committee which has the responsibility to take proposals forward, make links with relevant local institutions and secure financial support for local activities. This process of consolidation is crucial to ensure that discussion is converted to action. By inviting secondary stakeholders, such as Union Parishad officials and Upazilla fishery or agriculture staff to the group discussions, it is hoped that this process is encouraged.

The entire process is intended to be carried out across 5-8 days and to be facilitated by several skilled staff. PAPD has been applied at numerous sites within several large NRM projects in Bangladesh, including the DFID-supported Community-Based Fisheries Management Project (CBFM-2). In this context, PAPD provides a systematic methodology to attract community support and to quickly identify unifying interventions. PAPD represents an entry point to longer-term resource use negotiation, committee formation and local management. However, because PAPD is applied in the project context, implemented activities are intended to fit overall project themes and objectives – normally the sustainable management of fisheries resources through community-level management committees.

### **Proposed Methodology for PAPD implementation in charlands**

The specific challenges of adapting PAPD to charlands livelihoods relate to the fact that the key NR conflicts are, at root, entrenched class conflicts over access to accreting sandbanks (*khas* land and *jalmahal* (water bodies), between the poor and the influential class. These *jalmahals* are potentially common property but are *de facto* private property resources. The influential classes exercise power through informal channels to capture these resources, making asset accumulation by the poor almost impossible. Land grabbing particularly affects isolated chars, whereas the *jalmahal* conflict is more typical of chars which are attached to the mainland.

In the *jalmahals*, the fishermen normally have to pay a *two-thirds* portion of their catch during peak period and one third in the lean period to a wealthy leaseholder group which has managed, through informal channels, to interpose itself between the fishermen and the government. The fishermen themselves are too poor to compete for this lease. Control of the lease is extremely contested and is currently under litigation. How was PAPD to be adapted to deal with such entrenched practices? This was the question first put forward by ITDG as it moved towards deploying its intervention.

**Preparatory Phase.** The first phase involved a scoping study to assess the specific context of conflict and co-operation in charland communities. On the basis of this problem census the preparatory work with poor stakeholders is initiated. The length of this preparatory phase is conditioned by the time that it takes to identify opportunities for consensus building and the need to ensure that different stakeholder groups are equally mobilised and prepared for the process. Preparatory phase activities may need to include greater emphasis on the mobilisation of interest groups, raising the capacity of certain groups, and ensuring good channels of communication between potential PAPD representatives and the stakeholder group they will be representing.

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**PAPD Phase.** The key variables here are the nature of the entry point and the associated timeframe. Low Risk consensus building activities were deliberately targeted by the project and commenced in early 2003 with the training and deployment of rural community extensionists. Consensus building was almost immediately required on small emerging issues, e.g. women being permitted to own breeding bucks, which previously carried a mild social prohibition. The project plan involved a progressive move from such micro-planning processes towards more complex issues for which a PAPD process might be deployed. The research team began to refer to small-scale, production oriented consensus building as “Micro PAPD” for short, even though none of the main toolkit of PAPD actually needed to be deployed. A PAPD process involving the organisation of stakeholder group workshops and plenary sessions was referred to as a “Macro-PAPD”.

Emphasis was continually laid by senior project staff upon applying the PAPD tool to authentic processes emerging within the villages. Field staff were enjoined to “blend in” and “get close to the pulse of community life”, enabling the PAPD to be brought to bear seamlessly on real issues in real time. In discussions held between October 2002 and January 2003, UK ITDG staff maintained a strong argument to the effect that it might not be possible to deploy PAPD at all, during the lifetime of the project, as it might not prove to be relevant or suitable to conditions in the study villages. To the Bangladesh field team, a process where “success” is measured in terms of the rigour of the findings rather than the developmental gains was almost incomprehensible. It was also problematic in terms of Bangladesh NGO regulations that measure performance only in terms of the value of goods and services delivered. This proved to be a long running source of misunderstanding within the research team as the communications between UK, Dhaka and the Jamalpur field office were marked by conceptual confusion and debate. Recommendations for field activities emanating from the UK such as “be flexible” or “follow your nose” had a counterproductive effect. This was eventually resolved by the introduction of more prescriptive monitoring instruments from September 2003 onwards, which have provided the main evidence base for the FTR (Annex B i and B iii).

### **The PAPD process adopted in the charland context.**

As expected, key constraints to establishing consensus and the capacity for community-level planning were social ones. Government and NGO presence in the chars is extremely weak and the communities themselves are often recently displaced and fractured. The project strategy was to introduce the greater project objective (consensus and planning) over an extended period the team called the “familiarity phase”. Technical support and facilitation with external service providers through the PTD were deliberately intended to build the level of trust and discussion and interaction between the various stakeholders before moving on to larger, more cross-cutting planning through PAPD.

In summary, the process was extended considerably from a workshop-based set of exercises to an eighteen-month process of interaction, discussion and facilitation on behalf of the communities. The following sequence is summarised in the Figure below.

#### **Stage 1** Familiarity phase (experimental PAPD), issue identification

The initial stage of the PTD/PAPD approach was to introduce concepts of community-planning and consensus and to learn of key livelihoods constraints in mixed group meetings. The broad concept of PAPD was introduced – what the team

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termed “experimental PAPD”. During this stage larger, more “difficult”, issues and problems are highlighted and potential solutions discussed. The process extended over a period of about 9 days. During this phase, the original PAPD can be re-evaluated. In the char context, for instance, *gusthi* (kinship) groupings appeared as significant as livelihoods or resource-user groups normally established with the facilitator.

### **Stage 2** Information gathering and sharing, group formation, 1<sup>st</sup> plenary

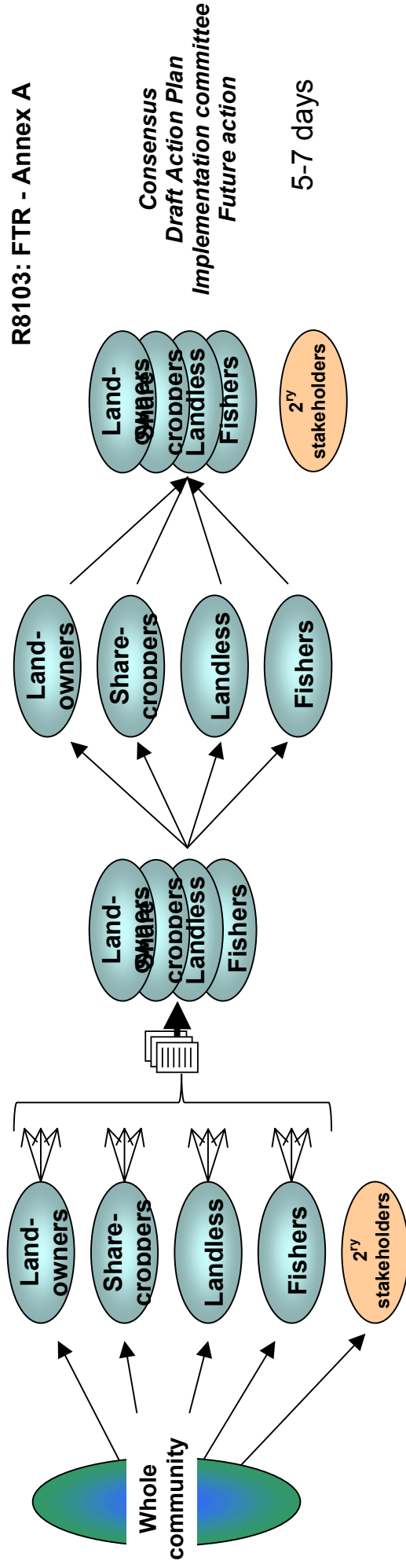
An information gathering process was established around a specific, unifying and cross-cutting prospective intervention. Researching and reporting responsibilities are delegated to community-identified representatives. A facilitator creates links with the relevant secondary stakeholders, local government institutions such as the Land Office, Union and Upazilla level agriculture and fisheries agencies.

The wider community is formally and informally updated of prospects and technical requirements for progressing by the facilitator and the community researchers before a formal, open group meeting is held to discuss planning. The community develop several (in the project’s case, seven) distinct groups in order to represent multiple interests and delegate responsibilities. These groups are supported in their establishment but select their own representatives and allocate responsibilities with no interference. The groups’ stance to the intervention is discussed and potential problems/solutions identified before a plenary is held where the concerns and suggestions are presented and negotiated in public.

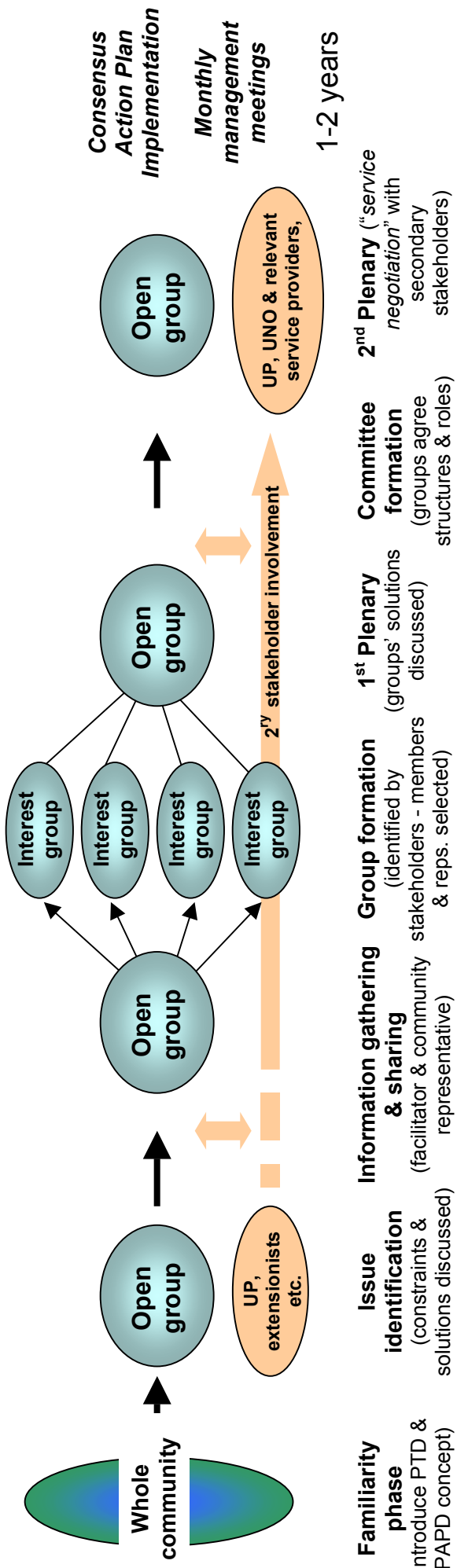
### **Stage 3** Committee formation, 2<sup>nd</sup> plenary, implementation

The committee formation process is a gradual one and occurs in parallel with the PTD activities in addition to the PAPD negotiations. By this stage, several community representatives will have experience of representing interest groups (PTD members) to ITDG and other external stakeholders. In this case, a Water Body Management Committee (WBMC) was formed with basic membership and denoted roles. This happened with little facilitation from ITDG and was modified by the community to be more representative of the poorest.

Roles and responsibilities are confirmed and agreed in a public plenary. Key to this stage is the “service negotiation” between the community and the secondary stakeholders invited to attend the meeting(s). The relevant sector-specific agencies are present and Union Parishad and Upazilla officials are encouraged to publicly acknowledge and support declarations. The intention is to reach agreement on the timing and logistics of implementation. Finally, the intervention is implemented (in this case, by releasing fingerlings in a public ceremony with Upazilla Fisheries and local government officials). The PAPD intervention is then modified and managed by interaction between the management committee and participants - the WBMC meets once every month.



The PAPD approach as developed in project R7562. The approach is workshop-based and may take between 5-8 days to conduct.



The PAPD approach modified for the char context. The facilitator can apply PTD to maintain enthusiasm, build trust and linkages with secondary stakeholders. This PAPD is process-based with regular formal / informal contact between community and facilitator over 12-24 months.

### Key PAPD modifications and their relevance

Some of the most interesting and potentially useful aspects of the team's use of PAPD relate to overall flexibility. The char-modified PAPD adopted to plan jalmohal management at Nandina recognised that local stakeholders have their own ways of negotiating new opportunities and their impacts in an off-stage setting – contrasting somewhat with the intensive workshop form of PAPD within the project-setting of the Community-Based Fisheries Management Project, for instance. In summary, the project findings/experience can develop the PAPD process in 4 particular areas;

#### 1. *Timing*

PAPD in some contexts is applied as rather an introductory, ice-breaking activity. As an action research project, with PAPD at the centre, the same constraints were not a factor here. The project team were allowed to develop personal relationships and trust with a client group suspicious of outsiders and unused to interacting with NGOs and development projects (especially in Nadagari).

PTD and micro-PAPD were intended to “*test the water*” and to slowly develop a local habit of interacting with service providers and political representatives. People became used to debating options and representing their own interests in a public setting. In the case of the macro-PAPD at Nandina, these skills and the knowledge collected during early planning were transferred to the wider-reaching issue of community jalmohal management.

From start to implementation, this macro-PAPD took about 18 months to achieve. The long timeframe was partly a function of the research team, themselves, learning and building up their own confidence, before tackling a major issue with powerful, external, interest groups.

Project experience suggests that momentum and confidence takes time to build in these isolated settings. Recently, the role of the *gusthi* groups in controlling or blocking change has been challenge by the cross-cutting CBO and popular support for challengers to membership of the committee.

#### **Address what is involved – skills resources, and what happens if time is not ripe**

#### 2. *The role of formal institutions (service providers and political representatives)*

PAPD in the R7562 project context draws in secondary stakeholders during the public plenary sessions in order to provide gravitas to the occasion and place some pressure on local political stakeholders for continued support.

In this project, however, the ITDG team and community felt the need to consolidate the planning process further *before* presenting detailed plans to these stakeholders. The team expressed their concern that these public meetings were used by political stakeholders to garner public support through hollow pronouncements unrelated to community plans and the project.

The land and jalmohal aspects of charlands planning have required interaction with political and administrative bodies up to District level. The Assistant District Commissioner was found to be responsive to and supportive of community planning within the project and his support opened up opportunities to influence the Land

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Registry agencies further down the chain. The UNO at Upazila level was also found to be supportive and was active in engaging the UFO and Union-level representatives.

The role of the Union Parishad changed during the lifespan of the project. Pre-planning the UP was relatively passive and any public pronouncements were routine and support-seeking. However, once the planning stage proper had started and the scope and potential of the process became more obvious the Union role became more supportive and facilitatory. During the information-gathering phase of the jalmohal macro-PAPD, for instance, the Union Parishad actively created a bridge between ITDG and the community to the line department agencies, the Land Office, UNO and the District administration.

Finally, once the information-gathering and planning was complete, the Union-level administration became less significant. Links had been formed with the relevant service providers (DoF and DAE personnel at Upazilla level, for instance) and the Union Parishad stood to one side. The Union Parishad role had been strongest in the mid-planning period where the potential beneficiaries and necessary agencies were being identified.

In terms of technical service provision, the project forged relationships with under-utilised staff at Upazila level. Community plans created a demand for livestock vaccination, soil testing, crop demonstrations etc. where previously there had been none. Local residents then formed their own personal (and business or client) relations with these staff, suggesting an element of mutual gain and sustainability.

In summary, the Upazila government appears to be critical node for enabling local PAPD. The UNO can act as gatekeeper for channelling external funds or support from other political and service providing agencies. In addition, the District administration has proved crucial and supportive for land and jalmohal resolution. To some extent this may relate to the personalities encountered (an informal institutional aspect – see below) but it seems these administrative bodies would provide similar function in charlands planning elsewhere.

### 3. *The role of informal institutions (including elite and social factions)*

The project has taken a pragmatic stance towards the “problem” of entrenched power relations and strong, local vested interests. For instance, the elected community representative in Nandina was the son of the previous Union Parishad Chairman and in this regard, could be considered an elite member of the community. However, the political capital that this individual possessed enabled him to exert pressure and to influence political and service providing institutions in ways that newly formed CBOs would not have been able to on their own. Similarly, the MP that expressed his support for the project had personal links with a member of the ITDG team.

The social and demographic character of the chars vary but experience at the isolated char, Nadagari, suggests potential constraints to planning in more recently settled villages. Annex B-iv reviews in detail the role of the *gusthi* groups at the village and how they have obstructed decision-making within micro-PAPD processes. It is interesting that in both villages there seems to be an interest in incorporating informal and existing institutions into PAPD. To some extent a reliance on the *salish*, mosque and the *samaj* indicates a preference by some poor to work through established power networks and to entrust decision-making to their patrons. There are two main why the *status quo* may tacitly be permitted to represent the poor on

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their behalf; 1) the political and social power these institutions provide reduce the transaction costs required to ensure implementation of decisions and 2) it reduces the income-earning opportunities relinquished by the poor during their attendance at meetings.

It is widely acknowledged that elites and pre-existing power differentials can modify or destroy intended management structures and activities but there is also a growing recognition that it can be counterproductive to attempt to circumvent them completely -true consensus entails identifying win-win options than can benefit the interests of all. However, the balance between facilitating an evolving local process and of over involvement (or interference) that may be unrealistic outside the project context is a delicate one. The ITDG team, themselves, have identified the key role they played in re-framing committee representation towards the poor and deflecting pro-landowner interests, for instance. Without careful scrutiny and concerted effort by the team the process would have been co-opted by elite but these raises questions over institutionalising PAPD in other contexts and with other facilitators.

However, the differences between the processes and outcomes at the two villages suggest greater prior knowledge of the areas was required before PAPD was introduced. While some of this relates to geographic characters (distance from markets, flood risk etc.), the strongest influencers appear social and institutional. In turn, whether formal or informal, these can be ubiquitous or site-specific. Some form of social and institutional mapping should highlight those site-specific characters that provide opportunities or obstacles to consensual planning. Many of these would relate to the informal institutional setting of the site in question – personal allegiances within Union-level government relating to *gusthi* or party politics, the interests of the Union Chairman, the function of the mosque committee, the level of respect for *salish* and their local role, the identity and interests of other elite etc.

In villages like Nadargari where it is not possible to proceed to a village level PAPD process due to ongoing intra-community mistrust, developmental strides can nevertheless be made in consensus building in smaller sub groups based on common production interests; the examples from Nadargari are the production groups on livestock and new crops, supported by ITDG trained community extensionists. In the R8103, the PAPD was always conceived as the “tip of the iceberg” of a series of new processes of group formation and negotiation taking place within the village. Micro-level fisheries initiatives in seasonal ditches and ponds will require constant renegotiation and communities can continue to apply their experience and learning from the project as they strive towards greater village unity.

#### 4. *The meaning of “success”*

The role and function of PAPD depends on setting and objective. In strongly-facilitated projects with distinct NRM objectives, consensual community-level planning can be a useful mechanism to raise the level of awareness and support for more equitable or sustainable management and practice. In the case of the chars, social development and empowerment may be a more pressing requirement. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, these areas have little or no interaction with project-aligned agencies or NGOs. Work in this context cannot assume the future presence of these secondary stakeholders and must attempt to build lasting relationships with those institutions that *do* function and that *are* ubiquitous throughout rural Bangladesh – Union and Upazila level government bodies and staff, the *samaj*, the mosque and patron-client relations.

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A particularly pressing issue in the chars relates to security of access rights and tenure. Currently, allocation of private and khas land is controlled by a complex institutional melange representing the personal interests of privileged and political stakeholders and maintained by opaque process and deliberate obfuscation.

However, in the case of the canal and community house micro-PAPDs and the macro-PAPD on the *jalmohal*, the project has demonstrated that this institutional landscape can be navigated by local and poor stakeholders with the facilitation of an agency such as ITDG. The land and the *jalmohal* required for these community initiatives was secured through a lengthy process of interaction and repeat visits to the Land Office and District level bureaucrats. The message here is that property rights can be negotiated for and by the poor and that the poor can be introduced to the formal and informal institutional workings of secondary stakeholders.

At the village level, PAPD has attempted to build cooperation between existing social factions. The *gusthi* (kinship groups) at Nadagari represent an informal but resilient institution in its own right. Initially, differences between these groups represented a serious constraint to decision-making and agreement but towards the end of the project there were some signs that younger and more pro-active individuals were challenging these local barriers. This relates directly to the greater (social capital and institutional) goals of PAPD in development.

The issue here is how sustainable these impacts on social and institutional constraints actually are. This project has invested considerable effort forging links and relationships between poor charland residents and the political stakeholders and service providers that are meant to represent them. However, although ITDG acted as a catalyst, injecting a base level of energy and incentive into the system, local people were active in shaping the direction and form of dialogue that resulted from village to District level. Project diaries have captured the fact that many community delegations to secondary stakeholders evolved independently of ITDG coordination.

In summary, the purpose of PAPD in the charland context should be to form links with external institutions in order to release future support and collaboration. The livelihoods constraints in the chars largely relate to political and institutional isolation because and the project has shown that service providers can ameliorate problems associated with environmental setting and factors related to production.

### **Key findings from Output Two: Six technical solutions adapted and promoted.**

The basis of the ITDG approach to application of PAPD was a vision of the catalytic opportunities around agricultural technologies being relevant especially among the poor: The model posited a progression from NGO “comfort zone” technical interventions to more risky/difficult socio-political interventions. This progression in Bangladesh typically moves from micro-credit provision through technical options for agriculture and livestock improvement to exploration of market linkages, engagement with government institutions, identification and dialogue with local power elites and finally to issues of representation of the poor. It translates ITDG’s core message on the use of technology to reduce poverty into a more socially embedded proposition in the arena of locally relevant democratic processes and governance.



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In the char villages of Jamalpur district, ITDG Bangladesh worked with a district NGO, Unayan Sangha Jamalpur, to deliver a “livelihood boost” technological intervention as the main entry point for working with the poor. Training on new cropping patterns, livestock improvements and fisheries options were conducted by the ITDG team. Successes from these interventions were those within the immediate reach of individual households and their existing resource access limits. For instance winter vegetables in home gardens, maize-chilli intercropping in low fertility char soils, and livestock health initiatives. The immediacy of improved income and nutrition derived from such activities at the household level released new energies in the communities.

We argue that the harnessing of such energies is crucial to the launching of action planning with the full involvement of the poor. In the project experience this led to a remarkably immediate, political issue for action planning, raised by the poorest households. This was the lack of physical, democratic space in the village. They argued that genuine debate and negotiation could not take place on the wealthy man’s porch, a community hall would be needed in which to conduct planning meetings. For such a community hall to be constructed, a landowner would need to donate a prize piece of raised land above the highest flood level. This triggered months of negotiations and bargaining, further raising the political energy levels throughout the villages.

It was also observed that some of the low-risk technical interventions themselves led directly into processes of consensus building and action planning. Those technical interventions requiring a reorientation of the management of common property resources as opposed to those privately controlled, tended to occur in the area of fisheries and concerned the stocking of seasonal ponds and waterbodies. Land based options took place within existing landowning and tenure arrangements and did not touch deeper controversies over the allocation of *khas* land. Even during project inception project staff witnessed violence to claimants of emerging char lands which the government is supposed to allocate to poor households but almost always fall into the hands of rich landowners. Instead ITDG has fomented major advances in winter (lean) season cropping and opened up access to fisheries resources which provide a crucial safety net to the poorest households.

The charland productivity boost also opens up new opportunities for NGOs and micro-level private sector initiatives in the whole chain of transportation and marketing. (see Annex B ii, Sections 2 and 3, for studies on brinjal and maize marketing) NGOs can broker relations with government and private sector service providers once the quality and quantity of charland produce are sufficient to overcome transportation cost constraints. Spontaneous developments, such as linkages between charland maize farmers and large-scale poultry producers will embed themselves in the local economy.

However, who will resource the new NGO role this emerging “social entrepreneur” role, fomenting a rise in agricultural productivity and linking this through to new markets? The inertia of the charland agricultural economy cannot be broken without support and subsidy, without an injection of assets. For example, the training and inputs for maize production were provided free by ITDG in conjunction with a national agricultural research station based in the district. The kind of mass uptake rates reported for the technical options offered by the project (e.g. 90% of all households in the case of winter vegetables. See Annex 2, Part 1) would probably not be feasible outside without the cushioning effect of ITDG subsidies and technical backstopping. It is therefore clear that to bring about the essential “livelihood boost” which releases the energies of marginalised communities for planning, a dedicated public resource

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for local/district NGO capacity building and programme outreach is required. This finding is discussed further in the Uptake Phase Conclusions (below p 26)

### **Key findings from Output Three: Participatory M and E established and practiced.**

The monitoring strategy has evolved over the course of the project. Originally, the emphasis was on detecting tangible changes in participation, livelihoods and production. To some extent, the project team needed to develop a recognition of the need for qualitative discussion of the “processes” evolving at the two sites and of ways to capture this change in a systematic manner. The key tools here were the diary and meeting report formats but the process of developing these with the team was informative for all project staff and consultants. This activity reinforced the need of the team to critically assess the meaning of what was seen and heard in terms of wider, long-term project objectives (testing the significance of PAPD to the charlands context and investigating prospects for lasting change).

The narratives developed by the team were intended not just to provide material for final reporting but to realign project and community strategy in real time. Although the broad areas to consider were pre-determined in diary design (*decision-making, linkage, dispute resolution* etc.) the content of diaries and the interpretation of their meaning was directed by staff. In some respects, this approach mirrors the flexible approach to reporting as developed within the most significant change (MSC) approach (see Annex B-iii).

Because PAPD relates to social capital and, particularly in isolated contexts like chars, to formal and informal institutional change, reporting had to highlight the ways people and vested interests were working with or reacting to PAPD concepts and plans. The overall approach to institutional change reflected the findings and recommendations of Project R8195 which suggests focussing on the processes that operate at interface between the project, communities and external stakeholders

With respect community-driven monitoring, the community monitoring system (CMS) that evolved was a very informal, routine, process of reporting to both the community and to ITDG (see Annex B-i: Section 1.5). The process depended on a community-elected representative communicating local issues of project performance and outcomes to project staff. Information gathering by these Community Monitors (CMs) operated informally at tea shops, group meetings and during “off-stage” discussions but it was also an opportunity for the community to discuss progress or problems in isolation from ITDG. This latter aspect was one of the main participatory characters of the approach. The other was the manner in which monitoring was decided. The communities rejected conventional forms of indicator and instead agreed to consider up to 10 positive or negative changes on a monthly basis.

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The CMS feedback seemed to reveal something about changing priorities and concerns as community-planning progressed at the two villages. The main theme represented by the CMS feedback is the switch from technical and physical observations and concerns to social and institutional ones. To some extent this might be expected because the project design had intended to make this progression and to follow the regular ITDG pathway from simple, practical solutions to more complex market and institutional issues.

However, PAPD was intended to make people more aware of the services available to them and the potential of collective planning in this respect. The type of community feedback did, in fact, change with time to incorporate social issues relating to acceptability of plans, linkage with outside institutions, public support or conversely to local disputes. At both villages, the total frequency of technical versus social observations made by the community and the CM changed over time so that social and institutional issues outgrew concerns over technical constraints or approval of new benefits from alternative cropping etc.

To date, there remain some concerns regarding the sustainability of the CMS. Institutionalisation of this internal monitoring would require an incentive outside the project context. There obviously needs to be some form of local planning operating for internal monitoring to be useful. In turn, there are two questions here; 1) is it realistic to assume extension of PAPD-type planning at the project sites and 2) will this occur within the framework of a facilitated project or will it occur autonomously? It is unlikely that highly structured consensual planning will operate without a project presence. At the project sites, however, it may be possible that similar activities and linkage to secondary stakeholders might be brought forward without reliance on a NGO facilitator but by drawing on the political and technical institutions mandated to perform such roles. The issue of PME in such a context is still questionable – i.e. who/what is being monitored and for what purpose?

In summary, community-generated evidence is most likely to have a role and impact within externally-facilitated processes because NGOs and others operating within a broader rural development setting are more frequently required to meet donor demands for participation and community monitoring. The role of “participation” as applied by GOs in the agriculture, fisheries and water sectors is dubious.

A review of CMS performance and potential is presented in table 1.

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<b>CMS role</b>	<b>Project monitoring</b>	<b>Project impact</b>	<b>Post-project</b>
<i>Actual</i>	Emphasis on technical (visual) uptake & breakthroughs – especially PTD.	Reporting back to ITDG team for monthly review & final report summary.	Community monitors will act as “demonstrators” to other villages in ongoing ITDG project work.
<i>Potential</i>	The system of observation collection needs to be better facilitated & ensured to be representative of interests.	<p>PAPD facilitators should encourage participants to consider the benefits of new linkages, relations etc. for long-term change – moving beyond technical change &amp; impacts.</p> <p>Participants would score or evaluate the role of service providers, the facilitator and other key stakeholders in their plans.</p>	PAPD-formed implementation committee or CBO could be responsible to “report back” status of plans & progress. The system would not rely on <i>data</i> but broad agreement on information types required by the community (tasks completed, expenditure, projected costs, decisions made etc.).

**Table 1. CMS project performance and potential role within PAPD.**

**Key findings from Output Four: Increased human and social capacity to increase representation.**

Clearly in terms of the project goals, and running counter to the original expectations of the project team, the PAPD outcomes were much more successful in Nandina, where there appears to be a strong possibility of achieving beneficial and sustainable change. Results were much less favourable in Nadagari, where, although an almost identical process was followed, there was some evidence of latent conflicts actually being inflamed. A comparison of the pre-intervention situations in both villages can therefore yield useful lessons as to the broader applicability of the PAPD method.

Nandina, a longer settled and relatively affluent village clearly, clearly had much greater pre-existing social cohesion than Nadagari. The ability to conduct a macro PAPD exercise around the *jalmohal* fishery was also instrumental in achieving broader acceptance and unity; there was no comparable 'large-scale' win-win opportunity in Nadagari. Nandina, which had two ex-UP members, also benefited from good linkages and political influence with external institutions which may also have strengthened their negotiating position, particularly with respect to the *jalmohal* fishery. In Nadagari lack of secure title to recently settled land was one of the principle causes of division. This was compounded by social heterogeneity and poorly defined project boundaries. Some fundamental institutional capacity building mistakes also fuelled a sense of grievance; especially relating to transparency and accountability in financial matters.

Nandina's cohesion was also reflected in their successful co-operation with earlier development projects. Under a recent UNICEF water sanitation program implemented by a local NGO, RDSM, the community constructed a deep arsenic-free community ground well with financial contributions from each household. Development initiatives in Nadagari appeared to be characterised by individual micro-credit and loans schemes which may have promoted a dependency culture.

In both villages there was an initial desire to incorporate functions of more traditional indigenous institutions such as *salish* into the CBO process. How compatible such functions might be given the more democratic nature of the CBO requires further investigation. Certainly, many of those on *Masjid* committees, Gram Sarkars etc. are also represented on the CBO and in Nandina at least appear to be benefit from the alternative perspectives provided by both systems. Furthermore, whether incorporated or not, villagers appear to be using these highly effective and sustainable traditional institutions as yardstick against which to measure the success of the CBO.

Although hope was expressed that a 'youth rebellion' in Nadagari might revitalise the CBO, there was clear evidence of linkages between this movement and agendas of broader interest groups involved in existing divisions. Never the less representation of younger people appeared poor in both villages; most of those attending the focus group meetings, including a large number of CBO executives, were in their late thirties or older. In Nandina, there was also some evidence of improved woman's representation although their role in collective decision-making is still extremely marginal.

Overall the results suggests that there will be a much greater challenge in implementing the PAPD process in more marginal Charland areas where internal struggles over land access are critical. Other parallel conflict resolution approaches are also required in such instances. Finally, in regard to dissemination of the method,

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ITDG provided strong advocacy up to MP level in order to secure rights to the *jalmohal*. Serious consideration must be given to the extent to which this could be repeated on larger scale by smaller and less experienced / influential NGOs?

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Setting / context	<i>Attached (Nandina)</i>	<i>Isolated (Nadagari)</i>
<b>Social</b>	Relative social cohesion, inter-marriage between gushti groups & 50 years settlement in village.	2 main gushti groups lacking trust, recently settled char. Many female-headed households due to seasonal migration of men.
	<p><b>PAPD significance:</b> Well established network of “legitimate” community representatives can accommodate community planning. Planning obstacles can be negotiated &amp; removed in PAPD.</p>	<p><b>PAPD significance:</b> Limits the potential of PAPD planning process and options for win-win interventions. Increased demand for female participation in PTD.</p>
<b>Political Institutional</b>	Former chairman of the UP covering Nandina village is a Nandina resident. An influential retired secondary school teacher, active in politics for 25 years.	No village resident has a formal political profile outside the village. Very weak institutional linkages – confusion and distrust over role of Upazilla Land Office
	<p><b>PAPD significance:</b> It was possible to negotiate a production management plan for the sixty acre water body adjacent to the village, despite entrenched leaseholder interest. Leaseholder, who belonged to former chairman’s <i>gushti</i> conceded management to a community committee</p>	<p><b>PAPD significance:</b> No individuals with prestige to act as brokers in intra community negotiations. Agreements reached over NR plans have tended to break down. Micro-level consensus building initiatives can proceed.</p>
<b>Physical</b>	Higher levels of soil fertility and greater pre-existing livelihood diversification	Poor soil, more prolonged flooding of fields (min. 3 months), very limited livelihood options
	<p><b>PAPD significance:</b> Less interest and uptake for livelihood options designed for the very poor; PAPD more intrinsically motivating as community able was to take on more ambitious plans.</p>	<p><b>PAPD significance:</b> Rapid mobilisation of community energies; good demand for service of local extensionists; farmers hungry for new options. Micro level production planning benefits from a consensus building approach.</p>

Table 2: Summary Comparison of Social Capital at Two Research Sites.

### **Key Findings from Output Five: Policy stakeholders using consensus-building methodologies in charland development**

The project has concluded that within the formal structures of government there is no immediate champion or catalyst agent at village level for transfer or embedding of new planning and consensus building tools developed in the project. The recommendations of the project revolve around bringing PAPD into the activities of local and district level NGOs working in char districts. These findings are discussed in more detail in Annex B-v.

#### *The potential role of administrative structures*

Many natural resource management projects have placed great emphasis on the UP and continue to do so but it seems that the UP, at their best, are most suited to consolidating the identity of potential beneficiaries/groups and in freeing-up resources from above. In other words, while they were found to be rather passive in the planning phase, they did add legitimacy and weight to plans at later stages. Once the time and costs of local planning had been invested by communities and by ITDG as the facilitator, Union level officials stepped in to assist implementation using their formal and informal political ties and influence.

The UP also provided support in data gathering and for agricultural development, generally. In this last respect the Upazila officials have also proved supportive. The UNO personally met with Nadagari residents during the flood of 2004, for instance, and has witnessed the level of community planning, first-hand.

Project-related structures and mediators (the CBOs and RCEs) have proved catalytic in changing roles and creating links with other secondary stakeholders, especially within PTD. With respect to PAPD, secondary stakeholders were crucial at all stage of pre-planning, planning and implementation and the Union and Upazila Level Land Offices and Additional District Commissioner (ADC) at District level were generally supportive and enabling in this respect. The Upazila Agricultural Coordination Committee (UACC) also appears to be a very important interface between the various line departments and service providers and a potential audience for PAPD plans.

The project team did find it possible to interact with and influence secondary stakeholders at these higher administrative levels and the opaque land and water rights issues necessitated this before meaningful interventions could proceed.

Crucially, as the research team note, although the support of secondary stakeholders cannot be solely attributed to the community themselves (the process was heavily facilitated by ITDG), what is important is that the community *do* recognise the potential of these stakeholders and *are* aware of the difference in relationships and their function before and after the PAPD process.

Although there are undoubtedly political and administrative nodes that can permit or obstruct local-level planning such as PAPD, some of the opportunities and constraints encountered may have been a manifestation of the personal stance of individuals. In turn, this may relate to complex personal stakes relating to social and political capital and influence or it may simply relate to enthusiasm for community-based rural development, distrust of NGOs, indifference etc.



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There are obvious consequences here for up-scaling forms of PAPD. While it is possible to make generalisations about the type of political, administrative or technical support required for community-based planning it is impossible to guarantee its success. Project R8195 suggests that some form of prior knowledge or reconnaissance and institutional mapping is required to uncover receptive individuals at critical points in the system.

In addition, there are several themes that operate consistently in the charland setting and that require special attention by facilitators and project designers in future. These generally relate to political/institutional isolation and the tendency for local, informal, political processes to fill a vacuum. These processes manifest themselves as local resource use conflict (irrespective of statutory frameworks and policy regarding titlement etc.) and factionalism based on political and social influence. These processes operate throughout rural Bangladesh but their isolated nature means that the modest demand-led change associated with the market and the private sector in other areas has not taken hold in the chars.

In reflection, the team realised that these local informal institutions (the *gusthi*, the *samaj* etc.) strongly influenced levels of participation, consensus and PAPD success in the villages (see Annex B-v for a detailed discussion of these social institutions).

### *The potential role of NGOs - influencing policy and practice by example*

There currently appears limited scope for affecting change in char livelihoods at policy level only. One of the most intractable char-specific constraints, for instance, is the proper allocation and administration of private and khas land. In principle, this is covered by suitable legal and institutional frameworks but it is the failure of these structures to deliver that has turned attention to the wider issue of governance, more generally (see Annex 5 for a discussion of the key charlands-related policy).

To deliver new participatory forms of local planning in the charlands will require drawing on a range of suitable stakeholders as contributors and users. Project experience suggests that Union to District GOs, service providers and NGOs will all have a role to play.

ITDG, in this project and elsewhere, is attempting to invigorate practice at all levels by providing evidence of participatory planning and progress. Unfortunately, the expertise and experience of most NGO field staff does not currently extend to understanding the significance of informal institutions and power relations and of ways to recognise problems or opportunities as they arise. In addition, the NGO presence in char regions has been limited to the delivery of pre-packaged activities such as credit provision that require little flexibility, planning or interaction with other institutions.

ITDG has been interacting with some of these NGOs to build their capacity through the Charland NGO Network and the Department of Agricultural Extension Liaison Committee. An early output of this project was to develop a PAPD training manual (*Charlands Technical and Planning Manual*, ITDG-B, 2005) for NGOs currently associated with ITDG in the charlands region and in several large programmes that have recently come on stream (these include the EC-funded Food Security – Bangladesh project at Jamalpur and Faridpur and the Disappearing Lands project supported by the UK Lottery Community Fund).

## **Uptake Phase Conclusions**

In the case of the charlands, the target provider of resources for local pro-poor plans was expected to be the DFID Charland livelihood programme, covering the five northern districts of Bangladesh where char lands are located. However, with evidence that the programme has been overwhelmed by management issues at national level, and has been unable to develop any means to absorb ideas and models from local actors, it now seems very unlikely that ITDG will make its much hoped for breakthrough in an apex role training other NGOs for effective poverty alleviation programming in char lands. Certainly, in pursuit of the NSRP programme objectives of uptake of research findings in ITDG took every conceivably opportunity to lobby the DFID CLP to take the char lands adapted PAPD method to scale.

With respect to the political, administrative and technical presence of the state at the local level, the experience of the project is that state actors come on board in a supporting role once there is evidence that the local productivity boost is throwing up dynamism and demands from farmer groups. Nevertheless due to bureaucratic inflexibilities, outside the shell provided by a major programme such as DFID-CLP it is highly unlikely that such institutions are an uptake partner *per se* for a local planning methodology. It is also highly unlikely that more resources will be forthcoming at the local level from the state itself to promote development. Union Parishad budgets are not currently sufficient to cover their minimum operating costs. Generally there are no resources or political incentives for local authorities to engage in participatory planning. Reform initiatives promoting decentralisation are blocked by Members of Parliament who currently control of resource flows at the local level.

At a national policy meeting convened by ITDG on 7 September 2005, a wide range of policy stakeholders were invited to review the prospects for policy level uptake of Participatory Action Planning. However the meeting was attended overwhelmingly by NGO leaders and staff seeking out new implementation opportunities. This suggests that for the foreseeable future, ITDG's uptake efforts for PAPD should remain at the upazilla and district level, through local networks of NGO and government staff. For instance, ministry technical staff for fisheries, livestock and agriculture will spread positive messages within their professional groupings as more of them become exposed to its positive impacts on their work. Meanwhile ITDG will continue to play a catalytic role at whilst discussing the opportunities which PAPD opens up to senior staff in other large scale NGO implementers like BRAC, PROSHIKA, OXFAM and CARE. Beyond the basic livelihood boost and consensus planning models offered by ITDG in its recently published "Charlands Development Manual", ITDG will need to instil into the other NGO players the importance of skilled facilitation of management plans for common pool resources such as seasonal ponds, ditches and waterbodies.

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