

DFID action planning and peri-urban livelihoods project for Kolkata

BRIEFING 2: ACTION PLANNING

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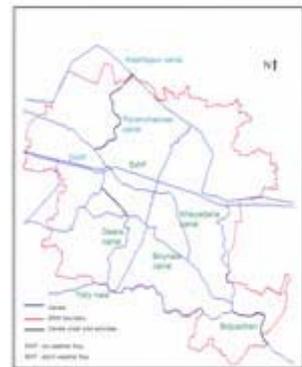
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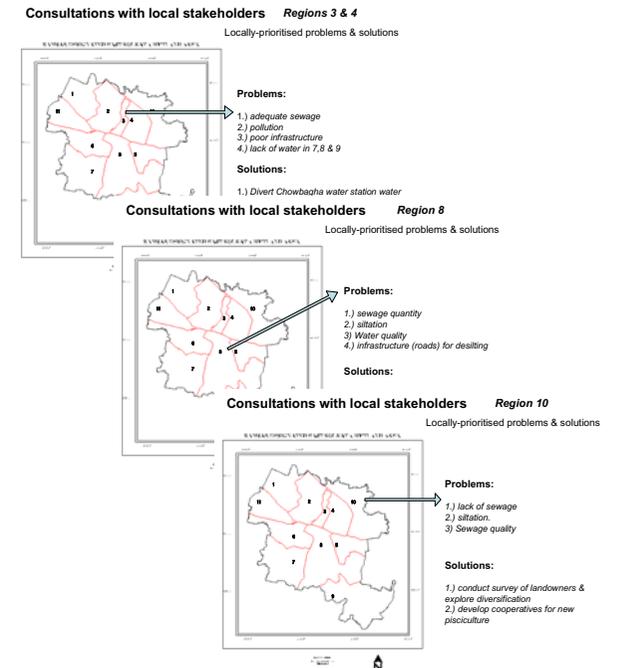
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Summary

This, the second in a series of project briefings provides an update on progress with participatory action planning in the East Kolkata Wetlands, including an overview of the innovative features of the planning process developed in the complex physical, social



and institutional setting of peri-urban Kolkata. The objectives of this work, approach adopted and resulting conclusions have received broad-based support from the principal stakeholders that participated in the process. In the next phase of the project the team will embark upon a process of implementing preliminary development activities that address some of the most pressing and widely held problems.



Update

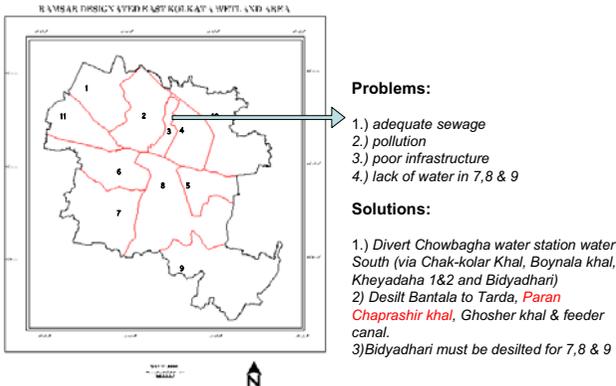
Participatory action planning has ensured that rice, vegetable and fish farmers, together with other community members were able to identify major constraints to natural resources management in the wetlands, propose appropriate solutions and develop and agree upon a plan of action to address the most pressing water management issues.

Water Management Action Plan

The water management action plan for the EKW addressed constraints faced by poor communities dependent largely on farming rice, fish or vegetables, or a combination of these. The regional basis of the action planning process, in which the EKW was divided into 11 geographically defined regions, was invoked to ensure groups with different livelihoods (fish farmers and labourers, rice and vegetable growers) and assets, notably social and political, were treated more equitably.

Consultations with local stakeholders Regions 3 & 4

Locally-prioritised problems & solutions



However, the scale and complexity of the EKW production system presents special problems regarding proper representation and the identification of potential actions that can benefit the range of poor stakeholders simultaneously, without significant negative impacts on other users or livelihood functions of the system.

Process monitoring

The initial process monitoring approach was modified from recording project progress to a tool for managing the planning process. This modified process monitoring strategy is enabling the

facilitators to navigate and manage the process by recognising obstacles, progress and opportunities. The planning process has thus evolved and been modified to respond to stakeholders suggestions. Rather than simply being employed as a research tool, process monitoring is critical in moving the planning process forward: recording interaction with the various stakeholders, the outcomes of this interaction and its significance for the pilot planning; highlighting the key role of the team as facilitators and the need to react strategically to the outcomes of discussion and meetings.

In this last regard, it is important that the project team are able to navigate the political landscape of the EKW and are aware of potential problems before they occur. Consequently reporting formats were formulated with the intention of prompting the team to consider opportunities and potential problems as the process evolves. Process monitoring outputs are also central to the ongoing comparison of the PUI participatory action planning process formulated in this project with experiences with the Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) in Bangladesh.

Innovative participatory action planning

Innovative elements of the participatory planning approach developed here include demarcation of the wetlands by land use in an attempt to deconstruct the system into manageable and representative units. The aim was to consult with and represent the objectives, concerns and suggestions of the entire range of stakeholders. Furthermore, the political and institutional complexity of the PUI and EKW required that potential planning processes balance or negotiate the interests and positions of multiple stakeholders at many levels.

Management of the PUI is controlled by overlapping functions and responsibilities that may complement or counteract one another. Superimposed on this is the informal institutional environment that influences the way land use decisions are made within and outside government. The intensity and diversity of economic activity means that any proposed

interventions will have knock-on impacts on other interests including departmental obligations or performance. The EKW's proximity to Kolkata also increases the diversity of economic interests and increases differences in the capacity to exert economic and political influence.

Although PAPD attempts to deconstruct the community and acknowledges differences in power, it is assumed that PAPD participants are similarly dependent on NRM improvements and are all vulnerable. The negotiation process in PAPD can be termed horizontal in that the participating stakeholder groups are peers and are directly linked to a local and delimited resource. Although the issue of institutionalisation of the PAPD process has recently been addressed in the context of Bangladesh charlands, integration with existing government structures and functions has not been attempted. PAPD has operated in project environments with pre-arranged *modus operandi* with key institutions such as local fisheries departments and their staff and most of these roles are related to project objectives (establishment of sanctuaries, training etc.).

In the context of the East Kolkata Wetlands, however, a vertical form of planning had to be tested. Actions with the potential to benefit meaningful numbers of poor people will require permission and developing a planning process with key government stakeholders is the most realistic way to increase coverage and attempt an ongoing process. The approach combined distinct, formal, interactions as one-off workshops and meetings with secondary and tertiary stakeholders with more targeted discussions.

Forthcoming project activities

January 2005 - Meetings with government, CBO and NGO stakeholder to verify the action plan

March - April 2005 - Test feasibility of pilot-scale activities at workshops in selected regions