

***Discussion Paper 2:***  
**Local resource management institutions  
& floodplain management –  
Common problems & potential solutions<sup>1</sup>**

Roger Lewins

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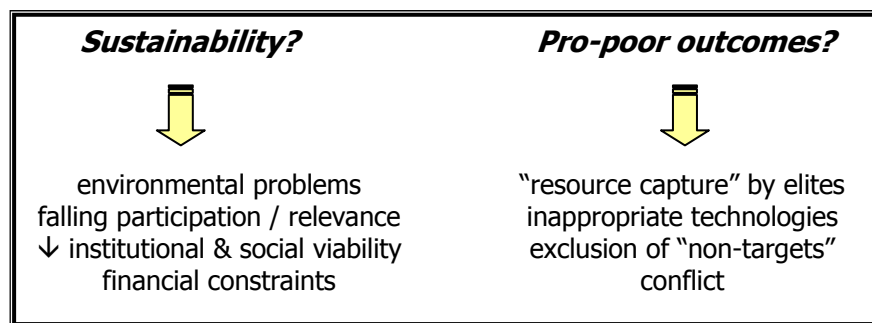
***Integrated floodplain management –  
Institutional environments and participatory methods***

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## Local Resource Management Institutions & Floodplain Management – *common problems & potential solutions*

Over the last two decades, in Bangladesh as elsewhere, the emphasis has been on involving local stakeholders in the management of their resources. Donors, GoB and NGOs have attempted various arrangements for natural resource management (NRM) aimed at providing sustainable and pro-poor outcomes. Unfortunately, although there have been some successes, local outcomes sometimes fail in both regards (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Common negative outcomes of NRM initiatives.**

With respect to IFM, several forms of local resource management initiatives have been adopted by the water and fisheries sectors, while donors and NGOs have also attempted cross-sectoral initiatives. Research within the recently completed DFID project “Integrated floodplain management – institutional environments

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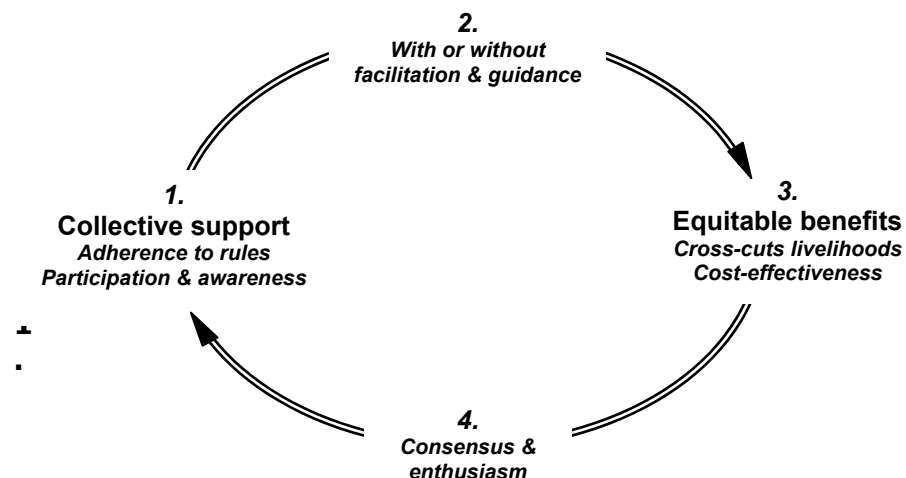
“Integrated floodplain management – institutional environments and participatory methods” (R8195)



and participatory management” suggests that while providing some positive changes, the entire range of approaches tends to suffer from at least some of the outcomes highlighted above.

### **An idealised model of local IFM**

Local and community-based NRM initiatives tend to strive for “collective action”, “participation”, “equity” and “pro-poor” outcomes. There are in-built assumptions in NRM theory that participation (in the design of rules, activities etc.) can lead to appropriate and so sustainable outcomes. Ideally, this form of management would be self-sustaining so that positive outcomes would lead to continued participation and increased legitimacy. A cycle of pro-poor IFM might be achieved (Figure 2.)



**Figure 2. An idealised cycle of inclusive and pro-poor IFM.**

At **Stage 1** of this idealised model, participation in current or new IFM is expected to increase the personal stake of the participant and interest in the outcomes. This interest in the future means that people are more likely to uphold and enforce new rules.

Sometimes these new initiatives appear endogenously ("local cuts" in embankments etc.) or are facilitated by an external GO or NGO agency (**Stage 2**). If the IFM arrangements are well designed (by primary stakeholders and facilitators) we might hope that a broad range of visible and sustainable benefits are made available to local people (**Stage 3**). In this idealised cycle, the benefits received by participating would outweigh the costs (in time, constraints on harvesting etc.) incurred for each participant.

Finally, in **Stage 4**, the obvious benefits from new IFM would engender enthusiasm and consensus, so leading to Stage 1 and completing the cycle.

In reality, these stages do not occur sequentially but cross-over, so that at any one time several interrelated processes occur. Nonetheless, the model allows us to consider the type of problems encountered and how they might be overcome.

### **Common Problems**

One of the recurring themes in IFM projects appears to be the apparent shortage of local support (Stage 1.). This may be because interventions to date have proved damaging or because of low perceived relevance of the intervention (either through lack of knowledge of objective or through real exclusion). This may result in dwindling attendance at meetings or in reluctance to adhere to

new rules. In this case, disputes between participants and non-participants may ensue. For instance, it has been found that fishers tend to lose interest in water sector interventions and that their representation and input can decline over time.

With respect to facilitation (Stage 2.), a common theme is for the frequency of interaction between primary stakeholders and supporting agencies to decline with time. This is partly because participation is normally considered most important at the beginning of the project cycle. However, the level of understanding of IFM interventions can be quite low. Project staff have a responsibility to maintain dialogue and disseminate the project's message *throughout* its life-span.

The problems of achieving sustainable and pro-poor outcomes (Stage 3.) are well-acknowledged by practitioners, Government and donors. For instance, it is widely recognised that "resource capture" by elites and the workings of local power structures can result in benefits being channelled away from the poor. New opportunities that arise from IFM interventions are most readily accessed by the wealthier who can afford investments in time and money. This problem appears to be worse where interventions are based on subsidy (provision of access and inputs) without due concern for mechanisms to assure preferential access to the poor.

Often the distribution of benefits is influenced by a combination of pre-existing power structures (UP members, mosque committee members and the *samaj* and *mathbor*, for instance) and it is important that the local role and context of these arrangements is understood (see later).

Finally, real and widespread local support and enthusiasm for IFM interventions (Stage 4.) appears to be uncommon. If benefits are not widely available or if new management practice does not yield positive outcomes for the range of stakeholders, consensus and support for continued activity will be lacking. Any perceived unfairness (whether real or not) can result in conflict and a break down in cooperation.

## **Potential Solutions**

### *Stage 1 – Local support*

There are two areas where special attention to local support should be given – pre-intervention and post-intervention. Prior to the intervention, the purpose of IFM interventions must be clear and project messages must be un-muddled. A review of nine case studies demonstrated generally quite poor levels of understanding of objectives, rules and resource management institutions (RMIs) by local residents. Where possible, simple public demonstrations (fish sanctuaries, canal re-excavation etc.) should be part of the participatory planning phase.

Post-intervention, outcomes and processes must have been inclusive, not exclusive. Activities and objectives should attempt to be cross-cutting (impact a range of groups in a range of ways) so that benefits can be realised by all stakeholders.

### *Stage 2 – Facilitation*

Analysis of IFM interventions with a sectoral and cross-sectoral focus demonstrate varying degrees of understanding, and so support, of activities. Although cross-sectoral projects with an “environment” focus might aim to benefit a range of stakeholders

simultaneously, it is possible that the diversity of activities and the very broad objective or “message” appears to confuse potential participants.

Given that third party facilitation appears to decline during, as well as after, project end, it is necessary to seek local champions to take management forward in future. These potential facilitators may be individuals, informal institutions (mosque committees, the *salish* etc.) or formal groups such as Water User Groups or local government institutions. Existing institutions are more likely to outlive the period of external support than new specially-designed RMIs and will be better placed to access the support of other secondary stakeholders and to widen legitimacy. If local mosque committees currently influence “rules of use” for natural resources, then this should be explored in relation to IFM and the building of any new RMIs, for instance.

### *Stage 3 – Equitable outcomes*

Local power structures, alliances and relationships between the poor, the elite and formal institutions operate everywhere. Normally these are described in negative terms and are considered obstacles to pro-poor NRM. However, the elite play an important role in consolidating (or obstructing) new initiatives and efforts should be made to find activities that benefit all groups simultaneously. Related to this, those IFM initiatives that aim to cross-cut livelihoods groups and extend the range of beneficiaries are probably least likely to result in conflict and negative impacts for the poor. Very focussed and directed projects appear to exacerbate underlying conflict rather than reduce them.\*

\*There is evidence that production-oriented interventions create conflict by attracting new entrants and excluding previous users (e.g. Aeron-Thomas (2003) & Lewins et al (2004)).

There is a trade-off here in encouraging IFM practice that is holistic and cross-cuts the range of livelihoods concerns and extending the range of activities too far and muddling the message. A common theme of integrated or environment projects, appears to be loss of focus, so reducing the level of understanding and support of potential beneficiaries.

Influential informal institutions such as the *salish* may have a potential role to play in legitimising new and pro-poor IFM and in enforcing rules for collective management. It is important that external facilitators such as local level NGO staff are aware of the importance of these pre-existing formal and informal institutions. Training in "community" organisation should engender an awareness of the positive (reinforcing) and negative (obstructive and pro-elite) role of local institutions and power relations. Improved awareness on behalf of the facilitator would also encompass an appreciation of the types of relationships and problems that tend to evolve and of the potential ways to track and record them (i.e. application of tools such as process documentation).

Finally, the other area where informal institutions seem to influence IFM is in the *de facto* access and ownership of the land-water interface. The local reality may not correspond with pre-defined IFM objectives and it is important that facilitators can adapt to "fuzzy" property rights as they find them on the ground.

#### *Stage 4 – Equitable outcomes*

Real and widespread support for project-based IFM seems to be uncommon. It is likely that this relates to the difficulty in securing collective benefits (Stage 3 above). Unfortunately, IFM

interventions have tended to alienate some groups, exacerbate differences in interests and create conflict. Following a more holistic and livelihoods-based approach may avoid this problem and actually function to identify mutual management requirements and interests. Tools such as PAPD or problem census should be applied prior to any IFM changes and should be a part of the participation process at Stage 1 of the model.

### **Conclusion**

It may be beyond the capacity of any one implementing agency to consider all these issues simultaneously. Many projects deploy small NGOs that may have limited community-organisation and RMI experience (their normal remit being credit provision, establishing AIGAs, education or simple health initiatives) and local field staff representing large national NGOs may also be inexperienced in this regard.

However, implementing agencies should be aware and open about the types of bottle-necks that tend to appear and be aware of the range of potential strategies to avoid them. In addition, it is important that progress or problems are reported and discussed. It is encouraging that IFM stakeholders, including GOs, are now discussing the problems of poor project performance at the local level. The dialogue should now turn from documenting and reporting local IFM performance to preventing the undesirable outcomes from evolving. The discussion above suggests that several approaches or messages regarding IFM design might be applied concurrently and these are summarised in Table 1.

Cycle Stage	Frequent problems	Potential strategies	Sources
<b>1</b> <i>Local Support</i>	Pre-initiative indifference	Simple, public examples (sanctuaries, field demonstrations etc.)	Thompson et al; 2003 MACH; 2003 etc.
	Post-initiative decline in support	Cost-effectiveness for participants & broad beneficiary range <i>(see Cycle Stage 3 below).</i>	Muir; 2003 Lewins et al; 2004
<b>2</b> <i>Facilitation</i>	Declining dialogue & interaction	Roles for pre-existing institutions (e.g. WMAs, LGED, local initiatives etc.) or new, consolidated RMI-LGO linkage	Sultana & Lewins; 2004 MACH CoP (pers.com.)*  Aeron-Thomas; 2003
	Limited participation & RMI-linked skills	Vetting of local partners  Training of local level staff (community organisation, power issues etc.)	  Sultana & Lewins; 2004
<b>3</b> <i>Equitable Outcomes</i>	Resource capture by non-targets	Ensure early inclusive planning  Increase staff awareness of power issues ("processes", RMI building training etc.)	Barr & Dixon; 2001 CPP; 1994 etc.  Sultana & Lewins; 2004 Aeron-Thomas; 2003 Lewins et al; 2004
	Negative impacts on some stakeholders	Avoiding strongly subsidised inputs for production & access rights  Low-cost, smaller actions (jalmohals < 20 ha. etc.)	As above  Begum; 2004 Thompson <i>et al</i> ; 2003

**Table 1. Frequent problems & potential preventative strategies.**

Cycle Stage	Frequent problems	Potential strategies	Sources
<b>3</b> <i>Equitable Outcomes</i>  <i>(contd.)</i>	Negative impacts on some stakeholders  <i>(contd.)</i>	Reduced geographic coverage (smaller participant clusters)  Working with pre-existing informal institutions (LIs, <i>samaj</i> , <i>salish</i> etc.).	Aeron-Thomas; 2003  Bode; 2002, Muir; 2003 Amin & Islam (in press) Lewins et al; 2004
		A change from a sectoral to a livelihoods focus (stressing delivery & interaction across groups)  A change from technical service provision to a rights-based approach	Aeron-Thomas; 2003 Muir; 2003 Barr & Dixon; 2001**  Bode; 2002
<b>4</b> <i>Consensus</i>	Intervention-induced conflict	Early use of participatory planning & consensus building  Dispute-resolution as an integral function of project RMIs  Utilisation of <i>salish</i>  <i>Requires pre-emptive design considerations such as those outlined above (stages 1-3)</i>	Barr & Dixon; 2001 CPP; 1994  Aeron-Thomas; 2003  Muir; 2003

**Table 1. (continued)**

\*Discussion of final stages of MACH and potential role of Upazilla Development Coordination Committee (UDCC). \*\* In the context of developing social capital via Participatory Action Plan Development (consensus building).

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### For information contact:

Roger Lewins  
20 Scott Road  
Oxford OX2 7TD  
United Kingdom  
rogerlewins@yahoo.co.uk

ITAD Limited  
12 English Business Park  
English Close  
Hove BN3 7ET  
United Kingdom  
mail@itad.com

