

Community Based (Natural Resources) Management

Key Lessons Summary

The Primary Sources of lessons in this paper are projects within DFID's Rural Livelihoods Programme (RLP)*. The evidence for these lessons come from evaluations of the projects carried out by the Rural Livelihoods Evaluation Partnership (RLEP). The full version of the Thematic Lessons Papers (TLP) are

Thematic Lessons Papers (TLP) are intended for stakeholders who are involved in policy or programme design and influencing, in order to assist them in making informed decisions in the future.

The TLPs draw together experiences of livelihoods programme in a particular thematic context. This paper focuses on Community Based (Natural Resources) Management theme. The lessons in this document are grouped under the following key issues:

- Project Design and Institutional Arrangements in CBM.
- Power Relations in CBM.
- Facilitation and Nature of Project Support to CBM and Timescale for Successful CBM Establishment.

1. Project design needs to be a community participatory process allowing in-built flexibility and enable community based resource management institutions to respond to local situations. Government and donors need to give an enabling framework.
2. No single CBM model [community based organization (CBO) structure and resource management rules] can be prescribed because communities and resource bases are so diverse, and attempts to follow one design have found this to be a serious constraint. CBM should be seen as a way of thinking or broad approach, the detailed outcome and institutional arrangements for this are space, time and socially bound.
3. Institutional development of CBOs for resource management is necessary for improved and sustained benefits to the poor. Without formalising CBOs there is a risk that benefits will be lost when projects end.
4. CBM creates opportunities for empowering communities and specially the poor resource users. But the CBOs created by fishery management projects have been highly vulnerable to take-over by local elite factions, especially where there are financial constraints for the poor and profit potential for the better off, such as high lease value jalmohals (waterbodies leased out for fishing). Project support and policy changes are needed to protect the interests of the poor.
5. CBM should build links with local champions who are sympathetic to the interests of the poor and with local government. Such people can provide support to CBOs in times of conflict and improve sustainability when NGO support is withdrawn.
6. The community capacity to handle all aspects of CBM in general, and specifically conflict management, is limited. External support and facilitation is needed, and local government can play a role.
7. More consideration should be given to post project sustainability of CBOs at the design stage of projects. Resources are needed for capacity building that is different from traditional NGO programmes. Within the exit strategy of projects, CBOs should be helped to make links with one another and with local government.
8. NGO facilitation in CBM is necessary for social mobilization, credit, broadening livelihood options and alternative income generating support, but a limitation is that NGOs usually do not want to confront local elites in support of poor people in fear of post-project adverse reaction.
9. NGO skills and commitment to help advocate the rights of poor people, challenge local elites, and overcome conflicts cannot be assumed. The 'projectisation' of CBM development tends to mean that NGOs contracted by projects to implement CBM recruit new staff for the job who may lack the range of skills and experience needed, and that support is time bound.
10. More cooperation is required among a range of government agencies and NGOs to build social capital among the wider community. There are overlapping and competing responsibilities and interests that should be coordinated at national and local levels. Similarly, NGOs in particular, and also government agencies need positive attitudes if CBOs are to

*8 projects within DFID's Rural Livelihoods Programme (RLP)

1. Fisheries Training and Extension Project- II (FTEP II)
2. Agricultural Services Innovation Reform Project (ASIRP)
3. Research and Extension in Farm Power Issues (REFPI)
4. Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA)
5. Support For University Fisheries Education and Research (SUFER)
6. Fourth Fisheries Project (FFP)
7. CARE Rural Livelihoods Programme (CARE RLP)
8. Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM2)

Introduction

Community based management is the management of natural resources under a plan developed, agreed to and implemented by the relevant local communities.

An attempt to find new solutions for the failure of top-down approaches to resource conservation and sustainability, Community Based Management (CBM) rests on the recognition that local communities should have direct control over the utilisation and benefits of local resources (in this context land, water and fishery resources) in order to value and use them in a sustainable manner. CBM has been seen as a conservation, empowering, poverty reducing and/or general rural development strategy

The communities in question possess the legal rights, own the local institutions, evolve the rules and regulations, and have the economic incentives to take responsibility for sustainable management of their natural resources. Some form of community authority exists that is capable of enforcing the rules and regulations.

Such community-based approaches create opportunities to strengthen social capital and community relations, and to develop

Project Design and Institutional Arrangements in CBM

Key lesson for 'better practice'

If institutional arrangements for CBM are chosen through participatory processes that emphasise the role of poorer users, the community based organisations can manage difficult issues in a better way and local elite control over resources can be limited. For example, smaller well defined waterbodies can be managed by particular target stakeholders (e.g. fishers), but wider community participation is needed for larger more complex resources.

Lessons Learnt

- Community management refers to varying degrees of community participation in management which might in any case be expected to vary according to factors such as environment, scale, property rights and community structure. CBM arrangements should be compatible to local situation, local needs, types of resources, community structure, community culture and local constraints. For this a participatory process-based approach is needed.
- Without a concerted effort to build institutions that empower the poor in a community, the majority of people in that community, particularly the poor, do not have bargaining power or are not clear about their rights.
- To improve benefits to poor people and ensure the long term sustainability of the resource and maintain a benefit stream to the user community, much more emphasis needs to be placed on community organisation and institution development i.e. the 'soft' aspects of CBM, rather than the technical and biological aspects. CBM employed by projects as a functional means to achieve externally set targets undermines the potential for sustainably empowering communities to manage their resources.
- Project designs need to be flexible and process based, they should:
 - ❑ Focus on outcome targets, and less on output targets (e.g. community empowerment and ability to manage a resource collectively, not production).
 - ❑ Consider how M&E will monitor transformational change in community behaviour (e.g. better resource use rules).
 - ❑ Ensure there is in-built flexibility for resource management institutions to be tailored to the social, and environmental, situation of different locations. A blueprint for specific committee types should be avoided.
 - ❑ Focus more on CBO development and ensuring the sustainability of CBM institutions rather than on technical interventions.
- Even where CBOs that include many poor people are established, financial, social and political factors tend to result in better off and better educated people holding key positions unless special efforts are made to develop the capacity of poorer participants, such as training in record keeping and accounts, adult literacy or understanding legal rights.
- The word 'community' encompasses ideas of groups of people who share common interests, usually located in a defined area. There are common misconceptions about the homogeneity and cohesion with communities. Evidence shows that a homogenous and relatively closed type of community structure is linked with effective institutions for community resource management.

Power Relations in CBM

Communities are complex social systems, and so developing an understanding of local power structure before trying to establish community based management is essential. Poor people in rural areas tend to be financially weak and have to depend on powerful people for financial and social support for resource management. This is especially the case for high value resources where financial involvement is high and therefore control usually goes to the powerful people.

Key lesson for 'better practice'

If projects are based on detailed understanding of local institutions and power structures, and NGOs provide grants, credit and capacity building for fishers, then elite capture of resources and organisations can be minimized; but this process should also

Lessons Learnt

- Understanding of local power structures to establish community based management is a time consuming activity but a very important prerequisite to management interventions
- Power relations are an integral part of any community and are a basis for existing community institutions which in some cases are ignored by sector based projects.
- Local elites need to be recognised, but their dominance should be minimized by focusing on strengthening the voices and organisations of the poor. This is specially important for high value resources.
- High value resources with high returns from exploitation attract elites. Particularly, subsidised stocking of water bodies. Interference by, or reliance on finance from elites can be removed or significantly reduced by focusing on low-cost interventions e.g. sanctuaries in unleased waterbodies and smaller, non-stocked, water bodies, and alternative means to boost the livelihoods of the poor, e.g. through credit and saving schemes and alternative income generating activities.
- Projects may mitigate the needs for the poor, and their CBOs, to depend on moneylenders to fund lease costs by providing access to grants or credit at this time, as well as encouraging savings and providing support for alternative income generating activities. They should also promote and build capacity in transparent financial planning and management.
- CBM may not be suitable at all sites. History and the nature of the resource may make achievement of real CBM very difficult. During the site selection process it is important to assess the role of social and political elites in access to the resource and their potential responses to the project intervention, and to exclude those sites where conditions appear unfavourable. Sites will be particularly difficult where previous projects have entrenched the interests of elites and created the expectation of a negative outcome among fishers.
- Projects need to move beyond the rhetoric of all elites exerting negative pressures on CBM. There is a need to explore their incentives for involvement and new ways of engaging them which benefit all the players.
- There is growing recognition of the scope and need as part of community management to identify local champions - elites, opinion leaders and local representatives - that are less exploitative and are sympathetic to the interests of poor user groups and to wide community level benefits rather than elite capture of resources. Such people can provide a valuable link with existing local institutions and can troubleshoot for the community based organisation when

Facilitation and Nature of Project Support to CBM and Timescale for Successful CBM Establishment

The community capacity to handle all CBM in general, and specifically conflict management within it, is limited. External support and facilitation is needed especially at the outset, although there are some examples of indigenous collective resource management.

Key lesson for 'better practice'

If projects start with participatory planning among different stakeholder groups and local government this increases social cohesion and consensus, which are necessary for CBM. But developing user confidence in their own new institutions, even with the help of GO and NGO, needs time. Evidence indicates that within 8 years CBM can be established. The first two years should be allocated for consensus and confidence building and then 3 years to demonstrate the effectiveness of the local institutions and then 3 years for phasing out while helping the CBOs to be strengthened. NGOs should provide support for Alternative Income

Lessons Learnt

- NGOs have a key role in facilitating CBM but care is needed in selecting them and too much should not be expected. Their support is also usually time bound.
- Establishing CBOs is a long term process that needs to be based on long term plans and supported by local opinion leaders.
- By providing credit to CBOs, NGOs can help reduce dependence on elites for finance.
- Communities should develop long term participatory plans for improvement of resource management, rather than focusing on maximizing short term production. To support this consensus and conflict resolution are needed. This requires greater emphasis on participatory planning at the outset, and ensuring a role and long term links with local government and thereby recognition of CBM institutions.
- Despite the extensive experience from different projects, there is no clear evidence yet to indicate how much time is needed to achieve successful and sustainable community management systems in Bangladesh. CBOs, donors and government (e.g. Department of Fisheries) question how much time it may take to establish community management systems that do not need special external support.
- Projects are still designed for 5 years at most and after the start up phase barely four years are left for establishing CBM in a form that is expected to sustain and continue to be pro-poor after the project ends. This is insufficient time, at least 8 years appears to be needed. Projects and their partners need to explore mechanism by which CBOs can continue to be supported post-project. Networks and resource centres are possible options, as well as close bridging to local government.

Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Key lesson for 'better practice'

If social capital among the wider community is built through networking between local CBOs, they can share information and engage in policy dialogue. Awareness building through group discussion and identification of common issues, determination of goals and participatory planning are best practices that can be facilitated by NGOs to bridge the gap between CBM institutions and

Lessons Learnt

- Each community has its own boundary and can only manage resources within its own boundary. Exchange of information and sharing of experience is mainly limited to within the community. However, knowledge sharing through networking and policy influence through participation in policy dialogue can enable the community to improve its resource management and influence decisions in a changing wider environment.
- To build social capital among the wider community and for the poor within a larger community, institutional coordination and organisational cooperation are essential. This needs to overcome the sectoral approaches of government and tensions between government staff and NGOs.
- Local government (Union Parishad) and local level administration (Upazilla) are powerful agencies for all development work at the grassroots level. However, CBM projects have not emphasised these linkages.
- Communities are normally a heterogeneous group of people, arrayed on axes of wealth, asset base, access to resources, occupation, belief, kin, etc, but linked by some social mechanism. In the context of CBM, the linking mechanism is an interest in the management of the common resource. The strengths of the linkage vary with community homogeneity and range of interests in exploiting the resource.
- There are gaps that could be bridged from both sides to the benefit of local communities and national development programmes. The Upazilla level administration has no direct linkages with the community and relies on reporting from line agencies; typically they do not know the needs or constraints of the community. Consequently, although known to be important for development and resolving problems, most poor people do not depend on or trust the administration. Community based approaches founded on participatory planning show some success in overcoming this gap, as seen in CBFM-

Scaling Up the CBM Approach

Scaling up is not just about covering more sites and communities, but raises issues of how to link resource management and create a

Key lesson for 'better practice'

If projects build CBM institutions in adjacent areas that are linked together this networking can be a basis for larger scale CBM and help generate demand from resource users for supportive government policies and NGO programmes.

Lessons Learned

- Availability of local resources for scaling up is limited. So far government and NGOs depend heavily on external project funding for scaling up.
- Government is interested in technologies more than social issues. However, donors are interested to see participation of beneficiaries in CBM. In between these two perspectives NGOs play an important middle role, but this is also a source of tensions and potential conflicts. NGOs are also not always the answer as they have limited capacity themselves to expand CBM.
- There is an issue of what scale of resource communities can manage. Typically it is argued that communities are more able to manage resources and take decisions when the resource unit and community are matched and relatively small. This is because the exchange of information, sharing of experience, and decision making between actors that helps CBM work is reasonably straightforward at the single community scale.
- However, CBM within tightly defined boundaries denies the realities of Bangladesh's densely populated floodplains. The common resources (waterbodies) become part of a massive interconnected system in the wet season. Communities are also socially and economically linked. How best to manage such a large system?

Way Forward?

1. New designs for project support are needed if there is to be a change from support for implementation and outputs to one that is more process orientated with flexibility that aims to empower the poor through CBM.
2. Strengthening of local CBOs and capacity building are clear areas where best practice needs to be developed. Mechanisms for networking of CBOs also look to be a good opportunity to strengthen CBM and to enable CBOs to have a role in advocacy and policy influence.
3. Institutional reform will be needed from the government side to formalise and recognise the role of CBOs in resource management and to support better participatory processes.
4. The legal and institutional entity of the CBOs is vital for the long term sustainability of CBM, this includes formal registration and developing their financial strength and management skills.
5. For better community management the NGOs along with the local CBOs should find out the local "champion(s)" elites, opinion leaders and local representatives that are less exploitative and are sympathetic to the interests of poor user groups and to wide community level benefits rather than elite capture of resources.
6. Greater consideration needs to be given to decentralising management of smaller water bodies to the Upazilla level of government administration.
7. The shift in lease value payment timing should be done by the relevant authority in order to prevent poor fishers from being trapped in elite net.
8. Lease value should be calculated on the basis of biological productivity and be commensurable to the local agricultural land lease rate. The rate should be fair and the purpose should not be to maximise government revenue.
9. In future there is scope for more emphasis on coordinating with, building on and modifying existing institutions.
10. Coordination among service providers offers new opportunities. For example, integration of management issues around the

environmental linkages in floodplains with shared water and fish resources and around the livelihood needs of poor resource users requires cooperation among a range of government agencies and NGOs.

11. Coordination among donors is needed if CBM is to be taken up on a larger scale and to avoid a wide range of practices being grouped together that may dilute best practice.
12. Development that is demand driven rather than donor driven is a way forward, but it is not sure if CBM will encourage this as it is restricted to project locations. The sponsors, facilitators and implementers of CBM will need to believe in empowering the poor in local communities to demand access to waterbodies and other natural resources, and to demand support for this from government
13. Communities should develop long term participatory plans for improvement of resource management, rather than focusing on maximizing short term production. It is particularly essential for places where there are different factions lacking any consensus.

Further Reading

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*More information on these themes & issues can be found in [Project Output to Purpose and End](#) of Project Review documents accessible at RLEP.