

LESSONS LEARNT in CBFM-SSEA SUNAMGANJ DISTRICT, BANGLADESH





1. The sustainable resource management, which is part and parcel of the Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) approach, has led to documented increases in yields as well as returns through reversing environmental degradation, in comparison to the previously existing situation of over-exploitation of fisheries resources.

- Implementing simple, enforceable rules such as banned-fishing periods (3 months) and prevention of complete de-watering, has led to an increase in fish stocks both in weight and in number of species
- While yields of the managed fisheries have increased, the subsistence catches on the fringes of the water bodies have not declined; this is especially of significance to non-member households living around the water bodies, and during the time of the fishing ban.
- Reversing environmental degradation is not only good for fish, it has also led to an increase of useful water plant species, which had become locally extinct; and to the return of migratory bird species, which benefit from the fish sanctuaries as 'safe havens' from hunting.



2. By establishing the Community Based Organisations (CBOs) for management of local water resources, and by formally registering such CBOs within the Government system, grassroots institutions have been created which have successfully exerted their legal rights.

- Exerting rights: Payment of lease fees is not always sufficient for establishing the rights to manage the fisheries resources based on traditional patronage patterns, locally influential persons occasionally have tried in subverting part or all of the prospective fish yields. Concerted action based on proper procedures and access to government officials has proven decisive in such disputes.



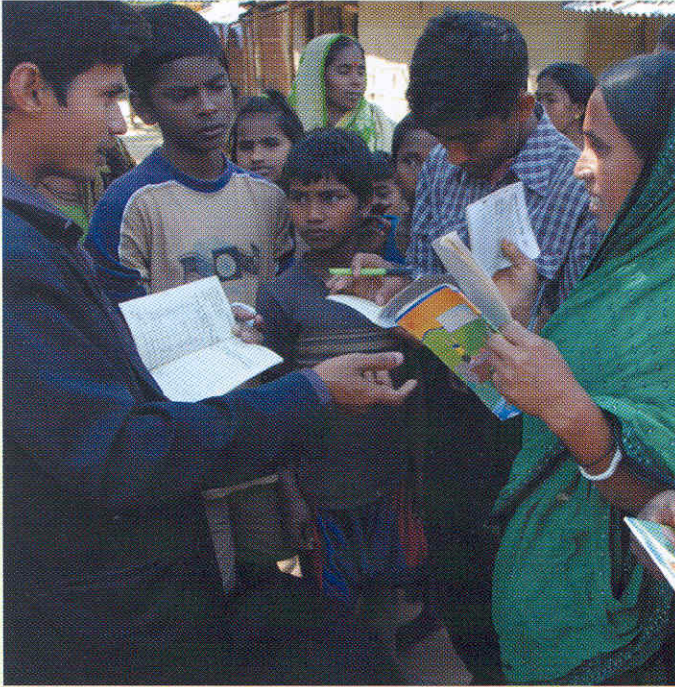
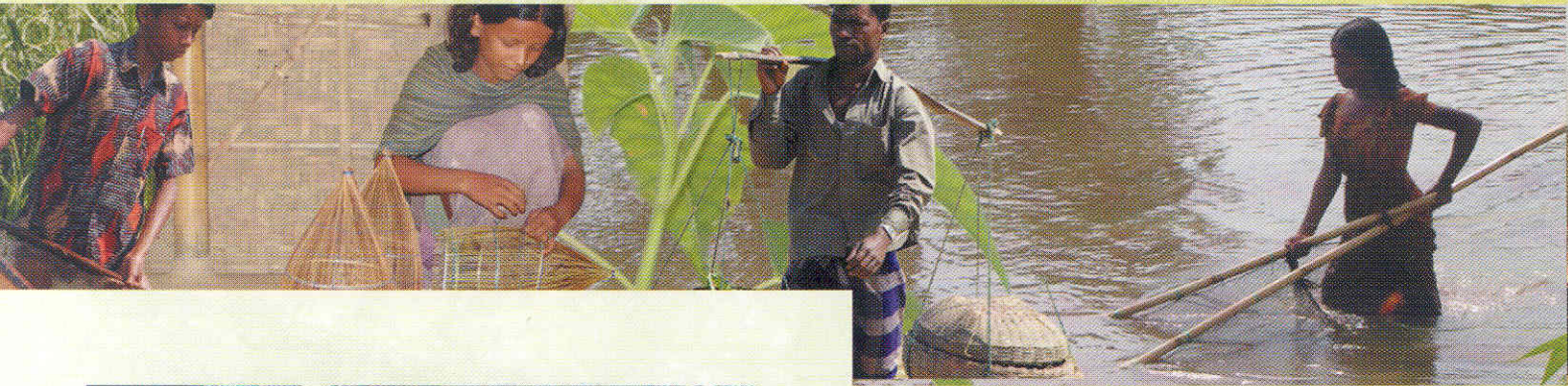
3. Initial revolving grants for payment of the first-year lease fee have proven a justifiable expense in light of the objective of establishing large groups of resource-poor households as sustainable CBOs for fisheries management.

- Analysis of available data indicates that lease fees represent roughly one third to half of total expenses; while market value of the fish yield is approximately double the total expenses. With increasing fish yields, profitability also increases significantly. Basically, the first 1-2 years are the most difficult years financially for the CBOs; while once established, CBOs have been capable of rolling over part of the current year's sales profit into next year's lease fee costs.
- Ideally the first year's lease fee should be covered by non-refundable grant. However, evidence from the project suggests that if the first year is paid through a loan facility, profit would be sufficient to ensure economic viability of the venture.

4. By making the processes of cost sharing and revenue distribution transparent for all inside as well as outside the CBOs, planning the management beyond the day-to-day needs has become feasible, as there is now less fear of losing out on one's individual fishing share.

- Training in basic numeracy ('book keeping') benefits the institution building process, as more people will have a good understanding of financial dealings, i.e. able to independently check on BMC information as well as to distinguish between false and true accusations concerning the use of funds.
- Registration of the CBOs with the Dept. of Cooperatives is a major breakthrough in the development process towards becoming an institutionalized grassroots organization. Registration requires approved bylaws and includes a procedure for annual audit of the accounts by government officials. While such measures are of course open to misuse, it provides nevertheless a starting point for discussion and corrective action.
- Annual election of office bearers provides an actual example of participative democracy at the local level, which is uncommon in Bangladesh. Rotation of office bearers through an election process (by secret ballot) further strengthens the process towards transparency.





5. An Alternative Income Generating Activity (AIGA) scheme supported by micro-credit facilities enables resource poor households to diversify livelihood options and has the added effect of. Provides the Beel Management Committee (BMC) with an opportunity to manage the fishing pressure more effectively.

- Several individuals from resource poor households have graduated into a local middle class resulting in upward social mobility thus providing a counterweight traditional pattern of patronage.
- As members access other income generating opportunities, reliance on fishery for food security declines resulting in options for BMC to increase number of fisher or maintain existing number to reduce fishing pressure for resource conservation.

6. Good fisheries management has led to adjusting the number of fishers in relation to the carrying capacity of the water resources; with increasing yields, the pressure from other resource-poor persons on sharing in the fisheries resource can be accommodated by increasing the number of CBO members.

- There appears to have been a slight increase in the number of fishers with the increasing returns, although obviously the fishers are careful to preserve their benefits. There exists, however, the risk of creating a new CBO elite if the membership is not increased in line with the increasing profits.
- Project needs to encourage CBOs in developing a system for absorbing in new members is the water body a community resource or will a small group of fishermen become the new 'water lords'? If the fishing shares are perceived as very attractive by less-poor members of the community, social pressure on the CBO is likely to increase to include more members.



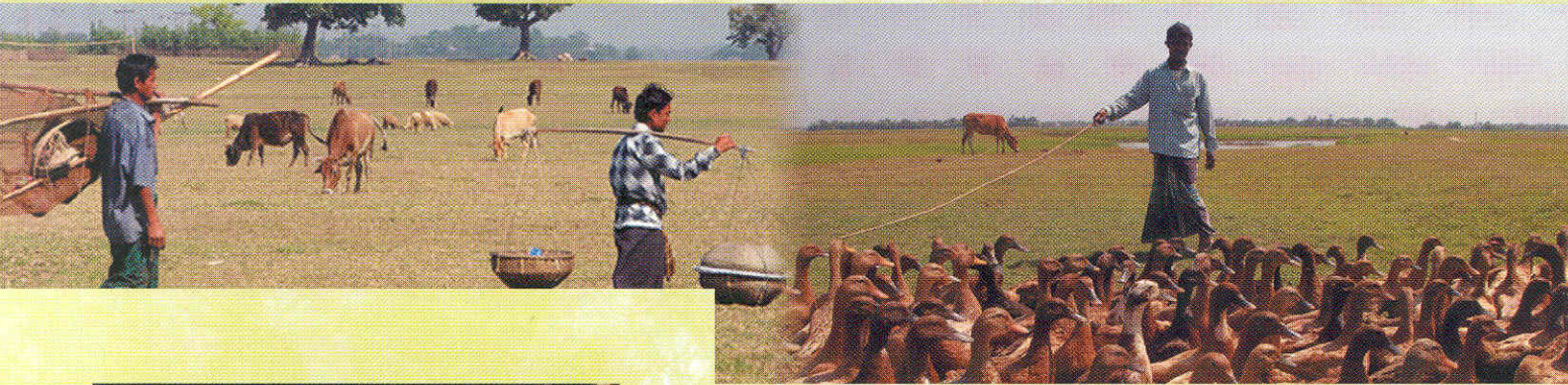
7. Women involvement in actual fishing activities has met serious cultural limitations, making this an option-of-last-resort for seriously deprived women only; nevertheless, inclusion of female representatives in the cluster management bodies has meant that women interests are being represented at the decision-making level for the first time

- Women can be actively involved in the sorting and handling of fish, and in catching of fish with scoops, baskets and push nets etc. The major fish harvest at the end-of-season is done with seine nets which are repeatedly run out from boats and hauled in, which is very hard work indeed; and for which the sari, obligatory for married women, is not very suitable working clothing. Nothing is impossible of course.
- Contrary to popular belief, women and women livelihoods are of concern to most of the men in rural Bangladesh. Examples exist where the fishers have provided opportunities for what they perceived to be destitute women. Proper representation in the CBO at the decision-making level will help further improving the gender dialogue.
- Women influence on the communities has increased through representation on the Beel Management Committees (BMCs) and Cluster Management Committees (CMCs), thereby ensuring the inclusion of the destitute women of the community in the CBO for micro-credit support, and by supporting welfare functions which are also beneficial to women (e.g., one village employed a female high school graduate as a teacher for the local children).

8. Training and support in Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) practices has proven successful in establishing CBOs adequately implementing environmentally sustainable fisheries management practices.

- Local fishers and their communities are receptive to implementing ecologically sound management measures, such as fish sanctuaries, closed fishing season, planting of swamp trees, ban on dewatering, etc.
- Project staff has reached out to other projects in Sunamganj, e.g. Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project, particularly to provide training on right to access natural resources and institutional approach for its sustainable management; training on fish habitat restoration and conservation; and training on participatory fish catch-and-consumption survey and reporting.





9. It is not proven that CBOs can adequately manage their affairs post-project without NGO support. Ways need to be found to ensure NGO support is sustained without project funding.

- The beneficiaries are convinced that, as long as they can retain access to their fishing areas (while excluding others), their basic livelihoods will remain secure. Concern has been expressed *if* CBOs can actually succeed in maintaining effective fisheries management on their water bodies *after the project*. Local business crooks will more-likely-than-not test the resolve of the CBOs once left on their own, and resource conflicts are bound to erupt.

- Minimal follow-up, e.g. 3-4 field visits per year by the local NGOs, during a weaning phase of 2-3 years would be required. However, it was shown that the volume of micro-credit from the six villages under this project is much too small for generating sufficient income for maintaining at least a few NGO staff during the weaning phase.
- From a business perspective, NGOs need to develop mechanisms for increasing the volume of micro-credit per staff member; given the isolated nature of the fishing villages and the intensive support required in CBFM especially in the first 2-3 years, scope for increasing the volume of micro-credit appear limited, and other cost-covering measures must be explored.
- As a cost-covering measure, the CBO might contribute from the fish sales towards the running costs of the NGO, to continue training and support activities for the general benefit of the community, and as a kind of insurance at times of conflicts over the fishing leases (for instance, encroachment, fish theft by 'forced fishing', lease renewal process, etc). The NGOs may job share their staff among different project groups to cut costs for individual groups.

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