

Building consensus

Devolving management of natural resources to users



There is a widely held view in development that the management of natural resources can be improved if it is devolved to the resource users themselves. Whether there is equitable distribution of benefits from community-based management is uncertain because of the social systems entwined in the use of these resources. But there is a demand for tools to support community-based management of natural resources and particularly common pool resources.

In Bangladesh, a community-based method for consensus building – Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) – was developed, tested and promoted. Its success and further development across a number of different natural resources management systems has led to plans to scale-up its use. To assist its wider promotion, suitable communication materials that would enable others to learn about PAPD and to put it into practice were needed.

Participatory Action Plan Development

Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) helps people to plan and manage their natural resources and especially those that are commonly owned. It is specifically for use with multiple stakeholder groups and it uses different participatory tools to reach consensus on the actions that are needed.

Many stakeholders are involved in the management and use of natural resources and PAPD is designed to represent all their views and not just the most vocal or socio-politically powerful. It actively encourages participation by the poorer members of a community and encourages community participants to respect others' concerns. The end result of a PAPD is a community action plan, with roles, responsibilities and a budget for managing natural resources.

PAPD has been used in Bangladesh since 1996. It was developed by the Centre for Natural Resources Studies (CNRS), a local NGO, to build consensus among natural resources users for taking initiatives to protect and restore fresh water swamp and wetlands of rich aquatic biodiversity that also provide the communities with their livelihoods. Since then CNRS has continued to use and develop it across a number of different natural resources management systems.

Wetlands management

Bangladesh has the highest population density in the world and consequently land value is high and there are many disputes over its ownership. Large areas are owned by the Government but much is illegally occupied. Wetlands and other valuable natural resources are damaged and lost due to illegal occupation and conversion to agricultural land, or other products.

The Haor basin is a vast seasonally flooded area of swamp forests and reed lands that make up a diverse and productive aquatic environment with a rich biodiversity of aquatic flora, bird and fish habitats, water bodies, canals, swamps and forests. This is gradually being degraded and destroyed by natural processes and by the local population and this threatens both the livelihoods of the people who depend on the Haor and the biodiversity of the region. A survey in 1999 estimated that more than 90 percent of the swamp forests have been cleared and more than 50 percent of perennial wetlands are either converted or encroached by the local population.



A communications needs assessment was conducted to identify stakeholders who could potentially benefit from using PAPD in their programmes



PAPD was used in a number of Haors communities to build consensus among the resources users and in many cases this led to the communities developing an action plan including solutions to the problems of managing and restoring the natural resources on which they depend.

Scaling-up

Since the development of PAPD there has been considerable interest shown by other international and national organisations such as the WorldFish Centre, IUCN, ITDG-Bangladesh, two national NGOs (Caritas and Proshika), and the Bangladesh Department of Fisheries (DoF). But promotional material and training in its use was not widely available beyond CNRS. Such interest led researchers to consider ways of scaling-up the use of PAPD by clearly identifying those who would benefit from its use, regionally and nationally, promoting it to them and developing an appropriate resource package for users. A mechanism was also tested to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of PAPD and how lessons learnt from its use can feed back into its further development or adaptation.

A communications needs assessment was conducted to identify stakeholders who could potentially benefit from using PAPD in their programmes and to find out how they prefer to receive and exchange information. More than 150 organisations indicated an interest and a small sample was selected for more in-depth analysis on their use of participatory planning processes, their knowledge of PAPD and their information needs (see table).

The results indicated that among senior management there was preference for receiving information through short, targeted meetings. They were interested to find out how the method could be used in their programmes, what impact or benefits could be expected and what resources were needed. Large one-day workshops, or meetings were found to be unsuitable for reaching these people as was email and the Internet. One of the key stakeholders, the Department of Fisheries, has only limited access to computer-based information services.

Communications plan for PAPD			
Clients to communicate with	Communications media	Timing	Intended result
Meso-level decision makers in Dept of Fisheries	Sensitisation visits to PAPD sites	Biannual	Raise awareness, Visual evidence of PAPD process in action
International Research Organisations – researchers and managers	Short, targeted presentations on PAPD process	Continuous	Use of PAPD as a method for consensus building and improved management of NRs
	Glossy colour brochure ‘what is PAPD’	Widely distributed in Bangladesh (1500+ copies) Available as PDF on web	Wider awareness
International audience – research, International NGOs	Web-pages ‘what is PAPD’ Download version of resource pack and video clips	Continuous	Wider awareness and use outside Bangladesh. Limited use in Bangladesh
Practitioners in local, national and international NGOs working in NR sector	On-the-job training – use of facilitation materials	Continuous	Wider awareness
Government officials at middle management level and below Training organisations	Classroom training – a resource manual and video clips	Continuous	Wider awareness

A range of media

A comprehensive communications 'package' was developed from this assessment that recognised that one medium such as a workshop, newsletter or video would not achieve a desired change. A range of media was needed with different communications objectives. The final 'package' comprised a short glossy brochure that could be handed out to key stakeholders combined with short (1-2 hour) direct presentations. A comprehensive resource pack was developed for facilitators who work directly with the communities. This was to teach them about the method and to guide them through the process. Visits to sites where PAPD was already being used was also seen as an important promotional tool as was providing access to material on the Internet particularly for international organisations, national NGOs and donor supported projects.

The resource pack contains instruction manuals and video clips and is designed as a 'stand-alone' package, though CNRS believes that facilitators need training if they are to use the materials competently. They also specify a number of pre-conditions for those conducting a PAPD. These include a very good understanding and rapport with the target communities, good facilitation skills and being in a position to follow-up and monitor with the communities.

"I think PAPD is an effective way of involving beneficiaries in planning and implementation activities. They can be involved in discussions on what they think is right. They can monitor their activity as well as analyse the impact. I am very much impressed when I see the government administration and related departments, local elite persons and NGO personnel socially involved with this process and committed to play an active role."

DoF employee on an exposure visit to a PAPD site.

The outcome

While the brochure was useful for raising awareness about PAPD so far there have been very few enquiries from this medium or from the Internet.

Word of mouth from those with practical knowledge of PAPD has proved to be the most successful medium.

Most of the interest concerned the Resource Pack and the supporting video materials and the need now is to make these more widely available throughout the country.

CNRS suggest that facilitators need to be trained to use the Pack. They need to have a good understanding and rapport with the target communities, good facilitation skills and are able to follow-up and monitor the communities.

PAPD Resource pack can be obtained from CNRS via www.itad.com

R8223 A learning and communications programme for Participatory Action Plan Development methodology

This project builds on

R7562 Consensus building in Common Pool Resources

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