

**Community
Based Fisheries
Management
Under Sunamganj
Community
Based Resource
Management
Project (SCBRMP)
In Bangladesh**



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INAFI Bangladesh and PROCASUR Corporation

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List of Acronyms

BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BMC	Beel Management Committee
BUG	Beel Users Group
CBFM	Community Based Fisheries Management
CO	Credit Organization
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DoF	Department of Fisheries
HILIP	Haor Infrastructure and Livelihood Improvement Project
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INAFI	International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions
LCS	Labor Contracting Societies
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
MoL	Ministry of Land
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
SCBRMP	Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project
WF	World Fish Center of CGIAR

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Executive Summary

This case study analyses the experience and successful factors in community based fisheries management (CBFM) of a Beel Users Group (BUG) developed under the IFAD funded Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) in Bangladesh. Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG has been selected by SCBRMP for this case study as it is one of the largest groups among the BUGs developed by the project and has demonstrated efficient CBFM skills.

Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG has been selected by SCBRMP as this is considered to be one of the most successful BUGs in terms of experiencing significant positive impact on beel management, fish conservation and inclusion of proper gender balance in management as promoted by the project. Fish harvesting practice in this open water-body is also different from other typical BUGs under this project as this is a river which has adequate water round the year.

The SCBRMP aimed to increase the assets and income of 90,000 households by developing self-managed grass-roots organizations to improve their access to primary resources, employment, self-employment and credit. There were four technical and one management component in the project: (i) rural infrastructure; (ii) community fisheries; (iii) agriculture and livestock; (iv) microfinance and, (v) project management.

The project facilitated the establishment of CBFM in two steps: beel (water body) lease and handover to genuine fishers through various stakeholders and initiating beel resource management activities. The project provided trainings to the BUG members on group management, accounting and bookkeeping, group dynamics and conflict resolutions, fish conservation and biodiversity, beel re-excavation, raising swamp tree nurseries and beel side plantation, fish drying and fish marketing, and familiarization with National Jalmahal¹ (water body) Management Guidelines and its implications. The female BUG members received training on cage fish culture. The project also focused on women empowerment and promoted gender equality.

With the support of the project, the BUG members gained the users' right of their designated beel. The BUG has the right to use the water body for 10 years on lease. The lease is paid to the Ministry of Land through the local Deputy Commissioner (DC) Office. The profit earned from collective fishing in the beel is equally distributed among the members each year. The project also facilitated formation of Credit Organizations (CO) to provide access to financial services in the locality.

Through this project, effective CBFM has been developed. Fish production and biodiversity has increased as a result of establishment of fish sanctuary and enforcement of closed fishing season during the breeding time. Amount of harvested fish has increased and consequently the incomes of the fisher households have also increased. Through formation of Credit Organizations (CO), the members gained access to financial services such as credit and savings.

As a result of the project interventions, women's mobility increased. The female BUG members feel more empowered as they have a sustainable source of income through the beel. The role in family decision making by the women has also increased.

Combined efforts by all actors involved in the process have been crucial in developing efficient BUGs to undertake community fisheries management. Such initiative have given the genuine fishermen access to water bodies for low-cost fishing which previously had not been possible as the fishermen were at the mercy of the rural elites who exercised control over the water bodies. Women have been empowered by including them in the fish production chain which was typically regarded as men's job. New methods of aquaculture have opened up increased opportunity for higher profits.

The success of the CBFM under this project is such that it has been scaled up in the whole Haor area under another IFAD funded project, the Haor Infrastructure and Livelihood Improvement Project (HILIP). It is recommended that the linkage between the BUGs and local fisheries department be continued and strengthened in order to ensure technical support after the project is completed. In order to sustain the changes in gender relation within the community long term strategic planning and intervention is required. Interventions in strengthening market linkage for fish can also be explored.

¹ Jalmahal refers to water-bodies that remain water-logged for certain period of time every year or round the year. Such water-bodies include Haor, baor, beel, jheel, pond, lake, river and sea.

1. Introduction

This case study analyses one of the successful experiences of community based fisheries management under the IFAD funded Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) in Bangladesh. The Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi Beel User Group (BUG) which has been focused in this case study is located at Bishwambharpur upazila of Sunamganj district.

INAFI (International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions) Bangladesh and PROCASUR Corporation in collaboration with SCBRMP conducted the study, and thanks to the full support provided by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Information pertaining to the case was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Literature review included SCBRMP's various documents including Annual Reports and other project reports. Field visit to Kholachanpur village of Bishwambharpur upazila, Sunamganj included focus group discussion with the BUG.

Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG has been selected by SCBRMP as this is considered one of the most successful BUGs in terms of experiencing significant positive impact on beel management, fish conservation and inclusion of proper gender balance in management as promoted by the project. Fish harvesting practice in this open water-body is also different from other typical BUGs under this project as this is a river which has adequate water round the year.

Section two of this document provides an overview of the project including details on BUG formation and its role; section three describes the experience of the Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG and the impact of SCBRMP in fishery management and fishing activities; sections four and five focus on lessons learned from the project and recommendations for the next phase respectively.

2. Overview of Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP)

2.1 The Project

Community Based Resource Management Project (CBRMP) is a 12 years project funded by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and being implemented by Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in partnership with Ministry of Land, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Local Administration, Department of Agriculture and WorldFish (WF). The project from January 2003 to July 2014 has been implemented in three phases covering all 11 upazilas of Sunamganj district.

Sunamganj Haor basin is extremely remote area with high poverty rate. Main characteristic of the haor area is that the area remains under water for better part of the year. As a result, livelihood opportunities are very limited. Remoteness of the area and severely underdeveloped transport infrastructure add to the difficulties of people already living with hardship.

The main objectives of the project has been to increase the assets and income of 90,000 households by developing self-managed grass-roots organizations to improve their access to primary resources, employment, self-employment and credit; and support the development of an institutional base to replicate the project approach in other areas of Bangladesh. The SCBRMP has 5 components: i) rural infrastructure; ii) community fisheries; iii) microfinance; iv) agriculture and livestock; and v) project management.

Under the first component, basic infrastructure has been developed in the project area which was severely underdeveloped. Through this component, employment has also been created for the poorest community mainly during the slack period. The community fisheries component focused on ensuring the access of the community people to the water bodies of the project area. The component aimed to get the access of 300 beels of which 100 are above 20 acres. This project, also targeted to increase the number of beels as well as fish species and develop the capacity of the fishing society.

Through microfinance component, the project aimed to develop Credit Organizations (CO) comprising the community poor people especially the women and create access to credit services for them under two categories. Agriculture and livestock is not the sector having the comparative advantage in the area due to frequent externalities such as flash floods. The component's target is to increase the income and enhance the scope of food security in the community through promoting crop and livestock production.

Until June 2014, the project has reached 86,737 households from 1090 villages in 11 upazilas.

As part of its outstanding achievements in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, the project was awarded IFAD Gender Award for Asia and the Pacific Region in 2013.

2.2 Formation of Beel User Group (BUG)

Under the Community Fisheries component, SCBRMP had a target of developing (through excavating and re-excavating) 300 beels and handing those over to the local fisher community for 10 years through lease from Land Ministry. For giving lease of the beels the project formed Beel User Groups (BUGs) comprising the fisher communities adjacent to the targeted water bodies. One BUG receives the users' right of one beel.

Each BUG has a 9 member Beel Management Committee (BMC) which is elected every 2 years by the BUG members. The BMC is accountable for overall management of its respective beel. There is a well-structured detailed guideline describing the overall management, activities and responsibilities of a BUG which also strictly promotes following the legal laws of conservation of the fish and water bodies. Fine is charged if the guideline is violated.

LGED under this project has first identified and demarked resource bases through mapping and surveying. They listed the households of the villages around the beel area and based on their well-being, the project identified potential members for developing BUG and finalized the list. After analyzing this list, the BUGs have been formed.

To be admitted in a new BUG one has to apply first to SCBRMP and has to be enlisted in the fisher community member list for a specific beel procured by SCBRMP. On the other hand to be admitted in an existing BUG, first, one has to be enlisted as a fisher community member of a specific beel and then apply to SCBRMP. Each member has to make a payment of BDT 25 as admission fee and has to accept and sign the BUG guidelines.

Criteria for becoming a BUG member:

- **Socioeconomic status:** to become a BUG member one has to be listed as an actual fisher community according to the respective clause of Government Jalmahal (water-body) Management Guidelines 2009. Members of a BUG should be selected from the fisher community list of SCBRMP and have to be approved by a government officer before admitting in the BUG. One will not be able to apply for the membership of a BUG if he or she owns more than 2.5 acres of arable land.
- **Gender:** 30% of the BUG members should be female.
- **Age limit:** 18- 60 years.
- **Dwelling status:** members have to be permanent resident of the respective beel adjacent para/village.
- **Membership:** one member from one household.
- **Legal status:** a BUG will not include any member who has been convicted by a court. Loan defaulter from any organization will not be acceptable to be a BUG member.
- **Other considerations:** CO members under the project will get priority in becoming BUG members.

Members are entitled to have the full right to use their respective beel and have to contribute in at least 80 percent of the work for catching fish. To some extent this is relaxed for the female members.

The BUG members can earn from selling fish and from wages earned by giving labour in catching fish. The profit from selling fish is equally distributed among the members in a very transparent way annually by organizing an event participated by the concerned government and private stakeholders and project staffs.

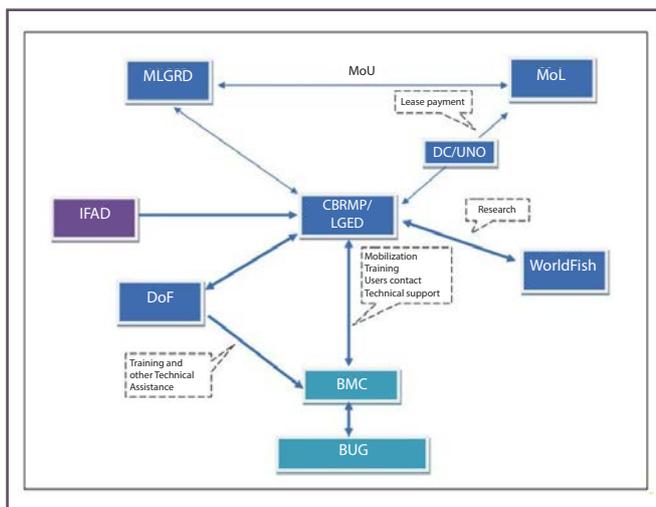
In enclosed water-bodies such as beels, organized catch is practiced for harvesting fish at a regular interval during the fishing season. Individual fishing is prohibited during the off season and in certain areas inside the beel such as fish sanctuaries even during the fishing season. Fish harvested from the beel through organized catch is sold by auction. The profit is divided among the fishers (male and female) equally. Even though individual fishing is not prohibited during the fishing season, this is not a common practice. Only surface fishing is practiced by some individual fishermen towards the end of the fishing season.

Participation of female members is highly promoted by the project. Female members help in net/ gear making, sorting of large catch for enhanced value addition, and in post-harvest processing and preservation, e.g. drying. Male members on the other hand are mainly involved in fishing, marketing, setting up of sanctuaries and guarding the water bodies. All the BUG members are treated equally in exercising voting rights, attendance in the meetings and decision making process.

The members participate at all level of beel management planning and implementation. Members of the BUG who are also the general body members are responsible to elect the BMC members. 30 percent of the members of the BMC should be female. The BUG members are the general body and the BMC members plays the role of executive body. BMC is elected for 2 years through direct voting and no members are elected for subsequent terms. Each month one BUG and one BMC meeting is held. Each BUG has a bank account which can be accessed by the Cashier or the President and in absence of the President by the Secretary.

2.3 Beel Handover through Various Stakeholders

Under this project, many beels and khals have been excavated. Sanctuaries for fishes have been created to save the extinct fish species. Many low cost and innovative techniques for fishing have been introduced at different parts of the district by this project. All the activities were done in collaboration with different relevant ministries, departments and institutes.



Map of Actors: Various stakeholders involved in the CBFM process.

Ministry of Land (MoL) played the key role in gaining access to the water bodies. All beels were transferred under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) from the MoL to LGED through the Local Government Ministry (MLGRD). Beels above 20 acres were transferred to LGED through Deputy Commissioner's Office and beels below 20 acres through Upazila Nirbahi Officer and then to the community. LGED provided training on the total process of CBFM through Department of Fisheries (DoF). The project provided training to both BUG and BMC.

3. The Case of Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi Beel Users Group

3.1 Background and Location: The BUG

Sunamganj district comprised of 11 upazilas with an area of 3669.58 sq km is located in the North-East of Bangladesh. The district standing on the bank of river Surma is rich in natural resources with plain cultivable land and open-water bodies such as haor, beels and canals. However, the low lying land of the district is highly prone to floods every year which makes the local community vulnerable. Siltation in the riverbeds is the major cause for flooding as well as for decline in the fish production in the area. Out of the total households, 51% have no land and are wage labourers, and 35% are marginal farmers owning less than 2.5 acre of land.²

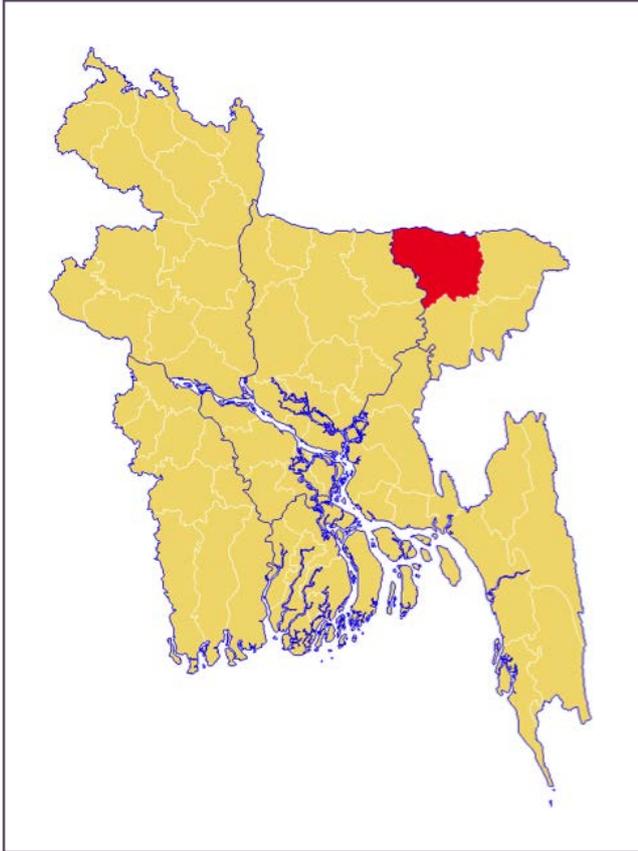
Bishwambharpur upazila is a remote area located along the Haor³ basin. In order to get to the nearest district town from Bishwambharpur, one has to take an engine boat ride for 30-40 minutes to Bishwambharpur Market. From there it's another 30 minutes motorbike ride to the ghat (riverbank). After crossing the river it takes another 15 minutes to reach Sunamganj town. Public transport is very limited in the area.

Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG

There are four villages along Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi: Kholachanpur, Fatepur, Khirdorpur and Gopalganj Barokori. These are known as the beel command villages. Altogether there are 550 households in these villages among which 230 are fisher households.

² Annual report 2012-2013, Community Based Resource Management Project

³ Haor is a wetland ecosystem in the north eastern part of Bangladesh



members form sub-groups within the BUG and work (renting the instrument for fishing, catching, sorting, marketing, processing fishes, etc.) according to this sub-group. There is a Beel Management Committee (BMC) of 9 members which is responsible for the management of the BUG as well as the water body they got the ownership of. BMC meeting is held on 10th of each month and also a BUG meeting is held on 24th of each month. 80 members of the BUG are to participate in that meeting. However, not all members are able to attend the meeting every month.

The one of the unique characteristics of Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi is that, unlike majority of the beels, it has adequate water for fishing activities round the year as it is a river. The BUG members are able to capture fish the whole year and usually harvest fish individually rather than in groups. The main source of earning for this BUG is licensing fee for fishing gears for both BUG and non-BUG fishermen to get access to the water body. One has to apply to the BMC for getting licence for a net. The license fee depends on the type and size of net used, fishing season, fishing area etc. All the dwellers of the beel adjacent area, both male and female, can apply for the licence.

Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG was formed in 2007. It has 80 members from surrounding villages. The BUG has the exclusive users' right to the water body which is 66.28 acres. The water body was acquired by SCBRMP from the local government in April 2007. It was transferred to the BUG in May 2007. The area of the water body has been demarcated by pillars. The demarcation was completed in April 2009. For 10 year lease of the particular water body, the BUG has to pay a rent of BDT 92,000 to Deputy Commissioner Office.

Among 80 BUG members, 33 are female. Both male and female members are equally entitled to the exercise their users' right and have equal share in profits earned irrespective of their role in fishing activities. The membership of the BUG is renewed every 2 years. The



Members of Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi Beel Users Group at Kholachanpur village

3.2 Project Activities

Developing Efficient Beel Users Groups for Community Fisheries Management

The project facilitated formation of BUG for each water body. The users' right of their respective water bodies has been transferred to the BUGs. One of the main objectives forming the BUGs was to ensure appropriate and sustainable management of water bodies as well as give the genuine fisherman access to water bodies to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

In order to ensure effective and efficient management of water bodies by the BUG, the project provided training to the BUG members on group management, accounting and bookkeeping, group dynamics and conflict resolutions, fish conservation and biodiversity, beel re-excavation, raising swamp tree nurseries and beel side plantation, fish drying and fish marketing, and familiarization with National Jalmahal (water body) Management Guidelines and its implications.

The female BUG members received training from the project on cage fish culture. They visited Chandpur and Comilla to see firsthand and learn more about cage fish culture.

Beel Development

Beel development process by the project includes beel demarcation, beel excavation by Labour Contracting Societies (LCS)⁴, beel connecting khal excavation by LCS, swamp tree plantation and constructing beel connecting roads. The project has also introduced fish sanctuary establishment in most of the water bodies and cage fish culture in some of the water bodies.

The area of each beel is demarcated with pillars. Within the demarcated area, the BUG members have the exclusive right to fish.

A village protection wall has been built along the river to save the village Kholachanpur from river erosion. The wall was built in 2011-12. The wall was constructed by the village people. One day training had been given by the project on construction process of the wall.

Fish Sanctuary to Protect and Conserve Fish Biodiversity

Under the project, fish sanctuaries have been built in majority of the water bodies in order to ensure conservation of fish biodiversity and to prevent the extinction of several endangered species. Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi has a fish sanctuary of 3000 square meters. This sanctuary has helped to prevent the extinction of several species and has enhanced their production. Some of the fish species with increased production are Pabda (Pabo Catfish), Aair (Giant River-catfish), Chitol (Humped Featherback), Batashi Indian Potasi) and Aloni, amongst others. The fishing remains closed from 15th of Falgun (from March) for about 4 months as this is the breeding period for the fish.

⁴ LCS are groups of women and/or men from local community who are contracted to work as construction labour.

Introduction to Additional Methods of Aquaculture

The project has also been promoting the use of cage aquaculture which only uses bamboo structure with netting materials. As the materials for this technology are easily available, the cost of this type of aquaculture is low. Initially the project provided some selected female BUG members cages free of cost.

The project also increased the quantity of nutrient rich Mola fish in the beels. As initial step, in April- May 2013, "Mola" fish stocking has been made in 14 beels, which has shown successful results with larger quantity of mola fish catch by the BUGs. With the increase in mola fish stocking, the community now has access to improved nutritional intake.

Generating Profits through BUG Members' and Non-members' Fishing Activities

The members of this BUG catch fish using different types of nets and fishing hooks. There is token system for using the nets and other gears. The BUG members decide the rates of all types of fishing instruments for a specific season unanimously at the BUG meeting. The members have to select the gear or type of net they want to use for a specific season and rent that instrument at the fixed rate. They are given a token for renting the instrument. The money raised through distributing these tokens is saved in a common bank account opened for that respective BUG. The BUG reimburses the lease fee to the government at Sunamganj DC Office from this token fee annually. The surplus amount is distributed equally among the members annually as profits.



Fishermen on Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi

Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG also provides non-members gear license which is not a usual practice in other BUGs. As this is an open water body and fishing is allowed throughout the year, other fishermen are also allowed and encouraged to fish in this water in exchange for license fee for their fishing gears. This has become the main income source of this BUG.

Facilitated Formation of Credit Organization (CO)

The project facilitated formation of community based credit organizations (CO) to encourage savings and credit activities. The people of Kholachanpur village have been member of the Credit Organization (CO) under the SCBRMP. There were 54 members in that CO. 30 of which were from west neighborhood and 24 from east neighborhood. The CO had a mandatory savings policy. With the fund generated from the savings, the CO offered credit services to its members.

3.3 Fisheries Management: The Traditional Way

The Government of Bangladesh has always been promoting and conceiving the idea to make available the water bodies to the genuine fisher communities. This right of the fisher community has been endorsed by the respective clause of National Jalmahal (water-body) Management Guidelines since long, though enforcement was not so prevalent.

In the haor basin of Sunamganj, most of the people have been involved in fishing for generations. However, lack of implementation and monitoring mechanism failed to state the effectiveness of the distribution of the water bodies among the community following the government rule. Rich and influential individuals exercised control over the land and water bodies whereas the genuine fisher community was left in the mercy of these rural elite groups.

Fishermen had to pay a significant amount in terms of money or fishes in order to capture fish in the river or haor as each of these was controlled by the influential people in the area. Fishermen also had to rent fishing nets and other gears from the so-called owners of the beels at a much higher price. No special care was taken to maintain the water bodies. Overfishing was a common practice as more fishing meant more profit for the owners of the beel. Misuse, mismanagement of water bodies and overfishing threatened the fish biodiversity as these water bodies were the home of many endangered species of fish.

3.4 Improved Community Based Fisheries Management through SCBRMP

Improved management of the water body resources

242 beels have been re-excavated as of June 2014 for development and habitat restoration and that has created almost 500,000 labor days for employment; 64 ponds of 30.83 acres and 69 khals (canals) with a length of 69.95 km have been re-excavated, respectively to facilitate fish refuge and migration of fishes from rivers to beels and vice versa.

Various awareness and capacity building trainings have made the BUG members conscious about how to take care of and to improve the environment of the beels which would in the long run develop better habitat for the fish on which they live. The BUG members are now confident that they are able to manage the water body on their own as they have been equipped with the necessary knowledge through the project.

The BUG members have used the acquired knowledge and skill from the training in different beel resource development activities such as planting swamp tree in beel areas, fixing demarcation pillars, establishing and maintaining fish sanctuary, re-excavating beels for habitat restoration, raising cage fisheries and so on. The BUG has also put restrictions on some harmful gears such as ber jaal (fishing net) and current jaal on all seasons.

Increased fish production and biodiversity

The establishment of fish sanctuary in the river has helped prevent several endangered species from extinction and has also increased their production. Swamp forestry has been initiated to make the beels more inhabitable for fishes. Some fish species that disappeared few years back and were declared endangered are now returning back in the haors due to their environment friendly fishing and development activities. A study by WorldFish has showed that fish production has increased from 663 kg/ha in 2007-08 to 720 kg/ha in 2009-10. Increase in the number of fish species has also been noted after the project intervention from 88 to 133 species.⁵

In the year 2012 the production of fish of Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG was 11,000 kg whereas at the beginning the fish production of this BUG used to be only 7,000 to 8,000 kg annually.

⁵ Supervision mission report 25 September – 7 October 2013

Improved livelihoods of the fisher community

Community based fisheries management (CBFM) is a relatively new approach which has ensured increased fish production and biodiversity through better management of the water bodies and resulted in increased income for the fisher communities.

Through this project LGED has been able to handover 250 beels till June 2014 to 250 BUGs from the target of 300 beels comprising a total area of 6015 acres. These 250 BUGs have been formed of 9061 members of which 2244 are women. Each BUG member received on average BDT 3,337 from selling of fish and BDT 3,800 as wages with total revenue of BDT 7,137. Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG received a profit of BDT 400,000 in the fiscal year 2012-2013.⁶

In total, fish production by all the BUGs stood at 1.6 million kg by 2014. The value of the fish produced was approximately BDT 1.67 billion. Around BDT 70 million (cumulative) was distributed among the BUG members as profit. The cumulative figure for wage earned by the BUG members was BDT 37.2 million.

The access right to the water bodies has increased the belief and respect of the members about their traditional occupation. They now own the exclusive right to use the water body which has been the source of their livelihoods for generations.

Improved access to financial services through CO

The loans were utilized by the CO members in different income generating activities including petty trades, agriculture and livestock rearing, aquaculture, food processing (for example, making pickles) and buying fishing nets .

Most of the female of Kholachanpur village were the members of the CO. Through the CO the members also gained access to credit from the Project Credit Line through Bangladesh Krishi Bank and invested in various IGAs such as livestock rearing, paddy cultivation, vegetable cultivation, fisheries, etc. The CO members received training on different income generating activities under the project.

A female BUG member, Swaraswati Barman started small trade with her loan. She is a widow. She does not have her own homestead. She has built a house in another person's land where she lives with her son. Her son catches fish. She herself is a small trader. She brings different types of vegetable from Sunamganj Sadar by boat and sells those at her neighborhood in Bishwambharpur.

Significant progress in terms of women empowerment

The project actively promoted gender equality along with providing women access to natural resources, financial services and skill development opportunities. Till June 2014, 25% of the total BUG members were women against the target of 30% female beneficiaries. The BUG guideline clearly confirms the inclusion of gender equal behavior among the BUG members. All the BUG members are treated equally in exercising voting rights, attendance in the meetings and decision making process. The women also hold key executive positions in the BMC. For instance, Probhashini Barman of the Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG is female and is successfully managing the accounts. The female members feel that they now have more respect within their family as well as the community by being directly involved in fisheries management.

Access to user right of the beel and a sustainable way of income has made the women feel empowered. The women BUG members are playing significant role in decision making within the BUG as well as in the family which also has empowered them with the confidence to spend their money as per their wish. Women's mobility has also increased significantly. According to the Third Round Livelihood Impact Monitoring Report of BUG Members, 84.6 percent households' women visited water bodies for collecting natural resources such as fuel, fodder and water. Their mobility to other places/ institutions such as markets, banks and Union Parishad has also increased. It has been reported that, the role of the female BUG members in their family decision making has increased substantially specifically in case of children's education.⁷

⁶ Beel Profile (June 2013)

⁷ Supervision Mission Report 25 September – 7 October 2013

4. Lessons Learned

Community based fisheries management developed successfully through cooperation of various stakeholders

Community based fisheries development and management is a multi-stakeholders initiative. Commitment and determination from all parties involved have been essential in making this venture successful. Gaining and maintaining access to beels can be challenging. Combined effort by all actors involved in the process has been crucial in developing efficient BUGs to undertake fisheries management.

CBFM led to improved livelihoods for fishermen

Through CBFM, the fishermen of the BUG received access to water bodies for low-cost fishing which previously had not been possible as the fishermen were at the mercy of the rural elites who exercised control over the water bodies. This has not only created a sustainable income source for them but has also given them a way to earn a profit from the BUG fund. Overall income of the fishermen households have increased significantly.

Empowering women by including them in the production chain

The project actively promoted gender equality through various awareness campaigns and women focused activities. However, in order to ensure the empowerment of women in the target area, the project has included them in the production chain of aquaculture. The female BUG members have been very active and have been able to raise their voice within their community. The female members are still not, however, directly involved in fish capturing. The women are involved in making and knitting fishnets, fish sorting, beel swamp planting, post-harvest processing and preservation, whereas male members are responsible for catching fish, marketing, developing and maintaining the sanctuaries.

Higher profitability from the new aquaculture methods

The project has introduced different types of cage culture in different beels which have proven to be quite profitable. One type of cage culture with 1mX1m cage can provide profits up to BDT 25,000 a year. Cage fish culture does not require much area. Women have become more involved in this type of aquaculture as this can be done near the homestead.



Cage fish culture by Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG.

Identifying and including genuine fishermen have yielded good results

The formation of BUG was preceded by developing a list of genuine fishermen in the target area. The fishermen in the haor area have been long deprived of the right to use the water bodies which they could only get access to by paying a high amount of money to the rural 'elites' who controlled the water bodies. The project has paved a way for these fishermen to have users' right to their designated water body. Those other than the BUG members also have the option of wage employment in the beels.

BUG of open water bodies have different fish harvesting and marketing practice

Advantage of open water body is that the water level is more or less consistent throughout the year. Apart from the fish sanctuary, fish can be captured round the year. In enclosed water bodies such as beels, fish is harvested mostly through organized catch⁸ and sold through auctions. Open catch or individual catch is not a common practice in such water bodies. In contrast to that, in open water bodies such as Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi, BUG members usually harvest fish individually rather than in groups. They capture fish for daily consumption. The excess fish is sold in nearby local market.

Since Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi does not have any closed fishing season, the BUG members allow non-members access to the river in exchange for a fee. This licensing fee for the fishing gears is the main income source for the Abua Prokashito Nainda Nodi BUG.

5. Recommendations

Continue sustainable linkage with the local fisheries department for technical assistance

The project now provides all kinds of technical assistance to the BUG members regarding fisheries management, fish sanctuary management etc. through Department of Fisheries. The area being very remote, access to information is somewhat limited. After project completion it might be difficult for the BUG members to receive technical information and assistance when required. It is crucial to maintain the linkage with the local fisheries department to ensure continuous flow of information regarding fisheries management.

Long term strategic planning to promote gender equality

As a result of the project interventions, mobility of women in the target area has increased significantly. They are now more conscious about their role in the community and are more involved in income generating activities. However, more rigorous campaign and long term interventions are required to sustain this change. The female BUG members are still only involved in fish drying and processing, and making fishnets. The female members can be encouraged to actively take part in fish capturing and marketing.

Market linkage for fish to ensure higher price

The Haor area is quite remote and distant from the nearest district town. Most BUG members sell their fish at the Bishwambharpur upazila market where demand is quite limited. There is still scope of improving fish market linkage.

⁸ In organized catch, multiple BUG members together capture fish at a regular interval.

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