

Introducing the Partner: Lessons-learned from the Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project

Pleased to meet you!

Interview with Md. Abul Hashem Sumon, participant of the COMACON and Project Director in the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh for the GIZ Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project (WBRP). Following the Conference Mr. Sumon was happy to share his thoughts concerning his personal COMACON “Take-Home Messages” and reflect on the state of Co-Management in Bangladesh



By Gerrit Qualitz & Angelina Halder

Please introduce yourself and your position.

Md. Abul Hashem Sumon, deputizing as Project Director of Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project (WBRP), Department of Fisheries, a joint collaboration project of Government of Bangladesh and Germany, since 2009.

What is the content of WBRP Project?

WBRP support people to restore their wetland ecosystem – to improve and protect living conditions. We raise awareness among local communities to enable them to manage their wetlands. We have many work packages as per project’s technical proposal. Some important of these are: Community mobilization and organization; Ecosystem restoration; Training and capacity building of beneficiaries; Studies and surveys; Business Development Services (BDS) and Alternative Income Generation Activities (AIGAs) among beneficiaries; Policy advices/Issues and Project management.

What is the main challenge of the project?

It is very important to say that access rights of resource users group to the wetland resource management is a crucial issue. Another thing is Integrated Natural Resources Management System: since wetlands are owned by the Ministry of Land, wetland management is more critical then forest management. Forest Department reserves the land ownership and manages forest but for the wetlands, Department of Fisheries (DoF) doesn’t have any wetland ownership. We have to work by taking lease for a period of time from Ministry of Land (first phase for six years). If we manage successfully then they may extend this lease period and wetland management can be done. But it’s not

easy to effectively manage wetland within this short period. I think Wetlands/waterbodies should be transferred to DoF in due course of time and leased out in favor of co-management bodies in long term basis.

As this project is almost near end, we are facing difficulties to implement our two prepared national guidelines; for sustainable wetland management strengthening governance and management of wetlands in Bangladesh (mainly transfer waterbodies with user rights to the local user group) another one is Agro fish friendly sluice gate management. We have submitted these to DoF and they are working on it. Recently they have decided that they will submit these to the Ministry accordingly and it will go after at policy level. Who will take over the material and how DoF will react on it that is a big challenge.

The good management practices developed by the Project and the Department of Fisheries can be taken up and applied by future projects. Sustainability of lesson learnt is depending on forthcoming projects.

Please describe the project’s impact on rural development in Bangladesh.

In short, I can say that awareness created in respect of biodiversity conservation in field level. People are aware about biodiversity conservation. Now they can raise voice in terms of ownership to the resources – “it is our need” Socioeconomic condition developed. The emphasis on gender equality has added to a great extent to sustain the achievements and operations of the Biodiversity Management Organizations (BMO); Capacity developed through training, discussions among BMO members and experts. We identified that there is a positive trend in self-motivation in our project areas.

You have attended the COMACON conference on Co-management back in October 2015. What was the most exciting new idea you brought back from the conference?

I appreciate this effort for a successful event organized by GIZ and USAID. Many ideas discussed over there which varies from country to country and situation. Interesting matter is we are very rich in different policies, strategies and action plan. Due to inter sectoral coordination in our country situation, we are lacking behind in implementation level. From this conference we gained different knowledge from regional partners and co-management experts. Transboundary issues and Cross border exchange was also interesting topics in the conference.

In your opinion what can Bangladesh learn from other countries experiences in terms of successful Co-management? Can you recall any specific topic or idea from another country that you would like to see applied in the context of Bangladesh?

How to improve livelihood through co management in Indonesia was really good example. Sri Lanka and Cambodia showed various examples on incentives used in co

management in revenue sharing and benefit sharing etc. Good governance training by Ms. Grazia Borrini- Feyerabend, was really fruitful and we learned a lot from her. Good governance management is not enough but 'who' and 'how' is also important.

Mostly I liked about the sharing from Sri-Lanka that how they manage waterbody with ownership of their Department of Fisheries; and resource which are under other than DoF they also take permission with approved production plan from respective departments. Cost and benefit of conservation followed by them according to their national wetland directory but in our country it's not followed. We can follow their direction. Main thing/issue is ownership.

How can, in your opinion, a cross border exchange on issues of co-management contribute to successful project implementation in the south and south-east Asian region?

Cross border exchange issues already been addressed in our country like 'Hilsha Conservation' issue. The idea has been taken by India and Thailand. Mainly for adaptation measures exchange of ideas time to time, country to country in respect of success stories is very essential.

What do you think will be the role of Co-Management for sustainable natural resource management in Bangladesh and also in the South Asian region in the future?

After end of development project, exit plan should be followed and Involvement of respective department through programs/projects with country's revenue budget allocation for sustainable resource management is very important. Beside that more foreign aided projects are also needed to run with updated implementation method for future adaptation. So we need more foreign aided project in future for long term basis for a sustaining development.

