

“Strengthening Governance in Wetlands and Water Bodies Management Policies in Bangladesh”

The Wetland Biodiversity Rehabilitation Project (WBRP) is jointly implemented by the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh (Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock), the Bangladesh Water Development Board (Ministry of Water Resources), and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The project addresses several priorities of the Bangladesh National Fisheries Strategy 2006 and promotes:

- environmental management taking an ecosystem based approach to conserve wetlands and reduce dry season water abstraction,
- biodiversity conservation (sanctuaries and restoring fish migration routes) and
- piloting co-management between communities and local government in a large river.



Furthermore WBRP compiled recommendations to enable and incorporate mechanisms and incentives for long term sustainability of wetland resources through socially just and pro-poor institutional arrangement and well-coordinated government and community initiatives.

In the national roundtable discussion, held on September 3rd, 2013 at The Daily Star Conference Room, Dhaka, the following recommendations were made based on the outcomes of the review of national waterbody (Jalmohal) policy-2009, field investigations and

consultation workshops at sub-district (upazila), district and regional level with concerned stakeholders:

- Jalmohal leasing principles from the ecological standpoint should stand on four pillars viz: i) Restoration, ii) Protection, iii) Preservation, and iv) Wise use to sustain the wetland productivity and biodiversity
- Jalmohal leasing principles from the social standpoint should stand on three pillars viz: i) pro-poor use rights, ii) fair lease values, iii) secure tenure. Instead of adopting “jaal jar, jola tar” principle (“owners of fishing nets will be the owners of Jalmohals”), an alternative principle is suggested: “Jibika jader machdhora, jolar adhiker pabe tara” (“those whose livelihood is fishing, would get the rights of access to Jalmohals”). Fishermen who have an ID-card should also be considered. This principle will largely ensure reaching the fishing dependent communities to have access to Jalmohals with possible exclusion of rich and influential individuals who invest and control the leasing
- In case of two or more fishermen societies in one village the wetland should be given to all fishermen societies as a single body for collective management
- The District Fisheries Officers and Upazila Fisheries Officer should be included as member secretaries (instead of members) in the district and upazila Jalmohals Management Committees, respectively, with a view to ensuring that appropriate decisions on technical and sustainable management of Jalmohals are taken under leasing systems
- The Jalmohals Management Committees should include representatives from the Bangladesh Water Development Board, Women Affairs, Local Government Engineering Department, Department of Agriculture Extension, non-governmental organizations and environmental experts for taking inclusive and well informed decisions. Decisions should be made in the presence of two-thirds of the total Jalmohals Management Committees members instead of fulfilling a quorum with only five members
- Policy should have clear provisions for the sustenance of co-management of Jalmohals under a Memorandum of Understanding
- There should be an inter-ministerial high level committee on Jalmohal management with the inclusion of technical staff from the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh Fisheries Resource Institute, universities and wetland based non-governmental organizations to take policy decisions for improved ecological management of Jalmohals
- The provision for leasing Jalmohals under development schemes (for 6 years) to fishers cooperatives should be stopped when the lease holders do not comply with their stated development commitments

- An urgent inventory is needed to update the status of Jalmohals for drawing up informed and realistic development strategies and plans. A physical inventory should clearly determine the size and delineate the boundaries of wetlands and a biological inventory should list the flora and fauna of the wetlands. Based on the outcome of a nationwide wetland inventory, urgent measures should be taken to restore degraded or semi-degraded wetlands and re-establish connectivity between the river and floodplain. This inventory should also help estimating modest lease values of Jalmohals to enable fisher communities to pay lease money without encouraging overexploitation, irrespective of the size of Jalmohals and averaging past lease values
- Every Jalmohal which is to be established and maintained as a wetland sanctuary must conserve fisheries/wetland biodiversity under the technical guidance of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock/Department of Fisheries. Where an entire Jalmohal becomes a sanctuary it is to be freed from the leasing system, or where a part is maintained as a long term sanctuary there should be a reduction in the lease rate as long as these are maintained
- For Jalmohals with high lease value, provisions can be made to pay lease money in instalments to reduce the debt burden of fishers and keep them free from the influence of hidden lease holders (mohajons) who often control the lease in the background
- There should be no advisor to the district and upazila Jalmohals Management Committees – competent members of such committees with a mix of administration and technical line agency members can and should take free and fair decisions based on technical merit and qualities of fisher societies and relevant fisheries/wetland based Community Biodiversity Organizations (under MoU)
- The policy should have a separate section on government owned land (khas pond) and oxbow lakes (baor management) as these are closed water-bodies and need a different management system as well as a section on “flowing river” management to ensure pro-poor access arrangements and sustainable management of river fisheries
- A coordination committee or institution needs to be formed which should have a clear mandate to protect wetlands from any anthropogenic encroachment/grabbing and environmental pollution and ensure user rights. This institution should create a common understanding for all stakeholders in wetland management



The recommendations were placed and shared at National Policy Dialogue on 24th September, 2013 at Conference Hall, BRAC Centre INN. Most of the recommendations were appreciated and accepted. The recommendations are with the Department of Fisheries and have to be forwarded to the Ministry of Land which acts as the approval body for this policy. WBRP is further supporting this process.

For further information please contact:

Mr. Md. Abul Hashem, Project Director, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (hashemsumon@yahoo.com) or

Ottilie Mooshofer, Principal Advisor, Wetland and Forest Biodiversity Rehabilitation Projects (ottilie.mooshofer@giz.de)