Capacity-Building in the Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project, Bangladesh

The Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) illustrates the importance of incorporating capacity building interventions among the project beneficiaries and community organizers as a component of a project's exit strategy.

The SCBRMP, which is being implemented in the Sunamganj District of Bangladesh, focuses on building capacity of rural poor and giving secure access to public water bodies (such as *beels, khals,* and *khas* ponds) for fishers and other beel user groups dependent on or living in the area.

In the past, leases to the beels and other public water bodies had been auctioned off by the local administration to the highest bidder. As a result, the beels have traditionally been controlled by elite groups. Thus, the SCBRMP has been working towards transferring such leases to fishing groups, as well as to non-fishers, such as farmers use beel water for crop cultivation living around the beel, and

women who make subsistence fishing and dry fish.

Through community management of the beels, the project hopes to improve incomes among the beneficiary groups as well as to rehabilitate the water bodies.

The project entails the formation of Community Organizations (COs), which are composed of land–poor people. Beel User Group will
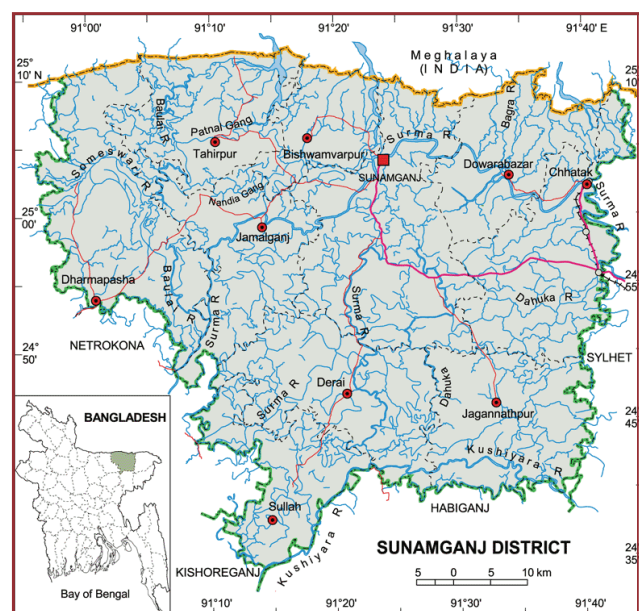
thereafter be formed mostly taking from COs. Credit is critical to ensuring that the BUG members are able to get access to water-bodies giving lease value. Without such access to credit, fishers would have to resort to high interest loans from local money lenders.

The SCBRMP and the local administration jointly conduct a resource mapping to determine the number of the water bodies that could be taken by the Project. The Project Director would then coordinate with the concerned Ministry and local administration to transfer the water bodies to the project. Apart from getting access to the water bodies, the BUG members need to cultivate the support of local administrative and fishery officials to forestall opposition from local or external power elites to illegal access to beels, as well as to ensure that any policies do not undermine the project's objectives.

The BUGs face other challenges once the leases have been transferred to them. These are as follows:

- Sustained access to technical support to maximize production in the water bodies;
- Effective management of production, protection of sanctuaries, conservation of water bodies and fisheries, harvesting, and income sharing;
- Consolidation of access to and control of the water bodies;
- Conflict management, especially to forestall infighting and factionalism;

BEELS are topographic depressions produced by erosion which accumulate surface water runoff. Many of the beels dry up in the winter but during the rains expand into broad and shallow sheets of water, which may be described as fresh water lagoons. The total area of beels in the dry season has been estimated at 177 square kilometers. This may increase to 1,500 square kilometers in the wet season.

KHALS is the local term for water canals.

KHAS PONDS are small water bodies on government owned lands.

- Poaching by members and outsiders; and
- High lease values (endangering the groups' continued user rights), interference and harassment from elite groups and their henchmen, etc.

Capacity Building Interventions in the SCBRMP

The success of the COs (the main primary group) would depend on how well they are able to hold up against many social challenges. Considering the limited preparation afforded by the project in this regard and the magnitude of the responsibility that the COs must take on once weaned from project support, the prospects for sustainability of the COs would greatly depend on continuing, community-based follow-on support. There were no provisions for such in the project design. Through the SCOPE (*Strengthening Capacities of Organizations of the Poor: Experiences in*

Figure 1. Implementation of the SCBRMP Exit Strategy

SOs & CDFs receive training under SCOPE Grant

↓

SOs & CDFs disseminate knowledge to CO members SOs & CDFs disseminate knowledge to CO members

↓

SOs & CDFs share the responsibilities (2nd phase of SCBRMP)

↓

3rd phase is to be linked up with Exit strategy (Training/ networking are very important at this stage)

↓

Knowledge is completely transferred to CDFs & CO members

↓

CDFs & CO members take up the responsibility for all organizational tasks

Source: Report on the First Monitoring Visit to SCOPE Grant Project under Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project in Connection with SCOPE Project, 26 April – 3 May 2007, Pilot Projects Division, CIRDAP, May 2007.

A. **Human Resource Development at Grassroots Level**
- Familiarization with PRA Tools and Practice
- Participatory Needs Assessment and Monitoring
- Gender and Development
- Good Governance Practice
- People's Institution Development
- Conflict Resolution Techniques

B. **Natural Resource Management**
- Awareness Raising on Rights to Access Natural Resources and Institutional Approach for Natural Resources Management
- Fish Habitat Restoration and Conservation
- Participatory Fish Catch and Consumption Survey and Reporting

C. **Institution Building**
- Capacity Building of Self Help Group (SHG) Management
- Developing People's Institutions and Networking
- Exposure Visit

D. **Research and Development**
- Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Asia) Project, the SCBRMP has been able to train and deploy Community Development Facilitators (CDFs) that would eventually take over the tasks of Project Staff, specifically the Social Organizers (SOs).

Training in the following areas has been provided for the SOs and the CDFs:

E. Participatory Technology and Participatory Extension Approach

- Appropriate Technology and Participatory Extension Approach

Upon the completion of their training, the SOs and CDFs would extend the same training to the COs.

As the SCBRMP Project goes into Phase II (July 2007 – June 2011), gaining hold of beels and other water bodies, along with the development of community infrastructure, such as roads and multipurpose village center, the SOs and the CDFs would share the responsibilities for project implementation.

As the Project begins to implement its exit strategy at Phase III (July 2011 – June 2014) of the Project, training becomes more intensive so as to completely transfer know-how to the CDFs and the CO members. Networking is also crucial at this Phase. In fact, the Project envisions the merger of the COs under "a strong Apex body." The SCBRMP selected the project areas on the assumption that the COs would eventually share resources and tackle common problems as a group.

In the post-project period, the CDFs and CO members are expected to jointly undertake all tasks related to the management of the water bodies.

The Exit Strategy proposed to be undertaken by the SCBRMP is illustrated as follows:

Sustainability and the CDFs

The deployment of the CDFs in the SCBRMP has yielded gains in the following areas, thus enhancing the COs' prospects for sustainability:

1. **Building Primary Organizations**
   Through the CDFs' constant interaction with the COs, the process of building up the latter has been strengthened. Leaders of the COs have become more skilled at group management, articulate in dispute resolution, and able to critically analyze social issues. Gender relationships have improved, such that women's role in decision-making has increased and women are more inclined to participate in good governance practices.

2. **Building Coalitions, Federations or Networks of the Poor**
   The CDFs are playing a vital role in the development of coalitions of BUGs by mobilizing them on issues of common interest, such as access to public water bodies; building and maintaining rural roads; etc. The process of CO federation building has also received a boost from the interventions of the CDFs.

3. Local Governance

The CDFs have been able to improve the linkages between the COs and local government institutions, thus enhancing community participation in local development activities. Many COs are now working towards getting their representatives elected to local government bodies.

4. Building External Linkages, Support Groups and Negotiation

The CDFs have been able to facilitate the building of linkages between the COs and external agencies, from which the COs can tap resources and between the COs and government agencies, thus promoting better service delivery. Through such linkages, the community has been able to access training and services, such as free vaccines for their livestock, etc. Local officials have also provided assistance to the community in natural resource conservation. □

by **Teresa Lingan-Debuque**

CONTACT DETAILS:

SCBRMP
Sk. Md. Mohsin, Project Director
LGED Bhaban (Level 12), Agargaon
Sher E-Bangla, Nagar 1207, Bangladesh
mohsin300964@yahoo.com

REFERENCES:

Hla, San San (2007). Lessons from the SCBRMP.

Report on the First Monitoring Visit to SCOPE Grant Project under Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project in Connection with SCOPE Project, 26 April – 3 May 2007, Pilot Projects Division, CIRDAP, May 2007.

SCBRMP. Assessment Report on Capacity Building Needs of the Bangladesh Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) in Building Organizations and Coalitions of the Rural Poor, submitted to CIRDAP on 15 June 2005.

SCOPE In-Country Intervention Grant Proposal submitted by SCBRMP on 15 February 2006.