

# Planning Together for Sustainable Water Resources Management



**A**chieving participation in planning and collective action among various stakeholders, even those with different or conflicting interests, is not impossible.

## Participatory Action Plan Development

Case studies in Bangladesh and the Mekong Delta have shown that a method called Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) is effective in consensus building, especially in the management of shared aquatic resources. The method, initially tested in Bangladesh, is a three-phased process comprising 13 stages leading to continuous and long-term resource management practice.

Previous efforts to manage inland fisheries in Bangladesh have shown the need for facilitated local institutions and establishment of common property regimes. In the case of floodplain wetlands, these are areas of seasonal flooding that provide fishing and irrigation, transportation, and a supply of wild plants used for food, animal feed, medicines, and construction. Depending on the stakeholders' resources and opportunities, they adopt different means of livelihood resulting in different ways of using the wetlands' resources. These ways may be complementary or competitive.

These variations create a need for management of the floodplains' resources. The PAPD process allows the stakeholders to achieve consensus on the actions necessary. PAPD is a planning process that recognizes diversity among stakeholders and their livelihoods while focusing on common interests.

### SOURCE:

Sultana, P. and P. Thompson. 2003. *Methods of Consensus Building for Community Based Fisheries Management in Bangladesh and the Mekong Delta*. CAPRI Working Paper No. 30, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C.

The process works to avoid domination by a few powerful voices while trying to come up with a desirable consensus. Stakeholders are grouped into their respective categories. Each group is then asked to enumerate their problems and rank them according to importance. After this, they meet in plenary with the other sub-groups to compile and rank all the problems. Solutions are then discussed separately again before meeting in plenary to agree on collective actions that would lead them to their goals as well as determine how these actions would affect their fellow stakeholders. The process also aims to increase social capital — that is, broadly, those things that help a community develop.

#### PAPD Applied in Bangladesh and Vietnam

In its application in Bangladesh and Vietnam, PAPD has proven that consensus among different stakeholders in the community is essential to collective action and the development of co-management institutions. Consensus thus appears to be a good starting point for community-led development; even some social capital indicators among the case study communities have shown a significant change. The PAPD process has also been shown to be transferable to other social settings, as it was first applied in Bangladesh before it was adapted in the Mekong Delta.

### PAPD Application to Resource Management

Community-based management strategies for improving natural resource management and empowering local communities have become common in the past 20 years. These strategies are based on co-management concepts and on the use of local knowledge and common property regimes.

Application of PAPD in both Bangladesh and Vietnam has been in the context of complex flood-plain wetland commons. Here there are policies for transferring formally-recognized rights over state-owned water bodies to user groups, and informal community rights over common pool fisheries on seasonally flooded private land. In both cases, it was understood that more participation and consensus are keys to its success.

PAPD is a method originally developed by a Bangladesh non-government organization (NGO), the Center for Natural Resource Studies, and researchers from Newcastle and Durham Universities and



**The participation and consensus of user groups develop community rights over common pool fisheries and seasonally flooded private land.**

the WorldFish Center. It is based on principles such as the desirability of consensus, the need for inclusivity, neutrality, and information sharing. Its key features include for each stakeholder category:

- identifying and ranking their problems (regarding natural resources management), and for all groups to set priority problems together; and
- considering solutions and their impacts, and then jointly forming a consensus on win-win solutions.

The PAPD method aims to provide a more holistic approach to resource management that is based on the principles of *heterogeneity* and *inclusivity*. This means that the method recognizes that users pursue different livelihood strategies that may or may not interfere with the others' activities. Further, the method recognizes the concerns of all users in the community.

PAPD also recognizes that some groups, due to certain advantages (education, social status, etc.), are likely to be heard, and thus it is designed so that the disadvantaged have equal chances to be recognized. The method even takes into account secondary users (government agencies, etc.) who may also have vested interests in the community's resources. As a process, PAPD tries to raise collective awareness of and action on the problems of the community.

The heart of the whole process is encapsulated in the second phase (stages 4-9). It is in this stage that participatory workshops with separate stakeholder groups and combined plenaries are held. It is here that most consensus building is achieved, thus making this phase the PAPD proper. The aim of the participatory process is to arrive at an agreement between the different stakeholders for sustainable collective actions. If this is to happen, the stakeholders must understand know each other well. Mutual understanding is expected to happen in the second phase and facilitators must

### Stages of PAPD Process

The PAPD process was originally conceived as a two-phase process but has since evolved into three stages during its application in Bangladesh. Within this process the actual PAPD workshop forms phase II. The different stages of the PAPD process are as follows:

#### I. Scoping Phase

1. Situational analysis (through summarizing local knowledge)
2. Stakeholder analysis (through key informants)
3. Household census (invitations sent to households selected by stratified random sampling)

#### II. Participatory Planning Phase

4. Problem census (within each stakeholder category group)
5. Compiling of ranked problems (separating natural resources problems and combining group rankings)
6. Stakeholders plenary (group representatives and local leaders will review problems, vote on top priorities for solution analysis)
7. Solution and impact analysis (within each stakeholder category group)
8. Stakeholders plenary (primary and secondary users will present whole process, identify feasible solutions, discuss institutional arrangements proposed by groups)

#### III. Implementation Phase

9. Develop community institutions for community resources management
10. Community organization develops detailed implementation plan for the agreed upon solutions
11. Wider community should review plans for adjustments especially to avoid adverse impacts
12. Implementation of action plan (actual physical work, implementation of rules, etc.)
13. Institutionalization of management arrangements including local policy support

understand this without allowing the participatory process, which encourages the necessary understanding between diverse people, to get lost in the tools that they use. After this, the process moves on to solution analysis. The stakeholders are again separated into their respective groups to find solutions before the second plenary where solutions are discussed altogether and ranked. In the process, part of the solution analysis is an understanding of how the stakeholders' actions, and proposed solutions will affect others in the area, as well as the feasibility of these solutions. These considerations are part of the ranking mechanism. After this, the process moves into the final phase.

#### Field Experience in Bangladesh and Vietnam: Avoiding Facilitator Influence

In Bangladesh and Vietnam, care was taken to avoid undue facilitator influence on the participants who spent a whole day listing and ranking their problems. In both countries, the problems appear to be simple but with complex backgrounds.

The common problems are a decline in fish catch, polluted waters, and malfunctioning infrastructure, among others. Extra care was taken to make sure everyone was able to air their concerns and have equal control of the proceedings. The problems identified by the separate groups were ranked separately and then validated and revised in plenary.

Meanwhile, action research to address the community's problems happens in the last stage; institutional arrangements and management actions are developed in this stage through the help of various agencies, including NGOs.



**Complementary or competitive uses create a need for the management of the floodplain's resources.**

## Assessing PAPD

Integral to the process is the evaluation of success. In PAPD, possible outcomes include: that stakeholders better understand each other's livelihood and use of shared resources; increased awareness of the resource management issues; greater social equity; and, most of all, that the different actions will be adopted. Eventually, impacts on more measurable indicators such as biodiversity, fish populations, production, and people's overall status can be measured. Possible indicators for assessing the impact of the consensus building process include the extent to which it:

- raises cognitive social capital levels;
- increases trust and reciprocity;
- empowers;

- it is inclusive and representative;
- focuses on common issues/goals;
- it is open for all to speak (civil discourse);
- scientifically informed and adaptive;
- encourages critical thinking;
- maintains stakeholder interests;
- results in decline of reported conflict;
- ensures that consensus is sought only after thorough exploration of issues; and
- applies Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods.

## Conclusion

The core of PAPD is an empowering process that will eventually lead stakeholders to create local institutions. Its success is determined and measured in terms of social capital that allows communities to better manage their resources.

In Vietnam, building on earlier work gave the PAPD process a more comprehensive view of the problems and possible solutions. This allowed the process to come up with an implementation plan, although that one still needed a few modifications. Nevertheless, the stakeholders were able to agree on rules and sanctions with regards to the use of the wetlands.

All in all, the process was proven to be an effective way of allowing people to come together and find ways of working together in their own way. Subsequent assessments in Bangladesh have quantified the advantages of adopting the PAPD process.

## Suggested Readings

- Barr, J.J.F, P-J. Dixon, M.M. Rahman, M.A. Islam, M.I. Zuberi, A.A. McGlynn, and G.P. Ghosh. 2000. *A Participatory, Systems-Based, Process for Identification of Improved Natural Resources Management for Better Floodplain Livelihoods*. Project Report of R6756. Newcastle, England: University of Newcastle, Centre for Land Use and Water Resources Research.
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- Sultana, P. and S. Abeyasekera. 2008. *Effectiveness of Participatory Planning for Community Management of Fisheries in Bangladesh*. *Journal of Environmental Management* 86(1): 201-213.