

# Effectiveness of participatory planning for community management of fisheries in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

This study provides statistical evidence that support for community-based management of resources was more effective when initiated through a process known as participatory action plan development (PAPD). Thirty-six sites were studied where community management of fisheries was facilitated by NGOs. All involved community participation and establishing local fisheries management institutions. However, communities were able to take up more conservation-related interventions and faced fewer conflicts in the 18 sites where a PAPD was the basis for collective action and institution development. This indicates the value and effectiveness of adopting good practice in participatory planning, such as PAPD, which helps diverse stakeholders find common problems and solutions for natural resource management.

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## 1. Introduction

Participation in planning and development programmes has become increasingly central to international development assistance since the 1980s following Chambers (1983) and adoption of approaches such as Participatory Rural Appraisal that emphasise facilitation and the pre-eminence of local knowledge (Chambers, 1997). However, more recently the mantra of participation has been criticised as a “tyranny” that, for example, reinforces existing social relations or fails to understand local power relations, or has in practice focused on tools rather than empowerment (Cooke and Kothari, 2002; Holmes and Scoones, 2000; Michener, 1998; Mosse, 2002; Nelson and Wright, 1995). The extent to which participatory processes are holistic, build partnerships, build local institutions, create synergies across sectors, foster local ownership, develop local partners and create enabling environments for the transparent and accountable delivery of services at the commu-

nity level, or replace more legitimate and sustainable existing institutions and processes has been questioned (Cooke and Kothari, 2002).

Participation in the form of community-based management of common pool natural resources has been promoted to improve their management and empower local communities. This has involved using local knowledge, recognising local institutions, establishing common property regimes, and developing partnerships and co-management between communities and government (Berkes et al., 1998; Ostrom, 1990; Pomeroy and Berkes, 1997). All such initiatives depend on community participation, so a major question is how best to initiate such regimes and what participatory planning methods are effective, given the (often considerable) diversity of interests among local communities. In Bangladesh a systematic methodology has been developed for consensus building for floodplain resource management that has been named participatory action plan development (PAPD) (Sultana and Thompson, 2004). The objective of this study was to provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of PAPD, by comparing community-based fisheries

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management in sites where PAPD had been used with sites where non-PAPD approaches have been used, and to discuss the implications of the findings.

### 1.1. Participatory action plan development

Sultana and Thompson (2004) summarise the principles and steps in PAPD and how it fits into the overall process of establishing community-based natural resource management. PAPD recognises heterogeneous interests in natural resources (floodplains) and aims to be inclusive of these diverse interests. It involves a series of linked local workshops where different stakeholder groups participate separately and together to develop a plan for management of the common aquatic resources that they depend on (Barr and Dixon, 2001). The process is designed to ensure that poor people's interests are voiced and represented on an equal footing with those of more powerful stakeholders.

Stages four to eight in Box 1 involve two rounds of participatory workshop sessions with separate stakeholder groups followed in each case by a plenary session, and form the actual PAPD set within a wider process. Multi-stakeholder negotiations have been promoted by some as a useful framework in conflicting situations and to resolve deadlock (Janakarajan, 2004), but others have argued that the limitations of such methods include how the agenda is

set, and biases against disadvantaged groups who may be manipulated by others (Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2001; Mosse, 1994; Moreyra and Wegerich, 2005). While similar, PAPD is designed not for resolving bi-polar conflicts, or large scale catchment issues, but for helping multiple stakeholder groups find common ground—shared problems and solutions—over which they may cooperate, and where the natural resource base is of modest size—typically up to about 10 villages (Barr and Dixon, 2001). The principle behind PAPD, adapted from Kaner (1996), is that members of any stakeholder category, but especially the disadvantaged (such as fishers in Bangladesh) are better able to express their views separate from other (dominant) categories of people. However, separate workshops will fail to develop a shared understanding of common problems and possible win-win solutions (consensus building). Therefore, PAPD is structured to have two rounds of divergent and convergent sessions. Through this it claims to find solutions that address problems shared by all stakeholders, and has been applied in a number of projects and locations in Bangladesh.

### 1.2. Community-based fisheries management

The community-based fisheries management project phase two (CBFM-2), supported by the UK Department

#### Box 1

Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) within the community-based fisheries management process

#### I. Scoping phase (*stages one to three*)

1. Situational analysis (summarising local knowledge)
2. Stakeholder identification and analysis (through key informants)
3. Household census and invitations to PAPD for a random sample of households (stratified by stakeholder categories)

#### II. Participatory planning phase—PAPD (*stages four to eight*)

4. Problem census (with each individual stakeholder group)
5. Compilation of problem rankings by facilitators (combining stakeholder group rankings)
6. Plenary with stakeholders and local leaders (to review and agree on main problems for solution analysis)
7. Solution and impact analysis (with each individual stakeholder group)
8. Plenary with stakeholders and secondary stakeholders (to present the process, identify feasible solutions, discuss institutional arrangements and next steps)

#### III. Implementation phase (*stages nine to thirteen*)

9. Develop and adapt community organisations and institutions for resource management
10. Community organisation develops detailed plan to implement solutions agreed in stage eight
11. Problem solving (review and adjust plans with community to mitigate or avoid any adverse impacts)
12. Implementation of action plan
13. Institutionalisation of management arrangements including local policy support.

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