



## Effective Governance Strategy: Key to Sustainable Collaborative Management in a Wildlife Sanctuary in South-Eastern Part of Bangladesh

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**Abstract** The Forest Department of Bangladesh piloted collaborative management, also known as co-management, in five protected areas, through its Nishorgo Support Project from 2004 to 2009. This paper documents one of the pilot co-management sites, specifically for the Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary comparing actual governance to the framework for good governance for protected areas. Through stakeholders and key informant interviews and observation of council and committee meetings, the research revealed that the co-management structure was an appendix in the forest department's organizational structure. Unwillingness to share responsibilities and decision-making was the major obstacle to effective co-management in the protected area. The lack of legal recognition and limited functional arrangements to support co-management resulted in weak managerial performance and poor governance. Thus, extraction of resources from the reserve continued. Moreover, no quick solutions to deal with environmental threats of land encroachment inside the sanctuary were undertaken. For co-management to result in effective forest and wildlife conservation, more focus on good governance and provision of socio-economic opportunities is needed.

**Keywords** protected area, Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary, co-management, governance

### INTRODUCTION

Depletion of forests is occurring worldwide. In Bangladesh, only 10.2% of the country's landmass remains under forest cover (Laurance, 2007). Forests continue to be degraded due to encroachment of forest land for habitation and cultivation (Muhammed et al., 2008) with 50% of the nation's forests destroyed in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Huda & Roy, 1999). To halt this destruction and preserve biodiversity, the Government of Bangladesh established one protected area in the 1980s and increased the number of protected areas to 28 in 2011 (Chowdhury et al., 2009). However, due to ineffective management, protected areas are subject to the same degradation as state forests, wetlands and other land-use resources (FSP, 2001). DeCosse & Roy (2005) found that the principal cause of destruction of parks and other protected areas in Bangladesh are the local elites who extract resources from protected areas for their own benefit, not that of the poor. Commercial demand for timber and firewood is the leading cause of forest loss with the poor engaged as hired hands to carry out this work for the elites (DeCosse & Roy, 2005).

Realizing the importance of protected areas for biodiversity conservation, a collaborative management approach was formally introduced in the protected areas of Bangladesh in the year 2004 (Sharma et al., 2008; Roy & DeCosse, 2006). One of the major emphases of applying co-management in protected areas was to ensure a congenial situation for governance as a recognized

requirement for sustainable development (DFID, 2001). The Forest Department initially piloted co-management in five protected areas in 2004. The focus of this paper is to look at co-management in one of these areas, namely the Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary (TWS), located at 21° 00' N and 92° 20' E in the Teknaf Peninsula of Cox's Bazaar district in south-eastern Bangladesh. The total area of the sanctuary is 11,615 hectares, which is composed of tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests (Green, 1990). This sanctuary is surrounded by 115 settlements with a total population of 119,950 (Mollah et al., 2004). The wild elephant, sambar, barking deer, leopard, Bengal tiger, panther etc. were common in this area but now most of these animals are extirpated or the population has dwindled, due to habitat destruction. Now, megafauna are restricted to a few small areas (Mollah et al., 2004; IPAC, 2009). In 2004, only a few small patches of natural forest remained in the sanctuary (Mollah et al., 2004) due to economic activities diminishing the forest by: fuel wood collection for household use and brick making; illegal timber extraction for commercial sale; non-timber forest products (mainly bamboo and rattan) collection; betel-leaf cultivation; and grazing of domestic animals (Studd, 2004).

Governance is considered to be the single most important factor for sustainable forest resource management (Larson, 2004), which highlights the need for analyzing the quality of governance at TWS. Realizing good governance is needed to ensure wildlife conservation and biodiversity, a two tier governance structure consisting of a 1) co-management council (henceforth called 'council') and 2) a co-management executive committee (henceforth called 'committee') that was formed with diverse stakeholders (NSP, 2006). Stakeholders include tribal people, forest villagers, local resource users, the middle class and elites. The business class has a strong role in land encroachment, including local elites, political leaders, law enforcing agencies, and forest headmen (Mollah et al., 2004), and must be engaged to prevent further habitat destruction and shift practice.

### **Principles of good governance for protected areas**

Governance determines who has power and makes decisions, how other stakeholders make their voices heard and what accountability measures are in place. Sustainable protected area management usually requires participation of local people in decision-making process, devolution of power, equitable benefit sharing, and building transparent and responsive institutions to ensure good governance (UNESCAP, 2007). Governance is also influenced by history, culture, legal and customary rights, access to information, economic outlook etc. Creating a suitable system of governance for protected areas in a country is of high importance in which government agencies at the national level usually play an eminent role (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2005). An analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making, implementing the decisions made, and the structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decisions (UNESCAP, 2007). Analyzing and taking action about governance of protected areas provide a powerful and insightful learning process. The management authority or stakeholders can establish criteria, principles and values to guide action to achieve good governance (Borrini-Feyerabend, 2003).

Five principles of good governance for protected areas developed by Graham et al. (2003) based on United Nations governance principles are: 1) legitimacy and voice, 2) accountability, 3) performance, 4) fairness, and 5) direction. These five principles are harmonized with the eight major characteristics of good governance principles namely 1) participation, 2) consensus-oriented, 3) accountability, 4) transparency, 5) responsiveness, 6) effectiveness and efficiency, 7) equity and inclusiveness, and 8) devotion to rule of law, identified by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2007), in Table 1.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This in-depth case study used semi-structured interviews and participant observation from August 2007 to February 2008. Six interviews were conducted with site coordinators of the project and Forest Department (FD) officials for the three ranges namely Whykong, Shilkhali and Teknaf.

Information about the governance structure of the council and committee formation process, legal matters, working mechanism of those bodies and experiences from performing activities through co-management was collected.

The researchers attended committee and council meetings to observe participation of representatives from different stakeholders. Each of the three committees was comprised of 18-19 members who were elected from 51-55 council members in those ranges. Formal interactive interviews were conducted with local government, non-government organization (NGO) groups, local elites, ethnic communities, forest department, resource user and other government representatives in committee using a semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive responses from the interviewees were gathered and cross-checked through field observation and discussion with key informants working at forest beat level (smallest administrative unit for forest management) including individuals from tribal community, forest villagers and patrol team members. Overall, an inductive approach was followed in the research process by moving to broader generalization from specific observations and results. Direct observation methods were followed to observe phenomenon and collect information on participants' behavior and field condition. Based on these findings an analysis of actual governance compared to the framework for good governance for protected areas developed by Graham et al. (2003) and (UNESCAP, 2007) were made in Table 1 which is a similar approach to that taken by Lockwood (2010) for other projects.

## RESULTS

The changes in governance attained by the re-arranged governance structure developed for co-management are analyzed by each governance principle (Table 1) and explained below.

### Governance by co-management authority in TWS.

#### 1. Legitimacy and voice: participation and consensus oriented (*principle one*)

Co-management was legitimated by a 2006 government gazette notification, which established three co-management committees and assigned them responsibilities. However, only 12% of the committees are made up of resource users, limiting their influence. The committees have a number of business persons with vested interest in the sanctuary, who do not play a convening role. A NGO representative in Whykong committee said: "I did not get any direction to interact with other local NGOs and don't know how I will collaborate." Forest Department workers are not included in council and committee and often do not attend field meetings, which results in suboptimal effort in co-management activities and is of concern to Community Patrolling Groups, as they need assistance and enforcement from these field level employees.

Attendance in monthly committee meeting is poor as some members are unwilling to provide voluntary service but attendance is better for council meeting representatives. Forest users' group meetings often do not take place due to lack of both participants and representatives from the committee. Activities at the field level are highly influenced by planning made at higher levels as activities and financing are not decided at the site office.

#### 2. Accountability and transparency (*principle two*)

The co-management committee members' accountability is demanded only at the monthly meetings. The committees do not have access to information on operations and budget expenditures of a part of the Nishorgo Support Project (NSP) as it was implemented by the Forest Department (FD) only. Committee members' do not have any established mechanism to convey learning and engage their own constituency. Although linkages have been established between forest user groups and community patrolling groups with the Forest Department, activities and requirements of the groups were not monitored: a Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) refers to this divide: "It is not pleasing for FD to work with local NGOs in co-management. Some of our staffs have shared their uncomfortable feeling on losing territorial control and authority in their work with groups in field".

**Table 1 Analysis of whether the Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary Co-management meets good governance principles and responsibilities**

Good governance Principles	Governance responsibilities	How governance principles and responsibilities are working in the study area?
1. Legitimacy and voice	1.1.1 Free expression of views with no discrimination	All committee members are encouraged to express their opinion in meetings. Field level employees and group's representatives still too vigilant to speak before elites.
1.1 Participatory	1.1.2 Dialogue and collective negotiation	Interaction occurs but dialogue is limited to project objective specific agendas. Limited discussion was performed on burning but sensitive issues.
1.2 Consensus-oriented	1.2.1 Stakeholders trust each other and have the feeling of owning the rules	Lack of trust is evident from absence of important stakeholders in meetings. Rules and agendas are fixed <i>ex-situ</i> having local stakeholders at supportive role on site.
2. Accountability and transparency	2.1 Accountability should be accessible to all	Very limited accountability of committee members and Forest Department staff.
	2.2 Accountability is linked to appropriate rewards and sanctions	Rewards and sanctions mechanism is not free from nepotism by influential members. No graduated sanctions are applied <i>de facto</i> for extracting resources and illegal felling.
	2.3 Clarity and transparency of responsibility	No posting of names & duties of committees, ongoing activities and budget in site offices.
3. Performance	3.1.1 Capable administration with sufficient institutional and human capacity to carry out required responsibilities	Co-management council have symbolic role only. Insufficient staff and dissatisfaction of working groups made large area conservation tough. Committee and participants are learning from training and visits to other protected areas.
3.1 Responsiveness	3.2.1 Dealing with complaints and criticisms in constructive manner	Lively discussion on co-management activities in meetings. Forest Department staff will not give up control but linkages with field groups are made.
3.2 Effectiveness and efficiency	3.2.2 The management structure should be robust, resilient, and capable to perform adaptive management	Activities depend on project funding but earning money from eco-tourism has started. The co-management institutions on site are precarious and has not attained self-sustaining situation yet.
4. Fairness	4.1.1 Conservation efforts should not humiliate or harm people's normal life	Tribal community, forest users and women were minimally involved. Alternative income generating initiatives were few compared to needs of forest depended households.
4.1 Equity & inclusiveness	4.1.2 Vulnerable ones should have opportunity to maintain their own happiness	Tribal community was not integrated well in decision making process and received little financial and material support for community economic development
4.2 Rule of Law	4.2.1 Consistent application of laws and regulations	Committee is often reluctant to apply regulations to committee members. A number of committee members are known well for past illegal activities in the sanctuary.
	4.2.2 Fair opportunities for conflict management and non-discriminatory option to justice	Community people depend on local leaders for conflict resolution. Conflicts related to the sanctuary are discussed in monthly committee meeting.
5. Direction	5.1.1 Peoples concerns should be listened and effective leadership with consistent vision for long term development should prevail	A vision for efficient co-management of the sanctuary is discussed but committee and council members seldom play leadership role or start initiatives.
5.1 Strategic vision	5.2.1 Context of the area should be clearly understood and innovative ideas and processes should be supported	Innovative ideas like establishing biogas plant, fuel-efficient improved cooking stove making are encouraged through arranging demonstration and training programs.
5.2 Embracing complexities		

### **3. Performance: responsiveness and efficiency (*principle three*)**

Co-management authorities empowered under government order are reluctant to apply rules to control extraction of resources, which allows widespread breaking of the rules. The field level groups cannot hand-over any violator to law enforcing agencies without consulting FD employees. With very limited alternative income generating support and other financial incentives, the forest patrolling groups are unwilling to provide voluntary service. On the other hand, NSP field staffs working in remote locations are unsatisfied with governance and facilities. A project field staff said: “Major decisions and planning of co-management activities on ground is performed at higher levels which don’t reflect the acceptance of field level employees and conscious people. But the system of adding our field experience to planning is not well established”.

Senior project staffs and academics discussed three aspects that mainly have prevented FD from efficient management of the sanctuary. These are: 1) administrative faults 2) policy & legal loopholes and 3) weak enforcement of rules. Co-management did not result in any organizational or logistical changes in FD, as this has to be approved by central government in cabinet.

### **4. Fairness: inclusiveness and rule of law (*principle four*)**

The three committees include 57 representatives from the different stakeholder groups of which 31 (54%) are from local government or are local elites who rarely visit the sanctuary, 14 (24.5%) are institutional stakeholders and 12 (21%) are from resource user including ethnic communities. Only six (11%) were women (Rahman, 2008). Although some effort was made to be inclusive, the inclusion of different stakeholders did not result in a concerted effort towards viable income generating activities. A head from tribal community in Whykong union complained about lack of resources for performing co-management activities:

“We are not included in [the] true sense in most of the development initiatives in TWS area including activities under the Nishorgo Support Project. We are given responsibilities to implement small-scale projects like making handicraft[s] but incentives provided for implementing those were very insufficient. So, it is difficult to sustain these businesses. Again, we take part in performing big responsibilities like preventing illegal logging in the sanctuary but often do not get information about the proceedings and do not have decision-making power. We are not happy with activities of both FD and NSP officials”.

One of the FD field level officials reported about how the corruption disrupts law and order:

“Many times we are bound to do what the influential people in the area want. FD employees are asked to give privileges to them and gets [an] offer to take [a] bribe even from committee members, otherwise we will be harmed. TWS is a very dangerous area for prevalence of armed robber groups, smuggling gangs and illegal migrant. Local law enforcing agencies find it much difficult to keep control over the fragile law and order situation”.

### **5. Direction: strategic vision and embracing complexities (*principle five*)**

A participatory visioning exercise named ‘*Nishorgo vision 2010*’ was conducted with the stakeholders by FD staff, which identified a number of future threats to TWS and other protected areas, and identified co-management as an effective way to deal with these threats (FD, 2007). Innovative ideas, like planning for ecotourism, public-private partnership, local entrepreneurship etc., were identified as promising prospect in co-management.

## **CONCLUSION**

Considering the constant deterioration of forest in the TWS and decline in the population of flora and fauna, effective co-management is necessary to prevent unlawful use and extraction of resources from the sanctuary. The governance framework linking institutions with different stakeholders in the community holds promise to reduce forest degradation. Some good governance principles were observed, which include finding direction through both strategic vision exercises and embracing complexities. As well, fairness was evident in efforts to include many diverse stakeholders on committees. Regarding the fairness principle, efforts were made to support alternative income generating initiatives but these were small relative to the need. Improvements are still needed regarding legitimacy and voice, to ensure participation without discrimination and

build the trust required for a true consensus-orientation. A real weakness was the lack of accountability and transparency. As well, performance was poor in its effectiveness and efficiency with insufficient staff for the large conservation area resulting in continued environmental degradation. However, justice and the rule of law were not applied with many committee members continuing to engage in the sanctuary based illegal businesses. This study was useful for scrutinizing governance performance of the organizations involved in co-management in TWS but ongoing mechanisms for review would improve the governance function.

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