

Example Case Study

Coastal Zone Policies and Livelihoods in Bangladesh

The Setting

The coastal areas of Bangladesh are one of the most under-developed regions of the country. Although there are differences between the coast east and west of the Meghna Estuary, most coastal districts are characterised by high levels of poverty and vulnerability to water-related hazards. Levels of service development and infrastructure are low and the institutional presence of both government and non-government agencies is limited. Livelihood opportunities (especially outside of agriculture) are limited, as are economic linkages, including access to markets. The area is also characterised by highly unequal social structures, with a small powerful elite dominating the mass of people, allied to high levels of conflict and poor law and order.

Vulnerability to cyclones and storm surges is a constant threat in the coasts, with people remembering major disasters such as the 1970 and 1991 cyclones and experiencing smaller storms every year. It is generally recognised that the overall incidence of disasters is likely to increase rather than decrease in the future, in part because of increased resource pressures but also because of the impact of climate change. There is also a range of other resource-based vulnerabilities, including the loss of mangroves and other forest resources, saline intrusion at the surface and in aquifers, biodiversity and habitat loss, the decline of fish stocks, declining soil fertility, land erosion, the scarcity of water resources and the impact of major infrastructure development and shrimp production.

Past approaches to these problems have centred on structural solutions, especially polders and cyclone shelter, but there is now a consensus that the problem needs to be addressed through a combination of non-structural and structural measures. This is reflected in the recent initiative to develop a new coastal zone policy, which focuses on **improving livelihoods and reducing vulnerabilities**, with emphasis placed on community capacity building to enhance poor people's ability to cope with disasters and maximise development opportunities.

The policy development is led by the Water Resources Planning Office (WARPO) of the Ministry of Water Resources, but involves several other ministries and government agencies, and is assisted by a donor consortium that includes the Government of the Netherlands, Department for International Development (UK), the World Bank, the ADB and others. This policy process is intended to guide all aspects of coastal development and, in particular, will set the framework within which future investments in the water and other sectors are made.

Objectives of the Case Study

The coastal zone policy process in Bangladesh offers an opportunity to understand better key aspects of policy processes. It is directly targeted at the poor and seeks to reduce poverty through a combination of livelihoods development and reducing vulnerabilities. It is based in the water sector but also includes strong links to a number of other sectors and non-government actors. It seeks to combine structural and non-

structural measures. Finally, it seeks to build from existing resource management practices and to enhance community capacities as a pre-requisite for sustainability.

The **objectives** of the case study will be twofold:

1. To demonstrate how new approaches to policy development that target the poor can be developed, with in particular specific policy goals that target improvements to the livelihoods and reduction of vulnerabilities experienced by poor communities.
2. To contribute to the process of policy development through providing a better understanding of the dynamics of coastal livelihoods and, in particular, the ways that poor people respond to risks from natural disasters.

Method and Anticipated Findings

The case study will use past research and project evaluations in the coastal zone to present an overall picture of coastal livelihoods and disaster coping strategies. This analysis will be further developed in one location (Polder 55/1) where a major infrastructure investment has been made but the impact upon coastal livelihoods is not fully assessed. Existing data shows that the infrastructure has had positive impacts upon agricultural production and reduced flooding and cyclone vulnerability, but there have been some drainage problems and conflicts between different stakeholders within the polder. The effects upon other aspects of livelihoods (especially fishing and domestic water provision) and on social equity are not understood.

The study will also undertake interviews with a range of key stakeholders at the national level to establish which issues are the key drivers of the policy process and what approach is being taken to target poverty and improved social equity in the coastal zone. Based on the results of this, advice will be given, where needed, to provide a more complete poverty perspective to the development of the coastal policy.

The implications of the policy development, in terms of changes to institutional roles and the needs for enhanced institutional capacities, will also be discussed. These will be linked to existing national policy priorities of decentralisation and the expansion of civil society participation in development processes. Key national NGOs, who are mostly not active in the coastal area, will be a specific target of the study. One of the goals of the study will be to advance national consensus by bringing different stakeholders together to establish a clearer understanding of the relationships between poverty, vulnerabilities and coastal development processes.

The case study will work with leading opinion formers from both government and non-government sectors who are involved in the policy development to act as 'champions' of the case study in the Asia Regional Consultation Workshop and, if appropriate, the Kyoto Forum. Close links will be established with the Government of Bangladesh WARPO, which is mandated to lead coastal policy development, as well as with different projects (such as the Sundarbans Biodiversity Project) active in the coastal area.