



## **Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL)**

**AID-388-A-12-00007**

### **Strengthen the Capacity of Co-Management Institutions**

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**USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) Project**



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## Table of Acronyms

CMC	Co-management Committee
CMO	Co-management Organization
CREL	Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods
ECA	Ecologically Critical Area
FD	Bangladesh Forest Department
FRUG	Federation of Resource User Groups
IPAC	Integrated Protected Area Co-Management
MACH	Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry
MOFL	Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock
MOL	Ministry of Land
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSP	Nishorgo Support Program
PA	Protected Area
PF	People's Forum
RMO	Resource Management Organization
RUG	Resource User Group
VCF	Village Conservation Forum
VCG	Village Conservation Group

## Introduction

USAID's Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) project (AID-388-A-12-00007) is implemented by an experienced consortium of partners led by Winrock International and including Tetra Tech, Inc., the World Fish Center, National Conservation Management (NACOM), and the Community Development Center (CODEC). CREL's partnership also includes local government and community partners including the Bangladesh Ministry of the Environment and Forests (MoEF), specifically the Department of the Environment (DoE) and the Forest Department (FD); the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL), specifically the Department of Fisheries (DoF); the Bangladesh Ministry of Land (MoL); the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), and the Centre for Natural Resources Studies (CNRS).

"Improved governance of natural resources and biodiversity" is one of four mutually-reinforcing components of CREL. Forest and wetland ecosystems are both preponderant and crucial within the environmental context of Bangladesh as well as providing for and protecting the homes and livelihoods of millions of Bangladeshis. These critical ecosystems are experiencing continual degradation due to a variety of interrelated causes including illegal logging, poaching, and other forms illegal exploitation, over-utilization of resources, pollution, urban expansion, regulatory failures, and elite capture. Land and resource governance has played a substantial role in all of these issues, leading to calls for establishing a system of management that are efficient and sustainable.

Participatory management has taken place in Bangladeshi forests since the early 1980s and in wetland areas since the 1990s. However, co-management of designated Protected Areas (PAs) was only initiated in 2003 (see Annex 1). CREL is working for forest and wetland management to improve governance. One of the activities to attain an intermediate result of improved governance is strengthening the capacity of co-management institutions, which is laid out in CREL's activity plan with the following specific deliverables:

1. Modified co-management institutional arrangements elaborated and tested;
2. Studies commissioned on the management of funds
3. Co-management architecture;
4. PFs registered under social welfare;
5. VCFs registered with cooperatives
6. Fishermen's cooperatives supported

Through expert consultations and reviews of the existing CMOs, the CREL team identified most appropriate ways of tailoring and strengthening existing co-management institutions to ecosystems and site-specific needs, for example modifying CMO design and government orders and registration for becoming a formal group to work together for the purpose of harnessing livelihoods along with serving for sustainable NRM.

CREL is developing a legal basis for community organizations that are engaged in co-management and developing their capacity to participate as functional and equal members of co-management committees (CMCs). CREL is registering groups of Village Conservation Forums (VCFs) as cooperatives that will enable these groups to function as joint enterprises to better represent their collective self-interest while providing incentive for VCF members to remain active in their respective forums and continue contributing to self-managed, sustainable Natural Resource Management (NRM). VCFs will be approached for assimilation into new or existing cooperatives based on their internally- and externally

assessed readiness and capacity level. CREL will also provide other advisory support to VCFs, such as encouraging VCFs to merge in cases where two such forums exist in a single village. CREL will help these institutions establish more direct and appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities for community organizations over designated parts of wetlands or forests, and enhance coordination in wetland systems and ECAs. Fisher’s cooperatives will also be supported to increase their accountability to stakeholders and their ability to manage fisheries sustainably.

CREL will help tailor the best possible composition of particular CMO tiers like CMC, Resource Management Organizations (RMOs), People’s Forums (PFs), VCF, Village Conservation Groups (VCGs), Forestry Committees (FCs) etc. and strengthen them so that they are able to carry out future projects under strengthened NRM.

## Community Organizations and Co-management of Forest PAs

### CBOs

In the vicinity of a forest, the Village Conservation Forum (VCF), occupies the lowest tier of community organization in regards to forest co-management. Large numbers of VCFs were formed during the

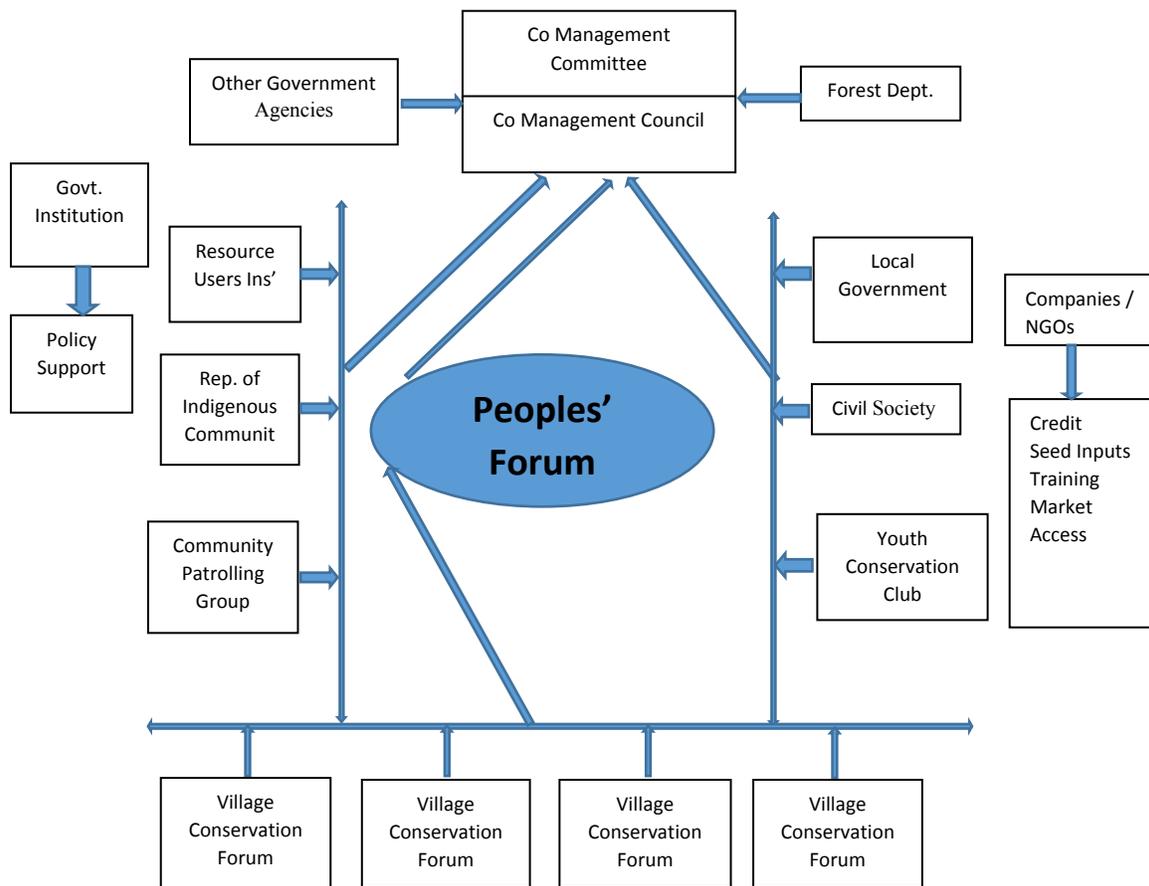


Fig. 1. Co-management institutions in forest PAs

implementation of CREL's predecessor project, Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) but these organizations received little official sanction and so remained informal groups. To date, VCF membership is largely linked to past livelihood initiatives under IPAC, and so were not clearly organized for NRM. Their ability to represent their communities effectively on CMCs is accordingly limited. CREL will support VCFs (and peer organizations like Fishers' Cooperatives) and will facilitate registering these groups as cooperatives to be more supportive to the members in collectively working to generate resources and distribute the benefit among the members.

The VCF members are natural resource dependent population of the village not in a position to access into the PA legally, but practically they are collecting fuel woods for their consumption and some of them are deriving their livelihoods to some extent. It is necessary to support and facilitate these people to have livelihoods outside the PAs and organized groups could benefit in deriving livelihoods other than forest harvest with support and facilitation of the development projects for instance CREL's value chain and market linking activities for the project beneficiaries. CREL in collaboration with FD and the CMC could explore opportunities for *khash* lands for VCF.

VCFs receiving capacity building support and orientation and facilitation from CREL should be graduating themselves to function as a joint enterprise even at the end of CREL facilitation and emerge collectively as the vanguard for the natural resources in their vicinity. The people around the forest are part of that ecosystem and were deriving livelihoods, shelters, food, medicine and actually thriving in their lives through generations and for understandable reason are the vanguard to the ecosystem. They could be the most trusted partners of the forest department in protecting forest resources, reducing the pressure of their livelihoods and at the same time protecting the integrity of the forest against the vested interested influential groups who logs illegally and even grab land for conversion to agriculture and other uses.

As such, strengthening VCF through providing a legal and institutional basis registering them under the cooperatives for the further livelihood strategy and development will reduce the pressure on the ecosystem and the VCF members will be encouraged to contribute to protect the ecosystem for their intangible benefits like oxygenating air, availability of water in the creeks, moisture in the watershed soil etc. Building their skills in organizing, NRM and skills for livelihoods and enabling them in accessing credit and market for example will be conducive for them to become the vanguard of the forests. In addition to these tiers of the poorest of the poor organized under the VCFs CREL will work to ensure functional engagement of wider representation of the communities and secure cooperation in climate resilient NRM through PF along with the VCF representation in the PFs.

The PFs are community organizations representing their member VCFs with the specific purposes of serving for NRM outside the PA and protecting and conserving the PAs from outside, and represent the community in the CMC. The entire landscape centering a PA shall remain as the command area for the respective PF and again depending on the spread and geographical condition, there could be more than one PF for a PA. However, PFs in close facilitation from CREL will develop comprehensive SOW including CPGs and developing a constitution for PFs before their registration to outline the jurisdiction and the command area. The command area should be pragmatically defined accommodating VCFs, defining landscape areas, and which areas of forest PA (for example beats and ranges) that they will support conservation.

All VCFs around a forest PA are represented in a people's forum (PF) for that forest and as part of the strengthening process, PF will be registered under the Social Welfare and groomed to serve as one of the principal community platforms to provide NRM services and raise grass-root's demand by creating a

provision to fund community-based NRM activities. CREL will also explore other options of providing a legal basis for the PF, if there seems any. Selected members from the PF represents to Co management Council and Committee, that to enhance functionality will be guiding and advising these lower tier community organizations in regards to co-management of the forests.

#### *Co-management bodies*

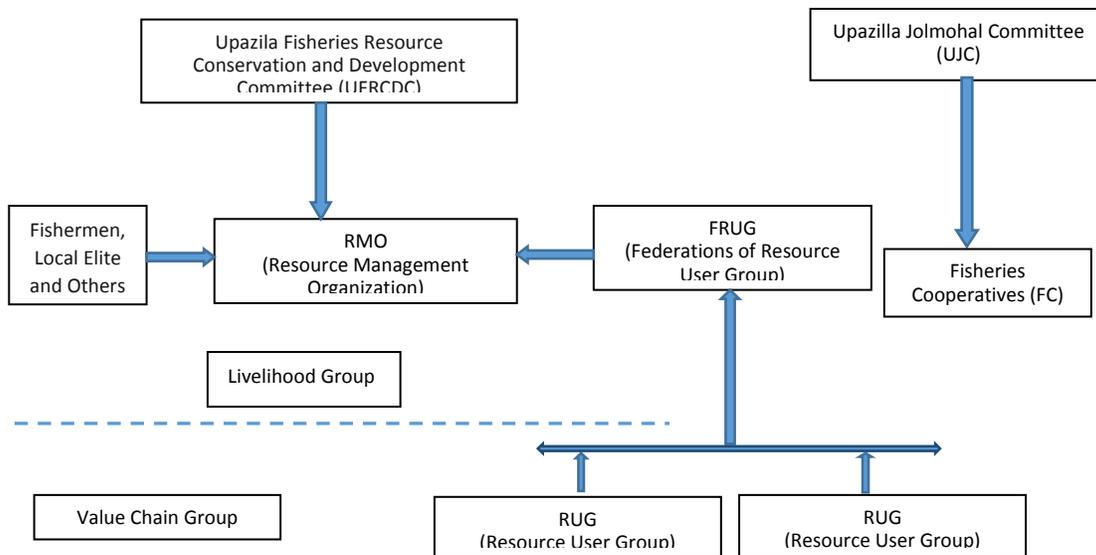
Government orders have established CMCs (Co-Management Committees) or local co-management councils for forest PA management. Councils are advisory bodies whereas committees are capable and authorized to implement while maintaining responsibility for budgets and activities. Each Council has 65 members and each Committee has 29. Councils and CMCs include local resource users and stakeholders as well as representatives from the FD and the PFs. See Annex 2 for additional details.

As mentioned, forest resource users at village levels are organized as VCF as the lowest tier of community organization and their capacity will be developed as organizations to engage functionally and effectively in the management of the forest resources through participation to the next level of community organization, the People's Forum (PF). PFs and VCFs exchange representatives, allowing each to remain aware of the activities of the other. There is conventionally one PF per CMC and the leadership of that PF will remain part of the *Upazila* that hosts major part of the command area of that CMC and outside the forest PA *Upazila*- and union-level PF will be formed with VCFs within each respective *Upazila* or union.

## **Community Organizations and Co-management of wetlands and ECAs in Hail Haor**

### *Hail Haor*

Regarding the institutions for fresh water wetlands, CREL will revive and continue promoting functionality of the FRUGs and RMOs; and reactivate effective *Upazila*-level co-management bodies. RMOs are the key community organization for wetland NRM formed with members from a number of villages around certain wetland (*Jalmohal*) and groomed during MACH project and were registered under Social welfare. MACH project supported and facilitated an MoU between MOFL and MOL to vest the management responsibility of numbers of wetlands to DOF and was leased to RMOs for 5 years having provision for extension of lease for another 5 year upon successful management. In order for reducing the pressure from these wetlands and development of livelihoods, MACH facilitated formation of resource user groups (RUGs) among the villagers (20-25 members in each) and are federated to FRUGs which are registered under the cooperative department that provides a legal basis for the RUGs to operate as well.



**Fig. 2. Co-management institutions in Wetlands**

The FRUGs were each provided with endowments (revolving funds) from USAID through MACH project and savings from the groups were added there too creating a revolving fund that provides credit to the members. Currently these groups and FRUG are existing with different degree of functionality. CREL will work to rejuvenate the functionality of RMOs and FRUGs. In addition CREL will catalyze value chain groups to livelihood strategy and development with an intention of further reduces pressure from CREL sites of wetlands. CREL has been working to bring wetlands under medium term leasing to RMOs through MoU between MOL and MOFL will be handed over to the RMOs and shall be managed by them in collaboration with the DOF as it was in previous practice. RMOs remain registered under social welfare and ensure sustainable NRM. FRUG remain as the apex body of the RUGs.

CREL will facilitate linking existing fisher cooperatives (FC) with the RMOs on condition that they follow good governance principles based on existing overlapping membership as far as possible. These FCs can operate under the guidance of the RMO and meet MOL conditions for obtaining a lease of wetlands per the *jalmohal* leasing policy. CREL will identify and establish functional linkages of FCs with RMOs in the region to ensure sustainable wetland management norms are practiced into the wetlands that are leased to fishers cooperative. Here we expect RMOs to remain as mainstream organizations and to influence the practices of other FCs, but more significantly that the *Upazila*-level co-management bodies will influence FCs and other leaseholders.

CREL will seek to merge the functions of 3 *Upazila*-level committees:

- The *Upazila* fisheries resources develop committee;
- The *Upazila Jolmohal* Leasing Committee, and;
- The *Upazila* ECA committees governing the Srimangal and Moulvibazar shoulders

Merging these organizations will actively support streamlined co-management of the entire *hoar* (see wetland co-management bodies below). It is worth mentioning that there is an extensive overlap in the memberships of these committees as they exist at present and that the new, merged committee will be inclusive of all of the existing memberships.

## ECAs

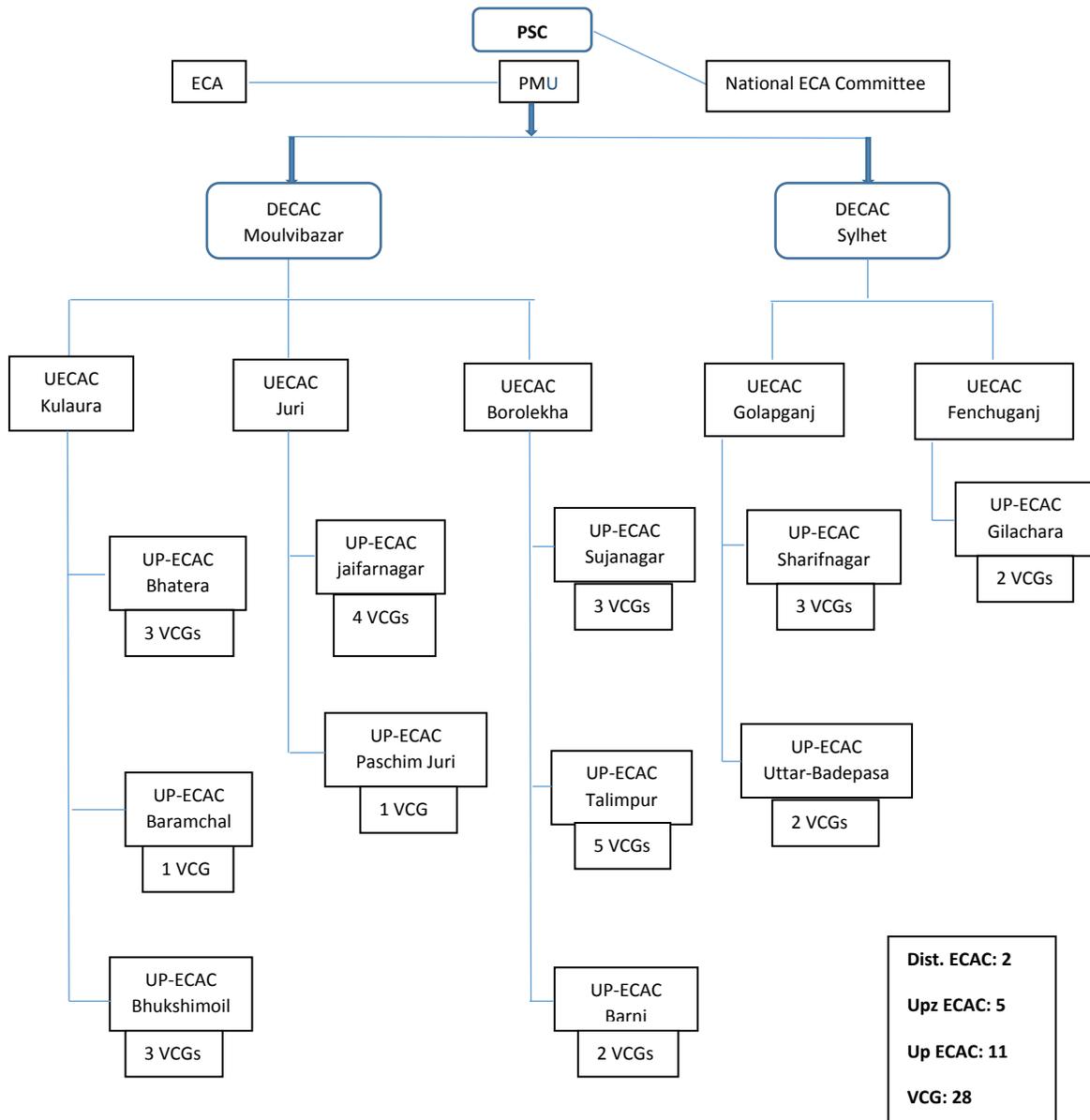
Ecologically Critical Areas (ECAs) are managed under the ECA rules under the Environment Act. The lowest tier for ECA management is Village Conservation Group (VCG) which as the name suggest is a village based. Next level is the Union ECA committee and above that *Upazila* ECA and then District ECA committee. These committees currently do not function as co-management bodies and are government entities with little or no involvement of the local community stakeholders and VCGs. The institutional arrangements for ECA will be reviewed and revised to bring in effective co-management, and to develop ways for communities to generate benefits from sustainable wetland resource use including where appropriate visitor fees or other. In this line, composition of ECA committees, fishermen's cooperative and other *haor* committees along with their SOWs, functionalities will be reviewed to prescribe effective management. The VCG groups could be registered under cooperatives as in case of VCF with same modality and functionality. However, they do not function as cooperatives as they are representative organizations charged with influencing their communities to adopt conservation measures, and do not share the benefits of joint enterprise/activities.

The situation in Hakaluki *Haor* (and most likely in other ECAs) is that VCGs need to work together to manage conservation areas like permanent sanctuaries and swamp forest restoration. It will make sense for these small organizations to merge or enter into long term agreements between one another in these cases— they are very small (typically 25 members) and have a fixed representational structure to date, and there are places where 2 or even 3 VCGs should probably permanently merge to manage a sizeable area of sanctuary and habitat restoration. They would of course keep village based sub-groups (this is like the arrangements that evolved in Kaliakoir in MACH - there RMOs were formed based on merging several smaller initial Kum committees. The target CBO structure would be conservation management areas with 1-4 VCGs working together to a) manage and protect sanctuaries and b) influence *jalmohal* leaseholders in that area; each cluster of VCGs will be represented in the higher co-management forums (committees) - see below.

### *New (non-ECA) wetlands (with implications for existing wetlands)*

CREL will review alternative models developed in the past for three *haors* (Hail, Hakaluki and Tanguar) and draw lessons to establish zoning and controls on land and wetland use changes, and on coordinating between community-level and *haor*-level in co-management. Staff will develop a guidance and management framework for communities on fishery conservation and permanent sanctuaries (for example Hakaluki *Haor*), community management, and tightening enforcement of sustainable practices in areas leased out through competitive processes.

In new wetlands, we expect to establish RMOs responsible for management of designated areas of the wetland system (e.g. *jalmohals* - areas of swamp forest) which will include areas that CREL achieves designation of as permanent sanctuaries, and/or areas of *jalmohal(s)* that are reserved for sustainable use by those RMOs. In the latter case the RMO will be based on or linked with existing fisher cooperatives that meet current MOL expectations of targeting use at fishers. For livelihood diversification and enhancement, we expect to form value chain groups that complement wetland conservation, these groups would not need registration unless that enhanced their enterprises. Single co-management committees will be formed or consolidated based on the review and experiences in existing wetlands (see below).



**Fig. 3. Co-management institutions in ECAs**

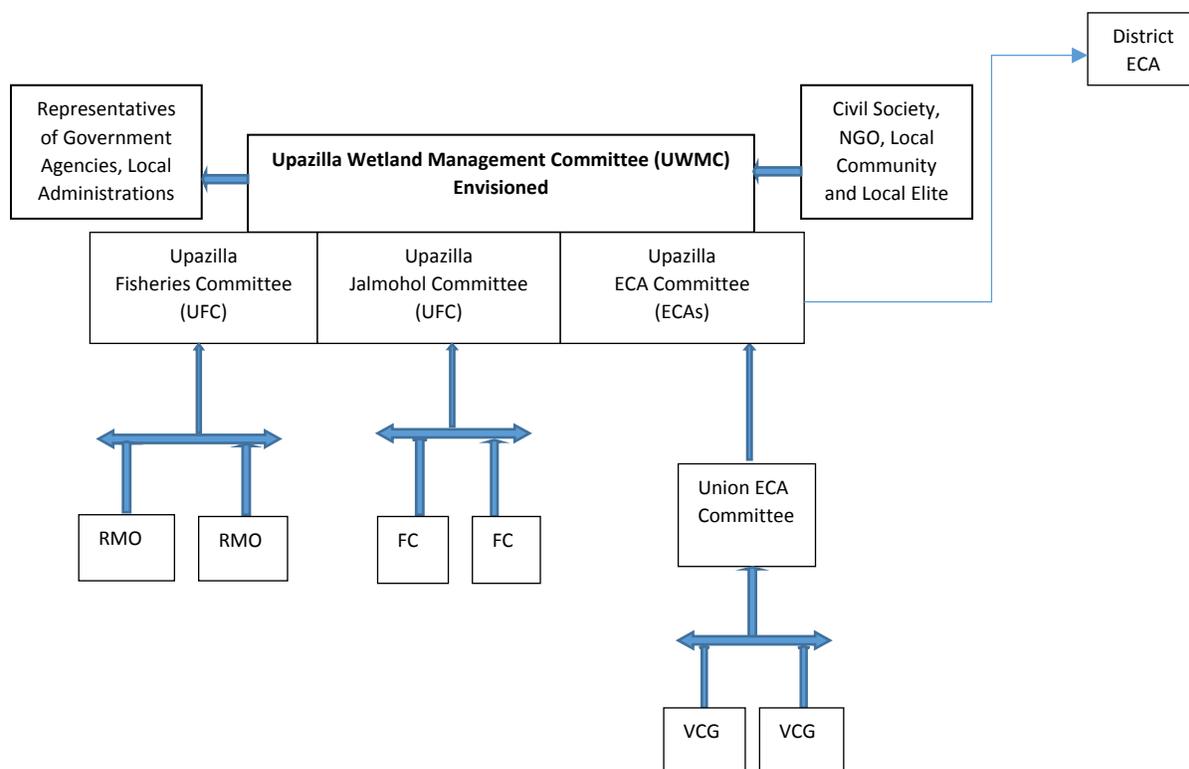


Fig 4: Institutional Arrangements for Wetland

## Wetland Co-Management Bodies

In managing wetlands there are *Upazilla Fisheries Resources Development Committees (UFRDC)* taking care of fisheries (formed under MOFL) and *Upazilla Jalmohal Leasing Committees (UJLC)* and *District Jalmohal Leasing Committees (DJLC)* leasing out the *Jalmohals* (formed under MOL; with leases to the main water bodies above 8 ha decided in the DJLC); and in the case of a wetland ECA in addition *Upazilla* and *District Environmental Committees* looking after environmental conditions in the ECAs (formed under MOEF). UJLC is responsible for the Ministry of Land (AC land/UNO lead) and UFO and few other government officers are member where representatives from one or two Fisher cooperatives participate as a member.

CREL will work with the government to merge these committees into one, as the existing overlap between their memberships is quite extensive. Scope and mandates for merging committee will be holistic in advising and guiding community organizations, and regulating leaseholders and other land users to ensure sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity. In case of wetland crossing administrative boundaries of the *Upazilas* could be vested in the committee that geographically host major portion of the ecosystem. CREL envisions that this merged committee in each *Upazilla* will accommodate CMOs representation and emerge as *Upazilla CMCs* for wetlands. In the similar fashion district co-management committee will be there.

### *CREL approach for strengthening CMOs*

As mentioned CMOs are formed during the previous USAID funded projects viz. MACH, NSP and IPAC. Lessons of co-management has been published in a book titled “Protected Area Co-Management Where People and Poverty Intersect: Lessons from Nishorgo in Bangladesh” in 2012 drawing lessons from five years (2003 to 2008) of efforts to develop models for forest conservation in Bangladesh under the NSP project. The chapter ‘Assessing the Capacity and Progress of Forest Co-Management Organizations’ discussed different aspects of capacities of these organizations and detailed the lessons learned at two distinct levels, Ecology level and Entity level. Lesson learned has been summarized in Annex 2 including a profile of the existing co management and community organizations.

To understand the status and capacity of the community organizations and Co management organizations engaged in forest and wetland management in the CREL working areas, CREL has conducted “Detailed Assessment of CMOs for capacity building and sustainability”. The assessment was intensive and robust and assessed capacities of the organizations in the following categories: NRM, CC resilience, M&E, Pro-poor, Women’s Role, Organizational effectiveness, financial management, internal governance, Leadership and external linkage. The assessment was conducted with 60 CMOs (CMC, PF, RMO, ECA) in Khulna, Chittagong, and Coxes Bazar and Sylet regions. (See Annex 3)

CREL learned and gained knowledge from previous experience, comprehend the learning, analyze, synthesis and argued, brainstormed, debated through a meeting on CMO legacy and a way forward held at the NE Regional Office, Sreemongal on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2013 where a total of 20 experts participated including BCAS, CNRS, NACOM, WF and CREL advisors on NRM. The meeting yielded a guiding set of recommendations (Annex 4)

Based on the lesson learned during the IAPC period, findings and recommendations of the “assessment of CMOs for capacity building and sustainability” and the Sreemongol meeting on CMO legacy and a way forward, CREL has identified activities, deliverables and a modality to realize result in this regard.

## **CREL modality for strengthening the capacity of co-management institutions’**

VCFs will encouraged to accept support to form cooperatives that facilitate them functioning as joint enterprises so that they could collectively also participate in sustainable NRM management with others as a part of co-management bodies. The registration for VCGs and or their clusters could be with Social welfare (Cooperative?). The PF, RMOs are registered under social welfare. Those Fisher cooperatives (FC) that make an alliance with RMO/VCG will receive linked capacity building with the respective CBO. Capacity building of RMOs and VCGs will be as per the capacity levels and gaps found through the assessment in the following categories: NRM, CC resilience, M&E, Pro-poor, Women’s Role, Organizational effectiveness, financial management, internal governance, Leadership and external linkage.

The capacity building component (component 2) following the architecture and in accordance with the findings of CMO assessment will develop a detailed training plan to enhance the skills needed to improve. Respective CREL officers at all sites in close guidance to the respective managers and the RCs will ensure delivery of the required training and education to respective VCG, VCF, PF, RMOs, CMCs and ECA committees.

CREL has conducted an assessment finding sharing workshop recently where a collective and devoted effort identified few headline indicators to measure the sustainability of the community organizations (Annex 5: CMO sustainability criteria). Gaining a certain level of competence in those headline indicators the CMOs will be eligible for receiving grants. Grants will allow these organizations to practically test the skills they gained through the training and concrete the skill for sustainable NRM. Whereas the Cooperatives will be facilitated through skill development for livelihoods, linking them to the market, facilitating access credit and linkage for leveraging will be ensured by component 4.

Biophysical improvement, NRM (Component 3) shall remain as a core component for the grants, while the component 2 shall be devoted to raising skills, component 1 concentrates on developing the governance of these organizations and component 4 links the members of the organizations to the livelihood development initiatives, M& E assist their learning participatory monitoring and evaluation while communication helps in functioning their linkage with the external institutions. CREL envisions these organizations upon graduating shall be in a position to

- Develop sustainable NRM planning
- Accessing resources for implementation of the plan
- Implement the plan
- Monitor and evaluate the plan

Individually the members of these organizations will be skillful and engaged in successful livelihood persuasion which are environmentally sound, climate resilient and not stressing forests or wetlands. One devoted CMO coordinator will coordinate directing functions of all 4 components, communication, grant and M&E for building and sustaining these organizations. The coordinator will develop a matrix including concrete tasks, deliverables, timeline and who will be providing what at local level, central level in coordination with respective RCs and managers.

#### **Vision for co-management**

CMC's vision is to build the platform of community and the government to conserve the biologically significant areas and its landscape through practicing improved governance and benefitting people

#### **Vision for community organization (PF, RMO) participating in co-management**

People's forum and resources management organization voice the forest and wetland communities representing landscape they belong to.

#### **Vision for community organization at lower tier**

Grassroots level community organizations is engaged and working for natural resources management through practicing climate resilient livelihoods, complying laws and implementing policies and have the capacity to manage funds for landscape level bio-physical improvement

## **Annex 1: Genesis of forest and wetland co-management in Bangladesh**

Forest and wetland ecosystem characterizes natural setting and environmental context of Bangladesh. These two distinctive and again interlinked ecosystems provide food and livelihoods to millions of rural population and protect the country against natural calamities. Historically Bangladesh was a subsistence economy and till date the economy is predominantly agrarian and the dependence of, in particular rural population on forest and wetland resources are huge. During last couple of decades due to various reasons the wetlands and forest ecosystems have been degraded in quality and decreased in size. The trends of degradation and decrease continues and as such quest for developing and employing a model for sustainable management is also on. Various models of management have been in the pilot testing stage in Bangladesh for forest and wetland resources which includes management by the land lords, owners, and state. Long time there was no management in to these ecosystems as well. Initiated during early 90s and receiving support from different players the concept of co management is emerging in Bangladesh over last two decades.

Community participation in wetland management emerged at the time of the Flood Action Plan process in the early 90s. Community based fisheries had been tested in several individual water bodies, including ox-bow lakes, *beels*, and parts of the rivers, in the mid-90s. Building on these pilots in open water fisheries management, Management of Aquatic ecosystems through Community Husbandry (MACH) had been implemented in the Hail *Haor* and in the Turag Bongshi and Kongshow Malijhi river basins during 1998 to 2008. MACH facilitated establishing community based resources management organization (RMO) and assisted to capacitate them. The resource management organizations was also formed and facilitated in Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM 1 & 2), Empowering Coastal Fisher Community (ECFC) and other projects during last two decades.

Forest co- management concept in Bangladesh has been evolved from the experience of the open water fisheries management. Social forestry was participatory in a narrow sense. Nishorgo Support Project (NSP) attempted forest co-management for the first time in Bangladesh. Following NSP many projects including Sundarban Environmental and Livelihoods Security (SEALS), The Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL), The Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP), Bengal Tiger Conservation Activity (BAGH) has adapted co management.

Collaborative management or co management in these two sectors in Bangladesh is still in its infancy. Concept co management however is rolling out at different part of the world both in wetland and in forest management. This paper mentions the genesis of co-management in wetland and forest sector, discuss lessons from previous initiatives, community organizations, decision of the “ Sreemongal Meeting on Co-management architecture” and finally proposes a model for Strengthening the Capacity of the co management Institutions’ for Improved governance in Natural Resources management and Biodiversity.

## Annex 2: Co-management organizations and lessons learned

**Forest management:** The Government of Bangladesh circulated a special gazette (Ref: PABAMA/PARESHA-4/NISHORGO/104/Sting/2006/398, dated: 23/11/2009) providing legal basis for the co-management of forest PAs in Bangladesh. The CMO has two tiers, the Co-Management Council and the CMC (co-management committee).

- a. The Co-Management Council is the topmost tier responsible for overall coordination, guidance and ensuring co-management in Forest PAs. This 65 member Council ensures equal participation of local government, administration and civil society representatives in planning, approving budget, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of co-management plans. The Council acts as a supervisory body of the CMC and led by *Upazila Nirbahi* Officer and the PA Range Officer for the affected area functioning as the President and Member Secretary, respectively. It has representation of 8 government officials, at least 15 female members, federation members of the forest resources user groups, government agencies and local leaders. At least twice a year the Council meets to review the status of CMOs and PA management.
- b. Co-management Committee, the second top-most tier of Forest PA co-management group, is the day-to-day management authority meeting monthly. It is led by a community elected civil society representative as the President and Range Officer as the Member Secretary with CMC office being located near PA forest offices. It comprises 29 members of which at least 18 are community representatives, 5 are females and rests are forest department and other government officials executing various activities under the guidance of Divisional Forest Officer and *Upazila Nirbahi* Officer. The bank account of the Committee is operated under the joint signature of the Member-secretary and an elected Treasurer. This Committee is reportable to the Council and People's Forum for all activities.

The principal functions of this Committee are to organize, coordinate, and develop management actions, regular monitoring and resolve conflicts related to PAs core zones and buffer zones through funds allocated from shared revenues and mandated utilization as in the annual co-management plan. Management of the forest PAs for protection and restoration is assisted through providing labor, patrolling and joint decision-making by the local community members. The Committee also ensures participation and transparency of the Forest Department and other stakeholders for to achieve the co-management goal and to properly distribute goods and services of protected area among the involved stakeholders with sustainable management.

Besides CM council and Committee there are another two tiers of community organization that send the community representative to CMCs are:

- c. People's Forum:  
The People's Forum is formed by election of representatives from villages and local communities within the Protected Area landscape comprising 22 members. It has an executive committee comprising 11 members for implementing the activities. All key stakeholders are represented, particularly women, the youth, lower income households, and important resource user groups with 50% females. Currently, meeting 4 times a year this forum ensures that local livelihood issues are taken into account in the preparation and implementation of Protected Area co-management plans. PF provides recommendation, guidance and support initiatives for protecting the natural resources and biodiversity of the Protected Area. It assists the Forest Department and

Co-management Committee in implementing tree plantations, reforestation, habitat restoration, nature tourism activities and other management activities.

d. Village Conservation Forum (VCF):

For each designated village, there is one Village Conservation Forum (VCF) with the participation of forest resource users in village households. The number and size of VCF for a PA vary based on the population, location and degree of forest resource dependency. Two representatives, one male & one female are elected for the Peoples' Forum and often these PF members are commonly represented in the Council. The VCF meets every month organized by a local person called Nishorgo Sahayak. According to the principle of co-management, these large grass-root groups generate the demand for management of natural resources in the buffer and landscape areas. Socio-economic well-being of the villagers are the main concern of VCF members and thereby, reducing excess pressure on forest resources.

Lessons of co-management has been published in a book titled "Protected Area Co-Management Where People and Poverty Interest: LESSONS FROM NISHORGO IN BANGLADESH in 2012 drawing lessons from five years (2003 to 2008) of efforts to develop models for forest conservation in Bangladesh under the NSP project. The chapter 'Assessing the Capacity and Progress of Forest Co-Management Organizations' discussed different aspects of capacities of these organizations and detailed the lessons learned at two distinct level, Ecology level and Entity level.

**Ecology level**

- It is imperative to engage with local leadership organizations—both traditional Samaj and local government especially Union Parishad)-based mechanisms – for successful functioning of CMOs.
- It is strategically wise, if not always “noble and brave,” for CMOs to avoid any major confrontation or clash with the powerful social and political forces in their locality.
- Relative homogeneity of social and demographic composition of the locality makes the exercise of CMOs' leadership authority and implementation of decisions easier
- In areas where some natural resources are still left (to be conserved) and the current depletion rate is alarming, local people show a relatively greater interest in coming to the fold of co-management activities.
- There has to be a recognition, rather than denial or avoidance, on the part of the concerned officials involved in co-management of the historical fact that local people, especially the poor and marginalized communities, have commonly run into conflicts with the government's regulatory forest management regimes.
- Co-management activities have a better prospect of public acceptance and grounding in areas where the local people have some earlier exposure to “participatory” project. At the sub-national (field) level, the understanding of, and benefits ensuing from, the recent policy and regulatory reforms in the forestry sector are inadequate and marginal
- Long-term financial sustainability of CMOs calls for careful visionary planning and overcoming of bureaucratic constraints.
- There are a number of legal, procedural, and policy constraints on successful functioning of the CMOs and co-management approach, which need to be urgently addressed. Examples of such constraining issues include the following:
  - a. “..legal constraint on future expansion and wider replication of the model (addressed after this book).
  - b. There is no specifically developed benefit-sharing contract for buffer plantations.
  - c. “.. the current legislative framework (especially the Forest Act, Wildlife Preservation Order, and National Forest Policy) do not provide for establish mentor conduct of any

- externally funded and implemented project, or operation of any external agency (e.g. CMO) inside the “core area.” Currently, there is a stalemate regarding the issue in the field – causing serious frustration among CMO members and associated villagers”.
- d. “. Can a CMO as a local institution exist beyond the project period, given that the government Gazette Notification, on which the CMOs primarily draw, is time-bound and limited? What would be the “role” of CMOs: management, decision making or implementer of projects?”

#### “Entity” Level

- CMOs (including Councils and Committees) need to ensure greater inclusion and voice of the relatively disadvantaged sections of society
- Transparency in CMO leadership calls for an institutionalized system of performance evaluation (including a reward and punishment system).
- The regulatory documents (Co-Management Council and Committee constitutions and government circulars) need to be disseminated to common members and any interested person in the community in a language and manner that is understandable to the local people.
- The social capital associated with CMO membership is widely valued, and remains a major attraction for CMO leaders.
- FD needs to play the crucial role of principal facilitator and nurturer of “co-management” if there is to be any reasonable degree of success of such an approach.
- Some quarters of local FD staff share an uncomfortable feeling of losing territorial control and authority in trying to promote co-management.
- Local people’s sound “popular wisdom,” especially in analyzing the performance of development projects (that they/CMO handle), is worth noting and exploring further.
- Participating women require great recognition and opportunities to access formal avenues of income and decision
- Making.
- Locally based planning exercises contribute to CMO and local community empowerment

**Wetland management:** Community participation in wetland management emerged at the time of the Flood Action Plan process in the early 90s. Community based fisheries had been tested and implemented in several individual water bodies, including ox-bow lakes, beels, and parts of the rivers, Haor system by Department of Fisheries in partnership with Local and international NGOs and with support from USAID, DFID and others during last two decades. Examples are MACH, CBFM, CWBMP. The institutional arrangements for the MACH project was RMOs, RUGs and FRUGs which were formed with members irrespective of their profession while their user hat was considered. RMO was registered under social welfare and a federation of RUGs were formed. UFRDC is the Government Committee for Upazila Fisheries conservation and development. Following institutional tiers and organizations are prevailing currently;

**Resource Management Organization (RMO):** In Hail Haor, there are 8 RMOs working for natural resource management of wetlands and managing fish sanctuaries. The number of members are differ in each RMOs with 60% fishermen or wetland resource users, 10% local elites and 30% other local community stakeholders. This is the top-most tier of the community-based wetland management organizations.

**Federation of Resources User Groups (FRUG):** It consists of the socio-economic beneficiaries of wetland dependent people often engaged in fishing business. This group provides interest-based loans

created by a revolving fund mechanism for the grassroots wetland people called the Resources Users Groups (RUGs). The loans are provided for developing local small business and enterprises.

**Resource User Group (RUG):** This group is similar to the VCFs of Forest PAs where local people depend and benefit directly or indirectly from Hail haor resources. Most of the villagers in these groups are connected to FRUGs for livelihood based loans and local commercial demands. However, conservation and management of Hail Haor as mandated by the RMOs are not clearly linked in current process except of physical community representation in the RMOs.

**Upazila Fisheries Resource Conservation and Development Committee (UFRCDC):** It is located in Sreemangal upazila of the Moulavibazar district headed by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and comprises 22 members, including Upazila level relevant Officers, academician, and civil society representatives. The structure of the CMOs/CBOs for ECAs management are:

**Upazila ECA Coordination Committee:** It is under Baralekha upazila of the Moulavibazar district headed by Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and comprises 15 members, including Upazila level relevant officers working on land administration, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, forest, local security and cooperatives, representatives of fishers association and other civil society representatives. The committee is responsible for Upazila level coordination in ECA management, awareness raising, supervising Village Conservation Groups (VCG) activities, and carry out conservation activities utilizing endowment fund.

**Union ECA Coordination Committee:** Main responsibilities of this 9-member committee include awareness raising, provide local level support in ECA management, supervising and reviewing activities of VCG and providing guidance to them. It is lead by the Union Parishad Chairman and government officials in either land administration or agriculture being the Member Secretary.

**Village Conservation Group (VCG):** There are several VCGs for the ECA management and in Hakaluki it comprises mainly members from Halla, Akota and Judisthir. The structure of the assessed VCGs is constituted with 21 members with 38% fishermen, 24% farmers, 14% landless, 14% poor day laborer and 10% other occupational resource users. An advisory committee within each VCG is constituted consisting 5-7 members from Union Parishad, local leader, religious leader (Imam) and elites. The lesson was;

- RUGs or RMOs cannot compete for gaining lease of the wetlands per Jolmohal leasing policy
- Endowment or seed fund profits designated to office expenditure were utilized while the allotment for the NRM were not released
- Elite become profound in the management of RMOs and RUGs and fishers who are poorest of the poor along with other poors have no voice and incentives through h these organizations
- Coordination among RUGs and among RMOs are lacking which is necessary to have a management over the entire haor

## **Annex 3: Detailed Assessment of CMOs for capacity building and sustainability- CREL**

CREL goal is to scale up and adapt successful co-management models to conserve ecosystems and protected areas (PAs), improve governance of natural resources and biodiversity, and increase resilience to climate change through improved planning and livelihoods diversification. Previously, USAID supported projects like: (MACH, IPAC and NISHORGO) that successfully introduced co-management concept in Bangladesh and formed co-management organizations (CMOs). Currently, existing CMOs under CREL's area are in the North-East Region (Sylhet/Sreemongol), South-East Region (Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar), and South-West Region (Khulna).

Detailed assessment of these CMOs in the above-mentioned 4 regions were carried out in July-September 2013 totaling 60 groups of forest PAs and Haor areas including ECAs. The assessment was carried out by selected group of evaluators from CREL's implementing partners and assessment tool developed by the Co-management advisor along with the governance team. The overall rating of the CMOs can be compared with those of IPAC's February 2013 records where significant discrepancy may be observed without considering few additions and modification in the original assessment tool used during IPAC's CMO self-assessment scorecard (CMO assessment final report, CREL 2013).

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## **Annex 4: Sreemongol Meeting on CMO legacy and way forward**

A meeting on CMO legacy and way forward was held at NE Regional Office, Sreemongalon 19<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2013. Darrel Deppert (CREL's CoP) chaired the meeting and Abu Mostafa Kamal Uddin was the moderator. A total 20 experts participated including BCAS, CNRS, NACOM, WF and CREL adviser on NRM.

### *Discussion*

During MACH, 8 RMOs and 5 FRUGs were formed. The present structure of RMO composed of local elites, poor, fishermen and women. Baragangina RMO was responsible for managing Baikka *Beel*. Now time has come to restructure RMO composition. There are a set of reasons behind this. For example, RMOs used endowment fund for the development work of the handed over water bodies. At present water bodies (except Baikka *Beel*) are not under the management of RMOs as MoU in-between MoL and MoFL not renewed. Secondly, there is no representation of RMOs/CBOs in *Upazila* or *Jalmahal* Management Committee and Fisheries Resource Conservation and Development Committee.

At present, RMOs have no access to endowment fund. So, they cannot receive fund for development of natural resources.

It was clearly mentioned in the accomplished MoU in-between MoL and MoFL "initially water bodies will be handed over for five years, if management is satisfactory during 1<sup>st</sup> 5 years there will be an extension for another five years and will be continued in same way".

RMO/RUG's members those are from fishers community may form Fishermen Cooperatives to get water bodies under existing *Jalmahal* policy.

*Jalmahal* may be handed over through MoU in-between MoL and MoFL under article No. 3.a of existing Wetland Leasing Policy 2009. Water bodies may be handed over by MoL directly to CBOs through MoU or existing policy may be amended keeping scope for the CBOs to get access to the water bodies for community-based natural resource management.

Social forestry started operating in 1980 and this movement became successful in 90s. Nishorgo Support Project started working from 2003. They formed Co-Management Councils and Co-Management Committees. During IPAC, Village Conservation Forum (VCF) and People's Forum (PF) were formed in 2010.

At the beginning VCF (formed by the forest resource dependent) was not functional and after a certain period, VCF started working for co-management of natural resources. PF (formed by the representatives of the VCF) is still not functioning. Having discussed with PF, concerted efforts should be taken to make PF functional. Interaction of PF should be increased with CMC. There should be a formal guideline/gazette notification for formation and functions of VCF and PF.

In comparison to RMO structure, CM-Council is general body and CM-Committee is a functional structure. CM Committee is accountable to CM-Council and PF. The accountability of CM Committee to PF is a question mark as CMC have govt. representatives and PF is composed of villagers. This symbolizes functional constraints.

Question raised that if CMC is a legal body of govt. why should it require registration. In CMC, there are representatives from different govt. agencies and if there are govt. representatives in any committee, structurally, it cannot be registered under social welfare or cooperative. It was discussed, if a body has to

secure fund from donors, it must have registration. But it is mentioned in the gazette notification (article 3.2 (kha&eeya) under Scope of Work of CM Committee) that CM Committee is allowed to collect fund from different sources and will be responsible to mobilize that to implement their ADP against particular Protected Area. However, clear clause on this can be provided and suggested to the Order on co-management bodies.

ECA and RMO should be linked. There should be committee from national to union level. In Hakaluki Haor, there is only one VCG representative in Union and Upazila level ECA committee. Which is not properly representing the total unions/Upazila. District level ECA committee is not functional.

District level committee may be formed for CREL activities.

### *Way Forward*

- Govt. order, 2009 on co-management bodies for forest PA and involvement of local stakeholders should be conceptualized clearly.
- Clarification, Composition & ToR of co-management concept should be made clear
- Strengthening of community particularly PF.
- Number of VCFs has to be equal to the number of villages
- Fund raising activities should be promoted
- Monitoring and evaluation of co-management activities should be on a regular basis
- Conflict resolution among different stakeholders should be developed
- VCF members should be well defined
- Action plan to encourage PF to participate actively in co-management
- Financial sustainability of CMO will be one of the main basis for their sustainability.
- Registration of VCF with cooperative to undertake income generating activities. Benefits to community must be ensured Sensitization about co-management from root level to ministry.
- Reactivation and proper use of endowment fund in MACH sites.
- CM Committee and CM Council are recognized in govt. notification. If it is added that they can secure and utilize fund for development activities, it would be positive for them to continue. Since PA Co-management Rules' 13 includes part of the CMO composition and functions, concerned official at Dhaka Office may suggest revision to FD in future
- Addition of a clause to govt. order 2009 to recognize existing RMO, which is formed during MACH project. This option should be explored soon.
- Fishermen cooperative society can be formed and represented to RMO where, RMO will be an apex body and various primary society ( fisher cooperative, RUG) will work under RMO
- VCF & PFs institutions should be finalized and implemented.
- PF may be formed beat/station wise depending on PA size for better communication in region like Sundarban.
- PF should be registered with social welfare to strengthen community activity and seek external funds for NRM projects as they are the main voice of the grassroots.
- CREL should network and coordinate with other players active in the region to harmonize, synergize, complement and avoid duplication of effort and leverage.
- At present CMC get fund from Forest Department for a year and they are to spend total fund within that fiscal year. There should be a provision for them to keep unspent fund for continuation of various development works. This has to be reflected in the PA rules

- Sharing of collected revenue should be at source and Dhaka CREL office can expedite the process.
- Individual/organization conducting research in PAs will have to submit their research findings to CMC.
- Review and revision of management plan on a regular basis
- Formation of district level committee for CREL through MoLand or Cabinet. This committee will hold meeting at least once in a quarter.
- Implementation of management plan, annual plan by CMC with support from the Forest Department.
- FD and CMC should develop one ADP/Management Plan for each PA
- Leasing of all MACH wetlands in favor of RMOs for longer term including new sites as proposed recently – 25 years or more
- Review and improve RUGs and FRUGs and their relation to RMOs and effective use of revolving loan funds
- Effectively engage youths and women in NRM
- Committees related to water bodies and environment at upazila/district level should be synchronized
- A study on Tanguar Haor to find a way out for CREL intervention and toll collection
- Review pile fishery systems and influence MoL to enforce pile fishery systems all over the haor basin
- Review of institutional arrangements of ECAs and develop and put in place effective ECA management institutions.