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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	AN ANALYSIS OF THE DETERMINANTS OF MINING INVESTMENT IN ZIMBABWE: BASED ON THE FLEXIBLE ACCELERATOR MODEL <i>LYMAN MLAMBO</i>	1
2.	FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF INDIAN GENERAL INSURANCE COMPANIES IN PRE RECESSION PERIOD <i>DR. S.M.TARIQ ZAFAR & RITIKA AGGARWAL</i>	7
3.	POSTAL SAVINGS IN INDIA – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS USING REGRESSION AND ARIMA MODELS <i>S.NEHRU & S. RAJARAM</i>	15
4.	FDI IN RETAILING: BOOST EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA'S YOUTH <i>DR. V.SELVAM</i>	21
5.	KERALA BUILDING AND OTHER CONSTRUCTION WORKERS WELFARE FUND BOARD - A MACRO PICTURE <i>DR. ABDUL NASAR VP, DR. ABOOBACKER SIDHEEQUE KT & DR. MUHAMMED BASHEER UMMATHUR</i>	25
6.	GROWTH AND PERFORMANCE OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN INDIA IN POST GLOBALIZATION PERIOD <i>R. PONMANI & DR. R. ANNAPOORANI</i>	39
7.	MICRO-FINANCE: A CHANGING PARADIGM IN THE NEW ECONOMIC SCENARIO IN THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT <i>DR. V.V. SUBBA RAO & T. MADHUSUDHAN RAO</i>	42
8.	BAMBOO CULTIVATION IN DIMAPUR, NAGALAND – GROWERS PERCEPTION <i>DR. P. NATARAJAN & IMTINUNGSANGJAMIR</i>	47
9.	USE OF Z-SCORE ANALYSIS FOR EVALUATION OF FINANCIAL HEALTH OF INDIAN OIL REFINERIES <i>DR. A. VIJAYAKUMAR & P.GOMATHI</i>	53
10.	IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ON EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTION <i>MUHAMMAD RIZWAN, MARIA SHAHID, HAMNA SHAFIQ, SUMAIRA TABASSUM, RAFIA BARI & JAVERIA UMAR</i>	63
11.	WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN INDIA <i>JYOTI KANDPAL BHATT, NEERAJ SHARMA & DEEPIKA GOEL</i>	70
12.	THE ROLE OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS: THE CASE OF HAOR FISHERMEN IN BANGLADESH <i>ROMAZA KHANUM</i>	75
13.	STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN NORTHERN STATES OF INDIA <i>TINA SINGH</i>	80
14.	INDIAN IPO MARKET - QUO VADIS <i>RASHI M. GOPLANI</i>	84
15.	FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS IN INDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY <i>DR. KUSHALAPPA. S & PRADEEP R BHANDARY</i>	91
16.	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF FEMALE FACULTY IN COLLEGES <i>P.YASODHA</i>	95
17.	EFFECTIVE EDUCATION FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED CHILDREN IN REGULAR STREAM: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS <i>DR. K. PARTHASARATHY</i>	99
18.	WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF- HELP GROUPS IN PUDUCHERRY: A CASE STUDY OF YANAM <i>DR. R.UMA DEVI</i>	104
19.	HINDRANCES TO MICROFINANCE SUSTAINABILITY IN RAJOURI DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR <i>AASIM MIR</i>	112
20.	A STUDY ON FACULTY STRESS IN SELECT COLLEGES IN KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT <i>B.SATHYA & DR. M.MURUGAN</i>	115
21.	GROWTH, PERFORMANCE AND DETERMINANTS OF AGRICULTURAL VARIATION IN PUNJAB: AN INTER DISTRICTS STUDY <i>JASPAL SINGH, NIRMAL SINGH & KULVINDER SINGH</i>	119
22.	PROMOTING ORGANIC FARMING: AN ANALYSIS OF STATUS AND ISSUES OF UTTARAKHAND ORGANIC COMMODITY BOARD <i>SHALINI SINGH & VISHNU SHANKER MEENA</i>	127
23.	RESEARCH ON THE VARIABLES THAT HAVE AN IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND TURNOVER INTENTION <i>MUHAMMAD RIZWAN, NIMRA SHAHZAD, QANDEEL SHEIKH, SANIA BATOOL, MARYAM RIAZ & SAMINA SIDDIQUE</i>	131
24.	THE DETERMINANTS OF LEVERAGE OF THE LISTED COMPANIES IN SRI LANKA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY <i>S.ANANDASAYANAN, V.A.SUBRAMANIAM, A.SIREERANHAN & M.RAVEESWARAN</i>	139
25.	THE IMPACT OF COMMERCIAL BANKS' ACTIVITIES ON RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA <i>OKE, MARGARET ADEBIPE & SAMUEL, IYIOLA KEHINDE OLUWATOYIN</i>	144
26.	THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SME's) OPERATED BY WOMEN AND MEN IN THE NON AGRICULTURE ROLE ENTERPRISE IN NANDI COUNTY, KENYA <i>STEPHEN K. CHELOGOI & EVERLINE C.TUM</i>	150
27.	ACCESS TO AND IMPACT OF CREDIT ON HOUSEHOLDS WELFARE IN NIGERIA <i>UGWUANYI, HILLARY CHIGOZIE & OMEJE, AMBROSE NNAEMEKA</i>	154
28.	BOARD GENDER DIVERSITY AND PERFORMANCE OF LISTED COMMERCIAL BANKS IN KENYA <i>UMULKHER ALI ABDILLAHI & MUGANDA MUNIR MANINI</i>	159
29.	INDIAN TEA PRODUCTION: AN ANALYSIS <i>P.V.ANIL</i>	166
30.	THE IMPACT OF THE BRAND TRUST, BRAND ATTACHMENT, BRAND COMMITMENT ON BRAND LOYALTY <i>MUHAMMAD RIZWAN, WAQAR AHMAD BHATTI, SAMRAIZ TAHIR, CH. SAJID ALI, FARAZEEN HASEEB PEERZADA, AFFIFA NAZ & QURAT-UL-AIN ZAHRA</i>	169
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	175

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THE ROLE OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS: THE CASE OF HAOR FISHERMEN IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

This place-based research critically analyses the sustainable livelihoods of fishermen in Hakaluki haor, one of the major wetlands of Bangladesh, which is full of wildlife and aquatic resources, flora and fauna, thousands of migratory birds, along with local birds of different species and plants. Based on field study in two fishing villages and secondary information from different publish articles, paper, project papers, etc., this research constitutes some major aspects in addition to the introduction and conclusion. First part provides numerous definitions such as sustainability, livelihood, sustainable livelihood and institution. In second session, the empirical link between sustainable livelihood and institution has been discussed. Third section highlights the different level of local institutions and hierarchy in haor area. Forth part analyzes the role of the Department of Fisheries (DOF), where it acts as a mediator of providing effective support for fishermen's livelihoods. The research concludes that the DOF is an ineffective and inefficient local institution due to lack of financial support and plays an insignificant role of planning, haor management and generating alternative income opportunities for haor fishermen in the lean period.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable livelihood, institution, governance, haor management policy, vulnerable.

INTRODUCTION

ustainability has recently come out as a major development issue of societies, livelihoods, and additional social, economic, and ecological activities. After the Rio Earth Summit 1992, the sustainability of humankind has become more dynamic debates on how to conserve natural resources to sustain the required goods and services for human well-being as these resources are providing livelihood support to millions (Scoones, 2007). Local institutions are important for rural people in this regards. Their influencing powers secure the rural people's participation equally in management, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources so that rural people can build their ability to cope with and recover from stress and shock by identifying their basic requirement. In this line of thought, the question is raised that do local institutions play a significant role in securing sustainable livelihood of rural people? This question is now critically important for policymakers, regulators, government, and non-government organizations in seeking sustainable livelihood of poor people in Bangladesh. In the study, it is necessary to define livelihood first for analyzing and understanding the livelihood sustainability. Ellis (2000:10) defines as "a livelihood comprises the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or household". Livelihood systems entail as a sets of complex economic, social and physical strategies. In this regard, the sustainable livelihood strategy of institutions is a major influencing instrument of poverty reduction. It improves the people's capacity and ability to enjoy choice, access to and use of natural resources at present or in the future. The effective and adequate support of local institution is also a contributing factor of generating alternative income opportunities in the lean period. It is, therefore necessary to define institutions.

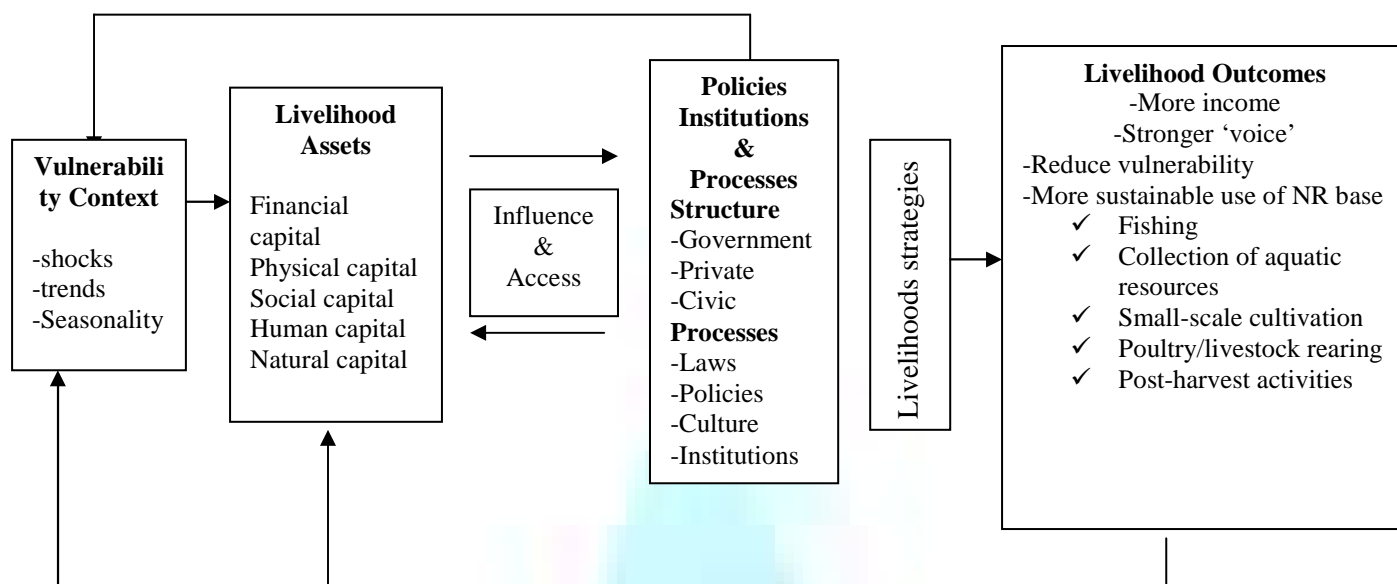
Institutions are "the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction....[and] reduce uncertainty (North, 1990:4)". Institutions are discussed in shaping people's life and its institutional arrangement is a fundamental aspect of investment in easier, cheaper and more profitable activities; particularly poor people diversify their livelihoods to overcome the vulnerabilities and gain new and more profitable income opportunities. It is, therefore important to address the question of how particular institution work efficiently in generating sustainable income opportunities for specific interest groups.

In the creation of sustainable livelihoods, the research has focused primarily on service provision of the Department of Fisheries (DOF), as a local institution, towards fishermen in Hakaluki haor, one of the major wetlands of Bangladesh, which is full of wildlife and aquatic resources, flora and fauna, thousands of migratory birds, along with local birds of different species and plants. The objective of this research paper is to examine the role of the DOF in generating sustainable livelihoods for haor fishermen and to highlight the different level hierarchy of haor resource management policies. The systematic review of role of the fisheries department complies and evaluates a rigorous theoretical research which examines the question; how the DOF works efficiently in securing the livelihood sustainability for haor fishermen and the arrangement of existing institutional capacity in the haor area by sharing the findings and policy implications of the research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the sustainable livelihood strategy of the DOF, a conceptual framework is essential to construct. The study develops a sustainable livelihoods framework in figure 1 which reflects the critical role of the local institutions in general. The study includes some assets in this framework: human capital (education, skills and health of fishermen), physical capital (fishing equipment, house, sewing machine, etc.), social capital (social network, associations, membership organizations, and peer-group network), financial capital (savings, credit, insurance, etc.), and natural capital (haor resource base).

FIGURE 1: A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS ANALYSIS OF POOR PEOPLE (ADOPTED FROM CARNEY ET AL 1999)



DFID (in Asley and Carney 1999:7) provides a sustainable livelihood framework to help building the understanding of various livelihood components and factors; "i) the priorities that people identify, ii) the different strategies they adopt in pursuit of their priorities, iii) the institutions, policies and organizations that determine their access to assets and the returns they can achieve, iv) their access to social, human, physical, financial and natural capital and their ability to put these to productive use, iv) the context in which they live, including external trends (economic, technological, demographic etc.), shocks (natural or man-made), and seasonality".

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on place-based intensive field work case studies of a *haor* in Bangladesh, named *Hakaluki haor*. A *haor* is basically a very low lying river basin area, which is just six months of a year covered by water. More specifically, "a *haor* is a wetland in the North Eastern part of Bangladesh which physically is a bowl shaped shallow depression. It is a mosaic of wetland habitats including rivers, streams and irrigation canals, large areas of seasonally flooded cultivated plains and hundreds of beels." (Hussain and Salam 2007: 3). The study was conducted in Kulaura Upazila under Maulvibazar district. The qualitative method was used with participatory technique. A multi-stage random sampling technique was considered. Two villages (i.e. Kandigaon and Radhanagar) and total 100 fishermen (50 *haor* fishermen from every village) were selected from this upazila. Structure and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were the main components of research tools. Secondary information also collected from the different published articles, policy papers, project papers, government and other useful websites, etc. The paper argues that the DOF is 'inefficient' by providing necessary support towards *haor* fishermen, in terms of capacity building (i.e. fishery improvement, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring and supervision, etc.) and sustainable livelihood strategies (i.e. sufficient funds, training facilities, information, locally-driven technology, etc.). It also argues that homogeneous and heterogeneous institutions play different but complementary roles in *haor* resources. In conclusion, the paper establishes strong policy to strengthening and capacity building of the DOF.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fishermen are not a homogeneous group (Crona and Bodin, 2006); rather they are classified by fishing gear or equipments. Christophe (2003:951) indicates as 'they are poor because they are fishermen and they are fishermen because they are poor'. In general, people and the ecological environment are more vulnerable in *haor* area due to flash floods and other natural calamities, ecological degradation, unsafe drinking water and sanitation, deforestation, lack of educational institutions and communication facilities and overall poor service provision of local institutions, etc., whose are inverse impacted on livelihood (Anika, 2011). Particularly, fishermen become more vulnerable in the lean season (mid-May to mid-October) and face unemployment situation due to ban fishing on *haor* for sanctuary, and shrink the fishable water areas, as a result, they become day labourers in the agricultural and construction sectors, or migrate to urban areas for better work, but lack of inputs as fishing gear and persistent debt to the usurious traditional credit system also bind them to their communities and occupation (Ruddle, 1994) during this season. It is therefore, the socio-economic background of *haor* fishermen are tremendously squat (Alam, 2005) due to unable to meet their basic needs, even to buy the main instruments of fishing (e.g. boat, net, etc.). On the other hand, Government regulations of leasing and licensing policy have been affected small-scale fishermen to take customary fishing rights in *haor* basin after leasing to richer groups. This system of collecting maximum revenue is influenced overexploitations, which have escalated wetland degradation, decimated fish stocks and other aquatic life from *haor*, and have put *haor* ecosystems at risk; these changes also have in turn adversely impacted on fishermen's livelihoods (Rahman and Begum, 2011). In order to restore habitats of fish and to increase fish productivity the Government of Bangladesh has inaugurated a particular local institution as a Department of Fisheries (DOF) and accepted the *Haor* Development Board Ordinance. Yet *haor* fishermen are not able to enjoy the certain flow of income opportunities. It is therefore, the DOF plays a significant role of ensuring sustainable income for *haor* fishermen. To examine its effective services towards fishermen, it is critically important to address the different level of institutions and hierarchy in *haor* area, whose are directly impacted on the sustainable role of the DOF and different assets of fishermen.

DIFFERENT LEVEL OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS IN HAOR AREA

This paper focuses on existing three types of governance systems over *haor* resource management such as civic, public, and private with formal form. Within these three broad domains, Uphoff and Buck (2006) highlighted two local *public* institutions (*local governments* and *local agencies*), two types of *civic* institutions (*membership organizations* and *cooperatives*), and two types of *private* institutions (*service organizations* i.e. NGOs, charities etc., and *private business*). For livelihood approaches, dozens of ministries and departments such as health, education, social welfare, agriculture, local government, etc., are involved in *haor* area as public organizations. At the central level, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MOLF), Ministry of Land (MOL), Ministry of Water Resources (MOWR), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF), and Local Government and Rural Development (MOLGRD) are primarily concerned with *haor* fisheries and other natural resource management. Among all these ministries, the MOL plays a critical role in controlling and leasing various government-owned water-bodies (*Jalmahal*). Moreover, a good number of national and International Non-Governmental Organizations are also working for the betterment of *haor*, such as; Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), Bangladesh POUISH, Bangladesh Center for Advanced Studies (BCAS), BRAC, NACOM, CFSD, IUCN, Universities and CBOs, local Nijera Kari (do own self), Samata (equity) etc. as private and civic organizations.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF HIERARCHY IN HAOR AREA

Historically, Bangladesh has been exploited by the British colonial and Pakistani regimes. Over the last two centuries, the management of haor has been focused on revenue earning. Prior to British rule, haor fishermen of Bangladesh enjoyed customary rights to fishing and local fishing communities had access to fisheries resources to support their subsistence livelihoods. The British colonial ruler established the Permanent Settlement Act 1793 over land and natural resources. According to the Act, the customary right to hold hereditary land was subject to the regular payment of rent, but this right could not be transferred from one individual to another. By this Act, local peoples' rights were restricted to the land and natural resources and maximized revenue collection for the colonial state. After the independence of the country (as East Pakistan in 1947 and as Bangladesh in 1971), there have been maintained the legal regimes in natural resource management (NRM) approaches which are basically scientific and technology-based, top-down, centralized, production and efficiency-oriented. In the formal management system, access to resources of resource users have been ignored and followed a state-governed management approach (SMA). The SMA was developed a strict control system of ensuring rent collection from resources and established the required administrative network of revenue collectors (Siddiqui, 1989) on all kinds of wetlands, such as rivers, *haors*, *beels*, *baors*, canals, streams, lakes and large ponds. After that the Government of Bangladesh transferred all 'jalmahals' from the MOL to the Department of Fisheries (DOF) under the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MOFL) in 1980. After establishing upazila (sub-district) administration in 1984, the responsibility of revenue earning from under 8 ha water bodies are taken under the Local Government Ordinance 1983. In 1986, the Government introduced 'New Fisheries Management Policy' (NFMP) with the objective of free fishing by intermediaries, leaseholders and financiers; to direct major benefits of fisheries to genuine fishermen (Ahmed et al, 1997). It is, therefore, fisheries management in the floodplain areas of Bangladesh cannot be operated by the lead ministry as MOL alone, only 257 water bodies out of 12,000 (around 2%) were handed over to DOF for licensing (Muir, 2003). Beside these, fishermen cannot fishing properly in *haor* due to economic, social and technical constants (Alam, 2005), and usually water bodies are leased out for three to five years by government to rich people, as a result, poor fishermen (Sarma, 2010) are not allowed to establish their customary rights on *jalmahal*. According to law, the leasing system is given preference to local fishermen on participation in the bidding system, but in reality most of fishermen cannot participate in the auction due to lack of bidding money. As a result, they become jobless after leasing and they move to cities or anywhere else in seeking farming or non-farming jobs to cope up their unemployment situation. Moreover, this leasing system of open water bodies is generated conflicts and chaos at local level, and reinforced the power hierarchy in the society (Toufique 1997). It is, therefore important to examine the specific role of the DOF which helps to generate sustainable livelihood for fishermen.

ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES

In this paper, the role of the DOF has significant implications on livelihoods, quality of life, and participation in decision making process of haor fishermen. In this regard, it is critically important to give attention on three sets of factors of the DOF: i) its nature and goals, ii) its pattern, how to facilitate the livelihood strategies for fishermen, and iii) linkages with other local institutions in the haor area. An understanding of above three aspects helps to identify the characteristic features of the DOF and focuses on the livelihood sustainability of fishing communities. According to law, it is the sole authority over aquaculture and fisheries resources across Bangladesh. Primarily, the objective of the DOF is to plan, implement and monitor various key development policies in order to establish livelihood opportunities and reduce income vulnerabilities of fishermen. It also acts as a protector, regulator and mediator and it is difficult to differentiate its haor fisheries management from other fisheries related activities. It is characterized by several important roles such as capacity-building and sustainable livelihood strategies in achieving livelihood sustainability. Such roles can be discussed below.

A. CAPACITY-BUILDING

The role of capacity-building relates to the aspects of learning, skill acquisition for both institution and beneficiaries group. A traditional proverb "give a man a fish, you have fed him for today; teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime" (<http://www.eduqna.com/Quotations/815-Quotations-6.html>). The proverb implies that the local institution is needed to focus on sustainable know-how development among fishing communities and on engaging their beneficiaries groups effectively in the decision-making process of natural resource management, rather than providing relief or material help. Not only do identify how fishermen are affected by livelihoods vulnerabilities, the DOF also helps to build the capacity of fishermen for improving livelihoods in a sustainable fashion. It compasses a multitude of activities as ability of fishery improvement, restoration, and rehabilitation in order to improve fishermen's performance and achieve their goal of sustainable income. The following some elements of capacity-building whose are essential to ensure the volume of fisheries resources in haor basin.

PLAN OF HAOR FISHERY IMPROVEMENT, RESTORATION, AND REHABILITATION

In general the DOF prepares and follows a fish production plan (annual, five yearly or any other), identifies a priority list of development the fish habitat and takes-up an annual fund for preparing *beel* nursery, sanctuary, etc. It is also a mediator of transferring technology, conserving fisheries resources, administering fisheries projects, formulating various policy, etc. Particularly, it did not show any official documents of fish production plan and formulation various committee to maintain fish habitat. Moreover, it has a remarkable progress in the extension of culture-based fisheries in *haor* area (see table 1). Recently, it is going to take 'fish culture and management project' in haor area for three years which will focus on i) increased fish production, ii) safe sanctuary, and iii) conservation of free breeding place and movement of fish.

Items	No.
Total number of pond	4110
Private fish hatchery	1
Private fish nursery	42

Field survey, 2012 (*Kulaura upazila*).

It is trying to impose 'best practices' to bring improved fishery. In the study area, 49 sanctuaries in 167 hectares were established and 511,000 trees were planted to maintain water year round for restoration the fish habitats. Unfortunately, more and more people (non-fishermen also) use destructively fine mesh nets to get high catch volume of fish. As a result, juvenile fish are disappeared day by day that is severely affected the fish regeneration cycle in the next monsoon.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO PRIORITY SETTING

The institutional capacity-building activity can be tailored on needs assessments to priority setting that is reflected a specific design of its services. It needs a multi-stakeholder approach to identify the target groups, such as poor, women and marginalized groups of fishermen. From the investigation, the needs assessment was completed by a capacity assessment of the DOF on banning harmful gears for fishing, banning fishing during the breeding season, maintaining a closed-season, restoring the fish migratory route, compliance of harvesting codes of conduct, use of irrigation pumps during the dry season, and plantation of flooded forest in *khas khandas* (raised land around beels). Even there was no any priority list of genuine fishermen in haor area.

Recently the DOF is going to take a 'Fishermen Registration and Issuing of Identity Card Project' that will help them to identify those who are involved in fishing in natural water bodies and their livelihoods depend mainly on fishing. This initiative will help to differentiate between fishermen and non-fishermen, particularly poor fishermen will be more benefited.

SUPERVISION AND MONITORING CAPACITY, AND SKILL ENHANCE

The supervision and monitoring capacity of development projects are a significant role of strengthening the future activities of the DOF. This is a bona fide mechanism to know it's every pros and cons, and to ensure its efficiency, accountability and responsibility towards fishermen. For building supervision and monitoring capacity, regular field visits are administered, discussion with implementing committee and representative of fishermen, and fishermen's participation in the monthly meeting are ensured. The DOF also prepares the progressing report of development activities and sends it to government time to time. Moreover, local fisheries department plays a critical role on development work of *haor* fisheries as preparing *beels* for sanctuary, conservation of mother fishery, establishment of fisheries law, etc. It is also responsible for long and short-term training on awareness building of conserving *beel* nursery. The

facilitation, supervision, guidance and supportive activities of the DOF play a significant role of enhancing skill in planning and implementing of development project also.

To compare the mechanism of capacity-building with the theoretical insights of sustainable livelihood, it is observable that most of the issues were different in practice from the theory. There was no any positive linkage between the role of capacity-building and development of *haor* fisheries resources for sustainable livelihood of *haor* fishermen. Because strengthening capacities as a part of long-term, continuous and self-sustaining effort that needs to be addressed target group and funding requirements. During the field visit, the sustainable livelihood framework was not administered in practice. The DOF was not influential institution for involving fishermen; rather it was more active to involve the superior, political leaders or local elite people. Due to lack of institutional capacity-building problems, monitoring and supervision capacity of *haor* development projects were not administered properly and annual plan of improved fishing habitat was not produced. The DOF had no power; the *haor* was strictly maintained by the Ministry of Land, the provisions of leasing rules of *jalmahals*. It was also not maintained the co-relation with other branches of government, and it's monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems were not up-to date. Thus, the DOF was not an accountable, responsible and efficient local institution for *haor* fishermen.

B. SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS STRATEGIES

In this regards, the DOF plays a key role in generating alternative income opportunities by facilitating access, use and control over fisheries resources for *haor* fishermen. Based on primary objective of poverty reduction, the DOF is taken a sustainable livelihood strategy by transferring fish technology, conserving fisheries resources, and administering fisheries projects and policy for fishing communities. It also ensures small-scale hatcheries, fish nurseries and fish seed collecting activities. In practice, the Fisheries Department controls only five *beels* out of more than 80 for sanctuaries in Hakaluki *haor*, but two *beels* are low productive capacity of fish production in terms of siltation, pollution from multiple sources, demographic pressure, and flood control measurement, etc. It is difficult to produce sustainable fishery stock for the future in these limited *beels*. On the other hand, flash flood, *haor* management and conservation policy are prohibited the small-scale fishing communities to continue their income opportunities. In these cases, *haor* fishermen are needed to provide financial support on livelihood diversification strategies by the respective institution. During investigation the fisheries department was providing financial support on only private pond construction, fishing equipments and fish production inputs. There was no any advance on loan provision or training facilities of generating alternative income (i.e. livestock and poultry rearing, tailoring, small business, etc.) for small-scale *haor* fishermen. It had limited staff to provide loan which was demanded a chain process of distribution, monitoring and timely collection. Sometimes fishermen were not interested to maintain the loan processing system which was also taken long time to get the loan. On the other hand, the DOF was not agreed to take the risk of management and the difficulties of loan distribution among poor fishermen. It was also stated that unpredictable the future production and the catch of fish and declined fish stock due to uncertain natural breeding systems were affected fishermen's income to pay back loans.

In contrast, there were some non-governmental financial institutions/NGOs, such as Green Bank, Association for Social Advancement (ASA), BRAC, etc. They were only provided micro-credit facilities to specific groups (i.e. women, poor people, and farmer) for small trading business. But there were not any provision of giving loan on fishing activities/or leasing of *Jalmahals* by these institutions. Moreover, Bangladesh *Krishi* (agricultural) Bank (KKB) had limited opportunities for genuine fishermen due to lack of property or fixed assets to use as collateral evidence against the loan. *Haor* Fishermen were not allowed for taking credit from these institutions as well. In response with this financial problem, the DOF wanted to start micro-credit systems and some training facilities with financial support. Some experienced staff and new technologies were also needed to operate the *haor* fisheries resources in *haor* area.

In this case, the institutional financial support was the most powerful element for generating alternative livelihood options, which are provided a minimum flow of monthly income opportunities so that they can lead a better life that are interconnected with other dimensions of life i.e. housing, education, lighting, and sanitation, etc. Fishermen also demanded specific training facilities (i.e. farm, off-farm) that build their skills, and need to introduce locally driven (i.e. tree plantation, other aquatic life) alternative income generating activities during the closed season of fishing or lean season when poor fishermen cannot sell their labour or unable to catch fish in *haor* basin. From the Study, the establishing sanctuaries of brood stock during the dry season are created a long-term reproduction of fish and other aquatic life. In this argument, there is a positive link with sustainable fish production that is contributed to livelihood sustainability over time. From the field experience, the DOF had well-trained and educated technical staff, fisheries extension and research capacity, and decision-making power for establishing fish sanctuaries. On the other site, it had poor capacity of governing system, low motivation, and revenue budgetary allocation towards fishing communities, whose are influenced a strong revenue orientation system rather than sustainable management of *haor*. Such types of activities are not allowed to develop a better livelihood outcome, a better health ecosystem, social equity and justice. As a result, it is difficult to generate livelihood strategies for poor *haor* fishermen. It was evident that the sustainable livelihood strategies of the DOF were very far from the theory of sustainable livelihood due to lack of providing financial support and generating alternative income opportunities towards fishermen in the lean period.

CONCLUSION

However, the study revealed some critical aspects; First, there were no clear guideline of formation of fish production plan, monitoring or supervision, and implementation committees of fisheries projects, Second, due to lack of institutional coordination with other institutions and capacity, the DOF was not capable to define their rights and duties, entitlement, and proper management initiatives in *haor* fishery, Third, it was unable to provide sufficient coordination and cooperation of credit facilities for generating alternative income opportunities in the lean period, Fourth, the diverse actors manage *haor* resources with diverse interest within the complex power structure of management. The diversity of actors signifies diverse resource use and production activities that are interconnected each other. As a consequence, fishermen are suffering from the isolation of the respective department, low or poor *haor* infrastructure (roads, water transport during the flood season, warehouse, and market) and services (health, education), and local conflicts. Moreover, the DOF failed to give an appropriate and specific attention of locally planning process of fishermen's livelihood and to facilitate a better exchanging power of information among fishermen. Based on field experience, it was impossible to provide an effective *haor* management policy and maintain equity and fairness, accountability, responsibility and efficiency within a strong networking process by the DOF.

In the research, the role of local fisheries office in *Hakaluki haor* of Bangladesh was examined and identified its *haor* management capacity and basic requirement for establishing sustainable livelihoods of fishermen. Obviously, it is evident that the relief or subsistence oriented programs cannot develop a positive trend of self-dependent or efficient manner of livelihood for poor people. It is, therefore, critically important to build capacity of its beneficiaries group to overcome the livelihoods challenges. Based on the key findings of the study, the following critical issues will be useful to develop a strong local institution for *haor* fishermen;

- i) First of all the DOF needs to build its institutional capacity to keep record of pre and post fish harvest, communicate with beneficiaries, and plan, design and implement the *haor* fisheries related programs and projects.
- ii) For empowering the *haor* fishermen, it should emphasis on sufficient fund as a micro-credit form with low interest rate, relevant technology of sustainable fish management, increasing awareness to conserve the fisheries resources etc. In order to increase fishermen's livelihoods, it should introduce diverse, locally-driven income generating activities, especially during the lean periods. Moreover, non-agricultural based training can be empowered them to ensure economic safety nets.
- iii) For the *haor* fisheries management, 'genuine' fishermen should be identified and involved them as early as possible in the development activities from planning to supervision over *haor* resources.
- iv) Last but not least, the government should change the leasing policy and controlling power over *haor* resources. It should be handed over to the fisheries department from the MOL.

This case study also offers a strong coordination between all actors and fishermen whose will directly involve in *haor* resource management in order to build up new policies, plans, and development initiatives. The aim of integrated governance approach is to build capacity of the DOF for promoting equal access to and control over *haor* resources.

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