

# A Unified Approach to Developing Water Management Organizations: Lessons from Polder 47/4<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) has been working in the operation and management (O&M) of coastal polders to allow access to water to a wide range of users and stakeholders. BWDB has faced diverse and multi-sectoral water problem and learned lot of experiences. Now it is concerned with the sustainable development of water management system for the completed polder system where large section of people's community is living. The Blue Gold Program operates in the southern and southwest coastal polders with the aim of introducing sustainable socio-economic development through participatory water management and diversified farming practices, market participation and supporting local initiative; for helping build relations with partner organisations, line agencies, local resource persons, private sectors; and for optimising the mix of disciplinary support to the situation at hand.

One of the main activities of the program has been to form stakeholders in water management organizations to be the main drivers for development activities. Polder Teams (BWDB-OCWM and BWDB-O&M Divisions, DAE and TA field staff) have established sub-catchment-based Water Management Groups and a Water Management Association at polder level.

The process used in Polder 47/4 in 2018 for mobilizing and organizing water management organizations has been documented in this paper based on the combined experience of the Technical Assistance (TA) zonal team and the community development facilitators (CDFs) who live and work in the polders. P47/4 has a gross area of about 6,600 ha and cultivable land about 5,600 ha. It includes four Unions (Baliatali, Khaprabhanga, Dhulashar and Mithaganj Union) and twelve mouzas (Char Nazib, Chotto Baliatali, Lemu Para, Sona Para, Bara Baliatali, Char Baliatali, Dulashar, Baultali, Dalbugonj, Manashatali, Harandrapur Khaprabhanga and Madukhali) in Kalapara Upazila of Patuakhali District. P47/4 was empoldered by BWDB between 1961 and 1964 under the Coastal Embankment Project through the construction of an embankment of a length of 61 km and 26 sluices.

## 2. Planned and Set-up Methodologies Adopted

During the formation of WMG the following process was used in P47/4 by BWDB and TA team members:

**2.1 Meet partner agency key staff:** TA Zonal and polder coordinators meet key staff of the partners in water management for development of the concerned polder – preferably as a group – to discuss the Blue Gold initiative, its initial activities (familiarisation and information gathering, program dissemination and polder planning) and its overall programme. To help build commitment, leaflets have distributed and different type of video are shown:

- BWDB: XEN and key staff; DCEO, and AEO;
- District and Upazila officials of DAE, DLS and DoF;
- UP and Upazila Chairmen and members.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper documents the experiences of the Technical Assistance (TA) team's community development facilitators (CDFs) in implementing the unified approach published in the PWM Field Manual (in [English](#) and [Bangla](#)) in February 2017

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### 3. Set-up polder teams

Polder Coordinator, Extension Overseer (XO), BWDB and Sub-Assistant Agricultural Officer (SAAO), DAE along with TA staff deployed at the polder-level.

**3.1 Conduct orientation workshops** for polder teams to ensure common understanding of key building blocks of water management for development:

- PWM Approach, goal and targets; as well as specific timelines for phasing-out TA staff from old polders and phasing-in into new ones;
- Building blocks for developing functional Water Management Organisations (WMOs);
- Collective Actions (CAs), Horizontal Learning and self-reflection, partnerships and networking;
- Collective actions and how to stimulate these with opportunities in FFS/MFS activities, operation and maintenance, and income generating activities (IGAs);
- Horizontal learning and participatory monitoring as a tool for promoting self-reflection and supporting a self-evolving development process;
- Creating partnerships and a support network to turn to as needed when addressing problems and opportunities on water resource management and economic development.

### 4. Activation Entry

**Support, enhance and expand collective actions:** Enhance existing collective actions and motivate their leaders to get involved in identifying and implementing new ones e.g. FFS sessions, group actions addressing construction-related issues and conflicts, using bargaining power in market linkages, water management/operation and maintenance, disaster preparedness, etc. Polder Team with support from Zonal and Dhaka Experts provide guidance and technical support to FFS and other common interest groups in undertaking actions. Involve selected farmer-trainers as apprentice in FFS implementation. It is important at this point to discuss with the collective action leaders the importance of horizontal learning strategies and strategies to hasten expansion of collective actions and disseminate lessons.

#### 4.1. Village and Embankment Walk

A useful PRA tool was used for the understanding the physical situation of the polder and socio-cultural position of the people. Through the process most of the institutions, roads, khals, rivers, markets identified. During the walking period peoples, notions and previous experience/ideas have shared as well compare the current situation of the area. The process also opens an opportunity to open the doorsteps of Blue Gold in the polder areas. Besides the walking exercise over the embankment, create clear picture about the physical situation of the polder system. A basic polder map showing administrative boundaries, existing roads and infrastructures prepared by GIS Coordinator for use during the walk-through. Polder team to pursue participation of interested collective action leaders and key informants from the polder community (existing WMOs, if applicable), SAAOs and UP members during the walk-through;

- The whole process has provided a taste of the physical and biological environment of the polder system.

### 5. Core group formation

The BGP polder team has been formed and synthesise a core group of people at each WMG area who are be responsible for laying the foundation for a self-evolving WMG. The core group has composed of community leaders that have emerged from the existing collective actions and new ones implemented including existing farmer trainers/resource farmers. The BGP polder team is, in consultation with key community informants and with the concerned UP ward members, carefully identify these core group.

### **5.1. Village Mapping and Boundary Selection**

On the basis of existing available map the Blue Gold Zonal/Polder Team has visited the whole project areas on the basis of village and union boundary. They have also found out the existing hydrological areas covered by a specific location sluice and inlets. The process together helps to identify the present water distribution system; village boundary and emerging conflict existed between and among parties/stakeholders involved in different activities such as fisherman, farmers, highland and lowland. The team also find out some problems that existing water distribution system unable to ensure water in some corner, pocket of the village that created conflict among the villagers. Some villages were split into two or more section on the basis of hydrological units. The process also helps to collect the land use pattern (single, double cropped area) and land (high, low and medium) situation of the areas. The village map and selection of village boundary was shared with LGI and motivation meeting and came in a consensus with the villagers.

- Through the process village maps and boundary has been prepared on the basis of hydrological units.

### **5.2. Identification of Problems and Physical Structures**

The existing problems are facing by the villagers regarding water management, sluice operation, water supply, high-low land, fishing, local initiatives etc. The problems were prioritized on the basis of their need and solution of problem. Data/information for organizing village profile on the basis existing situations; including resources, problems, socio-econo-political situation and local initiatives, etc. Collection of necessary data and information of household level also taken place. Indicate all type of existing infrastructure (structures, channel, roads etc.) and proposed structures has been identified.

- The list of problems and priority index was prepared.
- Mouza wise approximate area of land (100%) of Polder and WMG wise nos. of Households, Stakeholders and Category of Households of the Village.

### **5.3. Meeting with the LGI**

Formal (Zonal and Polder Team) discussion has taken place with the LGI (UP chairmen, Members,) representatives including local elites. The meeting oriented the Blue Gold Program objectives, activities and strategies to be followed during the implementation of work in the polder. Existing management system of the polder also shared. It was identified the existing physical and biological resources.

### **5.4. WMG/WMA Preparation Meeting**

After circulating introductory leaflets, a short briefing was provided about the Blue Gold program and to ensure individual contacts were made with individual households. Through this contact the Zonal Team arranged small village-level motivation/preparation meetings, which focused on the existing GPWM and water policy for organizing the WMG/WMA formation process. An action plan was prepared for the formation of WMG with participation of maximum household including male and female of the village.

### **5.5. Women Meeting**

An additional separate meeting was organized for each Para/Bari held with women to encourage involvement the project activities. The meeting addressed water related problems and useful to understand women issues to be addressed in the project.

The WMG/WMA formation process is summarized as follows:

- Preparation of a hydrological map for the polder
- Preparation and circulation of leaflets and posters as part of a wider information campaign
- Preparing a condition assessment all type of existing infrastructure (structures, channel, roads etc.)
- Introducing Blue Gold objectives to local leaders, UP chairmen, Members and other officials
- Collection of household data
- Collection of information on existing situation - resources, problems, socio-econo-political situation and local initiatives, etc.
- Hold separate meetings with women to encourage their involvement in project activities
- Arranging WMG formation meeting and selection/election of WMG Executive Committees

## **6. Water Management Organization (WMO)**

One of the roles of the TA team is to prepare WMO is to see the potential benefits to individuals and all users of in-polder water management, which requires the active involvement of people in all the stages of the project cycle. However, the Guidelines for Participatory Water Management (GPWM) and Participatory Water Management Rules 2014 have provided a direction for the preparation of WMOs. The guideline indicated the enabling the formation process and should work by the all development agencies under an umbrella.

### **6.1. Criteria for WMO membership**

Membership in Water Management Group is open to all adults (minimum 18 years women and men) permanent residing within the specified area of operation of the Group. For executive committee the age limits minimum 21 years.

### **6.2. Level of Organization**

All the WMGs in each polder have been combined in a Water Management Association (WMA). In time, these WMAs ultimately could join together in a Water Management Federation (WMF).

### **6.3. Relation between levels**

Each WMA consists of 4 members (at least one female) elected by each WMG. In addition, a landless, fisherfolk and destitute representatives has the right to elect member each (male/female) to the WMGs and WMAs. After completion of organizational structure, WMGs/WMAs are arranging monthly/special/general and consultation meeting and the meeting mainly facilitating by TA Team and BWDB staff. WMG will concern to deal water related and other issues and WMA mainly deal with the BWDB/DAE and other development agencies in order to harvest resources for the WMGs. The WMA will maintain a regular communication with the WMG.

## **7. WMG Formation**

WMOs have been formed in accordance with Water Management Rules 2014 and Blue Gold WMO formation Manual. The core group that has been partner to the polder team through the preceding stages now is in charge of setting-up an ad-hoc committee that performs the steps leading to formal establishment of the WMG (in accordance to government rules and regulations). This includes enrolled members from all stakeholder groups representing at least 55% of the total households in the WMG area; formulation of by-laws; selection of EC members; and registration with BWDB. The Ad-hoc committees benefit from guidance and advice by the BWDB extension overseers. The election committee scheduled according to the action plan-WMG formation date, place of meeting and time of meeting. Accordingly, the meeting took place on the basis of schedule. The male and

female participants sat in the meeting venue and signed. The meeting ensures man and women representation of the catchment. The meeting facilitated by the Zonal Team including Extension Overseer from Chief Water Management Office. According to the Participatory Water Management Rules 2014 and of GPWM/WMG we have adopted three processes on the basis of people consensus:

- (a) nomination of candidates and open voting system by rising hands,
- (b) Selection of 12 representatives (executive committee) from the catchments/Sub catchment by the villagers.
- (c) A small group nominated of representatives from different corners of the village. They sat separately and nominated a committee and approved by the general members. After finalization the executive committee, they selected four representatives for WMA (male and at least one female).

The 12 member of the executive committee was selected/elected from the different parts of the catchment/villages and they represent the large, medium and small farmers as well as landless and fishers folk. In the executive committee at least 30% women selected and most of the committee women representative was elected/selected as a Vice Chairman, Joint secretary and Treasurer. 3 vice-chairman, 1 General Secretary, 9 joint secretaries and 5 Treasurer. 3 Women represent selected with hard competitions by the male/female both members.

Eighteen WMGs were formed in P47/4 in 2018 using this approach.

## **8. WMA Formation**

According to the action plan WMA formation date, place of meeting and time of meeting were scheduled by the representative of WMA. The WMA formation meeting was invited by the Executive Engineer, Patuakhali WD Division, BWDB, Kalapara, Patuakhali. Accordingly, the zonal team has organized and mobilizes the meeting and motivates the members on their duties and responsibilities. WMA formation as well as executive committee was finalized by 8<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

In our observation it was noted that the Core Group and UP\_Chairman (S) role are very much essential to complete the WMA formation process. They have faced huge pressure from the District/Upazila political leaders. It was very much conducive and makes it success the WMA formation by the participation of BWDB, Patuakhali and Dhaka, BGP Zonal and Dhaka Team.

In P47/4 it was noted that a UP Chairmen and Social Leader has intended and initiated to convinced the WMA representative for finalization the executive committee of WMA before the formation day. In this regard, it was informed that they undertook internal meeting at least three times and discussed among the members of WMA and come in a consensus. On the WMA executive Committee election/selection day people are proposed and select executive committee members by raising their hands in the selection process. None of the member disagreed with the process. Finally, the executive committee was formed in the congenial environment.

In the WMA formation process the BWDB and DAE officials also joined and play an active role including Mr. Monirul Islam, DCEO, BWDB, Barisal and Mr. Masud Karim, Chief Extension Officer. The CDFs assigned for the polder 47/4 and Zonal Team members played a key role for the mobilizing and organizing the WMA formation.

## **9. Conclusion**

WMOs have been formed in P47/4 and are participating actively in the process of implementation of Project works on a full scale. Co-operation and consultation between the WMOs and BWDB/DAE/ DoF etc. is becoming ever closer and starting institutionalized.