14 Consultation and participation in planning

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This section discusses early efforts by BGP to consult and involve communities in planning. It

specifically reflects on the Polder Development Plans (PDP) and the WMG Action Plans (WAP).

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Polder Development Plan[edit | edit source]

Briefing Materials

The following materials illustrate concepts, interventions, outcomes and lessons learnt, including through stories from community members.

Slide decks

• WMOs: building sustainable partnerships for participatory water management

Thematic brochures

• Lessons learnt for scaling out: how participatory water management contributes to inclusive development
• WMOs: building sustainable partnerships for participatory water management

Case studies

• Building strong and functional water management organisations: Kholsibunia WMG

Videos

• PWM: an integrated approach - animation (Bangla with English subtitles)
• Water Management Organisations (Bangla with English subtitles)

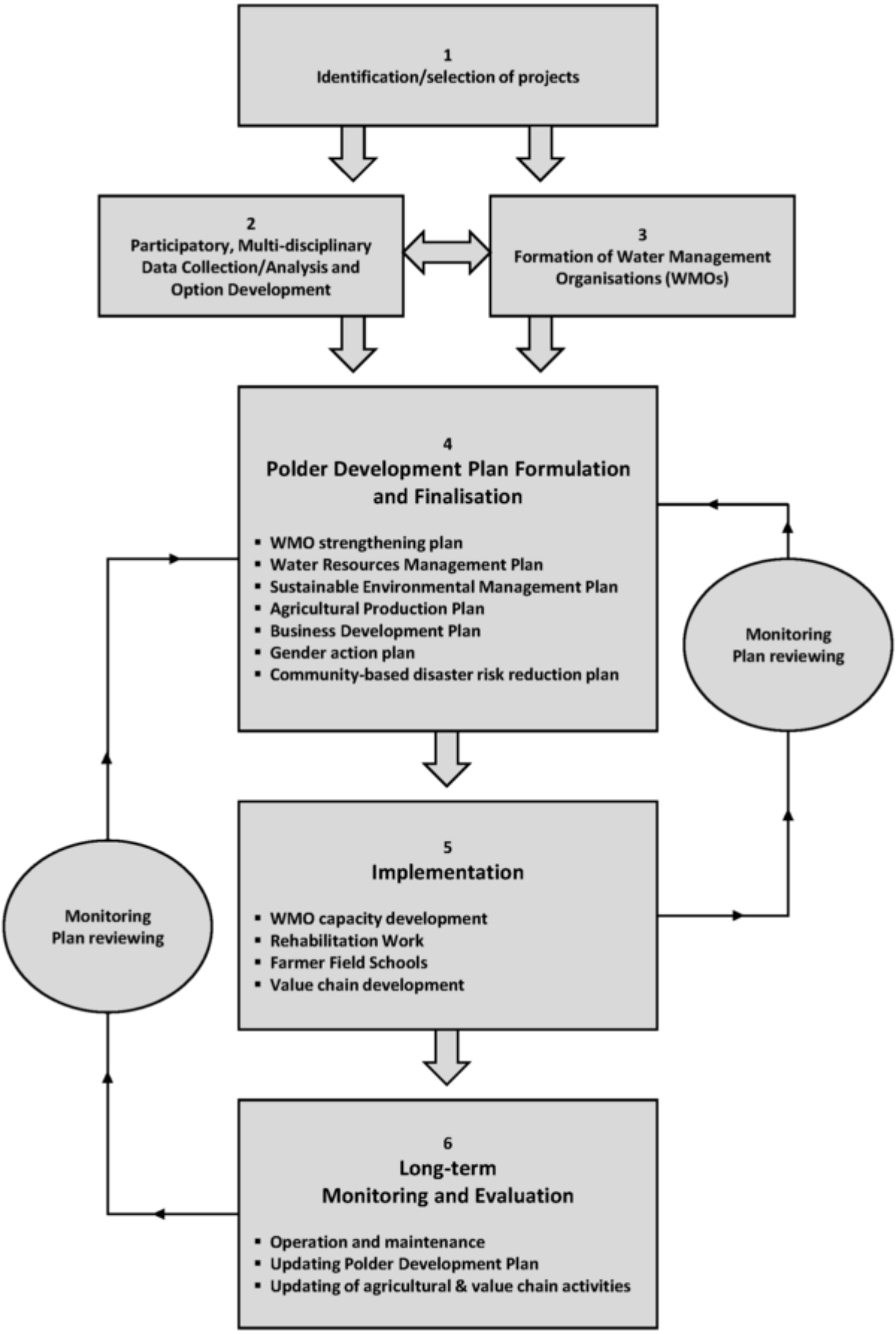

Figure 14.1: BGP Polder Development Approach at inception, based on IPSWARM 2008

In September 2008, BWDB approved the Guidelines for Integrated Planning for Sustainable Water Resources Management (IPSWARM) for use in existing medium-sized Flood Control and Drainage

Projects[1]. The Blue Gold Program initially followed the 6-step approach described in these guidelines[2]. In this 'polder development approach' (see Figure 14.1) the formulation and finalisation of a Polder Development Plan plays a pivotal role.

Subsequently, Polder Development Plans (PDPs) were developed for each of the 22 polders that BGP intervened in. With hindsight, the value of these documents is limited:

- The flowchart in Figure 14.1 suggests that PDPs were made with the WMOs and that they were defined to provide direction to subsequent implementation. In actuality, plans for rehabilitation of works and for Farmer Field Schools were defined in the Development Project Proforma of BWDB and DAE respectively, with a limited scope for adjustment. The water resources management plan announced in box 4 of Figure 14.1 did not cover management of water resources, but listed the proposed rehabilitation works.
- The PDPs adhered to the component-wise organisational structure of the BGP TA team and were – at best – plans for TA team activities to be implemented in the polders. Within the PDP action plans for each component were included, with little or no synergy between them and sometimes even contradictory choices[Notes 1]. The insights gathered on cropping patterns and potential improvements therein were not used to inform choices on water management.
- While the PDPs did offer a compilation of information about each of the polders – and thereby provided useful polder profiles – they have no value as planning documents and have consequently not been used as such. The ownership of the plans has been unclear from the beginning.

The PDP formulation and finalisation were largely internally-oriented exercises, with limited interaction with the intended beneficiary communities, their representatives and other stakeholder agencies at the local level. Making updates of the PDPs (box 6 in Figure 14.1) became redundant with the emergence of the Catchment Plans discussed later on.

The PDPs were completed as a contractual obligation, and had limited value for the polder development. The BGP TA team did however undertake planning activities in some of the polders, which showed an alternative approach to the overly internal oriented PDP exercise:

- **Land and Water Use workshops at polder level** – With a view to understand cropping patterns and major water management challenges per polder and to identify options for crop diversification and water management improvement; one-day workshops were held with an increasingly wide participation. Whereas initially discussions were held between BGP TA and local DAE staff, at later events BWDB, LGIs, staff from other departments and selected WMG representatives participated. While the participation in such workshops was amplified; the focus was sensibly narrowed to cropping patterns and water management. This was a first step towards 'in-polder water management', which is discussed in chapter 17. The Land and Water Use workshops also served to enhance involvement of stakeholder agencies in BGP activities and to establish good relations between the program and local agencies; and to a lesser extent between beneficiary communities and local agencies.
- **Infrastructure consultation workshops** – In order to set priorities for works implementation and to impress upon the beneficiaries that not all desired works could be undertaken, the TA engineers together with representatives from the concerned O&M Divisions conducted courtyard sessions. Here, maps were used to show locations of existing works and discussions were held on the relative priority of new works (especially khal re-excavation), vis-à-vis the limitations imposed by the Project's resources. These workshops confirmed that it is possible – and well-appreciated – to inform beneficiaries beforehand of infrastructural works decided upon for their areas; as well to constructively consult beneficiary communities on choices with respect to major infrastructure.

Both exercises demonstrated the merit of using large maps visualising aspects of the polder for engendering constructive discussion on constraints and solutions.

WMG Action Plans[edit | edit source]

The PWMR 2014 lists among the responsibilities and functions of the WMG inter alia:

Plan for Annual 'crops and other production' and preparation of plan for operation and maintenance (O&M)[3]

This plan is referred to in BGP reports as the Water Management Group Action Plan, WMG Action Plan or WAP. As the WAPs are listed in the PWMR 2014, their production has been seen as a reporting obligation and WAPs have been prepared by the WMGs and subsequently submitted to the regional offices of OCWM.

The WMGs were advised and assisted to make plans that coincided to the four components of BGP; i.e. they were advised to include actions with respect to their organisation, to infrastructure, agricultural extension and back- and forward market linkages. A standard format for activity planning was provided, which included a list of some 30 suggested activities.

In the end, the WMG executive committees produced, with overly strong handholding by the BGP TA community organisers, virtually identical plans, largely copied from the standard list of over 30 actions. The WMG action planning was flawed:

- The WAPs were seen as a means to ensure the continued registration of the WMGs with BWDB's OCWM rather than as serious own action plans.
- While the WAPs did contain some specification for the specific WMG (e.g. use of the proper name of local khals), the commitment to the actions can in many cases be doubted.
- The strong adherence to the BGP components raised the expectation that BGP would take the initiative to support the listed actions. The action list was seen as a wish list, and there was no mechanism to prioritise any of the actions.
- The TA community organisers – or community development facilitators as they were known at later stages of the BGP implementation period – did not guide a process of local planning and capacity development but helped WMGs meet the perceived criteria for a good plan.
- No follow-up was given to the plans. WMGs were neither asked about the progress in WAP implementation nor prompted to undertake a periodic update (other than for renewing the registration).
- The planning process was strongly focussed on action lists and did not dwell upon the purpose of the WMGs.

Despite the severely flawed process, WMGs did undertake actions:

- Many continued to run the credit and savings operation that was an obligatory part of the organisations when the registration was with the Department of Cooperatives. Savings & Credit are used to extend loans at concessional rates to individual group members, and are thereby hardly relevant for water management. Some argue that the continuous loan operations keep the WMG active and thereby help to mobilise members in cases of a water-related emergency, such as embankment erosion. The outcome survey, however, argues that flaws in how a community runs the savings and credit operation (is it well-administered? Is it inclusive?) pose substantial risks to the continuity of the WMG[4].
- A number of WMGs took the infrastructure-related actions seriously and made a start with sluice operation and khal cleaning; The re-excavation of a canal through community labour to

reduce waterlogging by Dakhin-Paschim Kalibari WMG in polder 43/2F is a telling example. In many initiatives a supportive engagement of the Union Parishad is noted.
- Within some WMGs – prompted possibly by the action planning and more likely by the BGP staff involved in business development – initiatives were undertaken for collective actions with respect to input supply.

From 2018 onwards, a link was made between plans at WMG level with respect to water management on the one hand; and the catchment plan on the other. This is discussed in chapter 17.

References[edit | edit source]

1. ↑ *Guidelines for Integrated Planning for Sustainable Water Resources Management (IPSWARM)*. BWDB. September 2008.
2. ↑ *Blue Gold Program Inception Report* (PDF). Euroconsult Mott MacDonald & Associates. November 2013.
3. ↑ *Participatory Water Management Rules (BWDB, unofficial translation)*. Government of Bangladesh. 2014.
4. ↑ *Improving the Productivity of Land in the Coastal Bangladesh: The Outcomes of Blue Gold Program Interventions, Technical Report 25* (PDF). Euroconsult Mott MacDonald & Associates. October 2018.

Notes[edit | edit source]

1. ↑ In the polder 22 PDP, khal re-excavation is attributed second priority in the water resources management section, while the environmental section emphasises the benefits of re-excavation of khals for drainage improvement during monsoon and post monsoon periods as well as for storage of rain water.

See also[edit | edit source]

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Section D: BGP Interventions: Participatory Water Management

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Chapter 20: Way Forward

Blue Gold Wiki

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Blue Gold Program

Polder Development Plan - presents an integrated analysis and planning for a specific polder covering community mobilization, water management, agriculture, business development, environment, gender, and institutions. A deliverable product under the BWDB Development Project Proforma (DPP). PDPs for all 22 polders are available through the File Library.

Water Management Group - The basic organizational unit in Blue Gold representing local stakeholders from a hydrological or social unit (para/village). Through Blue Gold, 511 WMGs have been formed and registered. The average WMG covers an area of around 230 ha has 365 households or a population of just over 1,500.

Water Management Group Action Plan - A plan drafted by water management groups; initially as a formal requirement for registration; later on as a building block for a sluice catchment management plan

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A defined set of temporary activities through which facilitators seek to effect change

(Guidelines for) Integrated Planning for Sustainable Water Resources Management

Bangladesh Water Development Board, government agency which is responsible for surface water and groundwater management in Bangladesh, and lead implementing agency for the Blue Gold Program

An area of low-lying land surrounded by an earthen embankment to prevent flooding by river or seawater, with associated structures which are provided to either drain excess rainwater within the polder or to admit freshwater to be stored in a khal for subsequent use for irrigation.

Water Management Organizations - The common name of organizations of the local stakeholders of a water resource project/sub-project/scheme. The concept WMO typically refers to WMGs and WMAs (and/or WMFs) together

Farmer Field School - A group-based learning process through which farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them to understand the ecology of their fields, based on simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalized recommendations that are formulated by specialists from outside the community.

Development Project Proforma: a formal document which sets out the intention of a GoB organisation to invest in a development project, seeking approval for the investment and, if successful, a budget allocation. The DPP follows a prescribed format, including the project's financial and physical scope, benefits, and proposals for monitoring and internal and external audits. The approval of a development project proposal follows a number of stages: formation with preliminary studies, formulation to develop greater detail and with additional information to make the economic case for the project, scrutiny by the executing agencies and concerned ministries, appraisal by the Planning Commission, recommendation for approval by Project Evaluation Committee (PEC), Minister/ECNEC approval, and inclusion of a budgetary allocation in the Annual Development Plan (ADP).

Department of Agricultural Extension, a department of the Ministry of Agriculture responsible for disseminating scientific research and new knowledge on agricultural practices through communication and learning activities for farmers in agriculture, agricultural marketing, nutrition and business studies.

Technical Assistance

human intervention in the capture, conveyance, utilisation and drainage of surface and/or ground water in a certain area: a process of social interaction between stakeholders around the issue of water control.

Any individual or group who, in one way or another is favourably influenced by the project.

A process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.

Local Government Institutions - Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad etc

In-polder water management; term used in Blue Gold to describe water management interventions which aim to deliver excess water from the field through field drains to secondary khals and thence to primary khals for evacuation through the sluice/regulator

drainage channel or canal

the adjustment of gates in water management infrastructure to control hydraulic conditions (water levels and discharges) in a water management system.

actions taken to prevent or repair the deterioration of water management infrastructure and to keep the physical components of a water management system in such a state that they can serve their intended function.

Operation and Maintenance

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Participatory Water Management Rules (2014)

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Office of the Chief of Water Management (in BWDB) responsible for the 'establishment of water user organizations, their training and participation, in project planning, implementation, operation and maintenance and cost recovery'

Also known as 'business linkages'. Linkages refer to the trading relationships between and among producers, input providers and traders, and other enterprises in a supply chain or value chain. We refer to Backward linkages on the input side and Forward linkages on the output side of the producer.

Earthen dyke or bundh raised above surrounding ground level, for example so that roads or railway lines are above highest flood levels, or so that an area is empoldered to protect it from external floods and saline waters.

A vertical gate to control the flow of water; also referred to as 'regulator'

Soil is regarded as waterlogged when it is nearly saturated with water much of the time such that its air phase is restricted and anaerobic conditions prevail. In agriculture, various crops need air (specifically, oxygen) to a greater or lesser depth in the soil. Waterlogging of the soil stops air getting in. How near the water table must be to the surface for the ground to be classed as waterlogged, varies with the purpose in view. A crop's demand for freedom from waterlogging may vary between seasons of the year.

Union Parishad - Union Council chaired by an elected Union Chairman

Collective action - by a producer group is one way to partially overcome constraints such as in weak markets, where inputs and services essential to production innovations, are generally scarce, costly to access and/or to obtain. Collective action is working in group instead of individually in order to gain economic or social benefit. Through collective action, farmers can address constraints in their market linkages, organise their activities jointly and use their collective bargaining power to reduce

input costs through bulk purchase, or to obtain services from buyers such as farm-level collection of produce

A process by which the local stakeholders are directly and actively involved in identification, planning, design, implementation, operation & maintenance and evaluation of a water management project.

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Variants

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Blue Gold Program Wiki

The wiki version of the Lessons Learnt Report of the Blue Gold program, documents the experiences of a technical assistance (TA) team working in a development project implemented by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) over an eight+ year period from March 2013 to December 2021. The wiki lessons learnt report (LLR) is intended to complement the BWDB and DAE project completion reports (PCRs), with the aim of recording lessons learnt for use in the design and implementation of future interventions in the coastal zone.