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# 18 The Water Management Partnership

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The [Guidelines for Participatory Water Management](#)<sup>[1]</sup> and the [Participatory Water Management Rules](#)<sup>[2]</sup> provide a legal basis for the establishment of Water Management Groups and Associations and regulate – in considerable detail – their functioning. While a legal basis is important, the new

organisations also need to simply prove their worth if they are to be seen as a serious factor in water management. Making a difference by hands-on improving water management conditions, as described in chapter 17 helps; but recognition as being a legitimate player also requires that the new organisations establish cordial working relations with existing, well-established organisations in their locality. Such a partnership is all the more important, as partners help a new organisation achieve goals that are beyond its own limited capacity.

### 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](#)

#### Videos

- [What water management means to me \(Bangla with English subtitles\)](#)
- [PWM: an integrated approach - animation \(Bangla with English subtitles\)](#)

A central relationship, on which WMAs should build their performance, is of course with BWDB. This is not only because the BWDB is the registrar for WMGs and WMAs, but especially so since the BWDB and the WMAs have a shared responsibility towards the upkeep of the polders.

- In the coastal zone proper water infrastructure for flood protection and water management is essential for protection of the polder inhabitants and for their economic development, in particular agricultural production. Any damages, whether due to natural disasters, erosion or manmade, will undermine the functioning of the water infrastructure. The costs for maintaining the infrastructure can be high, even more so when emergency repairs are needed after disasters, such as floods or cyclones.
- The costs for maintenance, repairs and rehabilitation are substantial and the BWDB generally has an O&M budget that is not adequate to meet all the requirements. Local government institutions (LGIs) neither have the mandate nor the budget to take up repair and maintenance costs; and for local communities the required sums would take-up a substantial part of the value added in agriculture, due to the protection offered by the embankments. The fact that the polders protect life and goods of a substantial population and economy, should mean that maintenance is funded to an extent by public resources. Possibly, the LGIs, which are public institutions close to the communities benefiting from well-functioning infrastructure, should have a mandate and budget for such maintenance and/or repairs. The 2018 Water Rules created opportunities for an increased role of LGIs in Integrated Water Resources Management, but this still needs to be elaborated.
- Under Blue Gold, a transitional solution was therefore sought, which comprises of an O&M

Agreement per polder signed between the WMAs and BWDB. The purpose of the agreement is to sustain the benefits of the improved water infrastructure by setting out the responsibilities for operation and maintenance. Operation especially refers to operating the hydraulic structures to optimize water management; maintenance refers to routine, periodic and emergency maintenance. A sample O&M Agreement is available in [Bangla](#) and in [English](#). The main responsibilities that are spelled out in the agreements are presented in table 18.1.

**Table 18.1: Main responsibilities for Operation and Maintenance of water infrastructure as in the O&M agreements signed between WMA and BWDB.**

#	Water infrastructure	Operation	Routine maintenance	Periodic maintenance	Emergency maintenance
1	Embankments		WMA	BWDB	BWDB
2	Hydraulic infrastructure	WMA	WMA	BWDB	BWDB
3	Channels (khals)		WMA	BWDB*	BWDB
4	IPWM infrastructure		WMA	WMA	

\*Based on the demand of WMA

By February 2020, O&M agreements had been signed by BWDB's Executive Engineer and representatives of the Executive Committees of 35 WMAs for the 22 BGP polders. Special agreement signing ceremonies ([batch 1](#), [batch 2](#) and [batch 3](#)) have been organised, wherein usually also high level representatives of LGIs (Union), BWDB, DAE and BGP were present, to endorse the agreements.

It is as yet too early to draw conclusions whether the agreements are implemented by the parties concerned. However, the WMAs would be well-advised to not rely on only its relationship with BWDB, but to look for partners in their close vicinity to help them play their role in water management for local economic development.

National legislation, policies and development plans and budgets are steadily moving towards a greater role for and reliance on local governance institutions. This provides opportunities for local governments - and especially the Union Parishads to assume more prominence. Inhabitants of the Southwest and especially the poorer segments stand to benefit from local governments that are partner in securing services, and which contribute to the efficiency and sustainability of these services<sup>[3]</sup>.

At the project's initial stage, the community mobilisation by BGP paid little heed to the role of the Union Parishads vis-à-vis water management; beyond the legal provision that the UP Chairman is an advisor to the WMG. As a follow-on to the study referred to above, BGP prepared in 2015 a sourcebook of examples existing on the ground of constructive cooperation between WMGs and Union Parishads<sup>[4]</sup>. This proved that - despite of not being strongly pursued by BGP - support from Union Parishads to WMG establishment and performance is an existing and generally successful practice. Where WMGs are good at articulating the aspirations of communities with respect to water management; the UPs were able to ensure orderly WMG elections; helped resolve conflicts of WMGs with third parties; e.g. in the case of obstructed drainage flows; and provided authority to WMG action such as canal cleaning. Union's moreover showed leadership in emergency response and were helpful in obtaining right-of-way for construction of new embankments.

From this point in 2015, the involvement of LGIs and specifically the Unions with the WMOs and with BGP was pursued more systematically and actively:

- Induction workshops were held with the Unions and Upazila at the time of entry of the program in a particular polder to explain objectives and request active support. Where, in a number of cases, BGP's intervention had already started, this resulted in a degree of initial push-back, fed by the frustration of being involved late in the process; but most of these workshops concluded with commitment by LGIs to the implementation of BGP.
- WMGs were more explicitly promoted to build good relations with the Unions; and the quality of their relation with the Union became a criteria in the monitoring system and in the self-monitoring promoted by BGP.
- Capacity building events for WMGs and WMAs involved LGI representatives and explicitly paid attention to planning joint activities and building a good relationship.
- LGIs were involved in the catchment planning process and were fully informed of the O&M agreement that was developed between the WMA and the BWDB. A logical further step would have been to appoint the LGIs as the third party in the polder-level O&M agreement alongside the WMA(s) and the BWDB O&M Division, but this would have required a lengthy process of adjustment to the BWDB Participatory Water Management Rules.
- Once WMAs were established, BGP organised interactive sessions per Upazila where the WMA presented itself and its aspirations to the concerned local governments and the departments that had been decentralised to this level.

At the same time, WMGs – and later on also the WMAs – were promoted to engage with other organisations, agencies and companies for the realisation of their aspirations. This often matched with the 'collective actions' undertaken by WMGs or WMG members. When the purchase of inputs was coordinated across a WMG or a sub-section thereof, this led to a stronger relationship with market partners; where co-funding was sought for small-scale infrastructure, relations with e.g. LGED were developed. Experience shows that the legitimacy of a WMO (WMG or WMA) depends on the respect it can gain from its constituents and from other local organisations. A strong focus on networking and partnership must therefore be a core element of building the capacity of new organisations.

The present regulatory framework for the WMOs places great importance on the centralised review of the WMO performance, especially in the field of maintaining basic organisational routines (regular meetings, good note keeping and financial management, timely elections and so on) but does not define how WMOs interact with and depend on their local network. Especially the role of the UPs vis-à-vis the WMGs is poorly defined. The articulation of an explicit role for local governments in the future practice of PWM is an essential improvement that needs priority attention.

## References[[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

1. [↑](#) *Guidelines for Participatory Water Management*. Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Water Resources. November 2000.
2. [↑](#) *Participatory Water Management Rules (BWDB, unofficial translation)*. Government of Bangladesh. 2014.
3. [↑](#) Blok, K. and Begum, R. (July 2013). "Capacity Building of Local Governments in South-West Bangladesh". *Identification Report*. VNG International.
4. [↑](#) *Engaging Local Government Institutions in Water Management – DRAFT Sourcebook* (PDF). Euroconsult Mott MacDonald & Associates. February 2015.

See also[[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

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[Chapter 17: In-polder water management](#)

[Blue Gold Lessons Learnt](#)

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[Interventions: Participatory Water Management](#)

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### Section D: BGP Interventions: Participatory Water Management

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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.

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.

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

Water Management Association - In Blue Gold, the polder-level representative of WMGs, and signatory to an O&M Agreement with BWDB

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

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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.

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.

Local Government Institutions - Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad etc

Integrated Water Resources Management - Internationally-accepted approach for efficient, equitable and sustainable development and management of water resources especially applicable where there are multiple stakeholder interests with conflicting demands.

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

Water Management Association - In Blue Gold, the polder-level representative of WMGs, and signatory to an O&M Agreement with BWDB

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

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Lowest tier of local government

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.

Union Parishad - Union Council chaired by an elected Union Chairman

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 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

Local Government Institutions - Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad etc

Identification and planning of both interventions and operations & maintenance within the catchment, resulting in an action plan for the catchment.

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.

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

Local Government Engineering Department



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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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## 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.

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