

Report on Platform for Consultation on Hilsa Conservation and Livelihoods

Duration: March 27-28, 2017

Meeting venue: *Conference Hall, The Maya Manor Boutique Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal*

Introduction:

International Water Association (IWA-www.iwa-network.org) is a network including different NGOs which are working in the field of water and its resources. It is also a self-governing non-profit organization which serves as a worldwide network for water professionals to advance standards and best practices in sustainable. During March 27-28, 2017 the IWA organized a platform for consultation on hilsa conservation and livelihoods in Kathmandu, Nepal where I was one of the participants on behalf of COAST Trust. The representatives from University of Dhaka, Sylhet Agricultural University, Bangladesh, Fisheries Research Institute, Chandpur, Bangladesh, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh Environment Development Society, Khulna, Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organization, India, The *Kaler Kantha* (a daily news paper), Bangladesh, Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, India, Integrated Coastal Management, India were present in the platform consultation.

The objectives of the platform for the consultation were to build consensus and dialogue multi layered livelihoods of the hilsa fishermen, to create interdisciplinary networks of experts, to focus on hilsa fish livelihoods and to explore synergies and collaboration on conserving hilsa and reconciliation of livelihoods.

Importance of hilsa in the region:

Hilsa is an iconic fish, represents common cultural bonds, a shared history, a common ecosystem and close economic ties between Bangladesh and India. It is an ideal focus that can be the entry point for developing transboundary deliberative mechanisms and creating common ground for agreements

while building confidence between the two countries. Hilsa spends its lifecycle in rivers, estuaries, coastal areas, the sea and migrates upstream towards freshwater for spawning.



Commercially the hilsa is the most important fisheries in the Bengal delta. Bangladesh is the leading country in hilsa production with 65% of all hilsa, while India contributes to 10-15%. Over the years, the hilsa population has declined impacting the livelihoods of more than 5 million fisher-folk and fishery workers in both countries who are directly or indirectly involved in hilsa fisheries. Despite being a common regional resource then policy framework and interventions for hilsa conservation are focused nationally.

Present phenomena of Hilsa Fishers Livelihood:

The people of these areas are dependent on the fishing from the open water sources. The coastal fishing activities have been hampered due to frequent cyclone signals. Such disasters make them more vulnerable and hits their major livelihoods. Due to climate change, the extensive river floods cause major disruption and damage of their assets. River and sea erosions induce them to be forced migrants in the slum areas in the cities where they are leading miserable lives. The scarcity of land in the shore area also creates social problems among the fishing community. Most of the fishers are living on the others' land or in the embankments.

My presentation on “Sustainable Livelihood Options can save the Fishers and Hilsa:”

About COAST

- Coastal based NGO (www.coastbd.net) in Bangladesh
- Recertified by HAP I up to 2018
- Special consultative status of UN ECOSOC
- Main interventions:
 - Micro Finance through integration with Right Based Approach (RBA)
 - Disaster Management keeping mind in humanitarian accountability
 - Adolescents Empowerment with Livelihood Training
 - Coastal Integrated Technology Transfer Program: Livestock, Fisheries and Agriculture
 - People’s Organization
 - Climate Change Adaptation
 - Advocacy Networks

COAST Believes:

- COAST practices the Right Based Approach equally mentioned in UDHR
- Rights of **TRANSPARANCY** and **PARTICIPATION** also from member participants
- Serious to accept and handling any complaints within the framework of the policy to ensure its **ACCOUNTABILITY** in all levels.

Problems facing by the coastal fishers

1. Fishing hampered due to frequent cyclones
2. Affected by the piracy
3. Less price by the middlemen and political influences
4. No hilsa processing facilities
5. Legal issues
6. Less scope to access to the formal credit system
7. No alternative income sources

COAST Interventions to the hilsa fishers

1. Working in Lower Meghna and Tentulia sanctuaries
2. COAST is working with hilsa fishers and hilsa conservation since 1997
3. Engaged with ECOFISH project in 2015 funded by USAID and technical support by WorldFish
4. Alternative Income Generating Activities
5. Co-management process by forming Hilsa Conservation Group, Hilsa Ghat Group

Major Learnings

1. Fishers and stakeholders are united to preserve the hilsa through co-management
2. Fishers respect the fishing laws and they are not to catch in “**No Take Zone**”
3. Illegal gears using decreased
4. Compensation system adopted
5. Alternative income increased
6. Savings mentality of fisher women increased
7. Abstained from catching juvenile and brood hilsa fish
8. Weather updates and awareness messages through Radio Meghna www.radiomeghna.net

Challenges faced

1. Less interest of local government institutions to adopt co-management



2. Hilsa price and landing centres controlled by elite people

3. Establishment of pro-fishers policies
4. No survey the resources in the Bay of Bengal
5. Trans-boundary policy dialogue between Bangladesh, India and Myanmar
6. Fake fishers are getting fisher ID cards

My learning from the consultation:

1. My concentration has been raised for working with hilsa and hilsa fishermen.
2. Also in-depth knowledge through continuous study should be developed for the intensive works with the hilsa and hilsa fishers.

My future plan with hilsa fishers and hilsa preservation:

1. We, along with the civil society networks and different fisher-folk committees, will continue the lobbying and dialogue with the government for keeping the rights and appropriate laws especially licensing and fishing systems in favor of small scale fishers.
2. We will work with government for ensuring the livelihood security as well as fishing security as they are attacked by the pirates frequently.

7. The boats are not equipped with safety measures.
8. Boat are not registered
9. Fishers cannot be brought out from the informal credit sources;

3. We will lead the campaign to ensure that the fishers ID cards are provided to the real fishers.
4. We will try for special inclusion of the fishers in the government safety net programs.
5. We will also campaign for opening of bank account with as little as 10 tk similarly to the farmers to include fishers in the formal credit sources.
6. COAST will work to continue the dialogue on the trans-boundary issues among Bangladesh, India and Myanmar.
7. Making more active the Bangladesh Fish Workers' Alliance through the union, upazilla, district, regional and national level committees.
8. Trying to get the membership from IWA for COAST.
9. Separate domain will be developed in the COAST website for hilsa and hilsa fishers.

Report prepared by

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