

**STOPPING AS SUCCESS:
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS FROM START TO EXIT**

BANGLADESH: COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

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Case study type: Maxi

International actor: Winrock International

Local actor: Community Management Organizations



CONTEXT

Climate Resilience Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) was a six-year, USAID-funded project implemented by a Winrock International-led consortium in tandem with Bangladeshi partners and government agencies, most notably the Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD). CREL sought to strengthen biodiversity protection and conservation in Protected Areas (PAs), such as wildlife sanctuaries. To accomplish this, CREL implemented a co-management model in these areas, promoted alternative livelihoods, and advocated at the national level for changes to the legal framework pertaining to forests.

Historically, the BFD viewed the interests local communities had in forests as incompatible with conservation. This approach disregarded the longstanding economic relationships that communities had with forests, and excluded them from any relevant management decisions. Co-management, adopted by the BFD in 2008, entails a participatory structure whereby various stakeholders can negotiate and collaborate on how to manage natural resources. Hence, in exchange for their cooperation in protecting the forest, communities would be offered support in developing alternative livelihoods,

as well as being entitled to receive a portion of funds generated from tourist activities. CREL, at the behest of the government of Bangladesh and with support from the BFD, sought to implement co-management in 29 PAs (including 7 from IPAC, a previous program); establishing 45 co-management organizations (CMOs) and developing their capacity in a number of functional areas.

STORY OF TRANSITION

CREL focused on making CMOs organizationally sustainable at multiple levels: politically, legally, financially, and socially. Politically, this was done through concept of co-management, which sought to bring together multiple, often antagonistic, stakeholders. This required deft facilitation skills at the grassroots level from Bangladeshi implementing partners such as Community Development Centre (CODEC), a national NGO that managed the CREL project in the Chittagong division. These partners bridged the gap between local communities and the BFD, addressing what had been a long history of mutual suspicion. By establishing the CMOs, the BFD and communities now had a formal means of engaging with one another, negotiating issues, and explaining their respective positions.



Legally, CREL implemented an intensive advocacy effort with the various government stakeholders. It helped departments, such as the BFD, update the legal regime surrounding PAs and CMOs. These efforts were the final step toward the passage of the 2017 Protected Area Management Rules, which codified the CMOs' existence and brought them official recognition. Furthermore, CREL sought to socialize these policies by engaging with the government bureaucratic hierarchy at multiple levels. For the BFD, this created a renaissance around the concept of co-management and its utility for conservation.

Financially, the rules entitled CMOs to half the revenue generated from tourism activities within forests. This income is meant to ensure the long-term financial

sustainability of CMOs. Moreover, CREL helped communities, especially those heavily dependent on forest resources, develop alternative livelihoods. These livelihoods relieved the human-generated pressures on the forests, and helped communities develop climate change-resilient businesses.

Socially, as communities lacked a full understanding of how some of their activities were damaging forests, CREL sought to create environmental awareness about the importance of preservation. Through training, new environmental norms were fostered among communities, and the capacity of CMOs' to raise awareness was developed. This change in perspective is best encapsulated in the communities' oft-repeated phrase: "If the forest survives, we survive."

KEY LESSONS

Organizational sustainability must be understood within the context of the social, financial, political, and legal system in which it exists. Organizational sustainability should not be an afterthought and must be thought of systematically. Transitions to locally led development demand that organizational sustainability be placed front and center, both conceptually and practically. While CREL as a project focused its efforts on developing the planning and financial management capacity of CMOs, it also went to great lengths creating an enabling environment through advocacy work with government departments and environmental awareness-raising efforts at the community level. These efforts altered the environment CMOs inhabit, making their long-term viability far more likely.

Continuous consultations with national partners and local communities is imperative. Through consultations with national partners and local communities, CREL worked to understand what precisely sustainability meant in the context of the CMOs. Rather than imposing a pre-existing framework of sustainability metrics, CREL recognized that the role and requirements of these organizations were unique, and instead developed fit-for-purpose indicators in close coordination with local actors.

It is better to work with available local instruments, such as co-management, rather than imposing external ones. In developing its programmatic elements, Winrock adopted a joint process of decision-making, relying heavily on input from national partners as well as local communities. Furthermore, it put great trust in the abilities of national partners to implement field work without micro-management.

Empowering relationships should be created with national NGOs in order to gain both trust and buy-in. By adopting co-management, CREL utilized a conceptual framework that was already available in Bangladesh, rather than importing a concept that would have demanded explanation and socialization. This made scaling up the project and getting buy-in from the BFD considerably more viable.