

An Analysis of Non Government Organisations and the Management of Commons in Bangladesh

Professor Aminur Rahman. Department of Economics, School of Business, Independent University, Bangladesh. Rahman.aminur206@gmail.com

Abstract

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have become life blood for the society in Bangladesh for development especially rural development. A wide variety of services to people, generating employment, mobilizing public opinion, and influencing governmental policies have become a regular practice of NGOs in Bangladesh. They remain as a vital link to the donor community and are a substantial cultural, political and economic presence in the country. They are involved in many crucial sectors of the economy involving gender issues, education, health and microfinance. NGOs are significant ally active in influencing politically important issues relating generally to gender, poverty, corruption and particularly the activities of civil society. There exists an additional dimension to the efforts made by the NGOs and the steps taken by them in an attempt to raise consciousness and to empower people. This has led to alter how citizens in Bangladesh view their rights and obligation in society. Although various studies of specific organizations of NGOs exist, but no study so far dedicatedly targeted to the common management issues and the potential role of NGOs are seen available. The quest for the present study is to look into issues whether NGOs are active in interacting with Commons in Bangladesh. The paper will venture into the character of their activities and try to figure out whether their activities can be substantially linked to management of Common property interests. It will be much easier if NGO activities can be linked to common issue. The major focus will be on the wetland management taking into couple of vital wetland management practices in Bangladesh. It seems that NGOs are potential source in managing vital water bodies in Bangladesh in the realm of Common management scenario

Key Words: Wetland, NGOs, Common issues, Present practice, Government policy

Introduction:

NGOs don't require any introduction at least in Bangladesh. Since independence of Bangladesh its presence is felt everywhere. NGOs have become a solid alternative to many poor and hard core poor in terms of providing food, clothing, education, shelter, micro credit and basic health facilities. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries on earth with scanty resources to meet the increasing demand of an increasing population. Historically agriculture played a dominant role in providing income to rural people and was the largest contributor to GDP. Its contribution is now insignificant. Recently its role has diminished as other sectors like

service is occupying major portion of job market. This change of trend has further diminished the opportunity of rural pore for their livings. Moreover, government has limitation in intervening improvement of rural economic scenario. At this backdrop and vacuum NGOs created their presence in all spheres of activities in all sphere of rural life and also urban activities. NGOs are pretty much engaged in poverty eradication by directly involving destitute. NGOs mammoth task is to organize poor and vulnerable people, create awareness in them and prepare them taking challenges of tough trajectory of growth and development. Their work covers wide range of activities. However, the quest of this paper is to see how far their work is extended in case common property resources and could be linked to such activities. We can limit our pursuit in case of wetland management and to some extent forest management. The paper has been designed to look into: NGOs in Bangladesh, major activities, financing, natural resource management, commons concept in general, NGOs and commons and Forrest, wetland management and commons

Methodology

This paper heavily concentrates in secondary data available in different literature and refers to an empirical study done by the author couple of year ago in wetland management.

NGOs in Bangladesh

Government's scanty budget together with galaxy of problems in implementation of development programs paved the way for NGOs. There are uncountable numbers of NGOs in Bangladesh. It will be several thousands. Some of them have become world famous like BRAC.

But what do we mean by NGO truly. As a matter of fact NGO is Non-Governmental aid providing entity. The common meaning in terms of social science domain NGO can be coined as "Non Government Organization is a non-profit agency that serves some public interest. Non Government Organization is established to fulfill some social purposes other than monetary rewards to financial backers. In other words it is stated "NGO's are usually defined as an association of persons organized on voluntary basis through the initiative of one or more dedicated persons committed to the planning and implementation of development projects at the grass root level. NGO's although work outside the government structure but they are within the legal framework of the country". The government of Bangladesh has taken this entity very seriously. It has established an NGO bureau to monitor its activities. They are subject to transparency and accountability.

NGO Activities in Bangladesh

The NGO are pretty active in intervening in the areas of Micro credit, employment generation, human resource development specially the poor. They are highly active in area of women empowerment and children education in slum and remote areas of Bangladesh.

We will try to give short picture of NGO activities in Bangladesh. But they have become famous in micro credit operation and self sufficiency efforts for rural women in Bangladesh. NGOs are playing very vital and crucial role for humanitarian development through joint analysis and

seeking solution through different seminars and workshop, joint social activities, and application of socio-economic projects. Besides, they have introduced certain essential concepts like developing small groups, credit based cooperatives, mother welfare society and cooperatives etc. for homeless/ landless etc. and thus have strengthened the root of organizational structure for rural poverty. We cannot leave rural Bangladesh behind if we really want to develop Bangladesh and take it to the threshold of Middle income country by 2021. Rural people have potential but they hardly have any guts to take risk as risk involves taking of loan. So micro credit opens the door to them. Grameen Bank and Brac together with many others NGOs came forward to extent their hands to the rural poor specially the women. Grameen Banks efforts were awarded by Nobel Prize and its recognition is being echoed all most everyday globally.

Besides these activities the government has established Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (Rural Activities Assistance Foundation) or PKSF has provided millions of taka loans to several eligible NGOs. PKSF is continuously proving support to the needed segment of population. Moreover, two other giant NGOs like Proshika and ASHA are also very active and dedicated to poverty elevation and development pursuit of the country. Some NGOs are very active in providing jobs to rural people through projects and these projects that are being conducted under the supervision and assistance of NGOs are numerous ranging from Irrigation to fishery. Specially fishing in the coastal area, cattle nourishment, equipment supplies for landless share cropper, weaving, bee keeping, small business, rice and popcorn production, sericulture, handicrafts i.e. earthen wares, wood and cane works, developing nursery are most prominent activities seen in NGO work. They have become the life blood of rural poor and overall development of the country.

The NGOs are highly active in informal and non-formal education sector. As a matter of fact, they are pioneer in this sector. The shortest way to develop human resource is through proper and need based education. Rampant illiteracy is still prevailing in the country due to lack of education which is threatening impediments for socio economic development of Bangladesh. The low rate of admission in the primary schools, failure to attract the children to schools, unlikable education method and syllabus for etc. reason the rate of primary education in the rural area are not at all hopeful. Bangladesh government together with some donors has changed the scenario a lot. Primary education has been made free and girls in rural area can read free up to degree level. Even BRAC have started satellite school system based on informal education policy. As a result the poor children at the rural area are now being given special importance. More emphasis is given on the participation of parents as well as community in this regard.

There is hardly any proper health care system in Bangladesh. Although there are some recent improvement but the efforts are still unable to reach majority of rural people. Consequently a substantial part of the active NGOs of Bangladesh are providing training and education service in the field of health and nutrition. An independent organization named Voluntary Health Services Society (VHSS) is supervising the NGOs that are working on the health and nutrition sector. Health and nutrition is one very important indicator of poverty measurement. In some specific area of primary health care sector like diarrhea control, vaccination against six hazardous diseases, campaigning for health consciousness, expansion of water and sanitation services, reproductive health care and family planning services etc. Many other NGOs are also involved in this pursuit.

Bangladesh being one of the densely populated countries on earth and per capita land ownership is extremely unequal and poor. Moreover, there are many landless villagers whose life depends on share cropping of some other's property on temporary arrangements. They hardly have any property rights. So what they do becomes half hearted. The government owned khas land especially the roadside lands are now being used by the by the landless people for social forestation. On the other hand, under the project of irrigation for landless by organizing the landless people, the NGOs are helping them to become the owner of deep tube-well and shallow tube-well and low-lift pump. Besides many NGOs are organizing the landless people and taking lease of khas land and dry riverbed to use for shared fish culture. Whereas, some NGOs are organizing the fishermen by managing fishing and fish cultivation in open water bodies for them. Again there are NGOs which has established village based nursery and thus assisting in social forestation and tree plantation, yet another assistance by the NGOs to eradicate poverty in the rural sector.

Since one major cause of poverty rate increase in Bangladesh is natural disaster NGOs are seen pretty active in this natural disaster management, Together with government efforts they have successfully confronted many and last cyclonic havoc in eastern and southern Bangladesh. It has been observed that whenever there is natural disaster like flood, drought, famine, storm, contaminated diseases, tidal waves etc. NGOs would extend their hands and do the needful. They also take part in rehabilitation programs. As a vital player in digital Bangladesh the NGOs provide idea about appropriate technology in agriculture and sericulture activities. Their efforts have paid a very positive role in enhancing agricultural production and fruit cultivation.

NGOs have worked side by side with government agencies in irrigation projects in agriculture. Unfortunately it was not that successful in case of small farmland. NGOs helped to introduce appropriate method like country specific technology instead of deep tube wells with much less cost Moreover, the cost was covered by loans from NGOs. NGOs also arrange to teach appropriate technology for fruits, vegetables, fish and cooking through transfer of suitable technology for family agriculture. The NGOs also use newer communication and transportation technology to play significant role in poverty eradication

NGOs, Commons and Natural Resource Management

Rahman, M (1995) has lucidly narrated wetland resources in Bangladesh. In his description the following has been mentioned "Bangladesh, a deltaic floodplain formed by the three major rivers of the world is endowed with vast wetland resources which include 1.03 million hectares of rivers, canals and estuaries, 114,161 hectares of natural depressions, 161,943 hectares of ponds, 5,488 hectares of ox-bow lakes, 68,800 hectares of reservoirs, 2.8 Million hectares of seasonal flood lands and 87,300 hectares of brackish water aqua firms. These wetlands support rich biological diversity of flora and fauna. Wetlands and their biodiversity have been contributing substantially to the socio-economic life of the millions of people of rural Bangladesh by providing opportunities of employment, food & nutrition, fuel, fodder, transportation, irrigation and so forth. Men, women and children are engaged in harvesting diverse resources of wetlands".

In his paper he highlights different management patterns of wetlands. It also covers the use and access rights in harvesting wetland-based natural resources and relates these to social

stratification and wetland types (including location and seasonality). His major concerns related to conversion of wetlands to croplands and depletion of wetland-based biodiversity. He also mentioned that in cites some instances of gradual transformation of common property rights regimes on wetland resources into private property rights. He attempted to conduct studies on the importance of the existing status of wetland-based common property resources and rights in Bangladesh and to come up with specific recommendations toward building institutions in the country for conserving and protecting biological and cultural diversity of wetlands on a sustainable basis so that the common people are benefitted. For our purpose we will concentrate on one vast wetland whose management plan and valuation was done under the Ministry of environment and forestry of Bangladesh and IUCN (the world conservation union) couple of years ago and currently run by common pool resource management style. We will look into its total value considering the total economic valuation approach. The chart below (Rahman M 1995) gives a picture of wetland of Bangladesh. However, the current size has declined manifold than the data on the chart.

Table 1: Wetlands of Bangladesh.

Wetland Types	Area (in ha)
Rivers, Canals and Estuaries	1,030,000
Natural Depressions	114,161
Ponds	161,943
Ox-bow lakes	5,488
Reservoirs	68,800
Seasonal Floodlands	2,800,000
Brackishwater Farms	87,300

Source: Rahman, A.K.A., 1989.

Wetland Management and Resource Harvesting Pattern in Bangladesh

Rahman M (1995) also lucid supplied a historical background of wetland management. “During pre-British period, the wetlands were traditionally managed by the people living around them. The local community evolved and enforced various complex and localized tenurial systems for harvesting fisheries resources (Capistrano et al, 1994)¹⁰. The traditional management systems also varied from place to place and types of water-bodies.”

He moreover added “During British period, the wetlands (more precisely the fisheries resources) came under the control of Zaminders (Land Lords) as a part of their revenue earnings estates. In 1950 when the Zaminder system was abolished, the government got the ownership of most of the wetlands. The government owned wetlands (*khas*) are managed by the Ministry of Land (MOL) . The major objective of the MOL has been observed to earn revenue through leasing out the wetlands to highest bidders for fishing purposes (for 1-3 years). Some wetlands also lease out temporarily for collection of sand and boulders. The MOL does nothing related to management and development of the resource bases. They also do not care the about the access issues of the real fishermen and the rural poor who have been surviving on these common property resources for generations. Despite having a rule of giving priority to the fishermen society, there are evidences that most of the government owned wetlands are

leased out to local elites, money lenders and politicians. These elites are powerful class in the society often managed to obtain the lease of wetlands. If required, they can produce vague papers of fishermen society to obtain the lease.

Wetlands as Common Property Resource

Among the natural resource bases in the country, wetland have been most effectively treated as common property resources from time immemorial. Over centuries, the wetlands in Bangladesh have been providing wider opportunities for the millions of rural people to make up their livelihood through harvesting diverse resources of both plant and animal origin. During pre-British regime, the wetlands were exclusively used as common property resources for fisheries, cattle grazing and other various purposes round the year. The access regulation to leased wetlands found to enforce strictly for fisheries purposes. Harvesting of other resources from wetlands are almost unregulated. Most the poor women and children collect plant based resources such as food items, vegetables, fodders almost freely. Access to the resources by the poor people is unregulated for at least part of a year particularly during the wet monsoon. Statistics shows that substantial numbers of rural households in the floodplain still carry out subsistence fishing in the wetlands. A study revealed that 51% of the total fishermen in two *beels* was subsistence fishermen and they fished almost round the year¹¹. In many leased water bodies, the poor, to some extent, allowed to catch fish with small gears for their family consumption. The access arrangements to wetlands for the subsistence fishing families are very complex and varied from place to place”.

Common people have open access to floodplain wetlands for fishing -during the whole inundation period but the access is limited for fishing in canals during early and late monsoon at places. Access to river for fishing is mostly confined to the lease holders, sub-lease holders and licensee. Subsistence fishing found less in the rivers due to strong fishing regulation by the lease holders as well as inability of poor to organize expensive gears required in river fishing. Compared to river, common access are widespread in seasonal flood lands, *beels*, *haors* and canals particularly during monsoon months. When the flood water receded from the floodlands, fish congregate in the *beels* and *pagars*” and most of these are privately owned and or under leasing system. The access of poor to leased *beels* and *pagars* become restricted during post monsoon and pre monsoon. However, the children and women are often allowed to glean the left over fish after major fishing is done by the owner and operators. The fishing regulations and leasing system also vary from place to place. In the *haor* basin of North-eastern Bangladesh which is rich in fisheries, access by others is strongly regulated by the leaseholders. There exist conflicts in obtaining lease between fisher groups and local elites and money lenders

In a study by Yamin Bayazid (2016) it has been mentioned by him that Floodplain water-bodies are one of the major common-pool resources (CPRs) of Bangladesh (Thompson et al. 1998; Sultana and Thompson 2008). The author has done empirical studies in Floodplain water-bodies are one of the major common-pool resources (CPRs) of Bangladesh and constitute more than fifty percent of inland open water bodies. He mentioned that “throughout the British colonial period, Pakistani rule and the first one and half decades of independent Bangladesh, a majority of inland water-bodies remained under direct government management, though the floodplains, by getting heavily inundated during the monsoon, turn into an open access resource. In the mid-1980s, co-management was introduced on a small scale with the help of NGOs as providers of management styles and credit to communities of fishers or villagers. NGOs also got involved in

floodplain water-bodies and came up with different models of user-managed fishery bodies. His paper examines a specific management system of community-governed floodplain aquaculture (FPA) known as the Daudkandi model, developed by a local NGO in the Daudkandi sub-district of the Comilla district. Applying the design principles developed by Ostrom (1990) characterizing long surviving successful user-managed common pool resource institutions, his paper explores the rules devised by partners in the management of a FPA under the Daudkandi model. Though the FPA management model is relatively new (i.e. it has been adopted in 1996) it has been found to follow the design principles in devising its management rules. However, because of its unique features in terms of seasonality, the NGO-community partnership, the exclusion of past users, and numerous replications, the future of the model as a CPR governance system holds many challenges and deserves a continuous research focus. So his study shows some evidence of Ostrom's graduated principle being used in one case. NGOs can take a leading role in replication of such efforts in many other similar cases in Bangladesh.

Wetland Management and Commons

Many other common property resources are also in a bad shape due to lack of proper management policies. Tangor Haor is an example which is now run by three stake holders was in a bad shape in the beginning of the 21st century. We will provide a value of the Haor (wetland) by using Total Economic Value Approach (TEV) to highlight the importance of this vital resource. Tangaor Haor is 9500 hectre wetland situated in the North Eastern part of the country. Its mother fisheries and vital to many biological and ecological objects. To make the resource more vital we provide a approach of total economic value which is much higher that only the direct value.

Direct Values of Fisheries and other resources;

Fisheries data and total value of othe spices.

Indirect values;

Existence value

Option value

Bequest value

For all other values we will use Benefit Transfer Methods adjusting to our socio economic status.

Table 2

Direct Use Values
Sustainable Harvest Products:
Fuel Wood

Fishing
Duck Keeping
Tourism
Genetic Materials
Education
Human Habitat
Indirect Use Values:
Ecological Function
Protection of Endangered Species
Carbon Store
Option Values:
Future Uses: Medical Importance
Existence Values:
Biodiversity
Total Economic Value

Protection of Endangered Species: This value reflects a compilation study of developed nations, mostly conducted in the USA and estimated using Contingent Valuation Method (CVM). Average value per ha US\$ 8 has been used. (Source: Economic Valuation of Environmental Impact ADB 1996)

Watershed Protection of Fisheries: The calculation of value here refers to the similar studies done in Cameroon. US\$ 54 ha. Total hectare $9727 \times 54 = \text{US\$ } 525,285$ (Source: Measuring Environmental Quality in Asia. ADB and Harvard University 1997)

Tourism: Values for this activity has been collected from the study done in Cameroon using Travel Cost Method. However, it has been adjusted to a reasonable level of Willingness to Pay (WTP) value considering the low- income level of resident. Calculation of total value for this section has been accomplished in the following fashion: US\$ 5 per ha. Total ha 9727. $9727 \times 5 = \text{US\$ } 48,635$. (Source: ADB 1997)

Carbon Store: Values of carbon store has been adjusted from US\$ 1300 to US\$ 300 per ha as these Studies were done in the developed countries where income level is high and WTP is

naturally higher than ours. Total value: US\$ 300x900 ha of swamp forest = US\$ 270,000 (Source: ADB 1997)

Genetic Materials: This activity carries value from the study done in Cameroon. Calculation is based on US\$ 7 per ha. Total value US\$ 7x 9727= US\$ 68,089 (Source ADB 1997)

Education: This value refers to the value calculated in a case study in Thailand. Value for this object varies from US\$ 33- US\$ 77000. (Source) ABD 1997)

Human Habitat (improved sanitation and water availability): Values for this part has been derived from the studies done in Nigeria using CVM based on WTP. However, Values have been adjusted due to low income of our beneficiaries US\$ 8 per household. Total benefit: Total Household US\$ =8 US\$ 4,1376 (Source: ADB 1996)

Medical Importance of Wetlands: Values have been derived from Indonesian case study. Per ha US\$ 16x9727= US\$ 155,632 (Source: ADB 1997)

Biodiversity: Values have been derived from case studies done in the developed countries. The adjusted value for our purpose is calculated in the following fashion: US\$ 21 ha. Total value 9727x21 = US\$ 204,267 (Sources: ADB 1996)

Calculating values following total economic valuation concepts make the case more vital to protect and common management practice with Ostrom principle as their value is worth preserving. Leasing or given to private hand will not save this vital wetland.

CONCLUSION

Non Government Organization or NGO is a necessity in economic development pursuit of Bangladesh. It does not need any further comments that the active presences of NGOs are a must for the overall and social development of Bangladesh. The NGOs started their journey in a war ravaged Bangladesh with relief and rehabilitation program. Presently they are part and partner in Bangladesh's socio-economic, cultural, geographic, family planning, education, health, credit and other probable areas of development. They have proven themselves as the trust worthy associates/partner of the government in their drive to poverty eradication and socio-cultural development. In many cases (i.e. micro-credit) NGOs are more successful in some aspects of development where the government is playing a secondary role. However, government believes that most of the development credits go to their planning and policy. Micro credit plays a secondary role. NGOs should be encouraged in taking more initiative in common pool resources management especially wetland management.

References

Rahman A. Economic valuation of Tangor Haor (wetland). Gissen. M edited 2001. Ministry of Environment and Forest. Bangladesh

Rahman M Mokhlesur : Wetlands and Biodiversity: A Case Study of Common Property Resources in Bangladesh. IASC presentation 1995

Ostrom E: Governing the Commons. Cambridge University Press. 1990

Yamin Bayazid: The Daudkandi model of community floodplain aquaculture in Bangladesh: a case for Ostrom's design principles
Graduate School of Fisheries and Environmental Sciences, Nagasaki University, Japan. 2016