

# Contested Governance of Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation in Southwest Bangladesh

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## Introduction



Good governance plays a vital role in the process of alleviating poverty through ecosystem services. Accountability, transparency, coordination and monitoring are among the key elements of good governance. Other elements like institutional capacity, service delivery, technology, financial management, participation, equity and inclusiveness are also important. A strategic and adaptive legislative, institutional and policy framework is essential. However, it is not easy to evaluate the state of ecosystem governance as it is a multidimensional issue. This presentation consists of an evaluation of existing legislative, policy, and strategic framework of governance of ecosystem services for poverty alleviation in the Southwest region of Bangladesh. The presentation attempts to carry out a mapping of livelihoods practices which are ecosystem dependent.

## Research Question

Which ecosystems services are impacted by a contested governance context and are shaped by practices in the processes of rural economy, food production, livelihoods and poverty alleviation?

## Methodology Followed

The methods used included a literature review, interviews with stakeholders at various levels, group discussions, and two local level participatory workshops in the Bagerhat and Khulna districts of South West Bangladesh.

People in Southwest delta of Bangladesh are dependent upon the functioning of ecosystems in manifolds. The poor and disadvantaged people's livelihoods are dependent on ecosystem services; the middle farmers try to improve their economic status using ecosystem services dominantly use land and water for rice production. Polderisation in southwest delta created enabling environment for intensive agriculture in the 1960s.

But the rich farmers and businessmen often use the ecosystems for further growth of their business. This power groups, managing supports from party- political power and state power, introduced 'salt water shrimp' farming in the polder displacing rice for faster business growth from exporting shrimp. These power groups desperately breach legislative guidelines of polder.



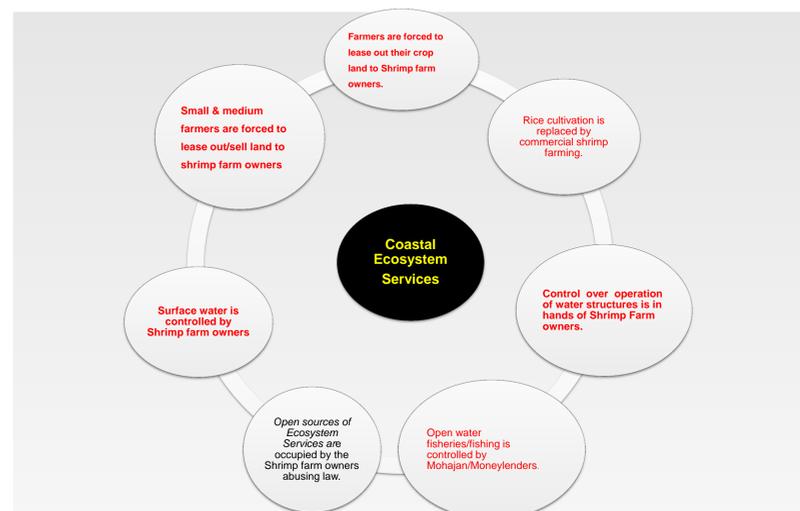
The national and local initiatives for interventions in ecosystems are always expected to in such way that the degradation of ecosystem services does not occur or very less. Hence, the policy guidelines such as policy, laws, ordinance, circular or any type of legislative measures are proclaimed. But they are often ignored, violated and misused by the power groups to exploit ecosystem services for faster growth of their business, especially shrimp in Southwest region of Bangladesh.



## Methodology Followed

The first dominant legislative framework appeared into existence in 1952 as Embankment and Drainage Act to make better provision for the construction, maintenance, management, removal and control of embankments and water courses for the better drainage and improvement of lands in the territories of 'East Pakistan' and for the protection of such lands from floods, erosion or other damage by water. Then the East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority Ordinance, 1958 was proclaimed. The strategic thrusts of these two acts and ordinance were to build physical engineering structures as Flood Control projects. Over the period a large number of legislative and policy guidelines were created in the water sector includes Bangladesh Water and Flood Management Strategy (BWFMS), National Water Policy, National Water Management Plan (NWMP), Guidelines of Participatory Water Management (GPWM), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), Guidelines for Project Assessment (GPA), Coastal Zone Policy, Water Act Bangladesh, and so on. The social construction processes of all these policy guidelines are rooted mainly in the initiatives of line ministries, their implementation wings, their development partners (donors, lending agencies like ADB, WB, etc.), local and foreign consultants in order to address and/or healing the criticisms of water sector projects. There has been always debate on the issue of whether these policy and legislative frameworks are constructed taking the interest s of local people, especially the poor and disadvantaged whose livelihoods are dependent on ecosystem services, and the protection of ecosystems in account.

## Vicious Circle of Ecosystem Services Governance



## Contested Governance



Local people initiated collective actions against commercial shrimp farming though organized campaign: protest against renewal of land leasing contract, protest against leasing open sources of ecosystem services to the shrimp farmers by the government, and demanding for drainage improvement project.

At certain point the local people collectively did cut the polder dike to release them from long lasted water logging trap that caused by polderisation. This action of the local people was conceptualised by the Bangladesh Water Development Board as "Tidal River Management (TRM)".



Farmers managed to back to agriculture challenging the vicious circle of governance over ecosystem services, which was created by introduction of commercial shrimp farming in the polder. Farmers now practice their innovated 'integrated agriculture': prawn-rice-fish-vegetables cultivation. This practices gave a new shape to landscape, and uses of ecosystem services.

Removal of water logging with the people's initiatives created enabling environment for the poor and disadvantaged men and women to have access to ecosystem services for their livelihoods. They have been having scope and opportunities to go for share cropping, livestock raising, fishing in open water bodies like river, beels, etc., and growing vegetables for consumption and earning cash income.



## Conclusion

Governance over ecosystem services in the flood polders of southwest region of Bangladesh created conjunctural crises in the biophysical and social processes. Domination of power-groups in controlling ecosystem that created vicious circle, which displaced the disadvantaged poor people from livelihoods. Thus impoverishment appeared. But, the collective actions of the local people contributed in removing the vicious circle of exploitations, and shaped the biophysical and social systems favorable to local people. Hence, practices of counter-development exist. We need to support this counter-development towards ensuring practices of sustainable livelihoods using ecosystem services.

