

Conclusions - Bangladesh

Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to a combination of factors. It is a low-lying and flat coastal plain, exposed to cyclones and flooding from major rivers. It is densely populated; and has very limited financial resources. International cooperation dealing with water management and coastal development is an important issue for Bangladesh. Particularly the cooperation with the Netherlands, in these fields was mostly successful and appreciated.

Most pressing problems are flooding, intrusion of saline water and seasonal drought. Bangladesh is actively adapting to present problems by building protection works and changing agricultural practices. However, much more needs to be done to cope with future challenges. Key issues in future coastal policy are: afforestation and forest preservation in coastal areas; planting protective mangrove belts; protecting ecosystems by zoning land use; restoring degraded lands; water-sharing arrangements between riparian countries. Most critical for implementation are awareness of climate impacts, understanding the measures required and limitations of available resources. Implementation of integrated coastal policy is limited. Actions are mostly driven by events such as cyclones and storm surges and based on historical knowledge rather than assessments of future risks.

In the last two decades, considerable efforts were made to adopt and implement the ICZM approach initially from the top down. There is a record of accomplishment of historic milestones in ICZM institutional development. Success stories include the polderisation of a substantial part of the coastal area, a massive plantation of forest and mangroves in coastal regions (including Sundarbans), building cyclone shelters (elevated structures of which more than 2500 were realised up to 2004) and the implementation of a low cost cyclone warning system, and producing a comprehensive ICZM knowledge base. In the mean time emphasis was successfully placed on building cooperation between and among the many national and local institutions, stakeholders, and communities to prepare coastal measures.

On the downside, a large number of policy and strategy directives have remained unimplemented, due to organisational and institutional difficulties. National focus and coordination could be strengthened. Further implementation of the identified, priority investment programme for the coastal zone can be considered as an efficient adaptive response option.

The central government, as one of the main partners, has a special duty ensuring the continuation of the ICZM process, raising funds and harmonising the international donor activities related to integrated water and coastal management.

NGOs are widespread in the coastal districts of Bangladesh, operating in a broad field (health, water and sanitation, credits, training and livelihood). The potential for NGOs to involve local communities in developing and implementing solutions at the grass root level is great and a key factor in coastal management. The ICZM concept has been introduced to the NGO community and was well received. Some NGOs combine their hazard relief activities with the creation of adaptive measures. With the support of the coastal villagers they help to create mangrove plantations, to develop floating vegetable beds, to construct clean water ponds or to introduce small solar energy units. Other NGOs are active in dissemination of knowledge to manage coastal resources in a sustainable way.

Although many successes were scored, the organisation and continuity of a number of valuable NGO activities faces challenges.