

**Proceedings of the ESPA event on
'Sharing and Synergy Building in ESPA Projects in Bangladesh'**

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Inauguration

The workshop on “Sharing and Synergy Building in ESPA Projects in Bangladesh” was jointly organized by the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) and the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) and it was held on 3 October 2013 at Spectra Convention Center in Dhaka.

The objective of the workshop was to bring together representatives from various government and non-government organizations, including research organizations, to share information about ESPA activities in Bangladesh, and especially findings of three projects funded by ESPA. The workshop enabled discussion amongst the researchers and development practitioners, on how to link ESPA research activities with development initiatives in Bangladesh, and with policy and decision making.

The ESPA research programme funded¹ by the UK Government aims to provide evidence and tools to enable decision makers to manage ecosystems and the services they provide sustainably and in a way that contributes to poverty alleviation. The workshop was attended by 55 participants amongst whom there were the researchers from the ESPA projects; civil society leaders, NGO workers, development practitioners and academics.

The keynote presentation was made by Professor Paul van Gardingen, the Director of ESPA, which was followed by presentations such as a) “Evidence and Impact Research: Impacts of Community Management of Forests and Floodplains” presented by Dr Parvin Sultana of Flood Hazard Research Centre b) “Modeling Interacting Impacts of Processes and Decisions on Ecosystem Dynamics” presented by Dr Ahmadul Hassan of CEGIS and c) “Assessing health, livelihoods, ecosystem services and poverty alleviation in populous Deltas” presented by ICDDR,B team on behalf of the ESPA DELTAS partners.



Dr Atiq Rahman making his inaugural speech

¹ ESPA is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, Economic and Social Research Council and Department for International Development

During the panel discussion, Dr Rashed Al Mahmood Titumir, Chairperson, Unnayan Onneshan, Ms Farah Kabir, Country Director, Action Aid Bangladesh and Dr Rezaur Rahman of Institute of Water and Flood Management, BUET took part in lively discussions.

Dr Atiq Rahman, E.D., BCAS welcomed everybody to the event. He presented a brief introduction on ESPA and the importance of the ESPA programmes in developing countries like Bangladesh, which are trying to improve the lives of poor people by filling knowledge gaps that currently limit the way that ecosystem services contribute to the alleviation of poverty. He recalled that during the first global environment conference in Rio, in 1992 along with other speakers, they persuaded the then world leaders to safeguard a healthy planet for future generations. Afterwards the world leader's thoughts changed, altered by different people and organizations, blending with different perspectives in reducing poverty and environmental stress. The donor community took a long time to grasp the idea of helping the poor, who are largely dependent on natural resources. Following its course of development, ESPA has introduced various projects in developing countries to safeguard ecosystems.

Dr Rahman then requested Professor van Gardingen, Director of ESPA to say something on ESPA. Professor van Gardingen explained the structure of ESPA and briefly presented the mode of work that ESPA follows.

Dr Rahman then spoke about the three academic projects in Bangladesh funded by ESPA. The purpose of the projects attending the event was to share their experiences, and to share their strategies and actions, and build up synergies of the progress achieved so far. Dr Rahman commented that generally academic programmes tend to be rigorous and we are here to learn how different partners in different countries use initiatives to achieve ESPA research objectives.



Professor van Gardingen's presentation on ESPA

Dr Rahman welcomed the participants on behalf of BCAS and the ESPA groups in Bangladesh, with the expectation that there would be plenty of scope for the participants to interact with the ESPA team throughout the course of the discussions. Dr Rahman then requested Professor van Gardingen to deliver his welcome note.

Professor van Gardingen expressed his delight to be present at the event. The purpose of ESPA is to help communities of the country to work together. ESPA is investigating the possibility of placing the South-East Asian global hub in Bangladesh. As ESPA is becoming larger, so too is the requirement to understand the strengths and opportunities of the ongoing projects.

With the aid of his presentation on ESPA, Professor van Gardingen then presented important information on various aspects of ESPA. ESPA is running for some time and its challenge is – “how do we link the multiple dimensions of poverty and understand how one is linked to the other.” There are very few communities in our society who have secure livelihoods so we need to look at their systems and the multiple dimensions of poverty in an integrated way.

We have to think deeply – “what if fighting poverty and protecting the planet are one and the same”. If environmental degradation increases, it will cause significant loss of ecosystem services. He cited the example of soil erosion, which results in loss of water as soil is the holder of moisture; it will reduce productivity, etc. We must be aware of the tipping point; the point of no return), we can't revive the environment if much change takes place in its composition. The poor people will always be more vulnerable to their environmental tipping point.

There are often early warning signs of the loss of ecosystem services as soon as the ecosystem begins to be under pressure. Improvement of the ecosystems' condition, in terms of real benefit, can only be achieved through collective action by the communities which are dependent on the ecosystems. For instance, a collective decision making system can be put into effect for managing land in a much more integrated way. This will ultimately help to avoid any wrong measure, such as the excessive use of fertilizer which ends up in the lakes and waterways and causes water pollution.

There are lots of lessons emerging from the ESPA projects; one such is the experience from China. It was found that the development initiatives which helped poverty reduction which resulted in the loss of ecosystem services. The sharing of information between countries is very significant, especially when countries are trying to deal with the same type of issues. It could help avoid irreparable loss of ecosystems.

Professor van Gardingen presented information on the future ESPA collaborative initiatives; he called these initiatives as opportunities. They are as follows:

1. ESPA Fellowships
 - a) Early Career Research Fellowships – research grants will be given to young researchers for enhancing/strengthening research capacity. It will support the professional development of promising early stage researchers. Early Career Research Fellows will be required to implement an independent programme of research linked to an ESPA project. This scheme is open to researchers of all nationalities.
 - b) Research Capacity Strengthening Fellowships – support nationals of poor countries who want to build a career in research. Under this scheme there will be greater emphasis on personal research capacity strengthening. Research Capacity Strengthening Fellows will join the research team of an existing, active ESPA project and contribute to the core research of that project. The scheme will support the professional development of researchers who are nationals of a low-income country.

2. Regional Opportunities Fund
 - a. Small grant scheme for “Impact related activities”
 - b. Helping one or more projects to translate research into policy and action

3. Regional Evidence Brokers
 - South Asia
 - East and Southern Africa

With his presentation the inaugural session ended. Dr Rahman requested the ESPA partners in Bangladesh to share their project activities.

Presentation session 1

Dr Parvin Sultana of Flood Hazard Research Centre made her presentation on “Evidence and Impact Research: Impacts of Community Management of Forests and Floodplains”

She was assisted by Dr Paul Thomson. The presentation gave information on community based management of forests in Nepal and community based management of floodplains in Bangladesh. The findings of the project found that community based management enabled improvement of ecosystems (quality of wetlands, establishment of fish sanctuaries) and livelihoods of community members (savings, creation of a revolving fund and come out of loan practices, harvesting methods, adaptation, compensation during closed seasons, etc.). Furthermore it enabled networking amongst various communities and the sharing of good practices made it possible to form good policy. After this presentation the audience remarked that there is a research gap regarding standardization of data.



PowerPoint presentation by Dr Parvin

Presentation session 2

Before the second presentation by Dr Ahmadul Hasan of CEGIS on the key findings of “Modeling



Interacting Impacts of Processes and Decisions on Ecosystem Dynamics”, Dr Dwijen Mallick, Fellow of BCAS gave a brief introduction on the project. The project findings were derived through a qualitative approach. The information presented in the presentation was acquired partly through desk based analysis and partly through modeling work.

Dr Hassan found that from 23 Global Circulation Models, MGICC8 was found to be most suitable for Bangladesh and it was used to generate information for this project. When analyzing the data externally the demographic pressure, climate change, salinity intrusion, land use changes, resource users’ conflict etc. were taken into consideration.

Presentation session 3

From the ESPA DELTAS partners a presentation was made by the ICDDR,B team on the project “Assessing health, livelihoods, ecosystem services and poverty alleviation in populous Deltas.” The presentation related to WP 2. Professor Kazi Matin Ahmed, Department of Ground Water Modeling, University of Dhaka briefed everyone on the hydrology component under WP 5 and Dr Pijush K Sarkar of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute briefed everyone on the agriculture component under WP 5 of the project.



Presenters from ICDDR,B

Panel discussion

In the panel discussion Dr Titumir, Unnayan Onneshan, Ms Farah Kabir, Action Aid Bangladesh and Dr Rezaur Rahman of BUET took part.



Discussion panel participants

Dr Rashed Al Mahmood Titumir – pointed out that the outcomes of research projects are not achieving the development objectives to meet the development needs of Bangladesh. He raised the question of “whether design failure leads to a project or does implementation failure leads to a project?” He commented that in developing countries like Bangladesh there are lots of research projects funded by various donors for solving various problems. Do we know how to design the required interventions to address socio-economic and environmental problems? He stated that design failure may cause disastrous consequence. Many of the project researchers are facilitating dialogues, which actually don’t touch the real issues. In many research projects it is found that the research topic is very selective and has no connection with local context. Additionally the importance is not given to local knowledge, and important decisions are taken in a short length of time. We must emphasize that the rights of the local people are established while transferring local resources into service.

Ms Farah Kabir – commented that in the backdrop of climate change, the research projects must address the issues of climate justice in their course of actions. Researchers should design projects with the notion that development of marginal people can’t be ensured if projects miss the consideration of disaster preparation, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance. She also pointed out that the research information tends to be highly scientific and promotes knowledge gaps at various levels of society. Much of the research information produced is not understood by the politicians of developing countries so is not user friendly. The information needs to be simplified so that it can easily be utilized during policy development.

Dr Rezaur – pointed out that for successful completion of any multi-disciplinary research Project, the researchers need to understand each other. Only then will it be possible for the researchers to overcome disciplinary barriers and generate research output. When research projects deal with ecosystems and peoples’ livelihoods it is very important for the researchers to think about how to include the views of communities in research initiatives and reflect their thoughts in the development process. He also cited outcomes from the Coastal Polder Project funded by the World Bank in 1960 as an example of the integration of people. Initially this project was viable and helped in increasing crop production at within the Polder area. However within 40 years the Polder area river beds became silted up due to the natural tide and web process and the adjacent areas of the project suffered long time water logging (area of Beel Dakatia, drainage congestion started from 1980) and they experienced a huge decline in fish production. The outcomes from the project therefore had a mix of benefits and losses. During the development stage of the project, local people’s knowledge was not taken into consideration, only adopted at a later stage; as a consequence this project was seen as not feasible for ecosystems.

Professor van Gardingen urged research projects in terms of contributing to social and environmental development. Researchers must opt for broader debate rather than short-term quick fixes. Researchers should place greater emphasis on transferring research information into policy so that the research outcomes can easily be put into practice.

Conclusion

Professor van Gardingen delivered his closing thoughts by stating that he is excited to see how researchers in Bangladesh are engaged in various ESPA projects. He urged the need of integration in research. He remarked that there are many good research components but how to put these pieces together is a big question.

He also urged for translating knowledge products into services and linking it to political process. If it can be done, then we will be able to turn our knowledge into practice, and this will Only be possible through building partnerships.



In the concluding remarks, Dr Atiq Rahman commented that all good things in human society are earned in the name of development but sometimes at the cost of degradation of ecosystems. It is also found that while emphasis is given to the reduction of poverty, protection of ecosystems is not taken into consideration. He specifically pointed out that people from the developed world are mostly responsible for greenhouse gas emission but they are not much affected by the catastrophes of climate change. So it can be said, that what is considered as basic necessity in the developed world, is luxury in the developing world. To support his comment, he further added that in today's world, 25% of all medicines produced and 35% of the food produced is wasted.

He suggested that in research initiatives, importance should be given to formulate effective policies, which will help in protecting ecosystems while reducing poverty and improving quality of life.

Our scientific papers should be user friendly and be able to influence groups that hold power in society. It can easily be seen that Bangladesh has lots of ideas and initiatives, but we find that our research outputs are not good enough due to the lack of integration between research initiatives.

Dr Rahman stated that the workshop was interesting and had stimulated ideas for ESPA collaboration in Bangladesh. He thanked the participants for their participation and for sharing their views regarding synergy building in ESPA Projects in Bangladesh.



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