

**Report on Multi-stakeholder Consultation on Hilsa and Livelihoods:
Bangladesh-India Perspectives
Date: August 22-23, 2017
Venue: Kenilworth Hotel, Kolkata, West Bengal, India**

Introduction:

International Water Association (IWA-www.iwa-network.org) is a network including different NGOs which are working in the field of water and its resources. It is also a self-governing non-profit organization which serves as a worldwide network for water professionals to advance standards and best practices in sustainable. During August 22-23, 2017 the IWA organized a “Multi-stakeholder Consultation on Hilsa and Livelihoods: Bangladesh-India” in Kolkata, West Bengal, India where I was one of the participants on behalf of COAST Trust. The representatives from University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, Fisheries Research Institute, Chandpur, Bangladesh, Jadavpur University, West Bengal, India, Bay of Bengal Program Inter-Governmental Organization, India, Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, India, WorldFish, Bangladesh, Winrock International, Bangladesh, Integrated Coastal Management, India and different fishers associations and also some fishers (men and women) from Bangladesh and India were present in the consultation.

The objectives of the consultation were to bring stakeholders, including policy makers, research community, conservationists and representatives from fishers’ associations and to make a wider platform with the CSOs, researchers, government officials and academicians.

Importance of hilsa in the region:

Hilsa is an iconic fish, represents common cultural bonds, a shared history, a common ecosystem and close economic ties between Bangladesh and India. It is an ideal focus that can be the entry point for developing transboundary deliberative mechanisms and creating common ground for agreements while building confidence between the two countries. Hilsa spends its lifecycle in rivers, estuaries, coastal areas, the sea and migrates upstream towards freshwater for spawning. Commercially the hilsa is

the most important fisheries in the Bengal delta. Bangladesh is the leading country in hilsa production with 65% of all hilsa, while India contributes to 10-15%. Over the years, the hilsa population has declined impacting the livelihoods of more than 5 million fisher-folk and fishery workers in both the countries who are directly or indirectly involved in hilsa fisheries.



Present phenomena of Hilsa Fishers Livelihood:

The people of these areas are dependent on the fishing from the open water sources. The coastal fishing activities have been hampered due to frequent cyclone signals. Such disasters make them more vulnerable and hits their major livelihoods. Due to climate change, the extensive river floods cause major disruption and damage of their assets. River and sea erosions induce them to be forced migrants in the slum areas in the cities where they are leading miserable lives. The scarcity of land in the shore area also creates social problems among the fishing community. Most of the fishers are living on the others’ land or in the embankments.

Panel discussions

The panelists raised the issues of essential regulatory actions by the both governments, social

media campaign, the attitude of the governments should be in favor of the fishermen, formation of pressure group will do work with the governments, political will also should be the fundamental issues in the region. In his speech, Dr. Atiur Rahman, Ex-Governor of Central Bank of Bangladesh and renowned as the banker of the poor people also the Chairman of Unnayan Shamannay, Bangladesh, told that during his tenure as governor he did a lot for the poor famers. But h could not get time for doing something for the poor fishers. He mentioned that as a coastal based NGO, COAST has done a lot for the poor fishers and they can also do huge works for the betterment of the fishers in the coastal areas as they have the excellent reputation for advocacy and campaign. He also said that he convinced the banks to come forward for taking the corporate social responsibilities and during his tenure the banks started for giving the credit to the NGOs.



Through this consultation, IWA is trying to develop a platform with the like-minded CSOs, government officials, researchers and academicians for sharing the experiences and research findings and other literatures. The main rationales of the platform are to create a repository of information and

knowledge, to move beyond disciplinary boundaries and broaden the scope of engagement on hilsa conservation, livelihoods and river management and to take forward and become champains in their own right on hilsa conservation river management and community livelihoods.

The proposed name of the platform will be **“Riverscapes, Communities and Hilsa”** and the objectives of the platform will be to facilitate/enable dialogues on hilsa fisheries, hilsa dependent livelihoods and water management, to provide a networking amd learning platform to share knowledge pertaining to hilsa fisheries, and livelihoods of communities that depend on it, to provide space for storing existing information and knowledge on hilsa, fishing communities and riverscapes and to create a vibrant community practitioners, academicians, civil societies on hilsa conservation and livelihoods. IWA is leading the efforts to set up the platform.

The voices from fishers:

1. The CSOs, government officials and other related bodies should try to set the priority of the works in the sector
2. Fixing the mesh size of the nets is the most important issues
3. The government should relax the hard law for fishing
4. Strengthening the food supply during the ban period and those support must be to the real fishers rather the fake fishers by the political influences
5. Joint act should be in place in both the countries also including Myanmar.
6. Finding out the alternative income generating activities by the NGOs and governments of the both countries can save the hilsa and fishers through their capacity development
7. The ban period of the both countries should be same
8. Keeping them under formal credit system will also be the boost up for their development in both economic and social
9. Their lives, nets and boat will be under the insurance policy

10. The governments should take the rehabilitation programs for permanent settlements of the **“Nauka Bashi Jele”**

My learning from the consultation:

1. My concentration has been raised for working with hilsa and hilsa fishermen.
2. Also in-depth knowledge through continuous study should be developed for the intensive works with the hilsa and hilsa fishers
- 3.



My future plan with hilsa fishers and hilsa preservation:

1. We, along with the civil society networks and different fisher-folk committees, will

continue the lobbying and dialogue with the government for keeping the rights and appropriate laws especially licensing and fishing systems in favor of small scale fishers.

2. We will work with government for ensuring the livelihood security as well as fishing security as they are attacked by the pirates frequently.
3. We will lead the campaign to ensure that the fishers ID cards are provided to the real fishers
4. We will try for special inclusion of the fishers in the government safety net programs
5. We will also campaign for opening of bank account with as little as 10 tk similarly to the farmers to include fishers in the formal credit sources.
6. COAST will work to continue the dialogue on the trans-boundary issues among Bangladesh, India and Myanmar.
7. Making more active the Bangladesh Fish Workers’ Alliance through the union, upazilla, district, regional and national level committees.
8. Trying to get the membership from IWA for COAST
9. I will actively be involved with the platform to be formed by IWA

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