

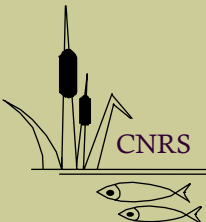


Building Environmental Governance Capacity in Bangladesh:

A CIDA-Funded Development Project through the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) Program

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Bangladesh, being one of the most populous countries in the world (with a population of 153.3 million) and located in an ecologically sensitive deltaic environment, is facing serious challenges to sustain its natural resource base and environmental health. The country's National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR) has identified governance, private sector development, women's participation in decision-making, the environment, and sustainable development as priority development areas. In the NSAPR, poverty reduction is the main goal of the Government of Bangladesh because the per capita Gross National Income is only US\$490, half the population lives below US\$1 per day (World Bank 2007), and the human development ranking of the country is 140th of 177 nations (UNDP 2007). This concern is compounded by challenges relating to the extremely dense population, a high population growth rate (2.2% per annum), and persistent yet inequitable economic growth. These processes are resulting in the rapid and severe degradation of natural capital and the environment, which in effect is further marginalizing many segments in society, in particular, rural women.

To address the intertwined problems of poverty reduction, lack of access of the poor to common-pool resources, and rapid depletion of natural resources, there is an immediate need to build the capacity of institutions and to develop human resources. Government decision-makers, university faculty and students, and persons in the field need to gain an experiential learning background, develop applied knowledge and skills in these areas, and have the ability to assist effective Environmental Governance. *Environmental Governance* is regarded as an interactive process where citizens act collectively in making decisions about access, allocation and use of natural resources, as well as about resource and environmental sustainability. The citizens make such decisions with and through the government, universities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. Engaging the citizens in such a process is warranted because these decisions affect their lives and livelihoods. In light of these challenging socioeconomic, demographic and socioecological conditions and current weaknesses in environmental and natural resource governance, the need for building and enhancing Environmental Governance capacity in Bangladesh was recognized and a project under the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) program was developed. In March, 2007, Dr. Emdad Haque and a team consisting of five other faculty members (Dr. Fikret Berkes, Dr. John Sinclair, Professor Thomas Henley, Dr. Leslie King and Dr. Shirley Thompson) of the Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources were awarded \$1 million in new funding from CIDA, through the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). The project is focused on building environmental and natural resource governance and management capacity in Bangladesh through developing partnerships between the University of Manitoba and North South University (Dhaka Bangladesh), BRAC (BRAC University, Bangladesh), and the Centre for Natural Resources Studies (NGO partner). The project will last for six years (2007-2013). Besides CIDA funding of \$1 million, an additional \$700,000 will be contributed by the partnering institutions.

With its remarkable involvement in international development and experience in working in developing countries, the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Manitoba, Canada is uniquely positioned, and therefore intends to work in partnership with six faculties of North South University (Dhaka, Bangladesh), the Institute of Governance Studies at BRAC University, the Centre for Natural Resources Studies, and 5 community-based organizations in one wetland area (i.e.,



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Hakaloki haor) and one floodplain area (*Magura-Narail*) to address human resource development needs in Environmental Governance and sustainable resource management. North South University is the largest and leading non-profit, private university in Bangladesh and offers undergraduate degrees in environmental science and management, business administration, and development studies. In this project, North South University will also collaborate with local and national governments and other stakeholders. BRAC is one of the largest and most reputed NGOs in the world. Its extensive programs serve 110 million Bangladeshis, and it has established a Master of Arts in Governance and Development program at BRAC University. The Centre for Natural Resource Studies is a leading community-based NGO that promotes sustainable resource and environmental management, manages fisheries and other livelihood projects in marginal wetland areas, and administers well-established micro-credit programs for women.

This project will develop human resource capacity in governance to support pro-poor economic growth, natural resource conservation and environmental sustainability in Bangladesh by linking higher education with national and local governments and civil society (the private sector, NGO and rural communities). It will thus strengthen human resource development capacity in good governance that promotes pro-poor micro-entrepreneurships (via micro-credit), sustainable natural resource and environmental management practices, and gender equality for poverty reduction. These goals will be achieved by building institutions that unite villages, NGOs, other development organizations, and universities, and by networking with the Government of Bangladesh, the private sector, and international development stakeholders.

The specific purposes and activities will involve the following:

- 1) establish a 2-year Master in Resource and Environmental Management (MREM) program at North South University, by training faculty members and producing more than 60 graduates (in 4 years) with field/site experiential learning;
- 2) enhance institutional capacity by providing 30 Government of Bangladesh and private sector personnel with training in environmental laws and regulation, measures and standards, monitoring, remediation, impact assessment and participatory environmental management, at the Centre for Governance Studies, BRAC University, and by placing student interns in Government of Bangladesh departments and private sector enterprises;
- 3) establish a human resource development support system for the NGO partner's micro-credit program, with the aim of furthering the advancement of poor women through supporting their micro-enterprises, assisting them to participate in local common property resource and environmental management, enhancing their awareness of benefits and methods of natural resource conservation, and thereby contributing to achieving and maintaining environmental sustainability;
- 4) institutionalize an Environmental Governance Policy Network through linking academics and field practitioners, and maintaining close collaboration between the project partners, in order to promote gender-sensitive democratic governance, pro-poor private sector development, and sustainable natural resource management; and
- 5) promote the replication of the project model through disseminating results to partners, stakeholders and the general public in Bangladesh.

It is expected that the project will have a wide impact upon poverty reduction and sustainable development throughout Bangladesh and beyond through sharing experience and knowledge on Environmental Governance innovation and through demonstrating successful local approaches to the *greening* of micro-enterprises.

This project recognizes that gender inequality continues to be a critical development issue for Bangladesh's sustained economic growth, human development, and environmental health. Although women's status in Bangladesh has improved in recent years, gender inequality remains a major obstacle to significantly improving the quality of life of both poor women and men: UNDP's 2003 Gender-Related Development Index ranked Bangladesh 120th out of 156 countries and the ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income is 56%. In consideration of gender inequality perspectives, the project is designed to ensure women have a direct role in all project decisions. Gender equality will also be a principal cross-cutting theme in all curriculum and training contents.

On August 24, 2007, an inauguration ceremony of the Project was held at North South University campus, and Mr. C.S. Karim, Honourable Advisor to the Ministries of Environment and Forests, Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock, attended the event as its Chief Guest. In respect to implementation of the Project activities, a team of Canadian scholars participated, during February 11-22, 2008, in joint workshops on curriculum development for the interdisciplinary Masters program on resource and environmental management at North South University, professional training on environmental governance at BRAC University, green micro-enterprise development at the Centre for Natural Resources Studies, and gender issues in higher education. In addition, a professional development workshop for upgrading expertise in the area of interdisciplinary studies and field-based (post-) graduate research was also organized for the faculty members of North South University and BRAC University.

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Overall, it is expected that the major impacts of the project will be an enhanced human resource capacity in Bangladesh in the areas of governance, women's participation in pro-poor, economic growth-oriented micro-entrepreneurships, and sustainable natural resource and environmental management at different levels. By linking higher education and practice, the project will contribute to meeting basic needs, reducing poverty, and attaining the social and economic development goals of the people of Bangladesh.

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Mr. C.S. Karim, Honourable Advisor to the Ministries of Environment and Forest, Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Building Environmental Governance Capacity in Bangladesh project

Dr. Emdad Haque, Project Director at the University of Manitoba, presenting on University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development.



What role for micro-finance in natural resource management?

Claude Peloquin, MNRM



NRI students Munjurul H. Khan (3rd from left) and Claude Peloquin (4th from left) with CNRS project members and staff in Hakaluki Haor.

“NGOs are a very important sector of the Bangladeshi economy, employing tens of thousands of workers in the country.”



Village Conservation Group meeting in a school.

Photo C. Peloquin.

The economy of rural Bangladesh consists mostly of small-scale farming of rice, vegetables, cattle and poultry, along with important domestic fisheries. Thus, most people depend on their immediate environment for livelihood, and as such, resource management issues are of direct relevance to them. Many of the environmental problems in these areas are at least partly linked to inequitable access to common-pool resources, which often leads to the worsening of both poverty and environmental degradation.

The Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) is the non-governmental organization (NGO) partner of the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) project 'Building Environmental Governance Capacity in Bangladesh'. This Bangladeshi organization is specialized in helping fishers and farmers restore, or foster sound use of, resource systems, most often in wetland environments. Their projects aim for the creation of community forums for conflict resolution and coordination, de-siltation of wetland basins, restoration of riparian vegetation, and creation of sanctuaries for fish and birds. CNRS also provides micro-credit services, as part of its working relationship with the communities in which it operates. This service came about following the requests of villagers who, being in more remote locations, had not yet received support from other, credit-oriented NGOs.

NGOs are a very important sector of the Bangladeshi economy, employing tens of thousands of workers in the country. These organizations administer many of the services that, in other countries, would be provided by either public or private sectors. For example, they run schools and universities, administer vaccination programs and offer banking services.

Since the breakthroughs of the Grameen Bank and others during and after the 1980s, micro-finance has become one of the preferred ways for implementing and financing development programs. Through reliance on group-based collateral, members of saving groups can get access to small loans provided by NGOs, at reasonable rates (15-20%) compared to the alternative option of relying on loan-sharks (100%+). Also, micro-credit activities have traditionally focused on women, who are otherwise often excluded from participation in non-household activities. As a result, many families gain access to capital that would otherwise be impossible to obtain, and this small capital is often what is needed to make a major difference in their quality of life. At the same time, profits are accrued to the lender. These initiatives have been successful at many of these levels, and the wide majority of NGOs in the country now rely on micro-credit for the financing of some of their activities.

When, in 1998, CNRS went to work on a resource management project in an area where NGOs were not previously active, villagers asked for this micro-financing service. The organization responded to the request, but somewhat reluctantly, since its main mandate pertained to natural resource issues. Besides, given the high transaction costs and labor-intensive, day-to-day management needs, micro-credit can be an overwhelming burden to an organization that seeks to facilitate many other non-credit related projects with limited logistical capacity. CNRS then slowly and carefully built credit services where needed. After 10 years, the organization now provides such services in 13 of its 31 branches. In these branches, credit activities are run in 'parallel' to the resource management work, with each having its own separate staff so that credit programs do not overwhelm other initiatives. The main way in which the credit and resource management streams are linked is through the common aim to improve livelihood diversification.

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Livelihood diversification contributes to making households less vulnerable to shocks, and to diffusing or reducing the pressure on resources. However, the fit between the credit and resource management streams has not been systematically evaluated.

There exists an interesting but unrealized potential for synergy between the micro-credit operations and natural resource management program. Looking for ways in which this potential may be realized is one of the dimensions of this UPCD project; how can micro-credit be used to foster 'green' micro-enterprises that enhance rather than degrade local resources? What are the ways in which one could evaluate whether activities can provide livelihood improvement without undermining the resource-base on which they rely? One of the proposed approaches would be to look at the fit between various investments and ecosystem services. Such questions will be addressed by teams of University students and faculty and CNRS staff, as part of applied research projects in the coming years.

Claude Peloquin conducted exploratory work on CNRS micro-credit programs in the fall of 2007, through the UPCD-CIDA project, and with funding provided by the Students for Development Program of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), financed by the Canadian International Development Agency.



**Micro-credit group meeting near Hakaluki Haor, in Borolekha, Bangladesh.
Photo C. Peloquin**

Connecting Local Communities through Environmental Governance to Facilitate Sharing of Power and Collective Actions for Sustainable Wetland Resource Management

Munjurul Hannan Khan, PhD Candidate

Local communities, particularly in Bangladesh, have a long tradition of managing wetlands and floodplains as common property on a sustainable basis. They have managed wetland resources for centuries to secure their livelihoods, with local institutions playing a central role in management practices. These diverse and highly productive wetland and floodplain ecosystems support millions of people of the poor communities. Prior to British rule in India, fishermen of Bangladesh enjoyed customary rights to fish in rivers, *haors*, *baors* and *beels*; the local communities had access to fish, swamp forest, reeds, wildlife, and other aquatic resources to support their living. The British colonial regime established its authority over land and natural resources by the enactment of the Permanent Settlement Act 1793. According to the Act, the customary right to hold hereditary land was subject to the regular payment of rent, but this right could not be transferred in any way. In fact, this Act restricted the local people's rights relating to the land and natural resources in order to maximize revenue collection for the colonial ruler. In the post-colonial period, after the independence of the country (as East Pakistan in 1948 and as Bangladesh in 1971), there have been no major qualitative changes in natural resources management. The country has maintained a similar kind of legal regime in its resource management approach. The post-colonial management regime has basically been structured by scientific and technology based, top-down, centralized, production and efficiency-oriented approaches.

“The State has extended its control over territories as well as over resources, such as the land, water, forests, minerals and biodiversity on which local people depend for their livelihoods.”

The State has extended its control over territories as well as over resources, such as the land, water, forests, minerals and biodiversity on which local people depend for their livelihoods. There are resulting complexities in the power relations between the State and local communities that have generated conflicts, mistrust, detachment, isolation, the displacement of local institutions, and the loss of resource users' access to and control over natural resources. Moreover, in the formal management system, the poor communities have been seen as a threat to natural resources and accused of being polluters and/or degraders of common-pool resources. Existing resource management policies and institutional structures do not favour the sharing of power with local communities for collective choice and actions. As a result, access to resources and the customary rights of the resource users have been gradually eroded by the policy changes.

The Ministry of Land leased out wetlands such as segments of rivers, *haors*, *baors* and *beels* that had potential as a *Jalmahal* (fishery-water estate) through an open bidding system for identifying the highest bidder to ensure the maximum rent from natural resources. On paper, the leasing system should give preference to local fishermen as lessees, but in the open bidding system that preference for the local fishermen does not have any value. In such an arrangement, the customary rights of the local communities are denied and moneylenders take full advantage of the highest-bid leasing system. In most cases, politically powerful leaders and/or their agents or local rich people happen to be the leaseholders of *Jalmahal*. Local fishermen can not participate in the bidding system because of their lack of financial capacity to pay upfront lease money. The leasing system also acts as an instrument for the temporary shift of property rights from communal property to private property for the leasing period. This change in property rights empowers only the lessee to control access to natural resources, thereby devoiding the fishermen of their traditional rights.

During my field research and work with local communities, it was documented that the leasing out of rivers, *haors* and *beels* of *Hakaluki Haor* area as *Jalmahal* have been detrimental to the well being of poor fishermen as they have lost their access to *haor* resources. This leasing system has also created conflicts, chaos and power hierarchy in the society, which has had negative impacts on local institutions, along with severely degrading the wetland ecosystems. The clearing of swamp forest, employment of dewatering methods of fishing, the use of harmful fishing gears, over exploitation of other aquatic resources and diversion of water flow from its usual course, etc., are a few

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examples of ecosystem degradation. Existing top-down, command and control based, and centralized formal institutional arrangements have been found to be very counterproductive to sustainable wetland resource management since they facilitate exploitation, deprivation, and livelihood insecurity of local communities.

This research examined and analyzed the processes of formation of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), the identification of stakeholders, the participation of local communities in decision-making process (including identification of their capacities), and recognition of the accountability, transparency, equity and involvement of external mediators or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) demonstrated under the Sustainable Environmental Management Programme (SEMP), the Community Based Fishery Management (CBFM-2) project and the Community-based Wetland Biodiversity Management Project (CWBMP) of *Hakaluki Haor* area. These Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) projects have clearly generated better results and opportunities for effective and efficient ways of managing natural resources in *Hakaluki Haor* area compared to the existing leasing system. However, all these experiences have been limited to the framework of development projects and need to be institutionalized through the formal system of wetland resource management.

Environmental governance signifies a new process that implies the sharing of power through institutional processes and structures for equitable decision-making in natural resource management. It facilitates a process of empowering stakeholders to ensure their rights in relation to resources as they are involved in decision-making. However, the effectiveness of community-based resource management or adaptive co-management critically depends on institutional governance that builds on trust, accountability, responsiveness, and fairness between the State and community in order to ensure sustainability in natural resources management.

¹ *Haors* are saucer-shaped, naturally depressed water basins or river back-swamp. A *baor* is an oxbow lake. *Beels* are perennial water bodies.

² Environmental governance encompasses the values, rules, institutions, and processes through which people and organizations attempt to work towards common objectives, make decisions, generate authority and legitimacy, and exercise power (CIDA 2006).



Local community sharing, with Dr. C. Emdad Haque and others, their problem of access to natural resources of *Hakaluki Haor* under the present leasing system.

'Power is not a cup of tea to hand over': Some observations on fisher's empowerment process in the floodplain and coastal wetlands of Bangladesh

Apurba Krishna Deb, PhD Candidate

Using a participatory approach, I examined the roles played by the processes of empowerment and fisheries co-management in two development projects in Bangladesh. The projects are popularly known as 'ECFC' (Empowerment of Coastal Fishing Communities for Livelihood Security, GoB/UNDP/FAO project: BGD/97/017, implemented jointly by FAO Bangladesh and Department of Fisheries (DoF) of the Government of Bangladesh) and 'CBFM-2' (Community based Fisheries Management- 2nd phase, implemented by WorldFish Center and DoF and funded by UK-DFID). My observations are strictly based on two villages: Volarkandi, a CBFM-2 project village representing a new-entrant, Muslim fishers group in the floodplain, and Thakurtala, an ECFC project village representing traditional hereditary Hindu fishers in the coastal island Moshkhal. The CBFM-2 started with 17 sites in the CBFM-1 phase and expanded to 117 water bodies (*Jalmohal*) in around 10 years, while the 5-year ECFC expanded from 33 villages in the first year to 111 from the second year onwards. Coastal fisheries are widely open access with hardly any management measures, while floodplain fisheries are controlled by leaseholder 'water lords' who are fuelled by hegemonic administrative and chaotic political processes.

The empowerment of fishers for socio-economic development and participation in aquatic resource management is very much a political issue, and also relates to the capacity of existing traditional institutions and the nurturing they offer. Historically, fishers are relegated socio-politically, geographically and culturally from the so-called mainstream society, partly due to ideologically endorsed, patron-client coercive relations, the erosion of the rural moral economy, extremely narrow occupationalization, the penetration of youngish capital and the absence of correct behaviour from post-colonial state machineries. Fishers have not been able to noticeably organize themselves for social change or movement, as we see in case of Bengal peasants; a few movements against massive exploitation 'relapsed into quiescence and passivity' as the short-term interest of individuals inevitably took precedence over any long-term ends. One of my respondents realized that 'Everybody likes power; power is not a cup of tea to be handed over for drink and then becoming empowered, it has to be gained through struggles; the powerful class shall never agree to sacrifice power'. The context of empowerment is different: in the floodplain cases, capacity building is necessary for ensuring access to and control over water bodies, while on the coast, it is often central to household level livelihoods (and food security) and to the mobilization of coastal resources through territorial management.

Figure 1 illustrates the perceived role of different institutions in relation to the fishers of the coastal village Thakurtala. It is evident that the ECFC project created significant space for fishers along with existing village-based institutions like traditional leadership, rural money-lending business and the religious temple, while the government institutions based at the sub-district and district levels had less influence on villagers. However, the CBFM-2 led organization in the Volarkandi village could not create significant political space for committee members along with other rural institutions. The ECFC project adopted a holistic approach for capacity building; it encouraged the fishermen and women to build organizations irrespective of economic status, but in the executive committee, the powerful elites and moneylenders were sidelined with the notion of balance in power and decision-making. This helped tremendously in raising the voice of the common fishers, who were generally characterized as reluctant to speak in different meetings. Excluding the members of the 'civilian labour force' consisting of the under-aged and the old, around 65% of the inhabitants of the coastal village had the opportunity to participate in interventions and socio-political institutions, while the coverage is <5% in the case of the floodplain Volarkandi village.

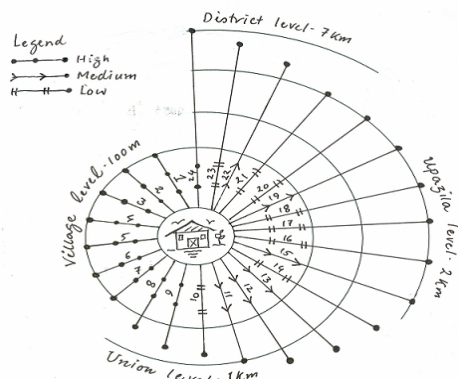


Figure 1: Fishers' perception on the role of cross-scale institutions in capacity building (Based on a 'focus group discussion' with key informants, 17 August 2005, Thakurtala)

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The ECFC project adopted the principle of *working with the people* instead of the traditional top-down bureaucratic mode of *working for the people*, thus creating room and opportunity for the people to lead and own the development process, and to make the local governance more democratic, responsive and accountable to local communities. The project showed a major shift from the usual incentive-driven developmental approach to a more difficult and rigorous course that heavily emphasized the quality of services to convince and build the capacity of the targeted fishing communities. While this approach minimized the importance of material and financial assistance/grants, it maximized the sustainability of the development intervention in the long run. Conscious efforts were made towards making them realize their own potentials, regaining their confidence and finally inspiring them to think and walk along their own development paths. Concurrent and synchronized efforts directed towards socio-economic development and community participation in coastal resource management have been complementary, have produced reinforcing effects and have yielded results that are no match for a sector-focused development approach. Through best practices in organizational management, education, disaster management, income-generation activities and community-run financial management, community based planning and implementation, 'participatory result oriented monitoring and evaluation (PROME)', and community participation in local level resource management in light of the 'FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries', the ECFC project clearly made a remarkable contribution to the fisher's empowerment process. The male and female fishers of Thakurtala participated in the development interventions of the ECFC project in a spirited manner and continue to keep up organizational activities even after the phasing out of the project.

Perusal of organizational records/registers and performance revealed that, in the case of village organizations (VOs) in Thakurtala, out of 117 members, 71 were found active, 33 were moderately active and 13 were found reluctant. In the case of Volarkandi, out of 23 committee members, 5 were active, 7 were moderately active and 11 were inert. Women's participation in the floodplain and coastal VOs was around 70% and 10% respectively among organizational members. In the case of the floodplain village Volarkandi, the CBFM-2 project assisted the community in organization and capacity building and in leasing two small water bodies from the local administration. The project organized a series of training activities for targeted members and provided working capital for the improvement of the water body and fish culture therein. The project concentrated on a limited number of beneficiaries (thus with a trend of gender-biased social exclusion); but because of the hierarchical project-driven implementation process, much of the targeted activities did not function well or maintain sustainability. The production level from the leased small water bodies was not satisfactory.

Undoubtedly, in the case of both the projects, the fishers' participation in the implementation process was remarkably good. CBFM-2 considered co-management as an empowerment tool, while ECFC considered social and economic uplifting also along with community participation in resource management. Both the projects considered the hypothesis that '*if there is no co-management, there is no community empowerment*'. I observed that such short-term, project-based participation is not necessarily indicative of social empowerment; rather it is a manifestation of economic compulsions for building networks for mobilizing various resources. In the case of both the projects, post-project supports and monitoring as anticipated from the DoF were very low. It is obvious that without strong commitments and supports from the State machineries, the positive impacts of development projects fall under erosion effects. Empowerment does not imply 'disempowerment of the already powered'; rather it asks for a sustained and progressive democratic process that ensures a position for those who are neglected in the decision-making process. Indeed, significant advancement of the fishers' socio-psychological, economic and political empowerment will be a long journey, unless there are adequate transformations and new thinking in the existing political culture, and development of visionary leadership against multiple corporate forces active in inland and coastal areas.



**Typical country boats
of the south-east
coast of Bangladesh**



Women Micro-credit savings group in a meeting

Local level workshop on the projects community developments at Borolekha



University of Manitoba (Canada) and North South University teams at the academic curriculum development workshop in Dhaka

NRI team in Cox's Bazaar visiting a conservation project

