

Community perception of impacts of protected area governance on local livelihoods: a case study of the *Lawachara* National Park, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Forest protected areas (FPAs) are great sources of natural resources in developing countries like Bangladesh. They play a vital role in the livelihoods of a large number of forest-dependent local people. The co-management based FPA governance was implemented through some donor funded programs to improve management effectiveness and reduce forest dependency of local people. The programs were to involve and provide access to different alternative income generating activities and livelihood supports. This paper examines how local people of a FPA perceive the impact of governance on themselves and their livelihoods. Accordingly, a household survey was conducted on 330 householders from six villages inside, adjacent and outside of Lawachara National Park. Two sets of Likert scale items of governance impact were used to assess the perception of local people. The first set of 10 items included usefulness of FPA governance, information sharing, decision-making, benefit sharing, awareness raising, skill enhancement, women's participation, ethnic community participation, youth participation, and decreasing conflicts. The second set of 10 items were recognition of local people's engagement, supporting local livelihoods, engaging in livelihood activities, FPA dependence reduction, income generating activities, employment opportunities, agricultural production, tourism scope/income, decreasing vulnerability/uncertainty of livelihoods, and climate-resilient agriculture. In both cases, descriptive analysis, weighted average index, and overall assessment were calculated. A perception index (0-1 value) corresponding to a social scale was used to evaluate the level of householders' perception about selected items. Although people irrespective of their place of residence thought that FPA governance was undoubtedly useful for the survival of the forest, it could neither bring about visible impact on people nor improve their livelihoods. Moreover, the limited achievement in several governance and livelihood indicators varied with location of their residential villages. Although this governance practice has been claimed to be successful, it was unfortunately producing limited visible goal achievement. To overcome the challenges of implementation, local people's engagement, participation and benefit sharing are of utmost importance.