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## **Establishing Participation: The Case of Empowering Communities in Wetland Fishery Management**

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**KEYWORDS** Conservation. Environment. Institution. Involvement. Resource Users. Sustainable.

**ABSTRACT** Participation of local fishing communities in conservation measures for enhancing fish populations has been established in Ashurar beel, a large perennial wetland in northeast Bangladesh. Caritas, a national NGO engaged in government led partnership arrangement Community Based Fisheries Management project to organize and motivate fishers with integrated approach towards understanding and implementing development initiatives. The study period encompassed since the project inception in 1996 to 2002. As the concept was new therefore, it was justified to select the study period in the subsequent years during the project period to investigate the outcome of community based management effort launched by the project. This gave an opportunity to critically see how the fishers acquainted themselves with the concept of the project approach in terms of fisheries management, sustainable use of recourses, equity, building up community organization, and at the same time how effectively they apply these in their work. The major areas for the study were related with the development of human resources, capital resources, and fisheries management. After a year of deal 25 Village based fisher groups with 527 members are organized. Cohesiveness among the members and a sense of ownership on the resource has been generated with diversified activities. A network interconnecting the organized groups has happened to form an institution and ensuring the fisher rights. Fishers established a fish sanctuary for enhancing natural fish population that has become the ever-largest functional sanctuary in Bangladesh. With NGO support backed by government, fishers have been empowered resulting in more sustainable and productive fishery management.

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