

Direct economic incentives for sustainable fisheries management: the case of Hilsa conservation in Bangladesh

Essam Yassin Mohammed¹, Md. Abdul Wahab²

¹International Institute for Environment and Development, UK, eymohammed@iied.org, ²Bangladesh Agricultural University, Bangladesh

Fisheries provide millions of people with a livelihood source. Yet across the world, these resources are fast diminishing because of pollution, habitat destruction, overfishing, natural disasters and climate change. Traditional approaches to halt this decline focus on regulating against destructive practices, but to little effect. A more successful strategy could be to establish a direct economic incentive mechanism such as payments for ecosystem services (PES), or incorporate an element of PES in existing regulatory mechanisms. Examples from terrestrial environments and a few from aquatic environments suggest that economic incentive based mechanisms can work to protect both livelihoods and environments. But to succeed, these schemes must be underpinned by robust research, clear property rights, effective monitoring and compliance, equitable benefit sharing and sustainable finance. One of the rare examples of using direct economic incentive mechanism for sustainable fisheries management is the payment for hilsa conservation in Bangladesh. Hilsa (Indian shad) is as important as any major fishery of the world, on which 250 million Bengali people are dependent for their food and nutrition and more than half a million people for their employment and livelihood. In this study examine how direct economic incentive mechanism complement regulatory fisheries management approaches. However, we believe that there is room for improvement. We argue that the effectiveness of the scheme can be enhanced by understanding the complex socio-economic and ecological systems; identification of beneficiaries from the management plan (ecosystem service buyers); assessing the preference of fisher communities for compensation packages; and empowering local fishermen to monitor and enforce compliance. Hilsa is anadromous in nature (an uncommon phenomenon in tropical waters), and lives in the sea for most of its life, but migrates up to 1200 km inland along major rivers in the Indian sub-continent for spawning. It is also one of the most important single species fisheries in the Bay of Bengal which is shared by Myanmar and India. However, there is very limited regional cooperation between the three countries to work together to conserve hilsa. Therefore we also argue that there is need for regional cooperation is very crucial to ensure the success of the scheme.