



Report of the Preparing the Ground for Planning and Implementing EAFM in Bangladesh





Preparing the Ground for Planning and Implementing EAFM in Bangladesh

*Stakeholder Workshop, Field Visit to FMU's and
Capacity Development Course on EAFM*

15-27 September 2025



Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)
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Report Preparation

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Preferred Citation

BOBP-IGO. (2025). *Preparing the Ground for Planning and Implementing EAFM in Bangladesh: Stakeholder Workshop, Field Visit to FMUs and Capacity Development Course on EAFM*. Report of BOBP-IGO Mission to Sri Lanka. Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation. 40 pp.

Executive Summary

Under the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project Phase II (BOBLME II), the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO) has initiated the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in its member countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. As part of promoting EAFM implementation in Bangladesh, BOBP-IGO, in consultation with the Government of Bangladesh and national experts, selected three Fishery Management Units (FMUs):

- (i) Fishery in Nijhum Dwip,
- (ii) Set Bag Net Fishery in Central Coastal Bangladesh, and
- (iii) Set Bag Net Fishery in Sonadia and Moheshkhali.

While EAFM in the first two fisheries will be directly implemented under the project, the third fishery will be implemented with support from the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and the Department of Fisheries, Government of Bangladesh.

To prepare the groundwork for planning and implementing EAFM in the selected FMUs, a BOBP-IGO Mission undertook a start-up initiative comprising stakeholder consultations, field visits, and a Capacity Development Course (CDC) on EAFM. The Mission included:

- Consultative workshops, stakeholder meetings, and field visits in Hatiya and Nijhum Dwip during 24–26 September 2025 focusing on the Fishery in Nijhum Dwip;
- Stakeholder consultations and field visits in Barguna during 17–19 December 2025 focusing on the Set Bag Net Fishery in Central Coastal Bangladesh; and
- A Capacity Development Course on EAFM for fisheries practitioners in Dhaka during 21–24 December 2025.

The broad objectives of the Mission were to:

- (i) Understand the characteristics and management challenges of the selected FMUs for planning and implementing EAFM;
- (ii) Identify and establish partnerships with relevant agencies, institutions, and stakeholders;
- (iii) Explore opportunities for collaboration between EAFM activities and marine biodiversity conservation initiatives led by IUCN Bangladesh; and
- (iv) Develop the practical skills and institutional capacity of fisheries practitioners for implementing EAFM in Bangladesh.

The Mission facilitated extensive stakeholder consultations involving fisheries officials, researchers, fishers, traders, NGOs, universities, and conservation agencies. Field visits to fish landing centres, fishing villages, ice plants, and fishing harbours provided practical insights into the characteristics, issues, and opportunities associated with the two fisheries. The consultations highlighted the importance of integrating fisheries management, biodiversity

conservation, co-management arrangements, and livelihood support within the EAFM framework.

For the Fishery in Nijhum Dwip, the consultations revealed that the island is ecologically significant, highly dependent on hilsa fisheries, and vulnerable to natural disasters, overfishing, habitat degradation, and socioeconomic challenges. Stakeholders emphasized the need for regulating destructive fishing practices, improving safety at sea, strengthening social protection, promoting alternative livelihoods, and establishing co-management committees involving fishers and government agencies. The Mission identified the Fishery in Nijhum Dwip Marine Protected Area (MPA) as an ideal FMU for implementing EAFM, given the potential to realise co-benefits from biodiversity conservation and sustainable fisheries management.

For the Set Bag Net Fishery in Central Coastal Bangladesh, the consultations highlighted concerns related to juvenile fish capture, operation of set bag nets in estuarine nursery grounds, use of small cod-end mesh sizes, weak enforcement of regulations, and dependence of fishing communities on daily fishing income. Stakeholders stressed the importance of practical and socially acceptable management measures, including selective fishing practices, awareness programmes, co-management systems, scientific monitoring, and livelihood diversification. The discussions emphasized that collaborative and evidence-based management approaches are essential for balancing livelihood security with conservation objectives in the fishery.

The Capacity Development Course on EAFM consisted of eight modules covering key components of EAFM, including scoping the fishery, stakeholder prioritisation, issue identification, co-management arrangements, EAFM plan development, implementation, monitoring, and adaptive management. The course combined theoretical sessions, group exercises, practical planning activities, and role-play sessions on conflict resolution. Participants included officials from the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute, IUCN, WorldFish, universities, NGOs, and fishers' organisations.

The CDC contributed significantly to strengthening the capacity of EAFM practitioners in Bangladesh. Key outcomes of the training included:

- Emergence of more capable practitioners with practical skills for EAFM planning and implementation;
- Improved understanding of stakeholder engagement, co-management, and ecosystem-based fisheries governance; and
- Alignment of training content and delivery with the practical needs of implementing EAFM in Bangladesh.

Abbreviation and Acronyms

BFRI	Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute
CDC	Capacity Development Course
CNRS	Center for Natural Resource Studies
DoF	Department of Fisheries
EAFM	Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ESBN	Estuarine Set Bag Net
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FMU	Fishery Management Unit
FN	Forenoon
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
MFA	Marine Fisheries Act
MMA	Marine Managed Area
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PSTU	Patuakhali Science and Technology University
SAP	Strategic Action Programme
SBN	Set Bag Net
SEAFDEC	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center
SSNI	Sustainable Seafood Network of India
TDA	Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
UN	United Nations

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Preparing the Ground for Planning and Implementing BOBLME project activities in Bangladesh

Report of BOBP-IGO Mission to Bangladesh

1. Background

Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) is one of the largest LMEs of the world with an area of about 6.2 million km². About 66 percent of the BOBLME lies within the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of BOBLME countries - Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The remainder is the high seas area. The BOBLME is home to rich biodiversity and critical habitats. The natural resources are of considerable social and economic importance to the bordering countries. Fisheries and aquaculture contribute immensely to food security, employment, and trade in the region.

The Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and Strategic Action Programme (SAP) phase of the BOBLME project phase I (2009-2015) identified three priority transboundary concerns and their proximate causes in the region. These include (1) overexploitation of marine living resources, (2) degradation of critical habitats, and (3) pollution and water quality.

In order to address these issues, the countries jointly developed the Strategic Action Programme (SAP), which is being implemented under the BOBLME Phase II project titled, “Sustainable management of fisheries, marine living resources and their habitats in the Bay of Bengal region for the benefit of coastal states and communities” (2023-2028). The project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). It is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO, for its member-countries, namely, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Maldives), and Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC, for countries part of BOBLME project and members of SEAFDEC) are the executing agencies of the project.

The project objective is to contribute to the sustainable management of fisheries, marine living resources, and their habitats in the Bay of Bengal region, to reduce environmental stress and improve environmental status for the benefit of coastal states and communities. Implementing Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) is one of the key sub-components of the project. BOBP-IGO will implement the project in its member countries viz., Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. National execution partners include Ministries of Fisheries and Agriculture, Ministries of Environment, and other national agencies of the participating countries.

The expected outcome of implementing EAFM in the member countries is that by the end of the project period, EAFM will be institutionalized at national level, including targeted transboundary fish stocks (Component 1 of the project).

The expected outputs of the project are:

- At least 2 EAFM plans implemented in each country;
- National and regional platforms established or strengthened to involve grassroots stakeholders in management decision-making; and
- EAFM training embedded in national and regional training institutions.

1.1 Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM)

The need to apply an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) is now globally accepted and has been endorsed in several international fora. Introduction of EAFM, as a holistic concept and alternative way to manage fisheries started after the Rio +20 conference in 2012 and several countries have adopted the concept for their national fisheries management. While support for EAFM has been in place through a range of global declarations and policy instruments, progress in the implementation of an EAFM at national and regional levels has been slow, partly due to the practitioners lacking the relevant skills and experience to apply such an integrated and holistic approach.

For implementing EAFM in Bangladesh,

- Fishery in Nijhum Dwip
- Set bagnet Fishery in Central Coastal Bangladesh
- Set-bag net Fishery in Sonadia & Moheshkhali

were selected as Fishery Management Units (FMUs) by the experts in a National Workshop conducted by the BOBP-IGO in Bangladesh (*BOBP-IGO, 2024. National Workshop on Scoping EAFM Planning and Implementation Process in Bangladesh Bay of Bengal Region – Event Report. Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation, 68 pp*) and approved by the Government of Bangladesh.

While EAFM in the first two fisheries will be directly implemented under the project, the third fishery will be implemented by getting support from the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, and Department of Fisheries Government of Bangladesh.

With the overall objective of promoting EAFM in Bangladesh, consultant is being identified, and scoping and development of the EAFM plan will be carried out in the coming months.

2. Purpose and Objectives of BOBP-IGO Mission to Bangladesh

The scope of EAFM planning and implementation need to be properly understood by all those involved in project execution. To prepare the ground for initiating the process of planning and implementing EAFM in the one selected FMUs, a BOBP Mission consisting Dr E Vivekanandan,

International Consultant, BOBLME, BOBP-IGO and Dr T Velumani, Project Scientist, BOBP-IGO undertook a Start-Up task by conducting pre-Scoping Consultations & field visits in Nijhum Dwip, Bangladesh.

As Nijhum Dwip MPA has been identified by the IUCN, Bangladesh for implementing Marine Managed Area (Component 2 of BOBLME project), the purpose of the Mission was extended to exploring the possibility of aligning the activities of EAFM (BOBP) and IUCN (MMA) to realise co-benefits from biodiversity conservation and fisheries.

The Start-Up consisted of the following tasks:

- Meeting with district fisheries officials and conducting consultative workshop with stakeholders, and field visits and meetings with the expert, namely, Dr. Sharif Uddin, Former Director, Dept of Fisheries, Bangladesh for Fishery in Hatiya Island during 24-25 September 2025;
- Field visits to Nijhum Dwip and meeting with various stakeholders involved in the Fishery in Nijhum Dwip on 26 September 2025;

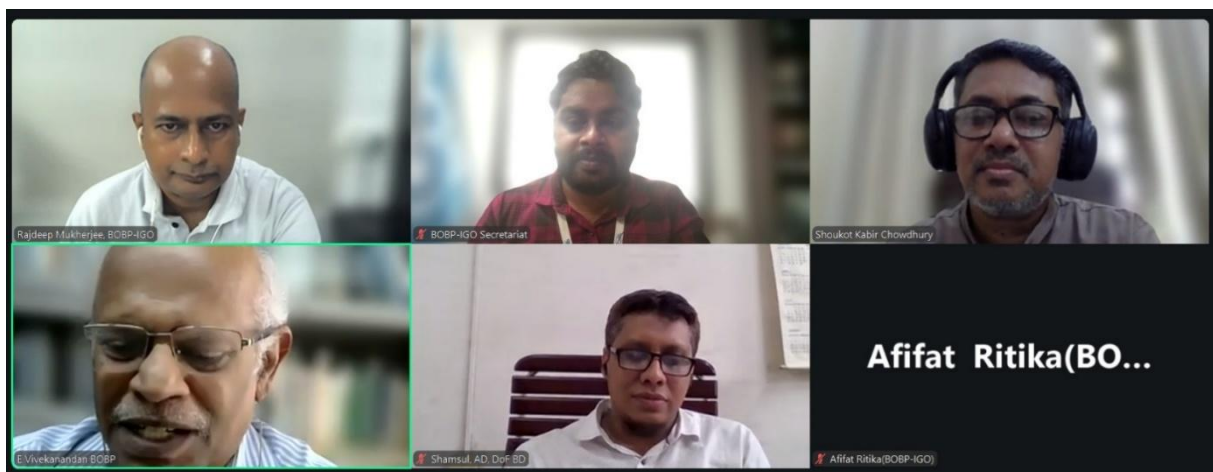


Figure 1. Pre-Mission Travel meetings: Three virtual meetings were conducted with department of fisheries officials, IUCN and experts to discuss preparing the ground for scoping EAFM in Nijhum Dwip, Bangladesh

The broad objectives of the Mission were to:

- i. Understand the fishery characteristics of Nijhum Dwip MPA, Set Bag Net Fishery for planning and implementing EAFM; conduct the capacity development course on EAFM for EAFM practitioners
- ii. Identify potential partners and other relevant agencies for implementing EAFM and establish partnerships;
- iii. Explore the possibilities of aligning with the activities of IUCN, Bangladesh for implementing EAFM and MMA component of the project in Nijhum Dwip, and
- iv. Plan the next steps to be taken.

3. Approach

The BOBP Mission undertook the following tasks in Bangladesh to accomplish the tasks:

Table 1. Table showing the Programme Agenda

Phase	Date	Agenda	Participating Organisations
NIJHUM DWIP – NOAKHALI AND HATIYA (23-26 September)	23.09.2025 AN	Arrival of BOBP team* at Dhaka from Chennai; Stay in Dhaka	Local Coordinator Dr. Sharif Uddin
	24.09.2025 FN	BOBP team* Travel to Hatiya Island from Dhaka; Stay in Hatiya	Dr. Sharif Uddin, DoF officials, IUCN and BOBP team
	25.09.2025 FN	Consultative meeting with fishers/leaders and department of fisheries officials in Hatiya and fish landing centre visit	
	26.09.2025	Visit fish landing centers and interaction with fishers in Nijhum Dwip	
SET BAG NET FISHERY IN CENTRAL COASTAL BANGLADESH (16-20 December)	16.12.2025	Arrival of BOBP team* at Dhaka from Chennai; Stay in Dhaka	Dr. Sharif Uddin, DoF officials, IUCN and BOBP team
	17.12.2025	BOBP team* Travel to Barguna from Dhaka; Stay in Barguna	
	18.12.2025	Consultative meeting	
	19.12.2025	Landing centre visit; meeting stakeholders	
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT COURSE ON EAFM (21-24 December)	21.12.2025 TO 24.12.2025	Capacity development course on EAFM	P. Krishnan, E Vivekanandan, K. S. Mohamed, Sharif Uddin, T. Velumani,

**BOBP team: Dr. E. Vivekanandan, International Consultant and Dr. T. Velumani, Project Scientist*

All the stakeholders for the consultative workshop were identified and informed of the programme through the department of fisheries and project consultant, requesting for their participation. Engagement with the local partners with similar/common mandate and insights in fisheries, and who will be executing the project in the one FMU, were considered as ideal to make the campaign effective.

Prior to travel to Bangladesh, the BOBP team conducted three online meetings in September 2025 with the department of fisheries and experts for coordination and to prepare the groundwork for the events.

4. Hatiya Consultative Workshop

On 25 September 2025, the BOBP and IUCN-Bangladesh jointly organized a Consultative Workshop for Scoping the fishery and biodiversity conservation in Hatiya and Nijhum Dwip.



Figure 2. Interaction with stakeholders related to Nijhum Dwip fishery during the consultative workshop

The specific objectives of the Workshop were to:

- Initiate the process of EAFM scoping and plan preparation;
 - Explore the feasibility of co-benefitting from fisheries and biodiversity conservation;
 - Identify potential collaborators and stakeholders and connect them with the process;
- and

The workshop was attended by 35 participants representing government departments including fisheries, forest, river police, coast guard, experts resource users and other stakeholders, and BOBP-IGO. The list of participants is placed in **Annex I**.

The Workshop was conducted in Bangla and English.

4.1 Field visits

On 25th September afternoon and 26th September, 2025, the BOBP and IUCN team, along with department of fisheries officials, experts and other stakeholders visited the following fish landing

centers, ice manufacturing plant, fish traders house and fishing villages located around the Hatiya and Nijhum Dwip islands.

- Surajamukhi fish landing center
- Namar Bazar fish landing center
- Monpura fishing village
- Fishing boat dock yard



Figure 3. The project team visited fish landing center, ice plant, boat dock yard, fishing village and held discussions on the fishery in Hatiya Island and Nijhum Dwip

The team interacted with a number of stakeholders including fishers, ice manufactures and traders to gain an insight into the characteristics, and issues and opportunities to improve the fisheries in the Island.

4.2 Meeting with IUCN

Nijhum Dwip is the common site for implementation of EAFM by BOBP (Component 1), MMA and livelihoods by IUCN (Components 2 & 3). Considering the opportunity for synergizing these components in Nijhum Dwip, the BOBP-IGO team visited the IUCN Country Office in Bangladesh and discussed potential areas of collaboration for grounding the project activities. IUCN has longstanding experience in conducting research in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Bangladesh and provides strong ground-level support. Both the teams agreed to share the proposed activities for the Nijhum Dwip MPA and explore opportunities for collaborative implementation.

From IUCN, the officials in the discussion included Ms. Bipasha Hussain, Country Representative; Dr. A.B.M. Sarowar Alam, Programme Manager; Mr. Mohammad Sultan Ahmed,

Senior Programme Officer; and Mr. Sk. Md. Saeef Ul Hoque Chishty, Programme Officer. From BOBP-IGO, Dr. E. Vivekanandan, International Consultant (BOBLME), and Dr. T. Velumani, Project Scientist, participated in the meeting.

5. Barguna Stakeholders Workshop

On 18 December 2025, the BOBP and IUCN-Bangladesh jointly organized a Consultative Workshop for Scoping the fishery and biodiversity conservation in Barguna.



Figure 4. Interaction with stakeholders related to Set Bag Net Fishery during the consultative workshop

The specific objectives of the Workshop were to:

- Initiate the process of EAFM scoping and plan preparation;
- Explore the feasibility of co-benefitting from fisheries and biodiversity conservation;
- Identify potential collaborators and stakeholders and connect them with the process; and
- Identify the capacity development needs.

The workshop was attended by 33 participants representing government departments including fisheries, forest, river police, coast guard, experts resource users and other stakeholders, and BOBP-IGO. The list of participants is placed in **Annex II**

The Workshop was conducted in Bangla and English.

5.1 Field visits

On 19 December, 2025 the BOBP and IUCN team, along with department of fisheries officials, experts and other stakeholders visited the following fish landing centers, ice manufacturing plant, fish traders house and fishing villages located around Barguna.

- Patharghata fish landing center
- Co-management model fishing village



Figure 5. The project team visited fish landing center and fishing village and held discussions on the fishery in Barguna

The team interacted with a number of stakeholders including fishers, traders and co-management model village to gain an insight into the characteristics, and issues and opportunities to improve the fisheries in the Barguna.

6. Proceedings of the Campaign for Nijhum Dwip

6.1 Observations for Scoping the Nijhum Dwip fishery in Bangladesh

From the Consultative Workshop, Field Campaign and meeting with different stakeholders in Hatiya and Nijhum Dwip, the following observations are made:

- Nijhum Dwip, (meaning “the Island of Silence”), located in central coastal Bangladesh under the administration of Hatiya Upazila in Noakhali District, is rich in biodiversity, and in recognition of its ecological significance, the Government of Bangladesh declared it a National Park in 2001. Historically, Nijhum Dwip was famous as a rich shrimp fishing

ground. Fishers from nearby Hatiya Island travel there, set up temporary shelters, and engage in fishing. However, the island is highly vulnerable to natural calamities, frequently experiencing cyclones and other coastal hazards. The historical use of the island, combined with increasing recognition of the urgent need for marine conservation in the face of overfishing and habitat degradation, led the Government of Bangladesh to declare Nijhum Dwip a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2019. Covering an area of 3,188 sq. km, approximately 2% of Bangladesh's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it is now one of the largest MPAs in the country.

- At present, Nijhum Dwip is densely populated and is home to around 30,000 people living in approximately 4,500 households, organized into cluster villages. Most residents belong to fishing communities engaged in fishing and related activities, such as working as boat crew, fish carriers, and in other post-harvest operations. In addition, about 3,577 hectares are under seasonal agriculture, where rice and other crops are cultivated, along with livestock rearing. Besides the islanders, many fishers from Hatiya also continue to fish in the waters surrounding Nijhum Dwip.
- Hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*) is the major species targeted around the island, within 20–80 km from the shore. The fishery is highly seasonal, with fishers obtaining large quantities of hilsa during May to October. In addition, small quantities of other species such as croakers, pangas, and rita are also caught. Fishers also harvest green crabs and shrimps along the mangrove areas of Nijhum Dwip. The fishery is of small-scale in nature and employ mostly trawls and gillnets. The trawlers are of small (< 3 days fishing), medium (3 to 5 days) and large size (> 5 days).
- Though Nijhum Dwip is declared as MPA, fishing is permitted. Clear zonation of fishing and non-fishing areas within the MPA is still to be notified by the government. IUCN has conducted studies and identified non-fishing zones in the MPA.

6.2 Challenges and needs highlighted during consultative workshop

- **Remoteness:** Nijhum Dwip is a remote island with limited transport facilities and with poor living condition. Majority of the fishers are very poor.
- **Regulating use of illegal and destructive fishing gear:** Fishers highlighted the harmful impacts of using small mesh-sized nets, as well as set bagnets and fyke nets, which indiscriminately catch fry and post-larvae of fish and shellfish, damaging the ecosystem. They also mentioned operation of illegal gear such as monofilament gill nets, which capture fish of all sizes. The size of fish and overall catch have decreased over the years. Legal measures such as mesh size regulation need to be effectively implemented to avoid juvenile capture. Fishing gear operation needs to be regulated according to specific fishing grounds (rivers, estuaries and deep sea) and vessels. Fishers further urged ban on double-layered nets through regulations enforced by administrative authorities.
- **Revising hilsa ban period:** Dissatisfaction was expressed with the current brood Hilsa ban period (October 4–25 in 2025). Participants suggested shifting the 22-day ban to mid-October, as was practiced in previous years, to better align with the breeding cycle. Fishers requested that a robust scientific study be conducted to accurately determine the Hilsa breeding period and declare a consistent ban period every year.



Figure 6. Images of fishing activity and consultative meeting in Nijhum Dwip

- **Submerged lands in the river hinder Hilsa migration:** Fishers highlighted that due to high siltation, submerged lands have formed across the riverine region, creating obstacles for Hilsa migration. This also restricts river water flow and significantly affects breeding and stock enhancement.
- **Resolving conflicts among the fishers:** There is a need to identify fishers who engage in riverine fishing and those who go to deep sea. Often, conflicts arise because riverine fishers, being small-scale and limited in scope of fishing, and sea-going fishers end up fishing in each other's areas, leading to disputes over resources. Concerns were also raised about increasing conflicts due to the growing number of trawlers.
- **Jellyfish bloom:** Concerns were raised over the increasing occurrence of jellyfish blooms and their potential ecological and economic consequences.
- **Increase social benefits:** Government provides ration during ban period, but does not provide any other significant social benefits.
- **Limited role of women:** Women role is very much limited either in harvest or post-harvest activities.
- **Additional livelihoods:** The number of fishers dependent on fishing has increased over the years, putting pressure on resources. To reduce pressure on fishing, promoting additional livelihood opportunities for fishing communities was strongly emphasized.
- **Improving safety at sea:** Fishers requested improved safety measures during high tides in the Dubochar region, where submerged chars become invisible and often cause accidents due to torn or lost nets.

- **Need for improving marketing mechanism:** The companies who buy fish give loan to the fishers; and the fishers are obliged to sell their catch to them and pay 10% of their sale as interest to the company.
- **Formation of local committees:** Each ghat in Hatiya and Nijhum Dwip has an association with an elected President and all fishers are members. In Hatiya Island alone, there are 22 ghats. Fishers showed willingness to form co-management committees at each ghat in Hatiya, comprising fishers, traders, union chairmen, and representatives from the Fisheries Department, Forest Department, and other stakeholders. These committees should be officially registered with the Government of Bangladesh.
- **Coordination of Committees:** To ensure sustainability of the proposed committees, participants stressed the importance of collaboration among members, administrative bodies, and cross-communication between different ghats by establishing a Coordination Committee.
- **Capacity-building programs:** Fishers urged the need for training programs on critical topics, including oil spill management and the application of the EAFM.

7. Summary

Considering the prevailing situation in Nijhum Dwip, the BOBLME project could consider the following for planning the activities:

- Nijhum Dwip is a remote island with many challenges such as difficulty in approach and lack of infrastructure. Poor living conditions and socioeconomic backwardness exacerbates the situation. Nijhum Dwip is a designated MPA and a biodiversity hotspot and a large vulnerable human population is dependent on fishery resources. It is imperative to conserve the biodiversity, protect the MPA and support ecological and human well-being through good governance.
- As fishing, particularly fishing for hilsa, is the lifeline of communities in Hatiya Island and Nijhum Dwip, best efforts need to be taken up for sustaining the fishery.
- Fishing zones in the Nijhum Dwip MPA have been demarcated as fishing and non-fishing zones, but yet to be implemented. If the zonation is effectively implemented, the fishing zones will be benefitted from ‘spillover’ effect from the non-fishing zone, thereby co-benefits from biodiversity & ecosystem conservation and sustainable fisheries can be realised. Considering this, the ideal FMU for implementing EAFM is the “*Fishery in Nijhum Dwip MPA*”.
- For realizing co-benefits, awareness building among the fishers and other stakeholders on the need, benefits and operational practices for adopting regulations in the fishing and non-fishing zones is vital through effective communication.
- Capacity development on livelihood-focused interventions by creating new income streams for individuals and communities by introducing sustainable, low-impact activities, and assisting communities in accessing wider markets is important. It would be appropriate to focus on enhancing the existing livelihood strategies of those most vulnerable to conservation-imposed resource access restrictions as a means of building good community relations.

- Leveraging the existing fisher associations into co-management structure with increased participation of government and non-government officials, researchers and other stakeholders could be a critical intervention to resolve issues such as illegal and destructive fishing, developing alternate livelihoods and address other basic infrastructure requirements.
- Effective intervention through coordination of BOBP-IGO, IUCN, Department of Fisheries and Department of Forest shall meet the objectives of implementing EAFM (Component 1 of BOBLME project), and MMA (Component 2) and improving the livelihood (Component 4)

8. Proceedings of the Campaign for Set Bag Net Fishery

From the Consultative Workshop, Field Campaign and meeting with different stakeholders in Barguna the following observations are made:

- The Estuarine Set Bag Net (ESBN) is a traditional small-mesh, fixed gear fishery operated mainly in estuarine and nearshore waters of Bangladesh. It targets a wide variety of small pelagics, shrimps, juveniles of hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*), and other finfish. ESBN is predominantly artisanal, contributing significantly to coastal livelihoods, though often associated with high juvenile and bycatch mortality. Fishing units are simple canoes and small motorised boats with fixed nets set in shallow estuarine zones.
- **Seasonal Fishing Bans:** Several temporal fishing restrictions have been introduced to support fish stock regeneration and protect critical breeding and nursery periods. A 65-day marine fishing ban is implemented annually between May and July to conserve marine fish resources during the peak spawning season. To protect hilsa populations, a 22-day fishing ban is enforced during October, coinciding with the peak breeding migration period. Furthermore, a two-month ban from March to April is imposed to conserve juvenile hilsa, locally known as jatka, thereby supporting stock replenishment and long-term sustainability.
- **Spatial Restrictions and Protected Areas:** Fishing activities by Engine-Set Bag Net (ESBN) operators are restricted in designated hilsa sanctuaries and marine protected areas (MPAs). ESBN operations are excluded from ecologically sensitive zones such as the Swatch of No Ground Marine Protected Area, which serves as an important habitat for marine biodiversity and fish spawning grounds. These spatial management measures aim to reduce habitat degradation and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems.
- **Size Limits and Conservation Measures:** To prevent overexploitation of juvenile fish, a minimum legal catch size of 23 cm has been established for hilsa. This measure is intended to ensure that fish are allowed to mature and reproduce before capture, contributing to sustainable fishery management.
- **Entry Restrictions and Licensing:** The Marine Fisheries Act (MFA) 2020 introduced licensing and fishing permit systems to regulate access to marine fisheries. These measures are designed to control fishing effort, improve monitoring of fishing activities, and strengthen compliance with fisheries regulations.

- **Co-management and Community Participation:** In addition to regulatory measures, some co-management initiatives have been implemented through local fisheries committees and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These initiatives encourage community participation in fisheries governance, awareness generation, conflict resolution, and resource conservation. Co-management approaches are intended to improve compliance, strengthen stakeholder ownership, and support sustainable fisheries management at the local level.

8.1 Challenges and needs highlighted during consultative workshop

- **Operation of Set Bag Nets in Estuarine and Nearshore Areas Despite Existing Regulations:** One of the major challenges in the Set Bag Net (SBN) fishery in Bangladesh is the continued operation of nets in estuarine and shallow nearshore waters, despite regulations requiring fishing activities to be conducted beyond the 10-m depth limit. Estuarine areas are highly productive ecosystems that function as critical nursery and breeding grounds for many commercially important fish and shrimp species, including hilsa and several demersal resources. Fishing in these sensitive habitats results in the capture of large quantities of juveniles and spawning individuals, thereby affecting stock recruitment and long-term fish productivity. The persistence of SBN operations in restricted areas is often linked to socioeconomic realities. Many small-scale fishers depend on estuarine fishing due to lower operational costs, limited vessel capacity, fuel constraints, and proximity to landing centers. Weak monitoring and enforcement capacity further contribute to non-compliance. In several cases, overlapping institutional responsibilities and insufficient patrol resources make it difficult to effectively regulate fishing activities in nearshore waters. As a result, the ecological objectives of the depth restriction are not fully achieved.
- **Concerns Related to Cod-end Mesh Size:** Another significant concern relates to the use of small cod-end mesh sizes in set-bag nets. Although regulations prohibit cod-end mesh sizes below 30 mm, smaller mesh sizes are still widely used in practice. Small mesh cod-ends retain juvenile fish, shrimp larvae, and non-target species, leading to high levels of bycatch and growth overfishing. This reduces the opportunity for fish stocks to reach maturity and reproduce, ultimately undermining the sustainability of the fishery. The issue is compounded by the economic incentives associated with mixed-species catches. Fishers often prefer smaller mesh sizes because they maximize total catch volume, including low-value juveniles that still generate income in local markets. In many areas, there is limited awareness regarding the long-term ecological and economic impacts of juvenile harvesting. Inadequate inspection mechanisms and irregular enforcement of gear regulations also contribute to continued non-compliance. Addressing this challenge requires not only stricter monitoring but also awareness programs, incentives for selective fishing practices, and the promotion of alternative livelihood options during restrictive periods.
- **Need for Practical and Sustainable Fishing Measures:** The fishery also faces challenges in adopting practical and economically viable measures to promote sustainable fishing practices. While several regulations and seasonal bans exist, implementation often remains difficult because many fishing households are highly

dependent on daily fishing income. Restrictions without adequate livelihood support can create economic hardship and reduce compliance among fishers. There is therefore a growing need for management approaches that balance conservation objectives with socioeconomic realities. Practical measures may include introducing more selective fishing gears, improving gear design to reduce juvenile catch, strengthening community-based co-management systems, enhancing fisher awareness and training, and providing alternative or supplementary livelihood opportunities. Improved access to social protection schemes, credit facilities, and market support can also help reduce pressure on fisheries resources. In addition, stronger scientific data collection and evidence-based management are essential for improving sustainability outcomes. Reliable information on catch composition, fishing effort, stock status, and habitat use is necessary to design effective regulations and adaptive management measures. Collaborative engagement among government agencies, researchers, local communities, NGOs, and fisheries stakeholders is critical for building trust, improving compliance, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of Bangladesh's set bag net fisheries.

- ***Importance of Collaborative and Evidence-Based Management:*** Discussions on SBN fisheries have repeatedly emphasized that regulatory enforcement alone may not be sufficient to address existing challenges. Sustainable management requires collaborative solutions that involve fishers, local communities, policymakers, scientists, and civil society organizations. Participatory decision-making can improve stakeholder ownership and increase acceptance of conservation measures. Evidence-based management is equally important. Scientific assessments, regular monitoring, and socioeconomic studies help identify priority areas for intervention and support adaptive management. Strengthening institutional coordination among fisheries, coast guard, environmental, and local governance authorities can further improve monitoring and compliance. Through integrated and collaborative approaches, Bangladesh can work toward balancing livelihood security with the conservation of marine and estuarine fishery resources.

9. Capacity Development Course on EAFM

9.1 Objectives and Approach to the CDC

To plan and implement EAFM in the two FMUs, the BOBP-IGO conducted a Capacity Development Course (CDC) to the prospective practitioners of EAFM in Bangladesh.

The broad objectives of the CDC on EAFM were:

- To enhance understanding of EAFM;
- To develop practical skills of fisheries practitioners to implement EAFM in fishery in Nijhum Dwip MPA and Set Bag Net Fishery; and
- To enhance understanding of multidimensional issues and find effective solutions to address them by following an expanded ecosystem approach.

The Course was strategically placed as a refresher and skill development course to elevate the practitioners who have basic familiarity with the governance issues to engage in effective consultation with experts and other stakeholders with scientific insights and novel thinking.



Figure 7. Inaugural session and active engagement of participants in the activity sessions

Dr. E. Vivekanandan, Senior Scientific Consultant, BOBP-IGO, welcomed the participants and provided an overview of the BOBLME Phase II Project, explaining that it originated from the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project launched in 2009 by FAO with support from GEF and Norad. He noted that the first phase from 2009 to 2015 resulted in the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme, which laid the foundation for the ongoing BOBLME Phase II Project from 2024 to 2028 being implemented by FAO, IUCN, SEAFDEC, and BOBP-IGO. He emphasized that the current phase focuses on implementing the Strategic Action Programme through sustainable fisheries management and the reduction of Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing, with pilot EAFM initiatives already underway in sites such as the Pichavaram and Coringa Mangrove Ecosystems. He added that the training aims to strengthen participants understanding and capacity to apply EAFM principles and to develop practical fisheries management plans.

In his address as Chief Guest, **Dr. Md. Abdur Rouf**, Director General, Department of Fisheries, appreciated the efforts of BOBP IGO in advancing the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management in Bangladesh. He highlighted the ecological and socio-economic significance of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem and acknowledged the shared transboundary challenges of overexploitation, habitat degradation, and pollution affecting marine fisheries. Emphasizing the need to move beyond conventional sector-based management, he noted that EAFM provides a balanced and practical framework for addressing these challenges.

The training brought together officials and practitioners from the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI), IUCN, WorldFish, researchers from Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, fisheries associations, and civil society organizations such as the Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS) and Dwip Unnayan Songstha. The list of participants is placed in **Annex III**

The course combines theoretical sessions, group exercises, and interactive discussions, drawing on ground level insights from multiple stakeholders. By the end of the programme, participants are expected to collaboratively develop EAFM plans for the selected pilot fisheries, thereby contributing to more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient fisheries management in Bangladesh.

The CDC was conducted in English.

9.2 Review of the Course

The course was delivered entirely by three trainers: **Dr. E. Vivekanandan**, International Consultant, BOBLME, BOBP-IGO, **Dr. K. Sunil Mohamed**, Former Principal Scientist, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Kochi, India, **Dr. Shariff Uddin**, Rtd, Director of Fisheries, Bangladesh and **Dr. Ananthan, P.S.**, Principal Scientist, ICAR-CIFE, Mumbai and supported by **Dr. T Velumani**, Project Scientist, BOBP-IGO. At the end of each day, the training team of 4 members had a feedback session and detailed planning of the following day.

The Course consisted eight Modules:

Module 1. Overview of EAFM

Module 2. Define & Scope the Fishery Management Unit (FMU)

Module 3. Identify & prioritise stakeholders

Module 4. Identify & prioritise Issues and goals

Module 5. Establishing co-management arrangement

Module 6. Develop EAFM plan

Module 7. Implement the plan

Module 8. Monitor, evaluate and adapt

On Day 4, sessions were held on Theory of Change, Capacity Development Need Assessment, Quiz and Course Evaluation.

The course ran seamlessly and at a good pace throughout. The participants actively participated in the entire Course. About half of the time of the Course was allotted to group exercises that generated lot of interest, and were found to promote better understanding, active involvement and real-world application. The participants had hands-on experience of preparing EAFM model plans for the two fisheries, and more importantly, got an insight into the procedure for preparing the plan. The participants took great interest in the role play on conflict resolution for the two FMUs.



Figure 8. Participants presenting their group activity outcome and also role play session

The Course concluded with feedback from the participants, next steps to be taken up, and closing remarks by **Mr. Shoukot Kabir Chowdhury**

9.3 Performance in the Quiz and Course Evaluation and Feedback

At the end, the participants evaluated the Course by answering a questionnaire on their learning experience, course design and course delivery. Post-course evaluation and feedback shows that participants rate the administration of the course as good.

9.4 Outcomes from the CDC

The CDC resulted in a number of key outcomes and lessons learnt, that are pivotal to implementing EAFM in the two FMUs in Bangladesh.

Outcome 1. Emergence of more capable and effective practitioners of EAFM

As the main focus of the CDC was on developing practical skills, the trainees developed skill for scoping, stakeholder engagements, developing EAFM planning, implementation, and assessment of capacity development initiatives in the two specific FMUs. The trainees can potentially serve as Trainers in future capacity development courses.

Outcome 2. Relevance of the Course to the participants

Many participants in the CDC were the right target audience, as they will be directly involved in the preparation of Scoping Report, EAFM Plan and Implementation. The audience was a mix of middle-level officials and researchers and their younger colleagues, with the prospect of providing the required experience as well as field-level data collection and interaction with the stakeholders. The participants learnt a lot personally, and will be able to apply the learning in implementing EAFM in the two FMUs. As adult learners, they could understand the relevance of the course to the task and to ensure motivation and sustained involvement.

Outcome 3. Platform to connect of the trainers, trainees and the project team to the FMUs

Two members of the BOBP team visited the FMUs in the previous week, conducted field visits, stakeholder consultations and meetings along with the team that will be engaged with the project to implement EAFM. These field campaigns have facilitated proper understand of the characteristics of the selected FMUs, issues, potential management actions, and prospects of stakeholder engagement. The CDC served as a platform to connect the trainers, trainees and the project team involved with the two FMUs.

Outcome 4. The training team defined the success of the Course

Trainers are responsible for not only delivery of content, but also the whole planning and organisation of delivery on a daily basis. The training team consisted members (Dr E Vivekanandan (India), Dr Sunil Mohamed (India), Dr. Shariff Uddin (Bangladesh) and Dr. Ananthan, P.S. (India)) who have conducted many EAFM trainings in multiple countries in the

past in the region. The training team worked together closely and planned meticulously beforehand everyday (content, delivery as well as logistics of each session). The team adapted to the requirements of the trainees, considering the characteristics of the two FMUs. Their experience, supported by Dr T Velumani (India) enabled good delivery style, approach and preparation, and success of the course.

Outcome 5. Aligning the course agenda, presentation materials and group activities to the specific needs

Aligning the training course agenda with requirements ensures that the training effectively addresses the needs of the project and its implementers. For the CDC, the course content, delivery methods, communication with examples were prepared considering the course objectives in the specific FMUs. The agenda and contents developed in the CDC can serve as a model for similar CDCs to be conducted in other countries in the BOBLME project.

Participants list for the Consultation Workshop in Nijhum Dwip



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project Phase II (BOBLME II)

Consultative Workshop for Implementing BOBLME project in Nijhum Dwip

25 September 2025, Hatiya, Bangladesh

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Participants List for the Stakeholders Consultation Meeting in Central Coastal Bangladesh



**Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project Phase II (BOBLME II)
Stakeholders Consultation Meeting on Preparing Scoping Report and
EAFM Plan for Set-Bagnet Fishery in Central Coastal Bangladesh**

18 December 2025 | Jagorani Chakro Foundation, Barguna, Bangladesh

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Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project Phase II (BOBLME II)

Capacity Development Course on Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) in Bangladesh

Venue: Hotel Bengal Blueberry
2025

Date: 21-24 December

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