

**CHEVRON'S SEISMIC SURVEY, USAID'S NISHORGO
PROJECT, THE LAWACHARA NATIONAL PARK OF
BANGLADESH: A CRITICAL REVIEW**

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Abstract

The paper mainly reviews the USAID-funded Nishorgo project which is an environmental project undertaken for the conservation of the officially declared protected areas of Bangladesh. This project is based on a co-management approach having the major features of Public-Private Partnership arrangements. Both state and non-state actors including the local communities are the participants in the project. However, the operation of this project coincides with the business interests of the US-based multinational company- Chevron in the project sites. In fact, it conducted a seismic survey in the Lawachhara forest areas of north-eastern Bangladesh. But the survey raised a public controversy as it violated the municipal laws of the country on wildlife conservation.

This paper takes a Gramscian perspective to review the two different but related MNC and donor projects. In this regard, the first project of seismic survey provides a case study for the analysis of Chevron's operation in Bangladesh, while the second project reviews USAID sponsored Nishorgo. Based on field works, interviews, and content analysis of local newspapers, this paper finds that both projects appear to have some other purposes which are largely related to the economic interests of the USA. In both cases, members of the local public and private agencies appear to partner with their international cohorts, and neglect the genuine responsibility of conserving the forests, thus further complicating the principles of public-private partnership empirically.

Key words: Public-Private Partnership, co-management approach, Nishorgo project, Chevron, USAID, forestry project, conservation, co-option, historic bloc.

Introduction

Many scholars recognise that under the hegemonic impact of neoliberal policy agendas- role of state (if not the regulatory capacity of state) is now in contraction. In fact, market driven neoliberal policy has created a new political space for the interplay of both state and non-state actors (e.g. ‘civil society’, ‘business organisation’, ‘community’ etc.). The interactions between the state and non-state actors are broadly understood in the context of some approaches, namely, ‘collaborative initiative’, ‘co-management’, ‘GO-NGO partnership’, or ‘public-private partnership’ (Jessop, 2002; Sassen, 1996; Haque, 2004; Evans, 1989, Levy and Newell, 2002). Scholars are relying on the concepts like ‘post-Westphalian state’, ‘post-development’, or ‘post-global state’ ‘complex multilateralism’ etc. to encapsulate this public-private trend (Hettne, 1996: 12). To understand the nature of such trend, scholars and practitioners also prefer using the term global ‘governance’, ‘hybrid governance’ rather than government (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992; Messner and Nuscheler, 1996; cited in Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2006; Hupe and Meijs, 2000).

The impact of neoliberal policy on governance is also evident in Bangladesh. Since its independence, the country has been witnessing profound changes as the participation of the non-state actors in state governance is growing. Such changes are well visible in various partnership projects involving state, INGOs/NGOs, international organisations and more recently business entities. This trend in governance has begun to find more grounds with the transition of the country into a democratic government system since the 1990s.

The state is undertaking many public-private partnership (PPP) projects under different names in collaboration with the donor agencies¹ (Haque, 2004: 274-275). The whole process of PPP has now opened up a new terrain² and thus replacing the traditional development sectors in many cases. The introduction of co-management approach in the forestry sector³ is one of the glaring examples in this regard.

¹ They mainly include the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

² Sectors are health, population, family planning, micro-credit, crop storage, capacity building, women and children, youth development, human rights, environmental issues and social forestry sector etc.

³ However, the ADB funded Sundarban Biodiversity Conservation Project: 1999-2006 was the first community based approach. But the ADB suspended the loan for the project in September 2003, on account of “serious implementation delays and lack of proper financial management of the project” (Huda, 2004: 13-16).

The so called co-management approach came to light in September 2000 when the Government of Bangladesh signed the Tropical Forest Conservation Fund Agreement (TFCFA)⁴ with the United States Government. Under this agreement, United States transferred first debt-for-nature funds in 2004 to protect and ensure the sustainability of biodiversity of the tropical forests in Bangladesh (Withanage, 2004). The state is now implementing this concept of co-management approach which was originally defined by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is defined as “a situation in which two or more social actors, define and guarantee amongst themselves sharing management functions, entitlements and responsibilities for a given territory, or set of natural resources” (cited in Roy, 2004: 9). To this end, an independent grant-making institution namely *Arannyak Foundation*⁵ was established in Bangladesh in light of the TCFA.

As a corollary to the TFCFA, on 24 February 2004, Nishorgo, a United States Assistance for International Development (USAID)-sponsored forestry project, was also launched in the Bhawal National Park in Bangladesh. The project officially aims at developing and implementing the IUCN advocated community-based approach for the preservation of protected areas of Bangladesh. In this connection, a Washington-based International Resources Group (IRG) was nominated by the USAID as an implementing partner with three other subcontracted local NGOs. It is a five-year long project⁶. It mainly refers to the forestry project undertaken in five different sites of north-east Bangladesh. The sites are located in the Lawachhara National Park, the Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, the Satchari Reserve Forest, the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, and the Teknaf Game Reserve.

However, the seismic survey done by Chevron at the Lawachhara National Park has brought the project under lime light. Furthermore, the approval of the government to Chevron for carrying out the survey has raised few eyebrows. It is now a question- how was Chevron, a US

⁴ It came into being under the Tropical Forest Conservation Act of 1998 (105 US C 214 of 29.07.1998). It is an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act (22 US C2151) for facilitating the protection of tropical forests through debt reduction.

⁵ *Arannyak* has the mandate to mobilize resources in the form of grants, loans and contributions from international donors, multinational companies, the Government of Bangladesh, private individuals and organizations. In its Board of Directors, members are from the USAID, Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF), and from several non-governmental organizations. International Resources Group (IRG), a Washington based consultancy organisation is a consulting firm for the project (<http://www.arannayk.org>)

⁶ In addition to the forestry projects, a fishery project, namely the Management of Aquatic Ecosystems through Community Husbandry (MACH) was launched with the partnership of the USAID.⁶ After its completion, the fishery project is originally planned to be merged with the Nishorgo project.

based oil giant able to do so in a serious violation of the existing Wild Life Preservation Act 1973 (amended) of Bangladesh? Indeed, there exists a government recognised co-management body of Nishorgo project at Lawachhara to help conserve the forest. Above all, the survey conducted in a government declared doubly protected Lawachhhara Forest has largely revealed some grey zones; given the USA's business and economic interests in Bangladesh, derived from Chevron's operation here. In this context, role of the state and the actors involved in Nishorgo project in particular are very vital for the analysis of the project. However, a close look at the functioning of the co-management approach to forestry project in Bangladesh broadly unveils the principles of Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

This paper aims to broadly explore the grey areas by reviewing the notion of PPP through which the state has attempted to conserve the forests in north-eastern Bangladesh. The analysis in the paper is based on an argument that the operation of Nishorgo project is perhaps more for facilitating US economic interests rather than for conserving the so called biodiversity and tropical forests of Bangladesh. It uses the Gramscian perspective to critically examine how the nexus between local and international cohorts promote certain norms and values largely disregarding the genuine issue of forest conservation.

The event of seismic survey at Lawachhara and the response of the actors offer only an important case study in this regard. Indeed, a review of the components of the forestry project being implemented at Lawachhara National Park and the analysis of implications of such project for environmental project are also very much pertinent to understand the grey areas.

The paper is divided into four sections. Section-I of the paper provides a theoretical discussion. Section-II contains the case study on the seismic survey and the reactions of different actors, made in response. Section-III contains a brief review of the programmes of the forestry project of Lawachhara. Section-IV of the paper focuses on the implications of USAID funded PPP project for the conservation of forest. Finally, the paper ends with concluding remarks.

I. Public-private partnership, nishorgo project: the relevance of Gramscian perspective

This section broadly deals with the concept of PPP and its critique to examine the relevance of Gramscian perspectives. This section also discusses the context of the USAID-funded forestry project in Bangladesh. The whole discussion is done in three separate but interconnected divisions.

The concept of PPP

PPP is defined as the “working arrangements based on a mutual commitment (over and above that implied in any contract) between a public sector organization with any organization outside of the public sector” (Bovaird, 2004: 200). Indeed, the co-management approach which is now in operation under Nishorgo project falls within this definition of PPP as it includes both state machineries and non-state organisations for the conservation of biodiversity and tropical forest.

The basic tenets of the PPP are of two folds. Firstly, it holds that in most countries, the public sector is an inefficient service provider. Secondly, the burdens of the taxpayers can better be shared by involving the private sector in the provision of services. Broadly speaking, the PPP is understood as a market-enabling strategy by which state can harness the contribution of non-state actors of both corporate and civil varieties to the processes of governance. (Linder, 1999; Savas, 2000; Bingman and Pitsvada, 1997; cited in Miraftab, 2004: 90-91). From a liberal institutional perspective, it is explained in terms of the functional logic of governance. It is advocated in conjunction with the political incentives for non-state and state actors to demand and supply institutional innovation in general and public-private institutions in particular.

Andonova (2005: 5-13), also discusses the issue of mitigating participatory gap between global governance and societies. This is because PPP is able to offer resources, information, and skills unavailable for making governance of the public institutions effective. In this context, she brings the issue of “agency slack”⁷ in the multi-stakeholder structure of public-private institutions into discussion. Accordingly she suggests that PPP has the potential to decrease the implementation and compliance costs of cooperation by engaging important non-state constituencies in the rule making process. She also signifies the growing political and financial role of the transnational actors including corporate organisations, NGOs and international organisations to justify PPP for governance.

But the problem with the concept of PPP is that it means different things to different people; and thus there is no consensus over the concept. To address this difficulty, Brinkerhoff (2002: 19-20) divides the perspectives on PPP into three broad categories- normative, reactive

⁷ It originates from the specialized knowledge, asymmetric information, and the presence of multiple or collective principals, often with divergent interests (Andonova, 2005: 15)

and instrumental perspectives. Normative perspective of such partnership between state and non-state actors explains it as “inherently and ethically good for development, empowerment, participation, and accountability”. Reactive perspective, advocated by the international organisations and states admires such partnership “to counter criticisms of exclusion, defend their own activities, and fortify public relations”. Instrumental perspective, often legitimatised by the experts and advisers; explains it “as a means or strategic tool to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness” (Brinkerhoff, 2002: 19–20; cited in Haque, 2004: 273). The USAID and Center for Economic Development (2006) also came up with four types of PPP depending on its functions. They categorise the concept of PPP as: advocacy; norms and standards developing; iii. resource-sharing and coordinating and developing expertise; iv. market-harnessing for development.

However, the concept of PPP is not beyond any criticism. In the study of Public Administration, the concept is criticised for being part of ‘new public management approach’ which is itself founded on neoliberal orthodoxy which holds that, “the state and its interventions are obstacles to economic and social development” (Clark, 2002: 77). PPP is also condemned for sidelining the issue of equity and distributional impacts in relation to the interests of the underprivileged (e.g., USAID 2002, 1997; Fiszbein and Lowden 1999; DFID 1999; Bennett 1998; UNCHS 1985; cited in Mirafab, 2004). Thus, the concept of PPP is often described as a “window-dressing and co-optation rather than a radically new, more inclusive form of governance” (Carino, 2002; cited in Andonova, 2005: 37). Even Andonova, who also advocates for PPP in her liberal Principle Agent Model, acknowledges that PPP is necessarily a political creation. To this end, she touches upon the influence of transnational corporations of the industrialised countries in globally pursuing their business interests. According to her, the industrialised countries, however, have little to lose as it offers a scope of inclusion of their transnational actors into international programmes. In this regard, Andonova (2005: 4) comments:

International organizations, acting as governance agents of states, along with powerful transnational entrepreneurs are the chief political drivers of public-private cooperation. Both the theoretical and empirical analysis reveal that public-private institutions do not simply crop up to fill all or even the most urgent governance gaps; instead they tend to focus on areas of cooperation where the interests of powerful state and transnational actors intersect.

Therefore, such PPP makes the developing countries more sceptical as there remains the chance of power-shifting away from the weak towards transnational societal actors (King 2001; Witte,

Streck, and Benner 2003; United Nations General Assembly 2001; cited in Andonova, 2005: 19). Taking this power-dimension of such partnership into account, Lankatilleke (1999) makes an observation that, “in partnerships among communities, government, and the private sector, it is important to realize who is participating on whose terrain and in whose process” (cited in Mirafatab, 2004: 4).

In fact, scholars who criticise the concept of PPP, have obvious reasons to be worried about as it is beyond doubt that business in general, and transnational corporations (TNCs) in particular, have become a political force to be reckoned with. TNCs now have huge financial and human resources at their disposal to become politically influential. Even the United Nations introduced Global Compact in 2000 to exploit the resources of private business for global public welfare. But in examining this trend, scholars tend to present their argument from a functionalist perspective reflecting largely on the management aspects of global affairs (Fuchs and Lederer, 2007: 1-2). In this regard, references are only made to the political power of business “in terms of comparisons in the size of TNCs versus small national economies, the cornering of global markets in certain products by a few companies, or the share of intra-firm trade in world trade” (Ferguson and Mansbach, 1999; Finger and Allouche, 2002; Thomas, 2000; cited in Fuchs and Lederer, 2007: 2). In effect, the analysis of PPP, in many cases, appears to be devoid of demonstrating “the pursuit of interests and the struggle for influence” of the actors (Fuchs and Lederer, 2007: 2).

To avoid the definitional weaknesses of business power, Fuchs and Lederer (ibid: 4-11), however, analyse the multidimensionality of power rather than coming up with certain categorisations of PPP. They employ instrumental, structural and discursive approaches for assessing the influence of business organisations in a PPP project. For them, instrumental approaches refer to actor oriented power which is direct or relational. It entails traditional political activities performed by a business entity in the forms of lobbying, campaign, party finance, recruiting electoral candidates etc (ibid: 4). Their structural approaches to business power indicate agenda setting power of the business enterprises. In such case, business enterprises derive power from the material structures of PPP project “underlying behavioral options and allocating indirect and direct decision-making power” (ibid: 5). Yet, to understand business power, Fuchs and Lederer identify certain difficulties in employing these instrumental and structural approaches: firstly, the instrumental approaches which see power in terms of party

finance, campaign- “may suffer from poor data or difficulties in attributing causal influence”; and secondly structural approaches “may not ‘leave a trace’ to begin with” (ibid: 6).

The instrumental and structural approaches also might blur the understanding of power which is not directly employed by a multinational national company (MNC). Problem is more intense, if the business enterprises are not direct participants in a PPP; but have broad economic and business interest. In such case, there might be some other agency; powerful enough to act and create a structure for protecting common interests on behalf of an MNC in a given area. The approaches invite further obscurity if the given area is explicitly non-economic and based on certain normative framework (e.g. environment). In addressing these lacunas inherent in the approaches, Fuchs and Lederer ponder on discursive approaches which treat power from a sociological perspective. Discursive approaches explain the concept of power as “a function of norms, ideas, and social institutions” which is “reflected in discourse, communicative practices, and social institutions” (ibid: 9). According to them, such power “influences the frames of policy problems and solutions...” (ibid). In fact, in their overall analysis of discursive approaches, they discuss systems theory and critical perspectives of power, based on Foucauldian and Gramscian thoughts, only to demonstrate the importance of discourse analysis.

Gramscian perspectives

Fuch and Lederer, in describing discursive power, however, are not very much specific in analysing the ‘life’ or ‘the internal dynamics’ of an institution in which particular actors become major role players. They also do not put forward a detailed account of how such power is applied in a certain institution of governance where actors across national boundaries are engaged in the interplay of interests. Thus specific analysis of such structures is very much important. Indeed, the structure comes into existence through a bargaining process, not necessarily by means of a “pluralistic contest among equals, but rather is embedded within broader relations of power” (Levy and Newell, 2007: 85). In this context, some of the concepts used by Antonio Gramsci appear to be more relevant. Especially his concepts of ‘hegemony’, ‘hegemonic stability’, and ‘historic bloc’ are useful to comprehend the interaction of the unequal actors who are bounded together by a normative and ideological framework.

For Gramsci, hegemony refers to the leadership assumed by one or a group of actors in certain social, political and economic structures. For doing so, the potential hegemon or an

established hegemon does not necessarily rely on the coercive elements rather makes concessions to the subordinates (Cox, 1994: 51). In the words of Levy and Newell (2007: 86):

Hegemony is not dependent on coercive control by a small elite, but rather rests on coalitions and compromises that provide a measure of political and material accommodation with other groups, and on ideologies that convey a mutuality of interests.

Under the circumstances, civil society institutions offer necessary moral and intellectual leadership for the stability in the hegemonic leadership. They play a major role to project a certain set of interests as the general interest by offering legitimacy and ideological reproduction. For Gramsci, civil society institutions indeed have dual existence- first one as an “extended state” to offset the necessity of using coercion; and other one as a “key site of political contestation” resulting from the relative autonomy they enjoy from economic structures and state authority (Ibid: 87). In this context, Gramsci refers to the term ‘historic bloc’. This ‘historic bloc’ indicates the alliances among various social groupings and also the particular configurations of material, organisational, and discursive structure for the stabilization and reproduction of relations of production. For Gramsci (1971: 181; cited in Levy and Newell, 2007: 87), it means:

not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity . . . the development and expansion of the [dominant] group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion . . . In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups.

However, Levy and Newell (2007), in examining prospect of employing Gramscian thoughts in the analysis of environmental governance, shed light on the critiques also. For instance, Germain and Kenny (1998) express doubt- whether Gramscian concept “offers a coherent perspective on the relationship between economic structure, ideology, and agency” (cited in Levy and Newell, 2007: 89). They also raise question over the application of state-civil society relations in international relations as there is the absence of a supra-national authority or a “corresponding structure of concrete political authority”(Germain and Kenny, 1998: 17; cited in *ibid*: 90). Nevertheless, in defence of the relevance of Gramscian perspective, Levy and Newell (2007: 90) argue that,

hegemony retains validity in describing the stabilization of a specific ensemble of economic and discursive relations that bind a network of actors within a framework of international institutions. This framework includes international agencies that exercise normative and disciplinary sanctions, if not sovereign powers. Similarly, Gramsci’s concept of civil society has application if emergent international NGOs play the same dual role envisaged by Gramsci; as semiautonomous arenas of cultural and ideological struggle, and also as key allies in securing hegemonic stability. They also praise Gramscian perspective as it is capable of exposing the interplay of forces operative at multiple and intersecting levels (*ibid*: 90-91). Indeed, Robert Cox, while reflecting

on Gramsci's concept of historicism, puts emphasis on the need for contextualising the concepts to make them relevant for analysis. According to Cox (1994: 50):

A concept, in Gramsci's thought, is loose and elastic and attains precision only when brought into contact with a particular situation which it helps to explain- a contact which also develops the meaning of the concept'

The context of Nishorgo project

Nishorgo project is, indeed, based on a certain normative framework of conserving the forests and ensuring better livelihood of the forest dwellers. The application of co-management approach for the forest conservation in Bangladesh has witnessed incorporation of the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) and its subservient Department of Forest of Bangladesh (DoE), certain private and transnational organisations, and the local communities in the project. Not only so, the project is being funded by the USAID, which implements development programmes in conformity with US foreign policy.

The official mission of USAID more recently is guided by the objectives of globally promoting national security also in collaboration with the State Department. The Recently published *Strategic Plan* is the documentary evidence in this regard (US State Department and USAID, 2007). The publication provided the necessary rationales for the institutional merger of security interests of the USA with that of development assistance offered by the USAID. Thus it is needless to mention that energy security is a very important and sensitive component of US national security⁸. In fact, the US House of Representatives' bar in 2005 on selling UNOCAL to China on the pretext of "national security" is a glaring example in this regard. Thus the operation of Nishorgo project in Bangladesh poses a dilemma for the USAID in the conservation of forest. This is because Chevron which is the major financial contributor to US economy also operates in areas where this Nishorgo project is functioning. Therefore, the dilemma for the USAID is generated from the importance of ensuring security of global energy supplies to the USA in particular.

In this regard, the event of seismic survey done by Chevron in Lawachhara National Park for assessing gas reserve has put the purpose of operating USAID-funded forestry project in doubt. Indeed, all the sites selected for the project are located well in the Surma Basin, This basin is also known as the Eastern fold belt, broadly- Chittagong-Tripura fold belt; and it is identified

⁸ available at http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/primer.html, accessed on 2 March 2008.

in 2001 as one of the most prosperous belts in terms of the existing and future gas reserves⁹ (US Geological Survey-Bangladesh Gas Assessment Team, 2001: 2-9). Indeed, Chevron Bangladesh is now operating in some of those areas identified in the survey.

Interestingly, Chevron¹⁰ is in separate PPP agreement with the USAID to deliver services in the areas of operation as part of their “corporate social responsibility” in the north-east of Bangladesh.¹¹ This partnership, in fact, is the result of a new business model of public-private partnership launched by the USAID in 2001 in the name of ‘Global Development Alliance’¹². The existing PPP between the USAID and Chevron coincides with Nishorgo project which aims to conserve the tropical forests in Bangladesh which are in decline or have already declined.

Not only so, Chevron has an intrinsic relationship with the other international/transnational actors operating in various capacities in Nishorgo project. For instance, IUCN Bangladesh is the official consultant and stakeholder of the forestry project in Bangladesh; but Chevron provides financial support¹³ to IUCN Head Office for its global implementation of environmental programmes (IUCN, 2007: 10). Not only so, US State Department also makes annual voluntary contribution to IUCN.¹⁴ The Washington-based IRG, which is the implementing partner of the project Chevron, is also in a business relationship with Chevron.¹⁵ On the other side, IUCN and IRG are working together in many separate projects around the world. Above all, IUCN, IRG, and Chevron have public-private partnerships with the USAID in many countries (see Gevers *et al.*, 2008: 122-123).

⁹ It was jointly done by US Geological Survey (which is under the Department of Interior of the USA) with Petro-Bangla, a state-owned oil and gas exploration company of Bangladesh.

¹⁰ Chevron is the second largest oil and gas company of the USA and a major contributor to US economy. In 2007, it earned a net income of USD 18.7 billion, which is the highest annual earnings in its history (Chevron, 2008: 1). It is also one of the major financial donors to the Republican Party which is in power since 2000 election. Currently, it ranked third after Altria Group and ExxonMobil in terms of the official monetary contributions made to the Republican and Democratic Parties of the USA during the years 1999-2006 (available at http://www.boycottbush.org/cies_en.php).

¹¹ Two Smiling Sun Hospitals at and around Srimangal, Moulvibazar and many other social development programmes in the areas have been undertaken under public-private partnership like in other countries where Chevron is in operation. Chevron also built a Eidgah at Baligaon of Kamalganj, Srimangal. Such major projects of Chevron exist in Angola, Azerbaijan, Chad, China, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Philippines, Russia, Thailand etc.

¹² During the fiscal years 2002-2003, a total of 200 alliances were formed to create a fund of five billion dollars in which partners would contribute USD 2.9 billion (USAID, 2004: 35).

¹³ In 2006, Chevron donated an amount of Swiss CHF 48953000 to IUCN.

¹⁴ available at <http://cms.iucn.org/about/union/donors/index.cfm>, accessed on 18 March 2008.

¹⁵ available at See http://www.irgltd.com/About_IRG/Clients.htm, accessed on 2 March 2008

In the case of local organisations involved in the forestry project, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) is a member of the National Committee of IUCN Bangladesh. It joined the project in 2007 to update the existing Wild Life Preservation Act 1974 (amended). Wildlife Trust Bangladesh (WTB), also a member of IUCN Bangladesh, is involved in the project as a partner and stakeholder. However, IRG's subcontracted partner¹⁶ Nature Conservation and Management (NACOM) is a member of the Board of Directors of the USAID-funded *Arannayak* Foundation Bangladesh.

Indeed, the forestry project of Bangladesh, which is based on community participation and the declared norm of 'saving forest for future generation', resembles two types of PPP. The first one is the PPP project which provides for developing norms and standards; and second one for sharing and coordinating resources and expertise. In this regard, the normative framework of the project has provided the necessary legitimacy for the interaction of the local and international organisations, which are connected to each other in one way or another. To this end, the seismic survey of Chevron around and within Lawachhara Forest offers a yardstick to expose the pattern of interactions among the actors participating in the project of co-management model. In other words, a critical examination of the response of the actors to seismic survey is necessary to broadly understand the attributes of the project, being implemented by the government of Bangladesh. The following two sections separately ponder on the specific nature of actors' response to the seismic survey conducted by Chevron and a brief assessment of the components of the forestry project, now being implemented in the Lawachhara National Park.

II. Seismic survey of chevron and the policy response

Seismic Survey of Chevron conducted during March-June of 2008 for measuring the gas reserve for block-14 of Moulvibazar caught the public attention for certain reasons. Firstly, a portion of the areas¹⁷ selected for the survey falls within a very vulnerable Lawachhara National Park, which is a government declared doubly protected area. Secondly, the survey witnessed in a

¹⁶ Other subcontracted partners include Community Development Center (CODEC) of Chittagong, Nature Conservation and Management (NACOM) and Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS).

¹⁷ 152 sq. k.m. in length of Moulvibazar and Srimangal districts came under seismic survey of Chevron

serious violation of Article 23 (3)¹⁸ of the Wild Life Preservation Act 1974 (Amended) of Bangladesh. The provision of the Act strongly prohibits such activities within one mile radius outside the boundary of forest. Thirdly, the survey was conducted during the breeding season of flora and fauna of the forest. Given these issues with regard to the survey, it is imperative to examine the response of the state actors including MoEF and DoF and the USAID and of the non-state actors operating within an institutional framework of the Nishorgo project.

Indeed, for running the forestry project, there is a Nishorgo Support Unit to provide overall technical and advisory support in implementing the programmes of the forestry project. It is headed by a Chief of Party who represents IRG, and located well inside the Dhaka Office of the DoF. On the contrary, co-management body works at local level and is comprised of local communities, local government and local staff of the DoF. Assistant Conservator of Forest (Wild life) of the DoF, by designation, is the secretary of co-management committee (CMC), which is the upper tier of the co-management body. The lower tier of the co-management body includes the co-management council which is the body for general discussion and making recommendations. General members from the local communities are mainly represented in the council. In the case of CMC, local elites are the members along with the forest and local government officials.

Response of the state actors

The DoF and the concerned Ministry: The issue of seismic survey came to limelight for first time in January 2008 in a Srimangal-based local newspaper, though Chevron had a meeting with the Ministry of Energy back in September, 2007 (*Weekly Porikroma*, 20 January 2008) involving the issue. In the beginning DoF was in dark about the seismic survey as disclosed by the divisional forest conservator (wild life management and nature preservation department) of Sylhet¹⁹ (*The Daily Star*, 22 February, 2008). However, in reaction to the survey came out in the media, DoF sent a letter in February 2008 to its Parent Ministry- MoEF, expressing its concern over the survey at Lawachhara National Park. Interestingly, the MoEF, without taking concern of

¹⁸ Article 23 (3) of the Act reads: “The Government may declare any area to be a national park where the following acts shall not be allowed, namely:- (i) hunting, killing or capturing any wild animal in a national park and within the radius of one mile outside its boundary; (ii) firing any gun or doing any other act which may disturb any wild animal or doing any act which may interfere with the breeding places of any wild animal; (iii) feeling, tapping, burning or in any way damaging or destroying, taking, collecting or removing any plant or tree therefrom; (iv) clearing or breaking up any land for cultivation, mining or for any other purpose; (v) polluting water flowing in and through the national park....”

¹⁹ Md Abul Basar Miah

the DoF into cognizance, issued a gazette notification in consultation with the Ministry of Law. This notification withheld the utility of the Article 23(3) of the existing Act on the ground of ‘public interest’ (Gain, 2008: 68). As a result, the survey was legalised by the Ministry in consistent with the Article 45 of the Wild Life Preservation Act. The article reads:

Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, the Government may, in the interest of scientific or any public purpose, allow, by notifications in the official Gazette, killing or capturing of any wild animal in such place and by such means as may be specified in the notification.

The MoEF also issued a clearance certificate to Chevron for conducting the survey (*Daily Star*, 22 February 2008; *Weekly Porikroma*, 18-28 March 2008; *The Daily Prothom Alo*, 16 May 2008). More so, it approved Chevron’s Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which are required for doing such survey. However, it was not clear whether the reports were submitted before the commencement of the survey. The IEE and EIA were never made public. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the Department of Environment (DoE) to ensure that the organization doing such survey submits Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports before the issuance of any clearance certificate (*The Daily Star*, 22 February 2008). However, prior to the issuing of this gazette notification, the Secretary for the MoE once remarked that the survey would not go against the national interest of Bangladesh and would not violate the Act of 1974 (*Chaer Desh*, 22 January, 2008).

Again, as public concern over Lawchhara Forest was growing particularly over the survey done within the premise of the Forest, the Ministry formed a monitoring team to assess the environmental impact. The team consisted of 12 members from IUCN, BELA, DoE, DoF, Petrobangla, Chevron, and Grant²⁰ (*Chaer Desh*, 2 April, 2008). The most worrying and interesting part of this monitoring team was that Chevron itself provided the former with the necessary fund for its operation. In such situation, what role the MoEF or the monitoring team can play in response to the seismic survey? In effect, for them, no other way was left, but to become a mere facilitator and legitimacy provider for Chevron.

Response of the actors within Nishorgo project

²⁰ A company subcontracted by Chevron for doing seismic survey

Co-management Body: The two-tier co-management body of the forestry project is officially responsible for conserving, developing alternative livelihood and ensuring welfare of the forest and forest people. This body is also designated as ‘the guardians of forests’. Thus, the role of the co-management body is particularly very critical in conserving forests and forest resources.

In response to the seismic survey, the co-management body did not take any official position and discuss anything on the issue at any level until the last week of May 2008. By that time, the survey of Chevron was almost complete²¹. On 29 May 2008, chairman of the CMC sent to a letter to the president of Chevron expressing their concern over hiding the ‘practical aspects’ and ‘true information’ related to the environmental impacts of the survey. In the letter, the CMC of Lawachhara forest also condemned Chevron for ignoring the issue of biodiversity protection and the interests of the local communities. They also alleged that Chevron had not held any ‘formal official meeting’ with them before conducting the seismic survey. In reply, Chevron denied the allegation of not making the committee aware of the survey. They claimed that they had ‘two meetings’ with the committee in March and April. But they did not attach any minutes of the ‘two meetings’ with the letter sent in reply. On the contrary, in a personal interview with the author, the vice chairman of the CMC reaffirmed that the committee had these ‘two meetings’ in presence of the members who hailed only from Kamalganj area; and members from Srimangal area were not invited. Thus, the CMC did not have any clear unified position in making reactions to the seismic survey conducted at Lawachhara Forest. More so, when the seismic survey was undergoing in the area, the co-management body remained busy in holding elections²² through secret ballot to elect their 19 executive members for the CMC.²³

Indeed, the newly elected leadership has some identical features in relation the project. For instance, the person who became vice-chairman of the CMC, is also an editor and owner of a local Bangla weekly- *Chaer Desh*. He is also the president of Srimangal Press Club. But the vice-chairman of the Lawachhara CMC is locally known as ‘pro-chevron’. The reports published in his weekly are the evidences in this respect. Reports of the weekly were found to be more ‘Chevron friendly’; no one would find a single report which highlighted the negative

²¹ It was disclosed in a Focus Group Discussion with the President, Secretary, Treasurer and others on 13 June 2008. Gidson Prodhan, the tribe chief of Magurchhara Punji was also interviewed. The author is in receipt of the minutes of the monthly meetings of co-management council from January to May.

²² Election was held on 17 April 2008.

²³ Minutes of the co-management committee meeting held on 20 April 2008.

consequences of the seismic survey on Lawachhara Forest²⁴. In two of its issues, the weekly even published a full-page report²⁵ and a separate investigative report in advocacy of the seismic survey²⁶. Besides, the elected treasurer of committee also served IRG for two years as a local consultant²⁷. He is also an executive director of a local NGO-*Prantik*. As a result, the top leadership of the CMC of Lawachhara was clearly divided over their own individual interests and motives in making response to the seismic survey. In fact, it probably barred them from taking any unified official position or communicating with Nishorgo Support Unit of Dhaka. Yet some of the members, in their personal capacity, did take part in the locally organised human chains held from March to May in protest against the seismic survey of Chevron defying emergency rule in the country.²⁸

Local Government which is part of the co-management body was seen to be active only when the local Upazila Nirbahi Officer formed a five-member investigation committee at the initiative of the District Commissioner. The committee was formed to assess the damage of a *Khasia punji* (village) (located inside the forest) where a fire incident took place while the seismic survey was undergoing. However, on the basis of the report of the committee, the Deputy Commissioner of Moulvibazar district permitted Chevron to resume its seismic survey in the concerned area.²⁹

Response of the non-state actors involved with Nishorgo Project

Nishorgo Support Unit: Nishorgo Support Unit was not seen to take any official position and express any concern over the issue of seismic survey. Indeed, representative of IRG heads the Nishorgo Support Unit as Chief of Party. Other subcontracted partners of IRG- NACOM, RDRS and CODEC of Chittagong also remained silent. However, USAID's Environment Team Leader once made comment that they had nothing to do as the DoF and DoE had authorised Chevron to operate within the premise of Lawachhara National Park (*Weekly Porikroma*, 12 May 2008).

IUCN, BELA and WTB: IUCN, WTB and BELA's response to the seismic survey was very confounding. Their perceptions on the probable impact of seismic survey did not differ from

²⁴ The author scanned all of the issues of the weekly ranging from January-June 2008.

²⁵ Published on 14 April 2008 under the heading 'Moulvibazar Fieldday Chevroner Trimatrik Vutattik Jorip' [3-D Survey of Chevron at Moulvibazar Field].

²⁶ Published on 2 April 2008 entitled 'Onushondhani Protibedon' [an Investigative Report].

²⁷ Disclosed by the treasurer himself in a personal conversation with the author

²⁸ It was revealed in a FGD with the leaders of CMC, held on 13 June 2008 at the local range office of the Forest Department.

²⁹ Letter issued on 30 April 2008 vide No. jaypromou/L.A-56(ongsho-1)/2008/191.

Chevron's position that the survey would not do any harm to Lawachhara forest. Like the USAID, all these consultant-NGOs involved in the project under different capacities put blame on the government for allowing Chevron to conduct the survey.³⁰ Indeed, IUCN Bangladesh was a member of the Chevron-funded-monitoring team (founded in April 2008) and an evaluator of Environment Management Plan of Chevron. Country representative of IUCN defended their relationship with Chevron on the ground of global policy of their organisation's headquarters.³¹

On the other hand, with regard to the prospect of filing a case against Chevron for violating the 1974 Act, BELA expressed their lack of confidence in filing a case against Chevron. It was on the ground that 'if BELA loses the case in the court, it would give Chevron a legal ground for conducting the survey'³². Still, BELA was found to be more active in holding street protests against the issue. Its local office of Srimangal organised and participated in a number of human chains along with other local organisations (*The Daily Star*, 6 March 2008). It also submitted a Notice of Concern to the government along with some other Dhaka-based NGOs³³ in April 2008 (*The Daily Star*, 7 April 2008).

III. The components of Nishorgo project and the conservation of lawchhara forest

Nishorgo project has some specific components for conserving the unique biodiversity of the protected areas. It broadly aims to reduce the dependence of the forest dwellers on the forest on the one hand, and arrange sustainable alternative means for livelihood for them, on the other. Promotions of eco-tourism and non-timber wood production are among the major constituents, which are being implemented in the protected areas (IRG, 2006: 16). The CMC of Nishorgo project is also authorized to form forest patrolling groups and distribute live stocks for livelihood. These programmes are for creating a sense of ownership and responsibility among the forest dwellers. In this context, a brief assessment of the components under implementation in the Lawachhara National Park from both functional and environmental perspectives would give an idea about the applicability of the forestry project to conserve the official protected areas from further deterioration.

³⁰ Opined by the IUCN's country representative- Ainun Nishat, BELA's programme Director- Rizwana Hasan in the recorded interviews taken on 15 June 2008; WTB's Executive Director- Md. Zakir Hossain in a telephonic interview with the author, taken on the 15 June, 16 June and 17 June 2008 respectively.

³¹ Ainun Nishat of Bangladesh in the interview taken by the author on 15 June 2008.

³² Rizwana Hasan of BELA in the interview with the author taken on 15 June 2008.

³³ The other organizations are Association for Land Reform and Development, Ain O Shalish Kendro, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust. Nijera Kori, Odhikar and Paribesh Bachao Andolon

Eco-tourism

With the increasing media attention over the Lawachhara Forest, now a good number of tourists visit it every year. According to the Information Center of Lawachhara Forest, in the first three months of 2008, an estimated number of 22000 tourists visited the area. The forestry project at Lawachhara now provides trained tourist guides for the visitors. Still, infrastructural support for the promotion of eco-tourism is not adequate and well-developed. There are no facilities other than a ticket counter cum information center, a make-shift tourist shop, and few tourist cottages. There are also some signages, brochures, leaflets and some newly constructed trails in Lawachhara forest. DoF of Bangladesh even expressed their dissatisfaction in this regard. Indeed, it observed in a report that:

Under Nishorgo, the lack of a medium- to long-term nature tourism development plan resulted in some trail development, refurbishing and enterprise-related investments not being as effective as they might have been (Forest Department, 2007: 13)

The benefit of growing tourism at Lawachhara is also not evenly distributed. Only 19% of the households get benefit from tourism (ibid). Also, not all the communities living in and around the protected area are being equally benefited. Among all the three communities (Khasia, Tripura and Manipuri), Manipuri community receives the maximum benefit from tourism (43% of the total households surveyed) and the Tripura community is the next (13%) (ibid: 140-140). Khasia community living inside the protected area is the most deprived. They did not get anything out of the so called eco-tourism. Thus the communities living outside the forest area is mostly benefited.

However, for infrastructural development, the authority is now planning to build an expensive 'interpretation centre' for the tourists (Ahsan, 2007: 133). Even there was also a proposal of building five star hotel to cater the need of the tourists for Lawachhara in a monthly meeting of CMC, held in May 2008. It was put forward by a member³⁴ of the CMC who represents Manipuri community of Srimangal³⁵.

Indeed several issues are also critical for getting positive results from ecotourism. These are designing an appropriate programme and strategy, having adequate facilities for the tourists, and understanding the capacity of the local community in absorbing the inflow of tourists into

³⁴ Annanda Mohon Sinha.

³⁵ The author attended the CMC meeting as an observer. The meeting was held on 30 May 2008. The meeting was attended, among others, by the Chief of Party, a representative of International Resources Group (IRG) in Bangladesh.

their culture and society. It also requires taking adequate safety measures, such as restricting the number of visitors and their access to the environmentally sensitive locations (Guillemain et al, 2007: 3633-3651; Monteros, 2002: 1539-1550; Belangar, 2006; Ogutu, 2002: 251-256).

On the basis of the above criteria, it is found that the Nishorgo project is poorly managed. For instance, for the Lawachhara forest which is only 1250 hectares in size, no inventory of the forest resources—both living and non-living was done to assess whether Lawachhara is suitable for the promotion of eco-tourism. Lawachhara has only some small patches of natural forest which provides refuge to the globally endangered species of hoolock gibbons. Also, the chief of the *Khasia punji*, located inside the forest, complained that visitors, who come to the Lawachhara National Park, do not respect their culture of protecting the betel leaf gardens. The visitors sometimes enter the betel leaf gardens indiscriminately without authorised permission and thus causing damage to the gardens. In Khasia culture, betel leaf gardening has a very special place. Khasis do not enter a betel leaf garden without performing rituals like sanctifying and wearing special clothes. Also, frequent access of the picnic parties and the use of sound system in the name of eco-tourism, according to the Khasia chief; also disrupt the serenity of the forest and the forest dwellers.³⁶

Alternative livelihood programmes

The Nishorgo project has adopted a multi-pronged approach for its livelihood programmes for the forest dwellers. It includes plantation of commercial plants in the buffer zones of the protected areas, animal rearing, micro-credit. The local NGO— Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) is in charge of administering the micro-credit and other livelihood programmes in the area. The aim of taking up the programmes under the forestry project is to reduce the dependence of the inhabitants on the forest so that forests can be conserved in a participatory manner.

For generating household incomes of the Lawachhara forest dwellers, the DoF promotes plantation of the species like eucalyptus, acacia, hybrid acacia etc. which are easily grown and commercially more beneficial for the stakeholders. But plantation of such plants confronted huge criticism in Bangladesh on the ground that they are not environment friendly and also destroys local species of plants. Asian Development Bank has recently stopped giving fund to such projects which they did earlier in the name of social forestry.

³⁶ Described by the Khasia punji chief during an interview on 29 May 2008.

Also, as part of the livelihood components, the CMC of Lawachhara also runs three area-based forest patrolling groups to reduce the incidents of illegal tree felling. Each patrolling group has 20 members to guard the forest. One of the groups is comprised of female members. However, the members who have been inducted in the patrolling groups were petty illegal tree fellers in the past. They were motivated mainly by the CMC to join the patrolling groups for better livelihood. CMC members and the local officers of DoF promised them that the pending forest cases filed against them for illegal tree felling would be withdrawn, if they joined. They also pledged to the members that they would give a monthly honourarium of Taka 2500 and other support to each group member. However, so far, only eight members of the groups of Bagmara and Dulubari had received³⁷ Taka 11000 individually for buying cattle. The members did not also get their promised monthly honourarium since December 2007. In this regard, a leader³⁸ from a female of the patrolling group alleged that they had not received anything apart from uniforms and shoes for patrolling the forest. Also, a male group leader³⁹ of Bagmara area informed that the members had got only Taka 2250 per month in the first 12-15 months after the formation of the groups. And for the next two months, prior to the eventual stoppage of the payment, they drew only Taka 1125. However, president of the CMC contradicted this information and mentioned that the amount had been Taka 2250, not 1125. He defended this non-repayment of the monthly allowance on the ground of fund shortage. To make the situation worse, the pending cases against the illegal tree fellers have not yet withdrawn by the DoF. Now if anybody refuses to guard the forest given the non-payment of honourarium, he gets the threat of arrest again from the DoF again. Not only so, some internal feuds within the patrolling groups were also seen to be creeping up. For instance, the CMC expelled 12 old members of the patrolling groups without showing any ground and accordingly inducted new members in place of them. Indeed, these expelled members were from a particular Baligaon area. Union parishad chairman⁴⁰ of the same area was also suspended from the CMC of Lawachhara as he went against the decision of the expulsion.

Under the circumstances, the usefulness of the patrolling groups in preventing illegal tree felling has now become a matter of further investigation. In this regard, vice-chairman of the

³⁷ Till the date when the author made field visits to Lawachhara forest area.

³⁸ Renu Begum

³⁹ Name of the leader is Kalam Ahmed of Bagmara area

⁴⁰ Golam Kibria Shafi

CMC made an observation that illegal tree felling had not significantly declined, rather the routes of carrying the trees had changed. An eco-tour guide working in the forest also made the similar statement that the stolen logs were used to be passed via Srimangal area in the past and the forest criminals now use the route of Rajnagar area. But president of the CMC claimed that the success rate of preventing illegal tree felling must not be less than 90%.

Also, given the area-based power struggle within the CMC of Lawachhara and weak performance in delivering services; the members of the CM council, the lower tier of the co-management body were seen to have lost their enthusiasm for attending monthly meetings. For instance, the CMC of Lawachhara once observed that among 58 members of the council, only 21 members had been regular. As many as eight members of the council had never attended a single meeting. And rest of the members had been irregular.⁴¹

IV. Nishorgo project in Bangladesh: implications for forest conservation

Considering the inertia of the CMC of Lawachhara, the inherent relationship of the actors and the underperformed livelihood programmes of the forestry project, it now appears to be a real catch-22 situation. Indeed, the co-management body operative under Nishorgo project has now become a part of government machineries as it has been gazetted by the government⁴². In this context, the 'statisation' of the co-management body on the one hand, and the authorisation of the government to Chevron to conduct the seismic survey, on the other, has raised some pertinent questions. What role, in fact, could this co-management body have played in Lawachhara when it is merged with the state machineries? Accordingly, how could it go against the authority of state itself to protest or prevent the seismic survey of Chevron? Above all, what implication does this Nishorgo project hold for the conservation of forest in the long run when both USAID and Chevron broadly represents the interests of the USA?

The Gazette Notification of the government provided for Nishorgo project is, in fact, fraught with inherent weaknesses in terms of its functions. The gazette recommends a uniform organisational and functional structure of the co-management body for all the five pilot sites ignoring the existing geographical and demographic differences of the project areas. Surprisingly, the number of members and functions of the co-management bodies of the Rema

⁴¹ Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the co-management committee.

⁴² It was notified through a Government Gazette, No. pobom/porisha-4/nishorgo-64/(ongsho-4)/112. dated 07 August 2006

Kalenga Forest of Habiganj (with an area of only 850 ha) and Teknaf Game Forest (located in the extreme south of Bangladesh, covering an area of 11, 615 hectares) are similar. Also, women have not been given any guaranteed number of seats in the CMC which exercises the highest political power for decision making. They have only an allotment of 10 seats in the CM council which is empowered only to discuss and recommend (Forest Department, 2007: 13). Their participation has been mainly recognised in the various livelihood programmes like forest patrolling, micro-credit operation, nursery development, handicrafts etc. In this regard, USAID, which globally advocates empowerment of women, did not appear to be sensitive enough to enhance women's participation in the Nishorgo project.

However, the forestry project is based on the official commitment of forest conservation by means of 'community participation' and 'local knowledge sharing'. These normative and ideational elements of the forestry project have paved the way for the IUCN Bangladesh and other civil society organisations/NGOs to get involved. Thus the engagement of BELA and WTB in particular witnessed the proposed modifications of the Wildlife Preservation Act 1974 to incorporate the co-management approach and other concepts and words necessary for the operation of forestry project in the protected areas. In fact, the issue of modifying the 1974 Act was first proposed in a workshop of the CMC of Lawachhara, held from 29 May-31 May, 2006.

The draft proposal for amending the 1974 Act also came into being only after the government had issued the gazette notification offering the organisational structure of Nishorgo project. The draft now proposes to legalise hunting of wild animals for, among other things, scientific research and when it is "necessary in the interest of scientific or any public purpose".⁴³ The proposed draft also authorises to "enter or reside in a sanctuary", for "scientific research" and "ecotourism"⁴⁴ among other things. But the phrases like 'scientific research', 'scientific purpose', 'public purpose' nor ecotourism have been defined in the draft. Co-management of the protected areas/sanctuaries has been termed as "collaborative management".⁴⁵

⁴³ Articles 7 and 9 of the draft Act.

⁴⁴ Article 18 of the Draft Amendment of Wild Life Act- 1974

⁴⁵ Article 19 of reads: (1) The Chief Wildlife Warden...(s)he shall, (a) construct such roads, bridges, buildings, fences or barrier gates, boundary marks and carry out such other works as he may consider necessary for the purposes of better management of such sanctuary:

Provided that no construction of commercial tourist lodges, hotels, zoos, eco-parks and safari parks shall be undertaken inside a sanctuary except having consent from the local community and with the prior approval of the Board and an environmental impact assessment; ...

Again, the article says:

In essence, Nishorgo project now appears to have created an institutionalised space conducive to the preservation of economic and security interest of the USA in general; and to be specific, to the interest of Chevron when necessary. Therefore, this is no surprise that Chevron had been able to conduct the seismic survey in Lawachhara National Park where an environmental project is in partnership with the ‘mighty’ USAID. In other words, Nishorgo project provides the necessary structures both for Chevron and the USAID for co-opting actors for necessary legitimacy and thus generating consents accordingly in terms of its programmes and declared norms/values.

Indeed, approach of the Nishorgo project for nature conservation coincides with the features of community development tactic which was once suggested in a report for the smooth operation of UNOCAL Bangladesh Limited (UBL) (Reyes and Begum, 2005). Even the absence of women leadership in the upper-tier of co-management body of the Lawachhara forest echoes the guidelines of the said report which observed that “female participation needs to occur in a culturally appropriate manner” (Reyes and Begum, 2005: 17). The report was made in response to the resistance, UBL had largely been confronting over gas pipeline construction and land encroachment in Moulvibazar and Srimanagal districts.

For their legitimacy and support-base, UBL also tried to get both IUCN and BELA involved for the supervision of their Lawachhara operation. But they could not do so. This is because IUCN “felt that any formal monitoring or advisory role related to the Lawachhara Forest needed to be sanctioned by the Bangladeshi government...” (ibid: 27). And, also in the case of BELA, they were again ‘hesitant’ to engage it as they were “discouraged... by the Ministry of Energy” (ibid). In assessing the consequences of such failure to engage these organisations in Bangladesh, the said report observed that:

...by not finding common ground with internationally recognized NGOs, reputable or not, UBL is fostering an adversarial environment where its every move is watched for the slightest sign of acting against the public interest, the environment or both’ (ibid).

The Government, in order to promote collaborative management... may frame appropriate rule through gazette notification, which shall include the following, amongst others;

- (i) recognition (constitution) of collaborative management council/ committee for the purpose of protection, improved management and sustainable use of wildlife resources and habitat;
- (ii) entering into an agreement with collaborative management council/ committee specifying rights and authorities of such council/ committee and also responsibility of such council /committee for protection, improved management and sustainable use of wildlife resources and habitat....

In this context, the report also gave emphasis on the need for engaging state machineries. In this context, the report reads:

...the government should have a leading role with specific efforts being designed in a way that incorporates communities and requires their involvement. UBL, with its daily presence in gas-affected communities and its ties to government, could play a coordinating role helping communities prioritize genuine needs while identifying and reaching out to relevant government entities (ibid: 21).

Thus, currently in Nishorgo project, the USAID-nominated IRG which is also a business partner of Chevron has appeared to replace the UBL functionally as proposed in the said report. And current organisational structure of the co-management body of Nishorgo project corresponds to the 'historical bloc' in Gramscian sense. Indeed, Chevron, which took over the operation of UBL in 2005, is now operating in the areas where the latter once worked.

The USAID is perhaps now acting under the influence of business power of Chevron as a 'proxy' hegemon in the project. In this context, state apparatus of Bangladesh with legitimate monopoly of enforcing laws appears to have been drafted in by the donor as a facilitator. In addition, local communities, the civil society organisations including IRG, IUCN, BELA, WTB and other NGOs involved in the project evidently have become either a 'legitimacy provider' or a 'consent generator'. In effect, they might be knowingly or unknowingly also functioning in the economic and business interests of the USA in general, given the geological features of the five pilot sites and the operation of Chevron in the project areas. However, they have not been offering these services without any economic benefit. The non-state organisations are now able to accumulate monetary benefit rather playing their due part in the conservation of nature. The one year budget of the project prepared in 2007 by IRG and its co-partners is the evidence, in this regard. It shows that the IRG alone gets about 17% of the total budget (\$1,906,825) for the five pilot sites. Also, if the costs of its subcontracted partners (48%) are included, the total expenditure for consultancy and service delivery stands at 65% while 17% of the budget is the indirect cost for the project. Finally 15.5% of the total budget remains only as the direct cost of the project (IRG, 2007: 52). Under the circumstances, for the forestry project in Bangladesh, Gramscian perspective seems more relevant. This is because, in Gramscian sense, the environmental project can be seen-

...as a strategy of accommodation, combining material and discursive efforts to preserve corporate legitimacy and autonomy in the face of growing public environmental concern; it is

thus more about political and economic than environmental sustainability (Levy and Newell, 2007: 93).

Concluding remarks

The case study of seismic survey and the underperformance of the livelihood programmes applied in the forest conservation project have provided the necessary empirical essentials to analyse an environmental project of Bangladesh. All these factors have been combined together to demonstrate that the forest conservation project based on 'co-management' approach or broadly PPP or in other forms might not be as harmless as it appears. And the officially declared values, norms, ideational elements which provide for the governance of such project are perhaps for something else in many cases. In this regard, the analysis has probably exposed a Pandora's Box indeed. Thus one must not be misled in his/her judgement by only focusing on such normative framework of governance apparently based on certain universal values like transparency, participation, accountability etc. To understand the complex dynamics of such project, it is necessary to dig into the intrinsic relationship of the actors to assess who is influencing who and for what reason. Particularly attention is needed to focus on the political-economic interests that bind the actors together within an ideological framework and thus functioning and interacting with each other cutting across both state and non-state levels.

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