

Comments on Bhoj Wetlands Brief

This is one of the few urban lakes included in the series. It gives a good account of the issues that arise in urban settings, particularly in countries where settlement densities are high and management funding is limited. Interestingly, the two lakes were constructed artificially but are now sufficiently old to have many of the characteristics of typical lakes.

The issues of flood management, pollution of the underlying groundwater system, pollution from urban runoff and effluent, destruction of riparian areas, and loss of recreational assets are all described in sufficient detail. Much of the brief describes the attempt to manage these issues through the Boj Wetlands Project funded by a JBIC loan. It would have strengthened the brief to have included the overall management of the lake and not just the actions and outcomes from this particular project.

The physical interventions undertaken during this project, such as planting buffer zones, dredging the lake sediments, construction of check dams, augmentation of sewerage schemes, etc are described well. However, the outcomes from these interventions are not described very well apart from a visible assessment that 'aesthetics and recreational values have improved' and that there is 'an overall improvement in environmental quality around the Lower lake'. Perhaps it is too soon to assess the project's success.

The project had community education and capacity building components. The former seems to be assessed as successful because it led to the shifting of idol immersion sites to a designate area and led to the prevention of motor boats on the lake. This particular project does not include any administrative components such as institution of laws and regulations, administrative rearrangements, or methods of raising finance that would lead to long term sustainability of the successes of the physical interventions. Even the public education component, which could have supported long term changes in attitude, does not appear to have done that. These longer term changes may well be happening outside this particular project but we are not told about them because of the sole focus on the one project.

A Lake Protection Authority is first mentioned under Lessons Learned towards the end of the Brief. It is not clear whether this is a generic authority permitted under the EPA Act or whether a specific authority has been established at Boj Wetlands. If the latter, then there should have been a discussion of the administrative arrangements governing the lake in which this Authority and its role, powers and responsibilities was described and assessed. Later, the Brief says that a Lake Conservation Authority has been proposed but again it is not stated whether this is part of the JBIC project or a separate initiative of the State or national government.

Overall, the Brief needs further work. While its description of issues needing management and the structure of the JBIC funded project are adequate, it needs to be expanded to include:

- Other activities at local, State and national level to improve lake management
- Administrative/legislative actions to provide long term sustainability
- Scientific input to the management of the lake