

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN THE CARRIBEAN

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THE CASE

This case study concerns the small island developing states (SIDS) of the eastern Caribbean which are part of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Emphasis is placed on Barbados. Other countries briefly examined are Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada.

Small-scale fisheries in the eastern Caribbean harvest a diverse array of living marine resources. Tuna, swordfish and billfish are among the highly migratory pelagic straddling stocks exploited. More confined to regional and coastal areas are dolphinfish, flyingfish, wahoo and kingfish among the pelagics, and demersal species such as snapper, reef fishes, sea urchins, lobster and conch. Virtually all of the fishery resources harvested are shared either regionally or internationally at some stage in their life history.

Most emphasis is now placed on the coastal resources more amenable to community-based management. However, in the medium to long term, it will be necessary to focus on the shared migratory pelagics since they hold the most potential for economic development and earning foreign exchange.

The global context is the situation that has developed out of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) through agreements, guidelines and changes in perspective on fisheries management. The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement are important for this region.

The fisheries sectors in these islands are of significant political, economic and social importance in terms of welfare through employment and assurance of income for the coastal poor. However, the contribution to Gross Domestic Product (typically less than 4 percent) makes them low priority as engines of economic development.

Now, extended marine jurisdiction and other factors have raised the economic development aspirations of fisherfolk and governments, but at the same time there are increasing fisheries management obligations. In the past neither fisherfolk nor governments paid much attention to fisheries management. More recently, through a series of initiatives from the late 1980's to the present, the countries have attempted to involve resource users and other beneficiaries in the establishment and operation of fisheries management regimes. This has meant creating suitable conditions for community-based management.

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THE INITIAL SITUATION

In the mid-1980s these islands all had developing fisheries which lacked fisheries management plans. A

few token fisheries regulations existed, but were neither enforced nor complied with on a regular basis. Clear mechanisms for involving stakeholders in making conservation or development policy, and management planning decisions, that affected them were absent. Fishery capitalization, although still small-scale, was depleting especially the coastal and shelf resources. This was obvious even without scientific analysis.

After UNCLOS it became apparent to governments that unmanaged fisheries cannot support sustainable social or economic development. The consequences would be widespread as the people became deprived of fish as food, welfare efforts would be undermined, and investment and trade opportunities would be lost. State fishery agencies realized that they could not effectively fulfill their technical and scientific mandates without resource user assistance in data collection and interpretation, plan formulation and evaluation, implementation, enforcement and other critical functions.

More recently, the fishing industries in these Caribbean countries realized that other coastal and marine economic developments, most notably tourism and watersports, were taking precedence. Unless fisherfolk achieved meaningful participation in fisheries-related decision-making their livelihood was in danger of becoming marginalized in comparison. Since the practice of integrated coastal area management is also new to the eastern Caribbean, there existed no established framework for dealing with these issues. These factors resulted in a convergence of interest in community-based fisheries management.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

On a regional scale, institutional change was initiated in the 1980s by participation in a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) project on developing resource-specific fishery management options. This was followed by the CARICOM Fisheries Resource Assessment and Management Programme (CFRAMP), ongoing throughout the 1990's, and proposed to be extended to 2001. These initiatives emphasized the importance of resource users and state authorities sharing power and responsibility for fishery resource management, and they set out mechanisms aimed at achieving this. National fisheries divisions supplemented by regional and international consultants conceived and started the activities. Now, the responsibility for implementation and evaluation is more evenly shared with the fishing industries. How this occurred differed amongst the countries.

Research

In 1992 the Chief Fisheries Officer of Barbados was funded by CFRAMP to conduct research on the implications of existing social organization and relations in the Barbados fishing industry for the introduction of fisheries management. The dynamics of social networks and formal organizations in the fishing industry were examined. This was necessary because Barbados has no history of community-based fishery management. Also, although several fisherfolk organizations have formed none have endured. Easy transition to either community-based management or co-management was not anticipated. Hence government needed to act as change agent to stimulate community interest for participating in fisheries management. The social science information was necessary to ensure that inappropriate assumptions were not made about the people and structure of the industry. This guided what role government was best placed to play.

The research showed that social networks in the industry were related more to occupation than location. The major occupational categories were fishermen, boat owners, fish vendors and fish processors. That communities of interest based on occupation predominated over geographic communities is not surprising. In Barbados there are few true fishing villages, and boats often change their homeport during

the fishing season depending upon sea conditions and fish availability. However, in terms of organizing collective action, the results suggested that community-based rather than occupational fisherfolk organizations were more appropriate. This is simply because fisherfolk of the same occupation, operating from the same location, typically had more interests in common.

The fish landing site was the preferred location for focusing community-based management. A landing site typically serves fisherfolk whose residences may be widely dispersed. At some fish landing sites there already existed significant collaboration between harvest and post-harvest enterprises, but this was the exception rather than the rule. At all landing sites the most often expressed, and most apparent, need was for assistance in the organization of the harvest sector.

These results lead to the recommendation for an incremental approach to the introduction of fisheries management. The encouragement of community-based fisherfolk organizations was seen as the means. Emphasis was also placed on information exchange between the Fisheries Division and fishing industry harvest sector in order to introduce the concepts of fisheries management and demonstrate the benefits of collaboration. Formal means of delivering policy advice from the industry were also recommended, including the preparation of a fisheries management plan and planning process through fishing industry participation.

Legislative Framework

In Barbados, after consultation with the fishing industry through site meetings, a new Fisheries Act was introduced in 1993 that provided for the formulation and review of fisheries management plans. The Act incorporates consultative mechanisms including the constitution of a Fisheries Advisory Committee to guide the minister responsible for fisheries on a wide range of issues. These issues include the management and development of fisheries; joint ventures and access agreements; harmonization of legislation; licensing of foreign fishing vessels; coordination of fisheries policies with other government policies; and any other matters concerning the Act or its regulations.

New fisheries legislation was introduced earlier in the other eastern Caribbean states. Compared to Barbados, these Acts go beyond merely establishing Fisheries Advisory Committees. Some also provide a legal basis for local area management authorities and fishery priority areas. Through these provisions a considerable amount of power and responsibility can be transferred from the state to approved community-based management structures.

The main reason for this difference compared to Barbados is that in the other islands distinct fishing villages exist due to the mountainous coastal terrain which results in fairly discrete settlements often associated with bays. Customary jurisdiction and territorial use rights over the adjacent coastal waters have developed at many locations. In some cases there are also constitutional arrangements for local government, such as village or district councils, that are absent in Barbados. Another critical difference is the presence of functioning fishing cooperatives or pre-cooperatives at most fishing sites and villages in the other islands whereas there were initially few in Barbados.

Given the history of community-based management and fisherfolk organizations, the fisheries officers in the other islands have mainly conducted social research on specific traditional management methods rather than adopt the broader approach of Barbados. The research was particularly detailed on the seine net fisheries of Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica given the elaborate, and apparently effective, rules that have existed for many years. National consultations and preparation of fisheries management plans have been proceeding on the basis that at least some of these traditional management rules will be incorporated into formal law in order to provide them with more weight. Unlike Barbados, the emphasis is more on building upon existing foundations rather than creating

conditions for community-based management from scratch.

THE OUTCOME

Fisheries Advisory Committee

In Barbados the Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC), constituted under the Fisheries Act, was appointed in 1995 with four of the seven members being drawn from the fishing industry. They represent the occupations of inshore and offshore fishers, fish vendors and fish processors. These members were nominated by the fishing industry and selected by the ministry responsible for fisheries. Although membership is based on individual qualities, people who were formal or informal leaders of fisherfolk were chosen. The FAC meets monthly under the chairmanship of the Chief Fisheries Officer with the other two members being a private sector fisheries consultant and a representative of the government's Coastal Zone Management Unit (CZMU). The Committee's first task was to set out the planning process and prepare a comprehensive fisheries management plan.

This task involved consultation on fisheries management planning with interest groups and the public. Meetings were held at fish landing sites, and persons present from the area were invited to set the agenda to address the issues of most concern to them. Participation was good, and issues specific to landing sites and fisheries were identified. In this way eight fishery-specific plans were formulated and appraised. In 1997 the Minister responsible for fisheries, as required by the Fisheries Act, approved these plans. The plans are now to be implemented mainly through regulations, research and development projects, institution building and public education.

Fishery Working Groups

To further institutionalize community-based management, the FAC advised the Minister to supplement and expand its formal consultative base by establishing three fishery working groups (FWGs) as secondary advisory sub-committees. These are being set up in order to expand the opportunities for the fishing industry to make direct input into policy decisions. The groups are proposed to work on fishery resources, the harvest sector and the post-harvest sector. At least one member of the FAC and an officer of the Fisheries Division are to be members of each group for the purpose of linkage. Other members are to be drawn from the private sector, particularly fishery and fishery-related NGOs. This is now possible due to recent increases in the number and activity of fisherfolk organizations. The FWGs are to be established in June 1998.

Fisherfolk Organizations

Most important to progress is the assistance provided for the development of the fisherfolk organizations necessary to institutionalize community-based management. Formal organizations are especially important in Barbados where fishing villages are not well defined geographically. Since the 1960s the government has made attempts to encourage fishing cooperatives at landing sites. Few have remained active more than a few months or years although several still exist on paper. People in the industry have also attempted to form a trade union and several associations. Due to the character of cooperative law in Barbados being geared more towards credit unions than producer cooperatives, associations have been more successful. Not being bound by law they have been more flexible to meet the needs of their members. However, once the reason for their formation (often a crisis) has passed, it has been difficult for leaders to keep members interested and involved. Lack of capital and management capability are also weaknesses.

The recommendation arising out of the social research and fisheries management planning process to promote and assist community-based fisherfolk organizations was implemented by obtaining international assistance in 1997. An adviser on fisherfolk organization development was provided to the Fisheries Division through the Commonwealth Secretariat. Working with counterpart Fisheries Division extension staff, this has resulted in about 5 primary fisherfolk organizations at landing sites developing, becoming properly constituted, and having their leaders receive training and assistance in formulating operational plans.

The latter have been aimed at achieving a variety of objectives. In one case the association wrote a proposal to obtain grant funds from a local bank for boat maintenance and safety equipment that would improve the security of members' investments. In another, an environmental NGO collaborated with the association on a project to sensitize the tourism industry to the use of fish traps by fishers. This was to reduce the incidence of trap tampering by dive tours. In a third, the organizations are determining ways to become involved in tourism-related ventures in their vicinity in order to provide members with income-earning alternatives desirable due to the seasonality of fishing. The fisherfolk committees of management devised these initiatives in order to show quick and meaningful results to their members. This progress has prompted proposed changes in the fisheries legislation to register fisherfolk associations and provide them with financial and other incentives.

The recommendation for collaboration with the fishing industry, especially in data collection, has led to the convening of resource specific workshops. Reef fishes, lobsters and sea urchins were targeted for possible community-based management. Several projects, some in close collaboration with the Coastal Zone Management Unit, have focused on mechanisms to provide resource user groups with management authority. Efforts are also now underway to form a secondary (i.e. umbrella) organization. This would assist in coordinating and facilitating the operations of the community-based organizations at the various landing sites.

In this region of the Caribbean there are several shared stocks of pelagic species exploited entirely by small-scale fisheries. Attempts have been made since 1994 to link community-based fisherfolk organizations in Barbados with those in neighbouring countries that share the resources. This has been led by the fisherfolk organizations themselves, but with limited success since it is difficult and expensive to arrange regular contact. It is hoped that a tertiary regional organization can be encouraged in the near future to assist with the bottom-up management of the region's shared resources. At a meeting of fishery officers and fisherfolk organization representatives on fisheries management planning in the region it was agreed that, without a viable regional fisherfolk organization, reaching scientific and political agreement on the management of shared resources would be very difficult. A network of community-based fisherfolk organizations may be most instrumental for the management of these fisheries.

Other Islands

Considering the other countries, in St. Lucia a community-based system for sea urchin management has been instituted. This allows communities that have traditionally managed a particular area through informal property rights to monitor urchin populations and determine, now more formally, harvest opening and closure among other management measures. They do this by advising the Fisheries Division, having made harvest decisions at community level. Community-based management of seamount cultivation, mangrove areas and marine reserves has also been initiated. The best known of the latter is the Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) which involves fishing, tourism and other interests in a series of zoned fishing priority and marine reserve areas. St. Lucia is focusing on finalizing its fisheries management plan and consulting with established fishery organizations and communities on the contents rather than on establishing a Fisheries Advisory Committee.

In Dominica, the Soufriere/Scotts Head Marine Reserve (SSMR) is growing in popularity as a tourism attraction and no-take marine reserve in addition to having a long-established artisanal fishery. It has been placed under a local area management authority (LAMA) following representation by a wide range of interests including fisheries, tourism, and environmentalists. The LAMA has responsibility and authority under the law for the management and development of the SSMR, but ultimate power lies with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment. Within the marine reserve is a fishing priority area also under the jurisdiction of the management authority. The LAMA's stakeholder membership includes the fisher organizations and village councils of the three surrounding communities, watersports association, hospitality industry, community groups, coast guard and the Fisheries Division. While intending to activate it in the future, because of the successful system of community representation and cooperatives, the establishment of a Fisheries Advisory Committee is not a priority at this time for Dominica.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines emphasis is on ensuring that traditional management methods are sufficiently well understood to be faithfully incorporated into law. The beach seining operations are an example. National consultations are being held on the fisheries management plan and planning process, and the Fisheries Advisory Committee is to be established. The fisherfolk organizations, mostly cooperatives, require strengthening and firmer establishment before they are capable of dealing with fishery resource management issues.

In Grenada two previous Fisheries Advisory Committees were formed and failed after one or two years. In both cases the reasons were linked to the fisherfolk representatives withdrawing based on the perception that they could not exercise sufficient influence on policy through the Committee. Emphasis is now being placed on the creation of a national fisherman's association to serve as an umbrella body for the several community-based organizations. One view from past experience is that this body and the Fisheries Advisory Committee are unlikely to co-exist amicably unless the issue of representation is resolved.

In all of the islands, including Barbados, expected impacts of community-based management initiatives include: improved quality of fishery management decisions and their implementation; enhanced flexibility of resource users to adapt to the changing international fisheries regime due to information exchange; empowerment and enhanced capability of communities to manage fishery resources for sustainability; increased contribution of the fisheries sector to economic development both directly and through linkages; and increased cost-effectiveness of fishery management.

THE LESSONS LEARNED

This case illustrates that the outward similarities of the eastern Caribbean small-scale fisheries can be deceptive if important social and economic differences are not taken into account. Particularly noticeable is the difference between Barbados and its neighbours. In Barbados the incremental process of creating conditions for community-based management has been slow due to resource users' lack of familiarity with fisheries management concepts and their strongly developmental orientation.

The development, rather than resource management, orientation of the activities reflects the interests of fisherfolk. While organization leaders are aware of the need to become involved in fishery management, they appreciate the need to build constituencies on the matters that are of most concern to their followers. Although the state's agenda is to encourage a shift towards conservation-oriented fishery management, the political reality is that in a developing country this is quite difficult without extenuating circumstances such as severe resource depletion. In addition, unlike its neighbours, fishery resources in Barbados tend to be completely open access, lacking the traditional informal property right systems prevalent in the coastal fisheries of the other islands.

Although not yet translated into management results, the need to focus heavily on information exchange between managers/scientists and the fishing industry has become increasingly apparent, especially as state agency operating budgets continue to shrink. For small countries like these, community-based management is more of a necessity than an option because the state cannot hope to manage the fisheries sector on its own, and sometimes is not in the position to co-manage effectively. Under such circumstances the devolution of responsibility and authority to community organizations is warranted once the latter are viable and appropriate.

The differences in approach between Barbados and the other islands are due mainly to the absence of fishing villages, organizations, or local governance systems in the former. Except in Barbados, the formal route of the Fisheries Advisory Committee is not seen as important due to the existence of alternatives that allow multi-stakeholder dialogue and inputs into policy. The successful establishment of fisherfolk organizations in Barbados may partly depend on the extent to which government is willing to provide incentives to organizations rather than individuals in order to create or conserve the social capital required for sustained collective action.

These lessons from the eastern Caribbean should be replicable in other small island fisheries situations, especially where there is no established tradition of community-based management, or where community-based management has been informal, but fisheries management planning is being introduced. Certainly this applies to other small islands within the wider Caribbean region. There is very little about this case that would seriously affect its ability to be replicated in countries under predominantly western influence and governance systems. In general, the case is not strongly conditioned by culturally specific indigenous structures for community-based management.

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