

Organising Fisherfolk in Barbados Without Completing a Clean Round

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ABSTRACT

In equestrian terms a clean round describes the completion of a prescribed course of jumps without time faults or jumping faults. In Barbados a prescribed course was set for the organisation of fisherfolk into formal groups such as associations or co-operatives. This was through a Fisherfolk Organisation Development Project that has been reported upon at previous meetings of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute. The course was prescribed and bounded in time by the project work plan. From inception, most of the obstacles were spotted in the distance and prepared for, but some proved deceptive and difficult to overcome. Likewise the timing was calculated, but with each obstacle the course proved longer. We did not complete a clean round. This paper reviews the Fisherfolk Organisation Development Project that was implemented between June 1997 and July 1999 in Barbados. Features of the project and its results are analysed in relation to a framework of factors derived from the literature on co-management and institutional analysis. Some alternative approaches and future options for extending the work of the project into a long-term programme are explored.

KEY WORDS: Barbados, co-management, fisheries

INTRODUCTION

At the 51st Annual Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute in 1998, a paper was presented on the history of fisherfolk organisation in Barbados and the new initiative of the 1997 to 1999 Fisherfolk Organisation Development Project (FODP) (McConney Atapattu and Leslie 2000). Based upon studies of social processes in the fishing industry an incremental introduction of co-management was advocated (McConney 1997). The FODP was expected to contribute towards the feasibility of introducing co-management through the establishment of formal fisherfolk organisations that could play meaningful roles as fisheries management partners with government (McConney and Mahon 1998). The government was expected to undertake whatever other action was necessary to provide a climate conducive to co-management.

This paper evaluates the FODP and supporting government action in the context of certain key conditions described in the literature as important to the introduction and sustainability of fisheries co-management. Some condition

proved to be obstacles too great to be overcome, at least in the period available for execution of the project, while others were taken in stride.

In many respects the course of the project resembled equestrian competition where horse and rider, working as a team, negotiate challenging courses with obstacles of different types and difficulty within a prescribed time. A “clean round” occurs when the process of overcoming the obstacles does not result in award of penalties. But the course can be completed, and the event won, without completing a clean round. In such cases success is judged by a level of performance that is short of perfection, but still satisfactory. Without suggesting who is horse and who is rider, perhaps the roles change with the obstacle encountered, the fishing industry and government similarly work in close partnership to overcome the obstacle course of establishing co-management.

The next section sets out the framework used for analysis. Results and discussion follow. Noting that the Fisheries Division was satisfied enough with progress during the FODP to incorporate continuity of the project into its regular work programme, some thoughts are shared on where to go from here to tackle the remaining obstacles in another round.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The Fisheries Management Plan for Barbados clearly states that the term “fisheries management” encompasses both fisheries conservation and development (Figure 1).

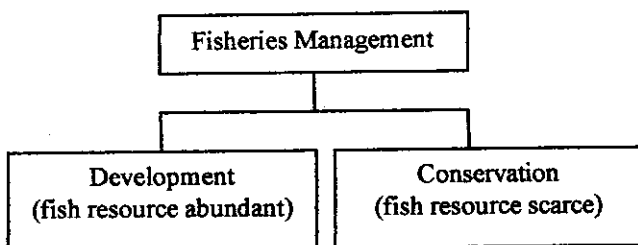


Figure 1. Dichotomy of fisheries management

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We are aware that others may use management to mean conservation and to oppose development. This use is not politically correct in a developing country. But it also does not mean that development is seen only as increased fish harvest. This would be equally naïve. Fishery development has many dimensions, some of which are illustrated in Figure 2. Often the non-harvest aspects are of most interest to the fishing industry since catching more fish does not necessarily result in a better life. These are important points for appreciating how co-management is usually viewed and approached in Barbados by both the fishing industry and government.

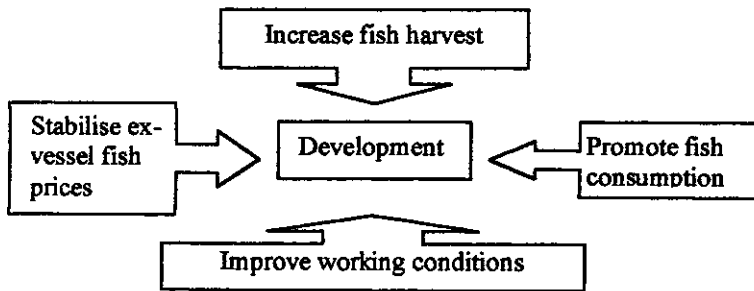


Figure 2. Some dimensions of fisheries development

The framework for analysis in this paper is drawn primarily from work by Pomeroy, Katon and Harkes (1998) on key conditions and principles that facilitate the successful implementation of fisheries co-management. These they drew from Asian experiences with co-management. The twenty-eight conditions and principles suggested for successful fisheries co-management in Asia are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation of fisheries co-management conditions in Barbados

Co-management condition	Score	Co-management condition	Score
Individual incentive structure	2	Political and social stability	1
Recognised resource management problems	2	Networking and advocacy	2
Leadership	2	Enabling policies and legislation	2
Stakeholder involvement	1	Provision of financial resources/budget	1
Empowerment	2	Government agency support	2
Trust between partners	2	Social and cultural fit	2
Property rights over resource	3	Partner sense of ownership	2
Local political support	2	Effective enforcement	2
Capability building	2	Partnerships and contractual agreements	1
Organisations	1	Overlap of interests	2
Conflict management	3	Flexibility	1
External agents	1	Appropriate scale	2
Clear objectives form a well-defined set of issues	2	Co-ordinating body	1
Effective communication	2	Social preparation and value formation	2

Scores: 1 = fully present; 2 = partially present; 3 = not present

RESULTS

Table 1 also contains the results of analysis derived from qualitatively evaluating how close the FODP and government of Barbados have come to making these part of the fisheries environment in Barbados. A score of 1, 2 or 3 points is given to each attribute depending upon whether it is judged to be: (1) fully present; (2) partially present; or (3) not present.

Individual Incentive Structure

This is partially present amongst most stakeholders, but needs to be developed on more a sustainable basis than the present tendency, particularly amongst fishers, to see co-management as a response to crisis.

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Recognised Resource Management Problems

This is also partially developed, but alarming proportions of fishers continue to deny that overfishing, particularly of pelagic species, is possible. More are ready to accept that inshore reef resources are declining, but they see threats from other coastal uses as the major problems, not fishing.

Leadership

Good leadership is present in only a few organisations. Development of leadership skills is an ongoing process that will take additional time.

Stakeholder Involvement

Other coastal users such as dive operators and recreational fishers have been the main stakeholders outside of the fishing industry. Their involvement is full, with an increasing appreciation of the issues related to coastal and fisheries management.

Empowerment

The fishing industry, and particularly the harvest sector, still considers itself relatively powerless in comparison to other coastal and ocean users. A process of enlightenment and empowerment to raise the consciousness and confidence of fisherfolk continues.

Trust Between Partners

The fishing industry generally continues not to trust the government fully, but trust appears to be growing. The government has demonstrated increasing trust in the fisherfolk organisations.

Property Rights over Resources

There is no system of traditional or modern property rights in the fishing industry. Such a system could only apply to the inshore reef fishery in the absence of multilateral arrangements for the pelagic fishery.

Local Political Support

Given the small size of the island and absence of local government, there is little distinction between local and national political support. Political support is present, but needs to be improved upon.

Capability Building

Building capability and capacity was one of the main components of the FODP, but still there is need for much more. This is especially with respect to leadership and the effective management of the fisherfolk associations.

Organisations

Organisation formation and strengthening was the focus of the FODP. In the two year period fourteen fisherfolk organisations became active. Their legitimacy is recognised by government through administrative registration, but to date legal status has only been accorded to co-operatives.

Conflict Management

There are no established mechanisms for conflict management or resolution in the fishing industry. Conflicts are usually mild, and most often between the harvest and postharvest sectors or within the latter.

External agents

The Fisheries Division has employed external agents throughout the FODP period and beyond. Fisheries authorities are acutely aware that a "foreigner factor" exists whereby information or advice from an outsider may be more readily accepted than from a local. This is a serious weakness.

Clear Objectives Form a Well-defined Set of Issues

Issues and objectives are not entirely clear to all parties. In particular, the denial of overfishing in some quarters makes it difficult for fishery conservation and recovery objectives to be shared by all stakeholders.

Effective Communication

Communication is improving between the fishing industry and government, but is not altogether satisfactory. One reason is that many in the fishing industry are not familiar with concepts in fisheries management.

Political and social stability

Barbados is extremely stable socially and politically.

Networking and Advocacy

Networking, more than advocacy, was a central theme of the FODP experience. Emphasis was placed on community linkages and exchanges of ideas and information between fisherfolk and other stakeholders.

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Enabling Policies and Legislation

The inadequacy of the legal framework was hinted at above concerning organisation registration, but it also extends to jurisdiction and powers. Right now, fisherfolk organisations are recognised entirely due to a supportive government policy which needs to be reflected in legislation.

Provision of Financial Resources/budget

The budget of the Fisheries Division is small, but since 1998 funds have been allocated to provide direct assistance through a small grant facility administered by the Fisheries Division with a minimum of red tape. Funds are available to fisherfolk organisations from a variety of sources, but they need to demonstrate willingness to manage their own affairs properly.

Government Agency Support

As stated throughout, government support has been excellent and the driving force behind co-management. Some types of support, particularly those requiring legal bases have, however, been too late in coming.

Social and Cultural Fit with Existing and Traditional Institutions

Although there were fisheries co-operatives 30 years ago, and the harvest sector in particular has yearned for more unity amongst fisherfolk, collective action is not the norm in the fishing industry. However in a country with an increasing number of interest groups, the social and cultural fit is much better now than before.

Partner Sense of Ownership of the Co-management Process

The sense of ownership in the fishing industry is only partially developed. There is still a considerable degree of dependence on government in paternal rather than partnership relations.

Effective Enforcement

There are relatively few fisheries management laws, and what few exist are only poorly enforced or complied with. However, there has been a noticeable increase in the provision of information from the fishing industry about law-breaking activities which offers hope for future development.

Partnerships and Contractual Agreements

Such agreements are not yet in place, although informally there are close

links between the Fisheries Division and the more active fisherfolk organisations. These links are aimed at improving the ability of the groups to be sub-contracted on fisheries issues. This relationship has developed in the awareness that as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) the fisherfolk organisations stand a better chance than government in attracting some types of funding and resources for conducting participatory activities.

Overlap of Interests

There is a significant overlap of interests amongst coastal and ocean resource users. This is now being realised through dialogue between the groups which did not exist before the FODP.

Flexibility

Notions of flexibility and adaptation are fundamental to the design of the co-management process in Barbados due to the acknowledged high levels of uncertainty in many aspects of the fishing industry.

Appropriate Scale

Scale poses a problem. Because nearly 90% of the total fish harvest in Barbados consists of migratory pelagic fishes, a region-wide scale for co-management is most appropriate. This is presently not possible due to the absence of appropriate inter-governmental organisations or arrangements. A smaller scale is appropriate for the inshore resources, but the absence of discrete geographic fishing communities and fishing grounds, results in large sections of coast, virtually the entire island, having to be the shared management area for several groups. Again the scale is too large in relation to the present capacity of the fisherfolk organisations. Hence the focus on the operation of a viable secondary level, national fisherfolk body.

Co-ordinating Body

The secondary level, national fisherfolk body co-ordinates fisherfolk organisations, while the Fisheries Division and Coastal Zone Management Unit bring together many government interests. The Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC) which operates under the Fisheries Act serves as the ultimate co-ordinating body by including major stakeholders at policy level.

Social Preparation and Value Formation

There was insufficient time under the FODP for social preparation, and it is still an ongoing process fundamental to the sustainability of the co-management process. A significant difference between wanting co-management and

functioning within its framework has been revealed by experience. Society still sees the fishing industry as individualistic and not capable of collaborative initiatives in true partnership with government. This is slowly changing, and successful practical demonstration of the potential of co-management has been the most effective change agent.

DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, the majority of key conditions and principles identified as important in the Asian experience are present to some extent in the Barbados situation. Because co-management, and indeed the whole concept of fisheries management, is a very recent introduction to Barbados, it is not possible to tell whether the same level of importance will be attached to these enabling conditions and principles in the longer term. However, it seems likely from this very preliminary and superficial analysis that several of them may be critical.

The results also reveal some policy implications that point the way forward if Barbados is to proceed with co-management as far as is feasible. One of the most fundamental concerns is scale. The sharing of fishery resources with neighbouring islands makes national scale, community-based co-management virtually impossible for many fisheries. It is enticing to think that regional scale co-management will be feasible once the appropriate networks of public and private sector stakeholder can be brought together, but this is futuristic. What is more feasible now is the forging of partnerships aimed at establishing the environment for such arrangements. In this context the current setting up of a regional inter-governmental fisheries mechanism is of considerable interest, and it needs to be paralleled at the community level among fisherfolk organisations.

Other major considerations concern the rate of progress of establishing co-management in Barbados, particularly in the wider context of including development aspects. While the process cannot be rushed, it is clear that the government must provide a more favourable climate for co-management through policies, procedures and legislation. There has been much good progress towards meaningful partnership between the fishing industry and government based on good will and trust, but this is insufficient. Unless the rights and duties of the stakeholders are more securely established, with flexibility of course, there will always be some holding back in fear of trust betrayed. Government needs to act swiftly to improve the climate and demonstrate its commitment in a more tangible manner.

Finally, there is the perspective and capacity of the fishing industry stakeholders, and particularly the fisherfolk organisations. The latter need to recognise and begin to exercise their true potential. At this stage there is understandably much dependence upon government, but a greater degree of self-

reliance must be demonstrated if they are to avoid co-optation by government, even if unintentional. Access to resources and expertise through NGO networking must be more fully explored. The organisations are still very weak in terms of their administrative capacity and ability to conduct their own affairs. Without significant advancement in this area, given the absence of a traditional fishing community organisational structure, their chances of meaningfully participating in co-management are small. As concluded in last year's presentation at the GCFI, their continued strengthening is of vital importance to the sustainability of co-management.

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