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Principles of Community Fisheries Management

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Principles of Community Fisheries Management

Background

1. People of Pacific Islands have lived in communities for many many years. Traditionally, they lived either in extended families, villages, tribes, or under one leadership (traditional kings / chiefs). The common community activities included hunting, planting, fishing, and defending themselves from enemies. Common activities were largely community driven for the purpose of survival.
2. While common community activities are slowly departing from their original purposes, they are still practised in every country of the Pacific by way of traditional village groups, religions, youth groups and other traditional divisions, although with various levels of success. It is being part of a community that drives many people to action. For example in Samoa, the “aumaga” (untitled men) are encouraged through community decision (“matai” system) to undertake certain activities or face community punishment. In Kiribati, the “Kaotibai” (island occasion/gathering) reflects the degree of manhood in a head of household through the provision of “bukinibai” (produces such as swamp taro, coconut strings etc). In Cook Islands the “Ra’ui” system obligates community members to follow decisions made by “Koutu Nui” (body of traditional chiefs). So the principles of and traditions of community management in all undertakings are strong in Pacific Islands.

The rights of coastal communities over the fisheries resources

3. In many Pacific Islands, communities choose to live in coastal areas where there is easy access to near-shore fish stocks, which are a vital source of food. Subsistence fisheries have been the main source of protein and are extremely important. So important are these fisheries resources, that many communities have claimed ownership of their adjacent waters, even if this is contrary to current national legislation. In other traditions, communities claims ownership of areas and resources extended from land to reefs.

Destructive fishing practices

4. The introduction of modern materials such as chicken-wire for fence traps and monofilament nylon for gill nets, for example, has made fishing effort more effective. In some cases, modest developments such as the introduction of underwater torches and scuba diving gear have resulted in a devastating increase in fishing efficiency. Environmental disturbances have resulted from not only natural events such as cyclones and storms but also from human activities such as road construction and land reclamation.

Management of fisheries by Legislation

5. Many countries have introduced fisheries legislation to address the management of their fishery resources. Rules and regulations have been imposed by government authorities with very little or no input from other important stakeholders such as fishing communities. Because of the common constraints amongst islands in terms of finance and resources, regulations are difficult to enforce and monitor, and may have very little impact on the management of subsistence fisheries resources.

Principles of management by communities

6. The management of fishery resources through community participation is a new concept and will become a new area of development in national fisheries. The key task is to convince the communities that since they are the resource users, **they**, not Government, have the primary responsibility to manage their marine environment.
7. The overall management strategy is to seek a community-developed Fisheries Management Plan from participating communities in a management programme. Each participating community is to be encouraged to analyse its fishing practices and develop a community-owned plan with undertakings to introduce appropriate village rules and regulations and pursue other conservation measures. Reciprocally, the Fisheries authorities will need to provide undertakings to support the communities by providing scientific advice and assistance. The management strategy is to be based on four principles - **i)** maximum community participation, **ii)** motivation rather than education, **iii)** a demand-based management system, and **iv)** the development of alternative sources of seafood to those resulting in the present heavy and destructive exploitation of lagoons and near-shore reefs.

i) Maximum community participation

8. Regardless of legislation or enforcement, the responsible management of marine resources will only be achieved when fishing communities themselves see it as their responsibility. Accordingly, the strategy needs to focus on mobilising each community through direct contact with key community groups. These include groups of women, men and chiefs to ensure the widest community participation and eventual ownership of the community fisheries management plan.

ii) Motivation not education

9. The knowledge of island and coastal people regarding the marine environment has often been underestimated. Most coastal communities have an awareness of, and concern for, their marine environment. Although public awareness-raising activities are part of the fisheries management programme, the prime need is not for education, but for motivation and support. Part of this motivation depends on the availability of economically viable alternatives to the present unsustainable and destructive fishing practices. The key task is to convince communities that being resource users, they have the primary responsibility to manage their marine environment.

iii) A management system which is demand-based

10. For reasons of efficiency and sustainability, the management system must focus on villages in which communities have a concern for the marine environment, and are prepared to participate and contribute in finding solutions to problems. This will require selectively working with villages which are eager to participate in the programme.

iv) The development of alternative sources of seafood

11. It is unreasonable to expect communities to adopt conservation measures, which will (at least in the short term) reduce present catches of seafood even further, without offering alternatives. Accordingly, a management programme must include the development of alternative sources of seafood to those resulting from the present heavy and destructive exploitation of near-shore reefs and lagoons. The alternatives seafood sources may include the diversion of fishing pressure to areas immediately beyond the reefs through the introduction of other means of fishing, the promotion of community-level aquaculture, and, the judicious introduction of new (exotic) or depleted species.