WHAT'S HAPPENING

OUTSIDE THE REGION

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Coming Together to manage Fisheries: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the Stakeholder Approach to Fisheries Management

by Rathin Roy

What exactly is the Stakeholder Approach to Fisheries Management?

Fisheries Management has traditionally been seen as something that governments or Departments of Fisheries do. Rules & Regulations are issued and enforced by law. The problem is that enforcing rules is costly, especially when fisheries are scattered along long coastlines and do not believe in the rules being enforced. And, fishers do not like to follow rules and regulations unless they believe in them. The Stakeholder Approach to Management (SHM) of Fisheries tries to overcome these problems and attempts to bring together all the stakeholders into the management process.

What does this mean? **Groups concerned with fisheries, such as fishers of different types, traders, money-lenders, wholesalers, retailers, consumers, government agencies, fishery agencies, and non-governmental organizations are brought together to identify the problems facing the fisheries from different points of view, to come up with mutually acceptable solution options and management plans, to implement and monitor the management measures and to help enforce the law.**

Who are the stakeholders? I can see the logic of including several of the groups mentioned but how do you justify including consumers and non-governmental organizations?

A stakeholder is broadly defined as anyone who is either involved in a fishery or one who influences the behavior of the fishery. For example, fishers concentrate on fishing for what consumers of fish want. If consumers want a particular type of fish and are willing to pay a good price for it then fishers will catch it irrespective of whether it is good or bad from the point of view of management.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned about the environment or about the quality of life of fishers may support or object to certain fishery-related activities. It makes no sense to ignore them as they can mobilize public awareness and concern and put obstacles in the path of the fishery sector. Involving concerned NGOs in the process of management rather than treating them as adversaries therefore becomes important.

Bringing a lot of different types of stakeholders into the process of fisheries management seems like a good idea but it is bound to complicate matters. Are you sure stakeholder approaches to management are really necessary?

The main reason why SHM holds promise in fisheries is because of the very nature of the problems confronting fisheries.

Let us pause a while and look at the issues in coastal fisheries. Fisher populations are increasing. This increase is multiplied several times when you consider the accelerating effect of technology: bigger boats, motorization, more efficient fishing gear and of course a lot more gear. All this leads to over-fishing, which in turn means reduced catch per unit of effort of fishing and lowered incomes. To make matters worse, pollution from industries and agricul-

ture and sewage from coastal cities are affecting coastal marine ecosystems and the very habitat of the fish. Fishers, desperate for incomes, are using destructive fishing methods like trawls and small-mesh gear.

Driven by customer need they are targeting juvenile fish and gravid fish, all of which affect fish stocks and catches. The scenario on land is no better. Fishers have little access to land or alternative income sources, making them totally dependent on fishing. Traders, who often control informal credit, earn their profits and get back their investments by using their clout to buy fish cheap.

Before we agree on the benefits of using SHM we need to look at the nature of these problems because it is this that will suggest the nature of the solution. It is obvious that there is a need to manage fisheries and their habitats if present and future generations of fishers have to make a decent living and provide food for others.

The Nature of the Problem

First, there are too many stakeholders (with little or no power to make a difference), each with their own perceptions of what the problems are. Even one unhappy or dissatisfied group can block the process of solving problems affecting the majority. Implementation and enforcement of management regulations is almost impossible, not to mention prohibitively expensive, unless all the stakeholders agree to the regulations and help in enforcing them.

Community-based management, otherwise an excellent approach, often breaks down because the fish stocks to be managed do not respect community and political boundaries. The learning here is that **we need a mechanism of management that can bring in all the stakeholders to agree on problems & solutions and participate in management and enforcement.**

Secondly, the marine ecosystem and the social ecosystem of the concerned people are both very complex. We lack good data, information and knowledge. Everything seems to be connected to everything else, and any action taken has delayed and often unpredictable results. It is very difficult to pin down precise causes for problems.

The learning here is that **it is difficult to come up with nice, clean, universally acceptable solutions to fisheries problems. The only way out may be to become precautionary and come to negotiated agreements not only on problems but also on solutions**. This again will require the involvement of all stakeholders.

Thirdly, solutions to fisheries problems often lie in other sectors, beyond the reach of fishery agencies. Pollution from industries, agriculture and human habitats are destroying fishery habitats, and yet, groups outside of the fishery sector can only address these. Worse, one sector's solution is often another sector's problem. Foresters log wood to profit, but the silt from unprotected hillside washes down to the sea, smothering marine habitats.

Poor consumers, desperate for fish, see lower-cost juvenile fish as a solution causing problems for fisheries. Even government agencies concerned with these diverse activities find it difficult to sit together and come up with mutually beneficial programmes. The learning here is that **unless we can bring together all the stakeholders who are involved in and who affect fisheries, we may never get around to solving fishery problems.**

Finally, to cut a long story short, **fishing is about ownership and user-rights of resources**. These are politically sensitive issues. People guard them jealously and are willing to fight over them. **Fisheries problems in the final analysis are socio-political problems that need political solutions, and these can only be achieved by all the stakeholders coming together to manage their resources.**

It is true that SHM is complex, time consuming and often difficult but given the nature of the problems there seems to be no easy way out, except by involving stakeholders in the management process to make it socially feasible.

The logic of considering SHM is falling into place but it is still not clear how SHM actually works. Could you describe the process of SHM? How would you go about really doing it?

Let us look at the process, step by step.

1. The first step is to **broadly determine the boundary of the problem which needs to be managed**. This could a geographical area, but in almost all cases the particular fishery determines

the boundary. For example the problem could be the offshore tuna fishery in Sri Lanka, or the reef resources utilization in the Maldives, or the estuarine set bag net fishery in Bangladesh. In some cases, if the geographical area coincides with the fishery area it will lend itself to SHM as in the case of Phang Nga Bay in Thailand.

2. The next step is to **identify the stakeholders**, all those involved in the fishery, from catching to selling to consuming, including all those who influence and affect the fishery, both positively and negatively. This is not as difficult as it sounds: by tracking the activities and impacts and asking the persons involved, a good listing is possible. And as the process evolves, those missed out will emerge and can be included.

3. Having identified the stakeholders it is necessary to **get to know them better**, to understand what they do and don't do and why. Perhaps the most important aspect of stakeholder analysis is to determine how they see and perceive the problems and solution options. An often ignored aspect is to determine their aspirations and dreams, as these are powerful driving forces among people and will often bring people together, instead of differences and problems. Stakeholder analysis has to be done group by group and the findings consolidated for further action. **Stakeholder analysis** can be done quickly using already well established participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) tools.

4. A carryover from stakeholder analysis but nevertheless a critical, distinct step is **problem analysis**. In problem analysis each stakeholder group is helped to separate symptoms from real problems and to determine the causes of the problems, as they perceive them. This is an important exercise, which lays the foundation for the rest of the process. It is very important at this stage to understand the group's aspirations and dreams as this often clarifies how they give meaning to problems. It also helps in bringing stakeholders together because shared aspirations attract people to co-operate better than shared problems.

5. At this stage of the process, stakeholders have to be motivated and given a reason to come together—initially to share their views and concerns and later to negotiate problem definitions, solution choices, choice of approaches to management and basically what each group is willing to win or lose for the greater good. The **consulta-tions and negotiations** need to be carefully mediated to avoid conflicts and to keep the process constructive.

6. Ideally the consultations and negotiations will result in a management plan which is agreed to by all the parties as the best possible deal they can get, which also answers their needs.

7. A management plan agreed to by all the stakeholders is merely a piece of paper with some hope. The next critical step is for government (one of the important stakeholders) to agree to the plan within the context of fisheries management legislation and to empower the stakeholder group to implement the plan as law. This not only requires enabling legislation but also requires that the stakeholder group is legitimized by law as a decision making group in the eyes of government and the law. Without this legitimizing and empowering process, the whole process of SHM will fail.

8. With empowerment, the process of implementing the management plan will begin with regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that things are going as planned.

9. All agreements necessarily are time bound and will need to be reviewed. The management plan should clearly specify the periodicity of review and the process of review, which in most cases will require going through the SHM process again.

This briefly is the SHM process, necessarily simplified for presentation. Many components often take place in parallel, and as in most people-oriented activities, nothing ever happens by design and smoothly. But with careful management of the process, good mediation and a lot of faith, SHM can make headway in an area where successes have not been too easy to find.

Correct me if I am wrong but I get the feeling that in SHM, fishery agencies have a lesser role. Once they empower the stakeholders they will have little or nothing to do.

It might seem like that but it is not true. Government and fishery agencies will actually end up doing much more than at present, though they may do different things. Let us look at it in detail. Fishery resources belong to the country, and government is the mandated agency to manage it. They do it by developing policy, creating rules and regulations and enforcing them. As important stakeholders, they also have most of the scientific knowledge.

In SHM fishery agencies are making the process of management more socially feasible by involving all the stakeholders in every aspect. It is fishery agencies that will have to lead the SHM process, guide it, empower it and through participative enforcement ensure its success. There is no SHM without government as a key stakeholder. Fishery agencies will have to develop their capacities in new areas such as stakeholder identification, stakeholder analysis, and mediation of consultations and negotiations to make SHM happen.

SHM sounds too good to be true. Surely if there are pros there should be cons. What are some of the problems?

Sure it has problems, any human process does. It is a difficult process, at least it seems more difficult for a fishery agency than taking all the decisions and trying to enforce it. It does take time. The objectives are difficult to control as in all participative processes. The important thing to remember is that the objective of SHM is not to arrive at the best possible management system but to arrive at the best possible management system that actually works. It is the art of the possible. There are a few other problems. The process of SHM tends to get political, which is natural because managing people's ownership and user-rights of resources is unfortunately political. Finally, in order to practise SHM, fishery agencies will have to change the way they work by building new skills and by becoming more participatory.

That's a lot of problems. I hope there are good aspects to SHM that would justify taking all the trouble?

Yes, there are. First, it brings all the parties into the process and makes it more participative. Problems are raised and the process provides clear agreement on the problems and their priorities. By working together and sharing responsibility, and with good mediation, conflicts are easier to resolve, particularly if they are identified before they become serious.

From the standpoint of fishery agencies, SHM reduces the cost of fisheries management and enforcement, and this is important—some fishery agencies spend up to one third of their budget enforcing regulations, and not very successfully at that. By giving "ownership" of the resources and of the process of management to the stakeholders they become more responsible and the chances of sustaining the management process increases. Finally, with all stakeholders involved and negotiating, the

chances are that the process will be more equitable than with a few controlling the process. In other words everyone will come out winning though not as much as they would want to.

If SHM has such good potential, how come people are not using it? Have there been any concrete attempts and, if so, what has the experience been?

The experience with SHM in the field of natural resources management is still relatively meager. Industry has over two decades of experience in SHM. SHM is being tried out in the forestry, fisheries and coastal zone management; experience, learning and the beginnings of success are trickling in. BOBP has tried the SHM approach in its third phase in its seven member countries with various levels of success, though five years is a very short period to judge the success of participatory developmental efforts. But some successes are visible—such as agreements on problems to be addressed and their priorities, a realization by the stakeholders that the resources that they are managing cannot be managed without all their participation, concrete efforts at modifying legislation to carry such efforts, facilitation of conflict resolution, to mention a few areas. The SHM process seems to be taking root in Sri Lanka in managing the ornamental fish sector, in the Maldives in integrated reef resources management, in Thailand to better manage the fisheries of Phang Nga Bay. There are also positive experiences from Southeast Asia and the Caribbean and these are enough reasons for us to give SHM a serious chance. The most important reason to keep faith in SHM is that if a process that addresses the very nature of the problems fails where will we turn to?

One last question: where can we get the details, the nuts and bolts of the SHM process, should we want to try it?

Some information is beginning to appear in the literature and on the Internet. We at BOBP are preparing a field guide to using the stakeholder approach to management of coastal fisheries resources and it should be out in a few months.

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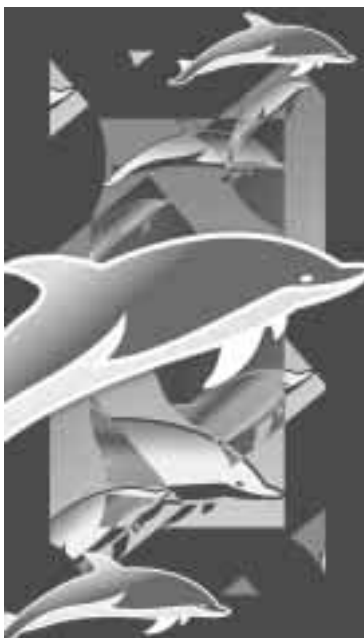
Villagers take lead in creation of the Blongko Marine Sanctuary, Indonesia

Blongko is a small village with a population of 1,250. It is located on the northwest shore of Minhasa, North Sulawesi, approximately one degree, eight minutes north of the equator. Its approximately 6.5 km of coastline is healthy and productive, bordered by relatively thick and vigorous mangrove. Most of the population lives along the water, and the majority of the population are fishers, although many residents both fish and farm. The fishery, both offshore and on the coral reef, plays a significant role in the livelihood of the community. Most fish captured are used for home consumption or sold by the fishers' wives to the local community.

The idea of making six hectares of mangrove swamp and part of the coral reef a marine sanctuary came about after a field visit by Blongko villagers to a marine sanctuary at Apo Island in the Philippines. A return visit by the Apo Island village chief and members of the women's cooperative took place to observe Blongko and exchange ideas. The kepala desa, village government head official, of Blongko and the community quickly understood the Apo Island group's description of how their community-driven marine sanctuary effort was developed and implemented. Realising the value of the local fishery, and seeing a way to protect it as a valuable nursery for fish that could help feed future generations, kepala desa worked with Proyek Pesisir's (the Indonesian coastal resources management project) staff and community members to collect data, identify a proper site and develop a local ordinance to regulate the proposed protected area.

Within a year, the community fully supported the concept, completed technical research and selected a site. The village government also received support from the regional and national governments for the ordinance that the villages had crafted. In October 1998, the area was officially designated a marine sanctuary. Already an information/meeting center is under construction, placement of boundary markers is underway and information signs are being created. By promoting the community-based marine sanctuary, Blongko's residents now have a more active role and responsibility for protecting and sustaining marine resources which directly affect their day-to-day lives. The resource users in Blongko are now becoming resource managers.

While one small sanctuary may not seem like much, if it is used as a model which is replicated widely, it can greatly add to the amount of coral reef area protected within a nation. It also has positive financial implications over time. With budgets cut due to the national economic crisis, community-based marine sanctuaries become an attractive and less-costly means of marine ecosystem and biodiversity protection as the majority of costs – like the benefits – can be internalised within the community rather than be rolled into national budgets.

The Blongko Marine Sanctuary is miniscule in a global context, but it is extremely important as an example of success in a country such as Indonesia, which contains 20 percent of the world's coral reefs and the highest marine biodiversity in the world – "the underwater rain forest."

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