

The challenge for Governance

Globalization and the exclusion of local fishing communities

The exploitation of fisheries resources and the markets for fisheries products are increasingly operating in the international domain. This represents opportunities for fishers and fishing communities, but exploring these opportunities requires substantial financial and organisational inputs as well as security of future access to fisheries resources. These requirements are rarely met in fishing communities in developing countries and the opportunities resulting from globalisation are, therefore, likely to turn into exclusion whereby fishing communities lose control over and access to the fisheries resources in their local environment as other users take over. Such users may be more resourceful fishing industries as can be seen in many developing countries when distant water fleets compete with coastal fisheries. An example is the case of the foreign fleets harvesting shrimp along the Mozambican coast in direct competition with local fleets.

Market driven agreements and conventions

Another aspect of globalisation is the development of international agreements and conventions on standards for environmental and fisheries management, which generally focus on the aquatic ecosystems rather than on local communities. Market driven arrangements such as green labelling or certification of fisheries products also tend to focus on ecosystems rather than people. The objectives of such arrangements may be in the long-term interest of fishing communities but do not address or may even be considered counterproductive to their immediate concerns such as meeting daily requirements for food and income.

Competition for the use of resources

Fisheries are under pressure from the uses of the coastal and freshwater environment for other purposes such as infrastructure and industrial development, irrigation and flooding control, hydropower development, aquaculture and environmental changes. Such uses often exclude fisheries by competing for space or by changing the environment in ways that lead to reduced productivity of fisheries resources. Examples of such developments are coastal aquaculture development in Thailand, which has resulted in loss of mangrove habitats of importance for the reproduction of fish stocks; the development of agriculture and floods control in the Mekong River Basin, which reduces the floodplain areas on which the fisheries rely (Sverdrup-Jensen 2002); and the development of tourism on Lake Kariba in Zimbabwe, which has led to fisheries being closed to local communities (Jul-Larsen et al. 2002). This exclusion has led to reduced access to resources and increased tension within communities.

The developments in coastal environments attract populations from inland areas causing more pressure on coastal space and resources. Fisheries harvest living natural resources and are thus based on a limited natural production in the aquatic ecosystem. Increased exploitation leads to overexploitation, reduced production per fisher and eventually to conflicts between fishers concerning access to resources and markets and gear conflicts.

Globalisation and competing uses of the aquatic environment leave fisheries communities in a precarious situation where they are in danger of losing access to and control over their resource base while the same resource base may be dwindling due to environmental changes and overexploitation. There is a need for an innovative way of managing fisheries that addresses these problems.

Who should take the responsibility to manage fisheries?

The basic challenge to governance in fisheries management is to establish and maintain institutions - norms and rules to guide decisions including a formal framework for decision-making - which enable the communities to address this complex and fragile situation. The process for establishing, enabling and maintaining institutions for improved governance of coastal resources is often not clear and requires a process of learning and adapting to the context of the fishery concerned. This may call for a rewamp of existing institutions and the establishment of more responsive and flexible arrangements for management. The balance of responsibility that has to be shared among governments, communities and industry has to be worked out through a negotiative and iterative process.

Inadequacy of traditional fisheries management

Institutions regulating access to fisheries had in many – if not most – cases been in place long before modern concepts of fisheries management were developed (Jul-Larsen et al. 2002). The problems being faced by the fishing communities are, therefore, not necessarily a result of an absence of management institutions, but rather of the inadequacy of these institutions to deal with recent developments. Examples of such systems are the “Sasi-Laut” system in the Maluku of Indonesia (Novaczek et al. 2001) and traditional fisheries management systems of the Pacific Islands (Ruddle 1998). Revitalization of such institutions will, therefore, not lead to solutions to the problems. They may have lost their significance exactly because they were set up to solve other problems and are thus inadequate to deal with the present situation.

Inadequacy of ‘modern’ fisheries management

Fisheries management as it has developed within modern industrialised societies (‘modern fisheries management’) does not represent a solution either. This centralised top-down fisheries management, focussing on objectives relating to the fish resources and based exclusively on formal biological science, is increasingly questioned in the societies in which it was developed and attempts to introduce such management in other environments have generally been without much success. Such management systems are inherently unable to address the present problems of fishing communities due to the ways objectives are defined, limitations in the knowledge on which they are based and the top-down nature of implementation. The overriding and immediate objectives of modern fisheries management are related to the sustainability of the resource. While these objectives are of relevance to the fishing communities, their immediate priorities for management are generally not directly related to the resource but to other pressures on their social and resource system - which may also include the causes for excessive exploitation of the resource. The combination of a top-down approach and a narrow focus on resource issues leads to management being

based on formal biological science produced in specialised research institutions and disregarding or even being in direct contrast to the experiences of fishers (Degnbol 2002). The result is that modern fisheries management fails to address the core concerns of fishing communities, is insensitive to local conditions, lacks backing from fishing communities and is even inefficient in achieving its own objectives.

A new approach is needed

The modern fisheries management approach has not prevented over-exploitation of fish resources. This is evident from the international experience that many important stocks that have been subject to this regime for decades have been severely overexploited and even collapsed. One of the main reasons for the lack of success for the modern fisheries management approach is that the top-down approach has left the fishing communities completely out of the process and builds up barriers between the fisheries administrations and the fishing communities. This has undermined the legitimacy and efficacy of the management system (Hara and Raakjaer Nielsen 2002).

These past experiences and the present challenges for fisheries management have led to a general acceptance that institutional reforms in the governance structures for fisheries management are required.

A new governance approach needs to be developed. This approach cannot be a revitalisation of existing or former management regimes in the community, which have proven inadequate to deal with the situation, nor can it be a replication of modern centralised fisheries management.

Problems facing fishing communities

The new governance approach must be able to address the problems facing the fishing communities in the present situation including:

- The risk of exclusion from resources and markets due to globalisation, competing uses of the freshwater and coastal environment and other activities which may lead to reduced resource productivity.
- Provision of an institutional framework to control access and resolve questions of distribution of access between fishers.
- Reversing overexploitation and establishing sustainable exploitation of the living aquatic resources on which the fishing communities rely.
- Reconciling the immediate needs of fishing communities with international agreements focussing on the aquatic ecosystem.

