Community resource management

A **resource** is something that is valuable and is used by people. Marine resources include fish, shellfish and other sea-life. These resources and where they live (their **environment**) are part of an **ecosystem** where all living and non-living things interact with each other.

The main aim of **marine resource management** is to ensure that the use of these resources is sustainable. This means that we must manage human activities to protect the environment, both on land and sea. What happens on land will affect things that live in the sea. Marine ecosystems and seafood species are affected by forestry, farming, mining, uncontrolled development and wastes from towns and villages.

The need for the broad management of land and sea has sometimes been called a ridge to reef approach or an ecosystem approach. It is this broader style of resource management, which includes the management of land, water and living resources, that this brochure is based on.

A community with strong leadership can develop resource management without outside assistance. However, communities and government authorities or NGOs working together (sometimes called **co-management**) will make the process easier and more effective.

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The essential elements of **community marine resource management** are given below.

1. Ensure that the community is aware, concerned and willing to take action

A community must have an **awareness** of the value of its marine resources and have a **concern** for existing problems. It must be prepared to take the **actions** necessary to manage its marine resources; it must also be prepared to work with the government if problems are beyond local control.

If this is not the case then co-management will fail. As the key stakeholder, the community must be the main driver of the process.

Community readiness must be assessed at the very outset – at the first meeting with community leaders.

→ If the assessment is negative, support would be better given to a more willing community.

→ If the assessment is positive, the procedure of developing co-management should be discussed and the opportunity given for community members to ask questions. Then continue with the following steps.

2. Agree on the key goals – the desired results

Goals must be set by the community even if developed with advice from a facilitator. An example of a narrow but important goal would be '*to ensure that catches of seafood continue to be sufficient to feed our community.*'

A broader goal would be '*to manage the land, water and living things in order to provide continuing food and other resources for the community.*'

The goal, or goals, must be widely agreed on by the community and consistent with national policies. Ideally, relevant government departments should be consulted and participate in initial meetings with the community.

3. Agree on a management plan with the actions or steps needed to achieve the goal

Although the process will be different in different countries, an important common theme must be to ensure **wide community involvement**.

It is important to involve different sectors of the community, including women's groups, clan representatives or family heads, owners and rights-holders of the different areas and fisher groups to ensure the widest community participation. This is the time to discuss the community actions and rules that are needed to achieve the goals.

It is important to encourage people to discuss their problems (related to the key goals) and to propose solutions. Useful information will include traditional knowledge and scientific information (as contained in the *SPC Information Sheets* in this series).

There are many ways to encourage people to join in discussions including theatrical performances, role-playing, resource mapping, and by using audience participation techniques such as constructing problem/solution trees and others (problem/solution trees and the Locally-Managed Marine Area (LMMA) techniques are described in the 2010 SPC/FAO/Nature Conservancy publication 'A community-based ecosystem approach to fisheries management; guidelines for Pacific Island Countries' – http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Manuals/Anon_10_EAFguidelines.pdf).

The main outcome must be agreement on the problems and solutions before deciding on the required actions and who is responsible for carrying them out. These can be recorded as an action plan or a **Community Resource Management Plan**. This plan, written in the local language, represents an important document to remember the agreements and rules as well as to show outsiders.

4. Identify or establish a small group to make the management plan work

Although community resource management is ideally supported by all people in the community, there needs to be some smaller group of people to take charge of the planned actions. This group may be thought of as a committee to administer the required actions and monitor progress. It also may need to penalize people who break management rules.

An existing group may be used or a **Community Resource Management Committee** could be established. The community may be made up of cultural leaders, or people appointed by them, or they could be elected by the people. The committee should include representatives from women's groups and fishers' groups. Ideally, it should also include representatives of the co-managers, either from government authorities or NGOs. They must meet regularly and work hard to keep the momentum of community resource management going.

5. Do it! – apply the actions in the management plan

Actions, rules or **tools** are used by community managers to achieve the goal. For example the community may choose to ban catching spawning fish and to ban certain types of destructive fishing.

To protect marine ecosystems they may decide to plant trees around a nearby river to prevent erosion, to protect mangrove areas, and to protect an area of coral reef by declaring a **Marine Protected Area**.

These are just some examples of tools that can be used – different ones may be used to achieve the same goal.

6. Check to see that actions are being carried out

It is necessary to monitor and assess how community resource management is functioning. This means seeking answers to questions such as the following.

→ Does the Community Resource Management Committee meet regularly?

→ Does it have the support of community leaders? - the church? - the people?

→ Do people respect the community rules established by the committee?

→ Does it enforce the community rules and regulations that have been agreed to?

7. Check to see if the plan is working

It is also necessary to monitor and assess if the applied actions and tools are achieving (or at least progressing towards) the intended goal. If this is not the case then different actions must be applied.

This may mean seeking answers to questions similar to the following ones.

→ Is the fish reserve working? Are numbers of fish increasing?

→ Is the ban on fishing with nets increasing the numbers of fish?

→ Is the tabu on catching certain species resulting in a greater number of fish?

→ Are catches improving, or at least not decreasing?

If the management measures taken are not working then some other measures will have to be taken. This is what is called 'adaptive management' – trying some sensible management measure and then seeing if it works; if it's not achieving results then it must be modified or other management measures should be tried.

Continuing support

In theory, if a community is managing its marine resources and there are visible benefits, community resource management will be self-sustaining. However, in practice, communities may find regular consultation with outside agencies useful for years to come.

If an outside agency is involved it may take years of regular visits to a community to ensure that co-management continues. Therefore, an exit strategy that involves a gradual withdrawal is better than an abrupt ending of support and encouragement for a community.

Extending community resource management to other communities

To extend the benefits to other communities, the co-managers or implementing agency should ensure that there is extensive media coverage for the first fishing communities to establish community resource management.

Radio interviews with key players from the first village are good ways of getting other communities interested. If modest funds are available, sponsoring exchange visits between communities with resource co-management and communities that are interested in establishing it is one of the most effective ways of extending the programme.

Regardless of legislation or enforcement, the responsible management of marine resources will only be achieved when fishing communities themselves see it as their responsibility.

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