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Implementing the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management

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Implementing the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management

Introduction

1. The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) has been discussed and debated in many international gatherings, although it is not a new concept for the Pacific Islands - especially at the local community level. The definitions of EAFM by many promoters of this phenomenon vary widely. Most are based on scientific and technical approaches promoted by each individual. While these approaches may have been tried, and perhaps seen as successful in other parts of the world, their applications in small island countries in the Pacific would need a lot of modifications to suit specific local situations. Pacific Island countries (PICs) are unique in many ways, and models designed to introduce new approaches must take into account local situations such as tradition and custom, social structure, protocol practiced at official and community levels, religion and availability of resources. These are the important factors which are often absent in current approaches, making many EAFM models inappropriate to Pacific Islands.
2. The EAFM approach promoted by SPC is based on its current Community-based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Programme, of which many Pacific Island countries have experience. The challenge for the CBFM programme is to find an acceptable method to integrate the EAF as a component of the CBFM programme. The challenge leads to development of an integrated name the Community-based Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (CEAFM). The approach contains most elements that have already been practiced by the Pacific Island countries under SPC Community-based Fisheries Management (CBFM) programme. It also contains important ideas on the formation of consultative bodies required at national level to ensure that the process of implementing a new integrated approach fits in with what the countries have and what they can afford.

The CEAFM Process

Preliminary Study

3. The preliminary study, to a certain extent, is similar to the scoping exercise under the FAO EAF model. The study is important to determine whether or not a request from a country to establish a CEAFM programme should proceed or not. It mainly assesses the level of resources available at local level to warrant the development of a programme. Among others, the study specifically examines issues such as the number of staff needed to operate the programme, the commitment of the Fisheries Department in providing finance to support the programme in its annual budget, the availability of relevant legislation to legalize the programme, and the general attitude of the public and local communities to the establishment of such a programme. The study will also provide recommendations on how the Fisheries Department may proceed should it wish to establish a CEAFM before moving to the next step.

National Workshop

4. Once the Fisheries Department fulfills the recommendations, there is a need to conduct a national workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to train Fisheries staff and other interested stakeholders in the use of the facilitation and participatory method to deal with members of local communities, and the use of the problem/solution tree as a tool to gather information from community members. Sometimes people think that working with communities is simple, but it is not. A special skill needs to be acquired by the Fisheries staff, who will be working in the field. This is more necessary when the participatory approach is used, to liaise with community members and to obtain information from them. Special skill is needed for the facilitation process during community workshops. The national workshop normally takes 5 days.

Development of a CEAFM model

5. While the principles of achieving a successful CEAFM programmes are similar, the processes to fulfill these are quite different between countries. Establishing CEAFM models take into account important factors such as tradition and culture, social structure, protocol practiced at official and community levels, religion, and availability of resources. As no two countries are the same, models are different, especially between the regions of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. Development of models is carried out by national fisheries staff that promote the CEAFM with advice and support from SPC. With the integration of the EAF component into the CBFM, there are complications in solving various problems which are beyond the capacities of local communities and the Fisheries Department. It is important therefore that part of the model should highlight methods to deal with problems that are beyond the capacities of the local communities and Fisheries to resolve.

Development of a Community Fisheries Management Plan (CFMP)

6. A Community Fisheries Management Plan is a guide formulated by community members with assistance of the national fisheries agency. It contains undertakings that the community are obligated to carry out in order to manage their fisheries resources and marine environment. It also contains supporting and technical services that a fisheries agency provides to support community management actions. The monitoring and enforcement of the CFMP is carried out by the community with support from government enforcement agencies.
7. Facilitation and community participation: The lack of scientific and statistical information available for coastal fisheries in most, if not all Pacific Island countries, is a problem when implementing management programmes. However, the local knowledge within the fishing communities who have harvested these resources over many years can be considered vital as long as these communities are involved in the process of CEAFM. Local and indigenous knowledge supplements the use of scientific information. The facilitation and community participation process allows community members to develop a community plan for the management of its fishery resources and marine environment with assistance of the trained community facilitators.

8. Community workshops: The main purpose of community workshops is to seek information from participating communities in order to develop CFMP. Community workshops seek to find out the key problems encountered by the communities and attempt to find ways to resolve such problems. Each community workshop requires a facilitator and a second person to record the discussions. In countries with enough Fisheries staff, these roles are looked after by trained Fisheries staff. In countries where Fisheries staffing is limited, community representatives are trained as community facilitators. As there may be three or more different community groups or sectors (traditional chiefs, men, women, youth, etc) in a particular community, it is most convenient to arrange for the individual workshops to be held on the same day. However, this may vary between countries depending on the social structure of a particular country. Workshops are run using the participatory approach and there are few methods of conducting participatory approaches. In the case of SPC, the use of a problem/solution tree is the main tool for analysing information from the community members.
9. Establishment of a Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC): It is important to establish a FAC to draft the Community Fisheries Management Plan (CFMP). The FAC is made up of representatives of each sector of the community that participates in community workshops. The FAC holds a series of meetings (say two or three) to further consider the outcomes of the community workshops, especially the problems and solutions identified by each group. The committee then decides how the solutions could be made to work, which actions are required from the community, and what type of support will be required from the promoting agency (Fisheries Department) or other government agencies.
10. At the FAC meetings, members (assisted by Fisheries staff) prepare a draft Community Fisheries Management Plan (CFMP). A CFMP should be carefully written in such a way that it is not too difficult for most of the community members to understand; but not too simplistic or important messages do not get across.
11. Approval of the Community Fisheries Management Plan: Community leaders will meet to consider the Community Fisheries Management Plan. The Community Fisheries Management Plan lists the resource management and conservation undertakings of the community, and the services and technical support required from the Fisheries Department and other government agencies. The plan should be presented to community leaders by the Fisheries Advisory Committee at a formal and culturally appropriate meeting. Fisheries staff should attend this meeting as observers (to signify the meeting's importance), but all questions relating to the plan should be answered by the committee wherever possible. If the community leaders accept the plan they should be asked to appoint a community Fisheries Management Committee to oversee the working of the plan.

Implementation and Monitoring the Plan

12. A Community Fisheries Management Plan can be well thought out and well written, but if it cannot be properly implemented and monitored, there is very little value in it. The implementation and monitoring of the plan is the responsibility of a Fisheries Management Committee (FMC). Some countries refer to this committee as a Monitoring and Enforcement Committee (MEC). In some countries like Tuvalu, a suitable committee already exists (falekaupule) – a committee that oversees any project within the community. The Fisheries Management Committee will make sure that the undertakings by the community under the CFMP are carried out in a timely manner. The committee also follows up on the obligations of the Fisheries Department in matters of technical support and community training required under the plan. The committee reports to the community leaders on the progress of the plan and works closely with the Fisheries Department on its implementation.

13. It is important that monthly meetings are held between the FMC and the Fisheries Department to review and assess progress, and to plan future activities in the coming month. An important function of these meetings is to review agreements contained in the CFMPs of all communities in the programme; this is to ensure that the undertakings of both the communities and the Fisheries Department are progressing.
14. It is highly advisable that, after a few communities have completed management plans, a workshop on the Community Management of Fisheries and the Marine Environment should be held. Representatives from each participating community are invited to the workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to allow committees from different communities to exchange information, and to decide how they could assist each other. The meeting is also used to obtain community feedback in order to improve the programme process.

Evaluation of the CEAFM programme

15. In order to assess the success of the programme, SPC undertakes appraisals of the programme through conducting six or twelve-monthly reviews, depending on how well the programme progresses. For the newly established programmes, six monthly visits are needed. As the programme progresses well, there may not be a need for visits to be so frequent. The purpose of the reviews is to assess the progress of the programme against its targets. Some of the important questions that help to assess the success of the programme include:
 - How many CFMPs were established since the programme started and how many are successfully implemented?
 - How many marine protected areas (MPAs) have been established and how are they being monitored?
 - How many participating communities have established Fisheries By-laws or Fisheries Management Ordinances and how are they monitored and enforced?
 - How well the communities have carried out their undertakings obligated under the CFPM, and if not well, what are the problems?
 - Has the Fisheries Department kept up with its obligations under the plan?
16. The above questions, among others, help to assess the situation within the development of the national CEAFM programme. The review will assess the challenges and how they may be overcome, and make recommendations to help improve the programme.

Conclusion

17. There are three basic requirements for setting up a successful CEAFM system in which the process culminates in a Community Fisheries Management Plan.

18. First, fishing communities must be aware of problems with the marine environment and fisheries resources, and have the desire to take action to address these problems. Although awareness of the need for marine conservation may be high in Pacific Island communities, it may be necessary to provide motivation and technical advice. It will also be necessary to convince communities that they, not the government, have the primary responsibility to manage their marine environment. The prime indicator of success in a CEAFM programme is the number of communities that: continue with the undertakings and activities agreed in their management plans; enforce their own regulations; and which have active and well-respected Fisheries Management Committees.
 19. A second requirement is that fishing communities must have either traditional, de facto or legal control over waters adjacent to their villages. In countries where this is not the case, it may be necessary to grant such rights, for example Territorial Use Rights in Fisheries, or TURFs as proposed in the Philippines. In Samoa, village councils have the ability to devise fisheries bylaws which, after government approval, become enforceable under national law.
 20. A third requirement is that fisheries authorities must have the technical and scientific capacity, as well as the willingness, to support community undertakings, and to encourage the development of alternative sources of seafood. Because subsistence fishers operate on a short-term strategy, in which the aim is to provide for their own immediate needs, any CEAFM programme which does not provide alternative means of obtaining seafood is doomed to fail. Many conservation measures (whether community-based or not), such as stopping destructive fishing methods or imposing fish size limits, will cause a short-term decrease in catches. In Pacific island countries, scientific input is required, for example, in surveying proposed sites for fish reserves, developing community fish farms, and re-establishing stocks of depleted shellfish. Similar inputs are required for diverting fishing pressure away from heavily exploited inshore areas to areas immediately beyond the reefs. It is doubtful that a CEAFM programme would continue on a sustainable basis without such support.
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