

**Lessons Learned: Reflections and Next Steps –  
The Case of Organising the Conset Bay Fishing Community in Barbados**

**Lecciones Aprendidas: Reflexiones y Próximos Pasos –  
El Caso de la Organización de la Comunidad de Pescadores de la Bahía Conset en Barbados**

**Leçons Apprises : Réflexions et Prochaines Étapes –  
Le Cas de L'organisation de la Communauté de Pêcheurs de Conset Bay à la Barbade**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper reports on one component of the project “Up-scaling Sustainable Resource Management in Coastal Watershed Communities of Barbados’ National Park and System of Open Spaces” which focused on conducting a preliminary institutional assessment and strengthening initiative in the fishing community of Conset Bay, St. John, Barbados. The project was a collaborative effort by the Government of Barbados, United Nations Environment Programme, and The University of the West Indies. Past initiatives to organise the fisherfolk and present institutional arrangements for Conset Bay were reviewed through desktop study and both formal and informal interviews with key fisheries stakeholders, including the Conset Bay fisherfolk. The review indicated that while this community is close-knit and socially cohesive, past initiatives including the establishment of cooperatives and fisherfolk organisations had not resulted in sustainable community groups. However, the interest in collective action to form and sustain a fisherfolk organisation remained relatively strong. In order for fisherfolk to effectively engage with other fisheries governance stakeholders and resolve existing fisheries issues, the project attempted to assist the community in identifying some governance mechanisms more suited to their current conditions. The community determined that an informal group of interested members was the best option, and the Conset Bay advocacy group was formed. A number of capacity building activities were conducted to engage and strengthen the group. The paper concludes with an evaluation of progress – what was achieved? – what were the lessons learned?

KEY WORDS: Conset Bay, institutions, fisherfolk, Barbados

**INTRODUCTION**

The Government of Barbados and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in conjunction with the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) from The University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill Campus undertook a pilot project entitled “Up-scaling Sustainable Resource Management in Coastal Watershed Communities of Barbados’ National Park and System of Open Spaces” in the context of the project “Strengthening National Capacities for Sustainable Resource Management in Latin America and the Caribbean”. The Conset Bay watershed was identified as the study site and the project became known as “The Conset Bay Pilot Project”. The goals were:

- i) To improve the management and monitoring of nearshore marine and terrestrial natural resources within coastal watershed areas,
- ii) To enhance the capacity of the local fishing community to participate in sustainable fisheries governance and management, and
- iii) To introduce systems for project management, reporting and information distribution.

The overall approach to the project was one of integration among all of the stakeholders for the sustainable management and monitoring of the Conset Bay Watershed. Therefore, the Conset Bay Governance Steering Committee (CBGC) was established and comprised all of the stakeholder agencies, including the Conset Bay community responsible for managing the resources. This particular coastal watershed also has a strong fishing heritage, and many of the community members, whose livelihoods are dependent on fisheries, are multi-generational families living in the surrounding communities within the watershed. They are aware of the interdependence between the terrestrial and marine habitats, whereby the impacts of land use affect marine productivity. A representative body from this community is therefore essential for participation in integrating sustainable land and coastal management practices in community resource management.

Over the years, a number of strengthening initiatives have been conducted to build capacity within the fishing community in the areas of fisheries development and management (Atapattu 1998, Mahon 1999). Unfortunately, after a few years of existence, the cooperatives and fisherfolk groups disbanded (Atapattu 1998, McConney et al. 2000). In acknowledging

the social cohesion of this community, a new governance mechanism was needed to allow the community to actively participate in fisheries management and build community stewardship of their resources, ensuring sustainability of their fisheries.

The project sought to explore the best options for fisheries governance in Conset Bay by reviewing past strengthening initiatives and the relationship between the fishing community and the stakeholders responsible for managing their fisheries resources. The best governance mechanism and the way forward to further mobilise them into active participation was also outlined, including their progress thus far.

This paper represents a summary of the third project report submitted to the Government of Barbados and UNEP entitled “Findings of an institutional assessment and strengthening initiative for the Conset Bay fishing community” (CERMES 2012c). It further evaluates progress by reviewing the lessons learned from this process.

### Characteristics of the Conset Bay Fishing Community

Conset Bay is located on the east coast of Barbados in the parish of St. John and represents the southern tip of the proposed Barbados National Park stretching from Archer’s Bay, along the north-east coast, to Conset Bay (Government of Barbados 2003). It is known for its rich fishing heritage and culture, and is also thought to be one of the last remaining close knit communities of its kind on the island (CERMES 2012c).

Conset Bay is one of only three primary fishing landing sites along the east coast, and is the only natural safe harbour on this coast (Figure 1). Since 1944 a number of developmental changes have occurred in the area, enabling the community to host an increased level of fishing activities/services (Fisheries Division 2008), including landing fish, boat building, vessel haul-up (especially in hurricane season), repairing and maintenance of vessels and small-scale aquaculture activities such as sea moss farming (CERMES 2012b). Currently, there are 64 registered persons in the fisheries industry that operate from Conset Bay (CERMES 2012b). The majority of them are fishermen while others include boat owners, boat agents (who manage fish sales on dock side), and those in the post-harvest sector in the areas of processing, boning, and vending.

The fishing fleet comprises mainly launches (6 - 12 m in length) or moses (3 - 6 m in length), with only two iceboats utilising the landing site. Currently there are no longliner vessels. Fish landed varies from pelagics to sea eggs (Cox, in prep), conch (Oxenford et al. 2007), and lobsters (CERMES 2012b). However, like other landing sites on the island, flying fish represents the most landings. Recent data from the Fisheries Division showed that of the total fish landed (38 metric tons) at Conset Bay during the period of November 2009 – October 2010, 28.7 metric tons were flyingfish (CERMES 2012b).



Figure 1. Landing sites (Source: Fisheries Division)

### METHODS

Using a loose interpretation of the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework to guide the process, a preliminary institutional assessment was undertaken to assist in developing an appropriate mechanism to mobilise the fisherfolk. The approach taken involved three steps (Figure 2):

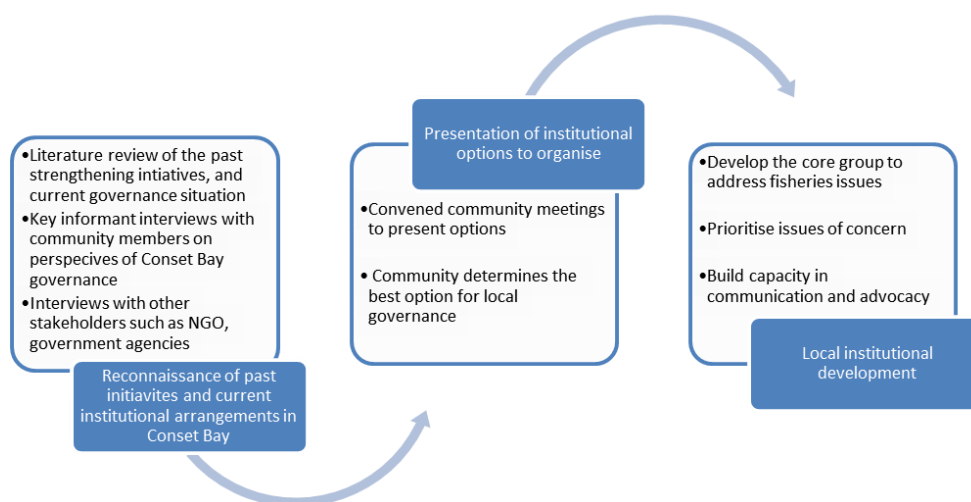
- i) Reconnaissance of past initiatives to organise the fisherfolk and current institutional arrangements for fisheries governance in Conset Bay,
- ii) Presentation of Institutional options to organize, and
- iii) Local institutional development.

### RESULTS

#### Past Initiatives Implemented to Organise the Conset Bay Fishing Community

Over the past decades a variety of initiatives were implemented to organise fisherfolk in Conset Bay through the establishment of cooperatives and fisherfolk organisations. These initiatives are summarised as follows:

*Cooperatives* — During the 1960s, the first attempt to organise fisherfolk in Barbados was made when nine fishing cooperative societies were established through the Cooperatives Division of the Department of Agriculture (McConney et al. 2000). The Cooperative Division encouraged fishers to join cooperatives to increase savings and to provide inputs and services not addressed by the Fisheries Division. Unfortunately, by the 1970s, these cooperatives became inactive (McConney et al. 2000). Along the east coast, two of these organisations were the



**Figure 2.** Methods used to conduct institutional assessment and develop a strengthening initiative.

Eastern Cooperative Fishing Savings Society Ltd, and the Conset Bay Fishing Society Limited (Atapattu 1998).

The Eastern Cooperative Fishing Society Ltd was registered in 1964 with jurisdiction in the eastern areas of the island (Atapattu 1998). The Conset Bay Cooperative Saving Society Limited was registered on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1970 but evolved into the Conset Bay Fishing Society Limited on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1971 (CERMES 2012c). Its area of jurisdiction was Conset Bay with 46 members and five committee members (Atapattu 1998). Their only asset was a van for the transportation of fish; however the van was returned when the cooperative was unable to repay its loan (Atapattu 1998).

*Fisherfolk Organisations* — In the early 1990s, informal groups of fisherfolk called “fisherfolk associations” emerged across the island; however they did not have the legal status to access institutional credit for further development (Atapattu 1998). Then in 1997, the Government of Barbados (Fisheries Division), with the support of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation launched the Fisherfolk Organisation Development Project (FODP). The project aimed to re-organize the fisherfolk into more formal organisations that were also significantly different from cooperatives (McConney et al. 2000). Its main objective was to improve the socio-economic situation of fisherfolk and to enhance sustainable fisheries development through participatory management (Atapattu 1998).

By the end of the project, the Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organisations (BARNUFO) was established in 1999 (McConney et al. 2003) (McConney et al. 2000). Eight FFOs were also established around the island, but unfortunately the Conset Bay fishing community was not one of them (McConney et al. 2000).

Dr. Atapattu (1998) reported that there was great difficulty in bringing the Conset Bay fisherfolk together. Contributing factors included poor participation (as most of the Conset Bay fishers were based in Bridgetown where they berthed their boats), lack of proper leadership, and the limited number of fisherfolk left operating in the area. Efforts such as using the president of the past cooperatives and finding a new leader to mobilise the fisherfolk were both unsuccessful (Atapattu 1998).

*Conset Bay Sea Moss Farmers and Processors Study Group* — The Sea Moss Study Group was conceived under the Sea Moss Farming project conducted in 1998 (Mahon 1999). The aim of the project was “to evaluate the participatory development of a sea moss farm and its potential for income generation” (Mahon 1999).

The project achieved its goal of launching a community-based sea moss farm at Conset Bay where residents farmed and processed approximately 90.7 kg (wet weight) of sea moss, from four PVC rafts, for local markets (Mahon 1999). Another major output was also the establishment of the Conset Bay Sea Moss Farmers and Processors Study Group to manage the sea moss farm but the group subsequently disbanded (CERMES 2012c).

#### **Current Institutional Arrangements for Conset Bay**

The stakeholders responsible for fisheries governance in Conset Bay were identified based on their mandates that directly influence fisheries development or are responsible for managing fisheries resources in Conset Bay. The agencies/organisations identified as having the most significant responsibility were: Fisheries Division, Markets Division and the Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organisations (BARNUFO).

Each agency/organisations was given an opportunity to present their perspectives on their strengths and challenges in effectively managing the fisheries resources

and infrastructure at Conset Bay. The inter-linkages between the agencies and their relationship with the Conset Bay fisherfolk were also documented. These are summarised as follows, along with the legislative framework governing the Conset Bay fishing community.

*The Fisheries Division* — is responsible for fisheries management in Barbados, including the conservation of resources and the development of fisheries. Some of the main strengths of the Fisheries Division are having well trained and competent staff, and an appropriate level of technology to carry out its functions (CERMES 2012c). Under the 1993 Fisheries Act, the Fisheries Division has accomplished a good system for vessel inspection and registration, an improved haul-up service, registration of fishers, and the formation of fisherfolk organisations around the island (CERMES 2012c).

The Fisheries Division has also established partnerships with other organisations actively working in the fisheries industry. These include the BARNUFO, the Markets Division, and The University of the West Indies, all of which are viewed by the Division as good relationships (CERMES 2012c).

With respect to Conset Bay, the Fisheries Division is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the boat yard, and for managing and updating the emergency response plan for hauling and securing boats in the event of severe weather, such as tropical storms and hurricanes (Cumberbatch and Simmons 2010). In the late 1990s, as was previously stated, the Division also worked to mobilise the fishing community through the FODP and supported the Sea Moss Farming project. More recently they have launched the Lobster Enhancement Project, which is currently ongoing (CERMES 2012).

However, one of the main challenges of the Fisheries Division is that they lack the monetary resources and to a lesser extent human capacity to adequately address all of the issues articulated by the Conset Bay fishing community (CERMES 2012c). As a result, the relationship between the Conset Bay fisherfolk and the Fisheries Division is a complex one, and the protracted delay in addressing the fishing community's issues appears to have put a strain on this relationship.

*Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC)* — In 1993 the Fisheries Act proclaimed the Fisheries Advisory Committee as a mechanism towards co-management for fisheries development (Government of Barbados 2002). It is an advisory body to the Minister of Agriculture and its recommendations and findings are forwarded to the Minister's office in a monthly report.

All members of the FAC are appointed by instrument by the Minister responsible for fisheries. Members include the Chief Fisheries Officer (*ex officio*), a fisheries biologist, four other persons engaged in the fishing industry (e.g. boat owner, fish processor) and representatives from

BARNUFO, Markets Division and the Ministry of Environment (e.g. CZMU) (CERMES 2012c). All members share the common goal of improving the fishing industry such that it runs systematically and professionally.

In terms of successes, the FAC has been instrumental in developing insurance coverage initiatives for fishing vessels and improved sanitary conditions in the fish markets. However, the challenge of this advisory body is that it works at the decision-making level without a mechanism to actively engage other stakeholders (CERMES 2012c). In addition, due to the period of time taken for decision-making with regards to matters raised by the FAC, it may be interpreted that the government does not view fisheries as a priority.

With respect to Conset Bay, the FAC can act as another forum where the issues affecting the fishing community can be presented to a multi-faceted group, which has a direct path to the Minister.

*Markets Division* — manages all of the public markets on the island, including all of the fish markets (Fisheries Division 2004). Its mandate is to maintain attractive marketing infrastructure to promote vending, entrepreneurship and encourage patronage, while ensuring that persons involved in marketing produce do so in proper sanitary conditions, thereby negating the risk of health problems for the local population and elsewhere (CERMES 2012c). As a result, Markets Division is responsible for licensing fish vendors, collecting fish tolls (landings tax), providing ice and fish storage facilities, renting lockers, monitoring fish quality and maintaining some boat repair areas (Fisheries Division 2004).

With respect to Conset Bay, in addition to the above they are also responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the jetty (CERMES 2012c).

At the Conset Bay Fish Market, the Markets Division has staff assigned to manage the market: supervisor-in-charge and two market keepers. The supervisor-in-charge is responsible of managing daily operations and acts as a liaison between the fisherfolk and Markets Division, providing recommendations to the Superintendent/Manager of the Markets Division. He is also responsible for holding meetings with the Conset Bay Fish Market staff, vendors and other fisherfolk apprising them of any changes that the Markets Division may plan to execute. The market keepers are in charge of opening and closing of the market, collecting tolls and assisting with the daily operations of the market (CERMES 2012c).

In terms of their linkages with other agencies, the Conset Bay Fish Market interacts mainly with the Fisheries Division, providing them with catch and landing data which is obtained through the collection of the tolls. The Coastal Zone Management Unit also informs them of any activities that they may be conducting in the area, as a professional inter-agency courtesy.

Currently, the supervisor-in-charge has held his post for the past four years and appears to have a good working relationship with the fisherfolk. However, one challenge faced by the Markets Division is the need for a computerised system at the Conset Bay Fish Market, which would assist the staff in carrying out their functions.

*Other Governmental Agencies* — The Ministry of Agriculture has the overall responsibility for fisheries management and development. While Fisheries Division and Markets Division have joint responsibility for management, there are other agencies within the ministry that contribute to the development process:

- i) Agricultural Planning Unit (compiles fisheries statistics),
- ii) Projects Unit (implements local and foreign-funded capital projects such as improvements to landing site infrastructure), and
- iii) Barbados Meteorological Services (provides forecasts of sea state and storm or hurricane advisories to which all mariners should pay attention)

The Ministry of Environment also provides services related to fisheries management through the:

- i) Coastal Zone Management Unit (responsible for protecting fish habitats such as coral reefs) and
- ii) Policy Research, Planning and Information Unit (supports national policy, programme development and implementation, local community initiatives towards environmental stewardship and sustainable livelihoods and inter-Ministry coordination).

### **Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organisations (BARNUFO)**

BARNUFO was established in 1999 to fulfil the requirements of its member fisherfolk organisations, with a view to improving their socio-economic conditions based on the sustainable development of fisheries (McConney et al. 2003). The organisation has an elected Executive Committee and an office based within the Fisheries Division. They receive an annual subvention from the Ministry of Agriculture and are currently dependent on these funds to function. Their role encompasses disseminating information to the fisherfolk through bi-annual newsletters, training workshops and courses (CERMES, 2102c). They also investigate any concerns raised by fisherfolk and act as a conduit in the relationship between government and fisherfolk organisations (CERMES 2012c).

BARNUFO's national partners include the Ministry of Agriculture- Fisheries Division, Markets Division, Ministry of Environment- CZMU, FAC, Barbados Vocational Training Board (provides assistance with the certificate training courses), and Ministry of Foreign

Affairs (provides assistance in resolving fisheries related issues between Barbados and Tobago).

Some of the challenges the organisation experiences include the need for staff, more office space and updated technology such as new computers. BARNUFO also requires a paid dedicated office manager to raise more funds for project and daily operations, and to facilitate the implementation of project activities on behalf of the organisation (CERMES 2012c).

With regards to Conset Bay, BARNUFO's perspective is that the issues encountered by the fisherfolk are not unique to them and their resistance to organise is symptomatic of other fisherfolk around the island, i.e. as long as they remain individualistic, they will fail to recognise the greater need to work collectively. Past challenges, mismanagement, and trust issues may also have contributed to their failure to organise. BARNUFO, with its limited capacity, has also found it difficult to demonstrate the benefits that fisherfolk and the industry as a whole could derive from being part of a fisherfolk organisation and by extension part of BARNUFO. As such, it remains a challenge for the organisation to assist the Conset Bay fishing community, especially with matters requiring government intervention.

### **Legislative Framework Governing the Conset Bay Fishing Community**

Conset Bay is governed by the same legal framework established to govern the whole island. The existing legislation and policies include:

- i) The Fisheries Act (1993)
- ii) The Fisheries (Management) Regulations (1998)
- iii) Fisheries (Sea eggs closed seasons) Notice
- iv) The Barbados Fisheries Management Plan

There is also legislation in draft:

- Fishing vessel safety legislation and Fisheries Management regulations

Furthermore there are eight other pieces of legislative material that have some influence on fisheries development and management. These fisheries related legislation are:

- i) Markets and Slaughterhouses Act (1958)
- ii) Barbados Territorial Waters Act (1977)
- iii) Marine Boundaries and Jurisdiction Act (1978)
- iv) Defence Act (1979)
- v) Shipping Act (1994)
- vi) The Coastal Zone Management Act (1998)
- vii) The Marine Pollution Control Act (1998)
- viii) Physical Development Plan Amended 2003

### **Rationale for the Conset Bay Fisherfolk to Organise**

With government intervention becoming a challenge, a number of fisheries related issues have remained unresolved for a long period of time, exacerbating the relationship between the Conset Bay fishing community and government. Many of the issues are related to infrastructure including the jetty, market facility, and the boat yard

(Cumberbatch and Simmons 2010). Unfortunately, most of these issues cannot be resolved by the community but rely on action by the government, specifically the Fisheries Division and Markets Division. However, organising would empower the fisherfolk to have a stronger voice in creating platforms to keep their issues on the agenda of the aforementioned agencies. It would also allow them to actively participate in decision-making and to take action to effectively manage their fisheries resources.

### Options for Organising

In a series of consultative meetings held with the Conset Bay fishing community, the current options for organising were presented: fisherfolk associations/organisations and cooperatives. Unlike other fishing villages, such as Oistins and Weston, Conset Bay has failed to form active associations and remains resistant to establishing a formal fisherfolk organisation.

The Bay Dogs, an informal group of Conset Bay fisherfolk based opposite the fish market, was identified early in the project as an active group (CERMES 2012). When determining whether this group could represent all of the Conset Bay fisherfolk in addressing their issues, it was determined that this was not the best option. In a formal meeting, when the option was raised, some fisherfolk were adamant about being associated with the Bay Dogs. An informal interview also revealed that the fisherfolk had different areas where they congregated, and the Bay Dogs only represented a portion of the Conset Bay fishing community (CERMES 2012c).

In term of cooperatives, many of the problems faced by the fishing community could be resolved through them. While cooperatives have been endorsed by governmental officials and BARNUFO (Cumberbatch and Simmons 2010), the community has been resistant to forming cooperatives, since those established in the late 1960s failed. However, it was noted that at times the Conset Bay fisherfolk co-operate like members of a cooperative through agreeing on fixed prices to sell certain species of fish. The development of a cooperative is an action to be considered in the future.

### Conset Bay Fisherfolk's Chosen Option: Conset Bay Advocacy Group

In recognising that past strengthening initiatives did not result in a sustainable organised fisherfolk group and with the resistance of the Conset Bay fisherfolk to the proposed options for governance, any formalisation had to vary from the past. Pollnac (1988) indicated that fishermen's organisations formed on the basis of local initiative — needs felt by the fishermen themselves — were more likely to succeed than those imposed from outside the community. McConney (2007) also supported this approach, stating that fisherfolk are unlikely to form an organisation or furthermore the group be sustainable unless they genuinely want to be organised.

Therefore, during a meeting with the Conset Bay fishing community, they were asked their preference on ways to move forward in addressing all of the issues that affected them. They were also given the option to maintain the status quo, and it was made clear that the success of the project was not dependent on their decision. The outcome was that three fisherfolk expressed their willingness to work together in finding solutions to the issues highlighted and the Conset Bay advocacy group was formed.

A series of meetings were then held to build the capacity of this core group, which grew to eight fisherfolk. One such meeting facilitated the newly formed group to discuss how they wanted to move forward and to prioritise fisherfolk issues of concern that they would undertake to get resolved. Another meeting convened aimed to enhance their communication and advocacy strategies. Representatives from various agencies and institutions were invited to participate as follows:

- i) Advise on some communication strategies and tools for keeping fisherfolk challenges as a priority with other stakeholders (UWI),
- ii) Discuss the reasons for forming their group and to share their experiences including challenges and successes (Central Fish Processor Group),
- iii) Discuss the most appropriate way to communicate with them and other governmental agencies (Fisheries Division and Policy Research, Planning and Information Unit), and
- iv) Sensitise on how cooperatives function and their potential advantages in addressing some of the fisherfolk issues identified (Barbados Public Workers Cooperative Credit Union).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Preliminary Assessment of the Institutional Arrangements for Conset Bay

The preliminary assessment revealed that the current institutional framework for Conset Bay fisheries governance is sound. There is a range of governmental and non-governmental agencies with comprehensive mandates, along with adequate legislation for fisheries management and development. However, there is room for improvement. These agencies have insufficient human and financial resources to comprehensively address the issues raised repeatedly by the fishing community. Furthermore, at the governmental level, the compartmentalisation of the agencies' mandates and associated budgets, along with their difficulty in maintaining a continuous rapport with the fishing community, is hindering their effectiveness with regards fisheries management and development in Conset Bay.

Therefore, a mechanism for the partial de-compartmentalisation of governmental agencies needs to be explored; as such action could facilitate overcoming their inadequacies related to limited budgets and human

capacity. This is particularly relevant for the Fisheries Division and Markets Division whose relationship could be further strengthened due to their complementary mandates and the significant roles they play as stakeholders in the fisheries governance of Conset Bay.

The concept of fisheries co-management appears to be supported by the government through their assistance of BARNUFO with the provision of office space and an annual subvention, as well as with the establishment of the FAC. However, McConney et al. (2003) highlighted that Barbados's legislation remains weak in co-management arrangements. As a result, entities such as FAC are limited in their function as a co-management body to deal with fisheries issues. Fisheries co-management also needs to penetrate further to the local level with fisheries institutions strengthening their collaboration with the local fishing communities.

Further opportunities for partnership among agencies and the Conset Bay community were also identified. For example, the Coastal Zone Management Unit and Fisheries Division collaborated during the sea moss aquaculture project (McConney et al. 2003) and could be continued through the Lobster Enhancement Project (CERMES 2012) with the assistance of the Conset Bay fishing community. Such collaborations may also be useful in furthering the rapport with the fishing community for other initiatives.

One functional mechanism that could address many of the challenges raised including the need for partial de-compartmentalisation of the government agencies, facilitation of co-management at the local level of the fishing community and cross agency collaboration is the continuation of the Conset Bay Governance Committee. The member agencies, comprising the Committee, agreed that it should remain intact and be considered as the executing entity in support of management and future initiatives within the Conset Bay Watershed (CERMES 2012c). It could also serve as the forum for the fisherfolk to raise their issues, especially since the agencies that are largely responsible for their fisheries governance are represented on the Committee. However, the CBGC, which largely comprises of governmental agencies, would need to invite more members of the Conset Bay fishing community, including the Conset Bay advocacy group, to be on the Committee.

#### **Assessment of the Conset Bay Fisherfolk to Organise**

Conset Bay is a close-knit community with kinship ties that easily allows them to interact with each other. With such strong linkages, there is a sense of community harmonisation which was observed in their consistency in presenting their issues, developing a fixed price for the sale of certain fish species, and hosting community fish fries. In essence they could be considered as an organisation where everyone has a role but without the formality. As a result, the importance and advantages of being 'organised' into a formal association have not yet been recognised. Nonethe-

less, the need for formalisation may become more evident if the fishing community is expected to deal with externalities e.g. requesting resources, including funds, for community projects to address fisheries and environmental issues, and having a substantive voice at the national level.

#### **Current Status of the Conset Bay Advocacy Group**

The future of the newly formed Conset Bay advocacy group is unclear, but they remain resolute about staying informal. However, they have taken initial steps to tackle their prioritised problems. They have also been instrumental in developing a Draft Conset Bay Sustainable Fisheries Code, along with an associated local sensitisation video, and have endorsed the Code as their pledge, which is to be later implemented within the wider fishing community.

To date, they have hosted two fish fries, the first in conjunction with the Conset Bay Pilot Project Team and the Natural Heritage Department to premier the two project videos to the community and award the prizes for the project's photo competition. The second fish fry was held during Fisherman's Week in 2012, for which they sourced their own sponsorship and funds. However, despite these positive first steps, the advocacy group currently remains in an infancy stage with no clear leadership and further work is needed for their institutional development, to ensure the group's sustainability.

#### **Next Steps**

In acknowledging the need to strengthen the relationships and enhance the capacity of the local fishing community to work with the external agencies responsible for the development and management of their resources in Conset Bay, a number of key steps and recommendations have been recognised and are as follows:

- i) The Conset Bay advocacy group has expressed their willingness to collaborate with external agencies on future work or projects in Conset Bay. In return the Government agencies need to also support them by facilitating their active participation. The resulting partnership would then give them incentive and a reason to mobilise. As the other fisherfolk observe the group working effectively with external agencies, they may start to positively acknowledge the advocacy group, thereby giving the latter validity and building their relevance within the community and among themselves.
- ii) A network analysis could be conducted to better understand the complex relationship between the Conset Bay fishing community and the governmental and non-governmental agencies, in particular the Fisheries Division and Markets Division, that impact on governance in Conset Bay.
- iii) Linkages between the advocacy group and BARNUFO need to be strengthened. The group

also needs to build relationships with active fisherfolk organisations around the island, to learn and share knowledge and information, for the advocacy group's institutional development.

- iv) A key instrument that could significantly assist in the sustainability of the advocacy group is the support of an *ex officio* member or entity that has a good relationship with the community and is familiar with the operations of the governing stakeholders. This representative would act as advisor to the group assisting them on their way forward, in addressing their prioritised issues, and on effectively communicating with governmental and non-governmental agencies. They could also assist in guiding the group through the transitional stages from informal to formal, should the group eventually decide on this option.
- v) Finally, to effectively manage fisheries resources, the Conset Bay advocacy group should be encouraged to view themselves as stewards of their watershed ecosystem, taking an ecosystem approach to fisheries in their acknowledgement that activities occurring on the terrestrial side could impact fisheries resources and their livelihoods.

### Overall Lessons Learned

There were a number of lessons learned by the project team during the process of this project that were relevant to the whole project and specifically to this component. The lessons are summarised as follows:

- i) The establishment of the CBGC was key in allowing the team to easily communicate with all of the relevant agencies, sharing and accessing information necessary to the project. It was also a positive step forward in bringing all of the stakeholders responsible for Conset Bay's resources under one committee. One factor leading to the Committee's collective agreement that it remain intact could have been creating an environment of respect, collaboration and inclusion. Any pre-judgements were set aside.
- ii) Another reason for the success of the project was that there was an existing relationship and ongoing CERMES presence in Conset Bay, in the form of a Ph.D. student where Conset Bay was one of her study sites. Her relationship with the fishing community was particularly strong and acknowledging the importance of her role with them, she was brought onto the project as the liaison officer. This was an essential factor in the level of participation and the quality of outputs derived from the community.
- iii) Despite past initiatives having not resulted in a sustainable fisherfolk group, they did act as building steps in working with and engaging the

community. Based on the advocacy group's willingness to continue working with external agencies, the past experiences to date could be taken as mostly positive. Therefore, it will be easier to return and continue working with the community in the future.

- iv) For the duration of the project, the Conset Bay advocacy group remained adamant against becoming formal. On reflection of the issues raised by the community, they do not need to be formalised to have these issues resolved. However they do need to be a consistent and active group that is adequately represented when interacting with the external agencies responsible for fisheries governance.
- v) The sustainability of the advocacy group will require patience and a driving mechanism to keep them constantly engaged. The growth of the group could perhaps be measured by their eventual desire to move further forward paired with the hindrance of being informal, in terms of accessing available resources. Their recognition of this limitation will be a positive step forward. However, their process to formalisation and perhaps possible evolution into becoming a cooperative is a long way off and could take years, if at all.
- vi) During the project, it became evident that the advocacy group, and the fishing community as a whole, were very good at mobilising and implementing events based activities. This is an important factor that needs to be considered in designing future projects and effectively engaging the group and the community.
- vii) In the course of interacting with the community at different stages in the project, it also became clear that the fisherfolk were aware of the complex interactions within their watershed and were conscious of the need to preserve and protect their resources from the land to the sea. This was an important acknowledgement on the part of the team and by extension the CBGC for the design and development of future initiatives in Conset Bay.
- viii) One overall project activity that was implemented to engage the community, as a whole, was a photo competition that was extended to the surrounding schools. However, the latter were unable to participate due to conflicting school activities. Involving the schools is an important mechanism for engaging an entire community and future work should incorporate activities that integrate more closely with school curricula. One unexpected outcome of the competition was the scope of photographs, by some community members, documenting Conset Bay and its fisherfolk over



the years, dating back to the pre-Independence era.

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