

Capacity Building and Community Involvement in Marine Protected Area Implementation

ROBERT S. POMEROY

*International Marinelifelife Alliance
Washington DC and Honolulu, Hawaii USA
and
Caribbean Conservation Association
Barbados*

ABSTRACT

The local community of resource users in the area of the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) needs to be enlisted as a co-management partner in its siting, planning, implementation and operation through a “bottom-up” approach. Experience has shown that the imposition of MPAs without broad participation, consensus and acceptability is a recipe for failure. However, not all resource users have the appropriate local institutions and skills for co-management, thus any co-management arrangement for an MPA will require both institution- and capacity-building. This paper presents factors related to capacity building and community involvement that can lead to the successful planning and implementation of MPAs.

KEY WORDS: Marine protected areas, co-management, capacity building

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Marine protected areas (MPAs) have been advocated by some as the solution for all fisheries and coastal ecosystem management problems. It is felt by some that MPAs can be scientifically designed and imposed from the top to achieve aquatic resource conservation, with little or no participation from the resource users in the area. The worldwide experience so far with MPAs has been mixed. There are many “paper parks” and failed MPAs around the world.

A number of factors have emerged from experience to improve the success of MPA implementation. MPAs need to be nested within a framework of integrated ecosystem or coastal area management. MPA objectives need to be clear and compatible with local conditions. The local community of resource users in the area of the MPA needs to be enlisted as partners in its siting, planning, implementation, and operation through a “bottom-up” approach. Experience has shown that the imposition of MPAs without broad participation, consensus and acceptability is a recipe for failure. Governance issues (rights, rules, organization, legal) must also take a high priority in planning and implementation. It is crucial, therefore, to understand the social, economic, political, and institutional context for establishing MPAs. On their own and without outside support, the community generally does not have the human resources and capacity to plan and manage the MPA. In most cases, it may be better to co-manage the MPA.

CO-MANAGEMENT

Co-management is defined as a partnership arrangement in which government, the community of local resource users, external change agents, and other resource stakeholders share the responsibility and authority for making decisions about management of the MPA. Through consultation, the partners develop an agreement that specifies their roles, responsibilities, and rights in management of the MPA. Not all resource users have the appropriate local institutions and skills for co-management, thus any co-management initiative will require both institution- and capacity-building.

This is especially true in the Caribbean-region where resource user capacity to engage in co-management is generally low and hindered by lack of community organizations, lack of traditions and experience with collective action, lack of social preparation, and limited empowerment. However, fishers generally express interest and support for participation and co-management. Capacity building and community involvement in MPA management is a long-term process, costly, risky, often not sustainable, and often not successful. Experience in the Philippines has shown that just community organizing can take three to five years. The development of institutions for coastal resource self-governance in St. Lucia has taken up to 10 years.

Research and practical experience from around the world has revealed factors which can lead to the successful planning and implementation of MPAs (Pollnac et al. 2001, Pomeroy et al. 2001).

CAPACITY BUILDING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUCCESS FACTORS FOR MPA IMPLEMENTATION

Participation by Those Affected

Most individuals affected by the MPA are included in the group that makes decisions about and can change the arrangements.

Individual Incentive Structure

An individual incentive structure (economic, social, political) must be present that induces individuals to want to participate in the MPA. Individuals must feel that the private benefits to be obtained from the MPA will outweigh private costs, especially in the long run. MPAs will often involve giving up individual short-term benefits for real and perceived long-term benefits. For the individual, the costs of decision-making, especially in terms of time involved, cannot be too high or participation will fall. Often the short-term costs are high in terms of lost income or livelihood. For a poor fisher with a family to feed, the incentive structure to support the MPA must be clear and large. Risk is involved for the individual in supporting the MPA. Individual behaviour cannot be changed unless the person has an incentive to want to change.

Sense of Ownership of the MPA and the Co-management Process

Those involved in the MPA and co-management must feel that it not only benefits them, but that they have a strong sense of participation in, commitment to, and ownership of the MPA. Those external to the community working on the MPA, such as a non-governmental organization (NGO), must ensure that the people recognize themselves as participants in and owners of the process. Forums for discussion about the MPA should be established early, be open to all, and encourage open and free dialogue on the issues. Partners in the MPA (fishers, government, NGO) roles, goals, purpose, operation, style and limitations must be made clear and transparent. Trust and mutual respect between partners must grow out of a sense of commitment, meeting objectives and targets, and open dialogue. Partners' views and ideas must be respected.

Leadership

Local leaders set an example for others to follow, set out courses of action, and provide energy and direction. Local elite may be the traditional leaders, but they may not be the most appropriate for MPA or co-management. New leaders may need to be drawn from or developed in the community. These individuals may be more acceptable and respected by their peers.

Individual and Community Empowerment

Empowerment is concerned with capacity building of individuals and the community in order for them to have greater social awareness, to gain greater autonomy over decision-making, and in establishing a balance in community power relations. Empowerment covers a range of actions including enhancing community access to information and services, ensuring community participation, consciousness raising, business and enterprise management skills, and gaining control over the utilization and management of coastal resources. Information and knowledge generation and sharing are key to empowerment.

Capacity Building

Empowerment is enhanced by capacity building through education and training efforts that raise the level of information and knowledge of those involved in the MPA and co-management. The capacity of the partners for collective action, cooperation, power sharing, dialogue, and leadership must be developed and strengthened. MPA management will require new skills and technologies that must be learned. Capacity building must address not only technical and managerial dimensions, but also attitudes and behavioural patterns of resource users. A range of capacity building methods can be used including fisher-to-fisher sharing, exchange visits, video and audio, and hands-on experience.

Social Preparation and Value Formation

The inability to sustain MPAs and co-management may be partly attributed to the insufficient time allocated to social preparation, value formation, and rapport

building within the community. Social preparation should always precede technical and material interventions. Cutting corners during the social preparation phase to yield to pressures to produce material accomplishments is likely to weaken the foundation for self-reliance in the community. Good social preparation is manifested in positive attitudes toward collective action and in the readiness of community members to take on the responsibility for MPA management.

Community Organization

The existence of a legitimate (to the community) community organization is vital to represent resource users interests and influencing decision-making. The organization must have the legal right to exist, be autonomous of government, and endorsed and credible to the people. Core groups, a sub-unit of the organization, can be formed for initial implementation and for specific activities.

Economic and Community Development

In order to maintain interest and participation in the MPA and co-management, it useful to start small, gain small successes, gain confidence and trust, and grow from there. Since MPAs often take some time to show impacts, it may be necessary to have associated projects such as alternative livelihoods, community infrastructure and services to reduce the negative impacts of the MPA.

Institutional Sustainability

Many MPA and co-management initiatives fail when the money and external agents leave the area. A critical question to be asked early in MPA design is what to do when the money stops. Self-sustained financing must be considered at the start of the MPA design process. A phase-out plan and project turnover should also be built into planning as the NGO or other external change agent leaves and the community takes over MPA management.

External Change Agents

External change agents (NGOs, academic and research institutions, religious organizations, government agencies) are often needed to guide, but not directly intervene, in MPA design and implementation. External change agents help define problems; provide independent advice, ideas and expertise; provide training and technical assistance; guide joint problem solving and decision-making, and assist in developing the MPA and co-management plan. The community should not become dependent upon the change agent as they will eventually leave the area. The relationship should be limited and there should be a planned phase-out of assistance.

DISCUSSION

None of the factors presented above exist in isolation, but each supports and links to another to make the complex process and arrangements for MPAs and co-management work. Also, these are not the only factors involved in capacity building and community involvement in MPA implementation. If nothing else, local people need to be at the center of decision-making about MPA siting, design and implementation. The active and long-term participation of local resource users in the MPA will increase the chance for success. Implementation is often a balancing act to meet these factors as timing and linkages in the MPA and co-management process are important.

LITERATURE CITED

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