How Do We Adapt Stakeholder Engagement for Effective Ocean Planning in the Caribbean? A Case Study of the Waitt Institute's Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit

¿Cómo Podemos Adaptar la Participación de las Partes Interesadas para Lograr una Planeación Oceánica Efectiva? Un Estudio de Caso de los Instrumentos del Waitt Institute

Comment Adapter L'engagement des Parties Prenantes pour une Planification Efficace de L'océan? Une Étude de Cas de l'Institut Waitt

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Waitt Institute partners with small-island governments and communities to create and implement ocean policies, including sustainable fishing practices and comprehensive ocean zoning through the Blue Halo Initiative. The partnership is a 5-year commitment, that begins with an assessment phase, including: an ecological assessment to describe the abundance, diversity and distribution of habitats, a legal framework analysis to identify policy options for advancing ocean zoning, and community consultation to understand local priorities related to environmental management. This is followed by a policy and planning phase to develop a marine spatial plan and draft new ocean laws, as well as research on sustainable financing to explore potential revenue streams for sanctuary management. The implementation phase begins when new ocean laws are passed, and sanctuaries are legally designated. This phase includes zone demarcation, enforcement support, capacity building for sanctuary and fisheries management, as well as outreach on any new regulations. Finally there is an adaptation phase, where ecosystem monitoring helps to determine if the marine spatial plan has been effective in improving ecosystem health and coastal livelihoods.

The Blue Halo Initiative deeply engages stakeholders in a science-based, community-driven approach, so stakeholder engagement is a critical part of this process. The Institute's work on three Caribbean islands (Barbuda, Curaçao, Montserrat) provides insights to how stakeholder engagement can occur and how it can be adapted to be most effective in different island settings. The Waitt Institute's toolkit for stakeholder engagement includes:
   i)   Surveys and focus groups to explore value and belief systems, gauge support for ocean management, learn about local fisheries, and map ocean uses,
   ii) Participatory mapping exercises, stakeholder meetings to discuss conservation priorities and trade-offs during the MSP process, and
   iii) Education and outreach to raise awareness and enhance knowledge about the ocean and marine spatial planning.

Using this toolkit, the Blue Halo partners gather critical data to inform policy recommendations, solicit stakeholder feedback for a marine spatial plan and strengthen public support for the Initiatives. However, Blue Halo sites have unique attributes that require flexibility in the structure and implementation of the stakeholder engagement toolkit. For instance, on Barbuda (pop. ~1,500) and Montserrat (pop. ~5,000), the Initiatives seek to broadly engage with both core ocean users and the public through formal and informal communication channels. In contrast, Curaçao has a larger population of ~150,000 and requires careful consideration in the design and implementation of stakeholder engagement strategies with a more-narrow focus on specific ocean stakeholder groups.

The following will discuss some of the approaches for engagement utilized on Montserrat, and mention how the approach varied for Barbuda and Curacao.

On Surveys

The Waitt Institute conducts community consultations to raise awareness of the Blue Halo Initiative, begin a dialogue with stakeholders about ocean conservation, and solicit feedback on ocean use and management. The consultation process consists of a series of meetings with stakeholder groups, a short survey for the public, and a longer survey of ocean stakeholders. The short survey instrument explores people's values and concerns related to the ocean as well as their support for marine conservation. Making the questions general at the onset of your research can help to encourage participation e.g. *"What is your favorite thing about the ocean?"*

To reach fishers, divers, natural resource managers, and those who have a greater stake in ocean management, the Waitt Institute administers additional questions through structured interviews with more in depth questions. The survey explores stakeholder opinions towards ocean management tools, including ocean zoning, gear bans, and catch limitations e.g. *"What type of zones do you think would be useful? Should parrotfish fishing be controlled?"*

Researchers adapted the survey for Curaçao, because the fishing sector is larger, and more questions were needed to characterize the local fishery. Tailoring questions to each site and using colloquial language can help connect and build trust with stakeholders during the survey stage.

On Participatory Mapping

In addition to the surveys, researchers interview fishers and divers to gain a better understanding of ocean use patterns, and how these ocean users value marine ecosystems. Each survey instrument asks fishers to draw their fishing grounds on a map using an interactive mapping tool, SeaSketch. In addition, researchers ask fishers to identify how much they value each area they fish or dive. These surveys help establish an island-wide map of areas that are most used and most valued by fishers and divers.

While this survey is generally administered with laptops, the team decided to use paper maps in Curacao where fishers are older and often intimidated by the use of technology. So be prepared to put your laptop away and kick it old school!

Making fishers & divers trust that the project will not shutdown their livelihood activities, is crucial to keeping them engaged in the ocean planning process. At the same time, managing expectations is key as stakeholders ought to understand some of their ocean use activities will be impacted by the regulations proposed once the research phase is complete.

On Education and Outreach

The goal of local community outreach is to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the ocean plans and given an outlet to voice any concerns. Making sure people understand what ocean zoning is and why it is useful in balancing uses and helping to promote sustainability is important from the onset. However, education and outreach plays an important role during each program phase. For instance, the ecological assessment provides the opportunity to educate islanders about unique habitats and build ocean pride. Later on, education and outreach is critical in strengthening compliance with fisheries regulations and marine sanctuaries.

The right communication channels also matter. Montserrat has one radio station with a broad listenership, periodic talk-show appearances with scientists, marine spatial planning experts, and legal experts starts an island-wide conversation about the importance and benefits of ocean planning and stewardship. Using Blue Halo tokens such as reusable grocery shopping bags and T-shirts as giveaways, listeners call in to ask questions or share opinions. In Curacao, the team uses TV to communicate and for Barbuda Facebook has a huge following.

Modifying communication channels to fit the community is important so that you are reaching your intended audience. Also varying your messaging can help you to speak to more people. For instance not everyone is receptive to scientific arguments, but explaining the economic benefits of ocean management can gain someone's interest and support.

Though everyone may not be a primary stakeholder, most people on the island are seafood consumers or beachgoers, so everyone has a role to play once new fisheries regulations are passed and protected areas are designated. Having ongoing outreach and education throughout all phases of an ocean planning project will help avoid any surprise or retaliation further along in the project.