

Fishing Seriously

A recent workshop in Barbados focused on issues related to the livelihoods and organizations of fisherfolk in the Caribbean region

Fisheries are serious business in the Caribbean. They occupy valuable marine and coastal space along with tourism. Fisheries are featured in many of the cultural touristic marketing images seen on bright screens and in glossy magazines. Spiny lobster, queen conch, shrimp and tuna are major earners of foreign exchange and contributors to food security in several countries of the region.

Marine protected areas (MPAs) integrate fisheries, tourism and conservation of biodiversity in mangrove, seagrass and coral reef areas. All of the above and more

agencies. They exchanged information and networked on topics of shared interest during research presentations, special workshops, a poster session, field trips and several social events. Fisherfolk from English, Spanish, French and Dutch-speaking locations around the region were active participants throughout.

At recent annual meetings of the GCFI there has been a Fishers Forum organized with, and for, fisherfolk. The 2014 Fishers Forum was hosted by the Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organizations (BARNUFO) with the theme “Fisheries Livelihoods: Living for the Work”.

Five fisherfolk made presentations to the conference on this theme, followed by discussion. The President of BARNUFO, Vernel Nicholls, spoke about gender in fisheries livelihoods and her experience in leading a post-harvest fisherfolk organization in Barbados that comprised mainly women.

Mitchell Lay, Co-ordinator of the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO), explained the importance of seafood quality. Nadine Nembhard, also of CNFO and Co-Chairperson of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, spoke on managed access as a management tool.

Livelihoods perspective

Tyrson Walters, who is both a fisher and a MPA warden offered a livelihoods perspective on a fish sanctuary in Jamaica. Claudio González, an award-winning fisher, spoke on fisheries livelihoods associated with an MPA in the Dominican Republic. The panel discussion that followed allowed GCFI delegates to learn more about

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were addressed at the 67th Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) conference, held during 3-7 November 2014 in Barbados.

The conference had the theme “Small Islands, Big Issues: Applying Fisheries and Marine Science to Solve Problems and Create Opportunities”. This was in recognition of 2014 as the United Nations International Year of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, was the host of the 67th GCFI.

The conference attracted over 200 fisherfolk, fisheries and MPA scientists and managers, research students, marine and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental and inter-governmental

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livelihoods directly from these fisherfolk. It helped to clarify, for scientists and others, a variety of issues facing fisherfolk in the region. The panel highlighted the need for a regional fisher ambassador programme, along with practical fisherfolk exchanges, for sharing knowledge and experience on sustainable fisheries practices. Scientists and others were challenged to apply marine science to improve fisheries livelihoods as well as increase knowledge.

Delegates were told of the GCFI Fisheries for Fishers Initiative that included an ambassador programme to enhance the policy influence of fisherfolk, and the regional recognition (in the form of the Gladding Memorial Award) for leading men and women who actively promoted and demonstrated sustainable fisheries practices.

Running in parallel with the main GCFI conference was a three-day workshop led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on strengthening organizations and collective action in fisheries towards the formulation of a capacity development programme.

Among the 24 participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean were fisherfolk leaders from Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize and Jamaica. The fisheries experts and fisherfolk leaders discussed fisheries organization and collective action case studies from Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Costa Rica, East Timor, Indonesia, Norway, Tanzania and the United States (US).

They addressed challenges and opportunities associated with implementing the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).

The aim of the workshop was to determine how fisherfolk organizations could continue to play a leading role in the SSF Guidelines, and what capacities were needed to make their engagement in the implementation phase successful.

Several participants will take the lessons learned from the workshop to a larger FAO gathering in Rome in December to address the Global Assistance Programme for the SSF Guidelines.

At the workshop fisherfolk raised points on critical matters requiring consideration in the SSF Guidelines implementation and by Caribbean fisheries stakeholders. These included observations such as:

- Fisherfolk organizations often require external support for collective action and organizing, but this should not be used by external agencies as an opportunity for their co-optation or coercion.
- Enhancing economic success and sustainable livelihoods was an important driver for forming and maintaining strong and viable fisherfolk organizations with developmental potential.
- Pro-organization legislation and active government support or partnership played an important role in creating an enabling environment that fostered strong fisherfolk organizations.
- Respecting customary management practices, along with local culture, values and norms, was vital in regard to durable partnerships; so changes needed to be promoted but not pressured.



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- Without visionary and capable leadership, fisherfolk appear to respond primarily to crisis or perceived crisis, so good leadership was key to facilitating organization and collective action.
- Capacity development involves dimensions and components such as world view, networks, organizational culture, adaptation strategies, skills, knowledge, physical assets and finance.

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- Developing capacity must be envisioned as a continuous long-term process if organizational sustainability is to be promoted; fisherfolk need to develop social learning institutions.
- Public education, advocacy, outreach and other forms of culturally appropriate communication help to provide the awareness of small-scale fisheries necessary for influencing fisheries policy.

A half-day Fishers Field Trip allowed about 50 people from the workshop and the conference to gain an appreciation of the fisheries sector of Barbados and to network informally in the field with each other and local fisherfolk at three stops.


The stops were the main commercial fishing harbour, a scenic fish-landing site that illustrated potential for integration with tourism, and another rural site where the fisherfolk had developed their own code for sustainable fisheries derived from the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

At this last stop, local fisherfolk hosted the touring party to an entertaining time that included an array of delicious seafood prepared on site to showcase value-added products in the context of fisheries livelihoods at the household level.

Another concurrent FAO-led event at the 67th GCFI was the Workshop on MPAs as a potential management tool for responsible fisheries in the Caribbean. With about 50 participants, including several fisherfolk, this workshop shifted the conversation about MPAs in the Caribbean away from primarily biodiversity conservation to also pay more attention to fisheries and livelihood sustainability.

With nearly 30 countries and territories in and around the Caribbean Sea it is difficult for fisherfolk and others to keep track of what is happening in the region.

The workshop was an excellent opportunity to take stock of, and discuss, persistent areas of concern such as MPA policy and practice in relation to fisheries, compliance and enforcement, sustainable financing, climate change and natural hazards, livelihoods and stakeholder engagement.

The participants worked in small groups to address a number of these issues and recommend ways in which to improve the relationship between fisheries and MPAs to meet multiple objectives encompassing biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods, food security and other aspects of human well-being. 

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