

Fisheries management

Coming together with confidence

This article looks at co-management of lake resources in Uganda through 'beach management units'

Fisheries resources throughout the world are under increasing pressure, and effective approaches to improve management are being sought. Many countries are looking for ways to involve fisheries users in management and the term 'fisheries co-management' has been adopted to refer to a broad range of user-government partnerships. This shift is in recognition of the failure of centralized management of fisheries to maintain stock levels and secure dependent livelihoods within fisheries communities.

Co-management has been defined as "a sharing of responsibility and authority for resource management between the government and local resource users/community" ("Community-based and co-management institutions for sustainable coastal fisheries management in Southeast Asia", by R. S Pomeroy, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 27 (3), 1995). There are, however, different interpretations of co-management, with different types of responsibilities and levels of authority shared between communities and government. The different approaches to co-management have implications for how fisheries stakeholders, particularly the boat crew and women, benefit from co-management.

Recent experience from Uganda in the implementation of a co-management approach to fisheries management demonstrates how the more marginalized stakeholders in fisheries—the boat crew and women—can be empowered through legislation, capacity building and participation in decision making.

The contribution of fisheries to the national economy of Uganda is

considerable, with an annual economic value of US\$301 mn (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development figures for 2004). Over 300,000 people are directly employed in the capture fisheries sector, many of whom are the poorest in rural society, with a further 1.2 mn people in rural households dependent on the sector. The government recognized that this significant contribution to poverty reduction can only be maintained and increased if the management of fisheries resources involves all relevant stakeholders, including the poor and women.

To implement the new fisheries co-management approach, the government, through its Department of Fisheries Resources (DFR), developed and approved the first-ever National Fisheries Policy (NFP) in March 2004, developed a provisional Fisheries Sector Strategic Plan (FSSP) and passed legislation to empower new fisheries community groups called 'beach management units' (BMUs). The BMUs are designed to ensure that the poor and women participate in key decision-making processes. A draft Fisheries Bill (2004) has been developed that will strengthen the new approach considerably, strengthening new institutions and reforming fisheries taxation.

Significant move

This article explains how BMUs represent a significant move from the past, centralized approach to fisheries management, how they operate and how those involved in capture fisheries, particularly the boat crew and women, benefit from the roles and responsibilities of BMUs and from the legislation that supports their active involvement. In Uganda, as in most other countries, fisheries management in the past was

vested with central government using out-posted fisheries staff. The administration and management was based on a command-and-control approach. There was very little or no participation by fisheries communities in resource planning, management and development.

At various stages in past management history, informal institutions were established, including local fisheries leaders, known as *gabungas*, landing site committees and fisheries taskforces. Representatives in all these informal institutions were not democratically elected, and had no legal status; their functions were not clearly defined and their operations lacked sufficient transparency and accountability.

Consequently, fisheries management using these institutions within a centralized approach was not very effective and did not reflect the needs of all fisheries stakeholders. Many fisherfolk were excluded from decision making and management, particularly boat crew (the fishermen) and women fishmongers and processors.

In light of the failure of the centralized approach to tackle harmful fishing practices and sustainably manage resources, and in line with the Government of Uganda's

decentralization policy, Uganda adopted a new, more participatory approach to fisheries management.

This approach is founded upon principles underpinning wider government policies that promote poverty-focused and gender-sensitive development strategies. It aims to build good governance, transparency and accountability in fisheries management. It deepens decentralization through participatory fisheries planning and management. This includes marginalized stakeholders, especially poor fishing crew members and women in decision-making structures and processes governing the management of resources upon which their livelihoods depend. This co-management approach brings fishing communities and government together for more effective management and implementation of policies and regulations.

In developing the new NFP and the provisional FSSP, the government held several consultative workshops with local government officials and representatives of all fisheries stakeholder groups. This consultation resulted in consensus and raised awareness about the new approach and ensured that policy was informed by experience and practice.

Sustainable exploitation

The primary objective of the NFP is to ensure "sustainable exploitation and

culture of the fishery resources at the highest possible levels, thereby maintaining fish availability for both present and future generations, without degrading the environment”.

There is no explicit mention of access rights and livelihoods, but the key policy strategies clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to a new co-management approach. Policy commitments on devolution of some decision-making responsibilities to communities and local government, the formation of sustainable institutions at all levels for fisheries management, and co-operation between local government and communities, guide the implementation of the co-management approach in Uganda.

In order for BMUs to become fully effective, the DFR recognized that they must associate with one another and with local governments to manage lake resources using an ecosystem approach. This is being achieved by the formation of Lake Management Organizations (LMOs), bringing together the local governments and communities bordering a lake, and addressing catchment issues that affect lake resources. The NFP also includes plans to create a Uganda Fisheries Authority (UFA) to take over from the DFR.

The UFA will be an autonomous institution under the parent Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF), which will be more flexible than a government department, more responsive and client-oriented, while costing less money for the government, through raising money within the sector.

The provisional FSSP was developed to implement the policy and includes detailed activities and spending plans. This document is used by the DFR to lobby for funds within MAAIF. The plan was instrumental in ensuring that DFR could lobby effectively during the revision of Uganda’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the overarching policy framework, for poverty reduction required by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for debt relief for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). Uganda’s PRSP is known as the

Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) and it is essential that fisheries and key action areas within fisheries that will lead to poverty reduction are included in the PEAP to secure resources for implementation.

DFR was successful in ensuring that fisheries is included in the revised PEAP, and the need for financial support for the formation and capacity building of fisheries co-management was noted as a priority area. This strengthens the ability of fisheries stakeholders in lobbying for resources to improve livelihoods, while also increasing productivity.

Fisheries co-management is being implemented through the formation of BMUs at designated landing sites, as required by the Fish (Beach Management) Rules, Statutory Instrument No. 35, July 2003. They are the institutional structures within which fisheries stakeholders work in partnership with local and central governments, to improve planning and to sustainably manage fisheries resources. Over 200 BMUs have been formed, mainly on Lakes Kyoga, George and Edward, with hundreds more expected on Lakes Victoria and Albert.

The statutory instrument is accompanied by detailed guidelines that set out how BMUs should be formed (such as raising awareness, registering members and holding elections for the committee) and who should be on the BMU committee. The legislation requires that boat crew have 30 per cent of the places on the BMU committee, and that women, wherever possible, also have 30 per cent of places. The percentage allocations are one way of ensuring that all fisheries stakeholders participate in decision making, safeguarding against domination by stakeholder groups that have traditionally managed landing sites, that is, fishing boatowners who invariably do not fish themselves. The legal allocations are supported by capacity building, monitoring and, in the future, by development initiatives to build the capacity of boat crew and women in decision making and leadership.

UK aid

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Table 1: BMU Composition on Lakes Kyoga and George

Number of...	Kyoga	George
BMUs	192	8
Boats	Approx 10,000	326
BMU members	42,281	2,478
Men	37,630	2,017
Women	4,651	461
Boat owners	8,572	444
Boat crew	24,740	1,158
Fish mongers	3,823	288
Fish processors	2,121	44
Other fisheries stakeholders	3,025	544

(DFID)-funded project, Integrated Lake Management (ILM, www.ilm.mrag.co.uk), BMUs have been formed on Lakes George and Kyoga. Lake Kyoga is in the centre of Uganda, covering around 2,800 sq km, with 10 districts bordering the lake. George is a much smaller lake, in the southwest of Uganda, within the Queen Elizabeth Protected Area. It covers 260 sq km, with three districts bordering the lake.

Table 1 shows the composition of these BMUs in terms of men and women, and stakeholder groups.

Table 1 shows that 11 per cent of BMU members on Kyoga are women, whereas the much smaller Lake George has 18.6 per cent women. On Kyoga, there are, on average, 2.5 boat crew per boat, and on George, 3.5 per boat. The higher figure on Lake George is due to sharing of boats and licences and the fact that Lake Kyoga includes dugout canoes where owners also go fishing.

Not all the BMUs on Lakes Kyoga and George have complied with government regulations on the composition of the committees. Forty-five per cent of the BMUs on Lake Kyoga had 30 per cent or more women on the committee, and 73 per cent had 30 per cent or more boat crew. In some fisheries, such as male-dominated dugout canoes, there is justification for fewer women and boat crew on the committee (as the boat owners also crew

the boats, so there are fewer registered boat crew), but in other cases, more effort is required to improve poverty focus and gender sensitivity. On Lake George, two of the eight BMUs have fewer women than required by law on the committees, and one has fewer boat crew.

Resistance to the allocation of committee member places to boat crew and women was particularly strong at two landing sites on Lake George, where the dominance of a small group of boatowners had prevailed for decades. The boatowners were able to lobby at ministerial level for a change in the guidelines, but were unsuccessful, largely due to the counter efforts of the DFR and district political leadership. The same groups did, however, succeed in slowing down the election process, but eventually accepted the prescribed procedures and committee composition.

This does not mean that opposition to the new approach has disappeared. It is expected that, in some places, dominant groups may still try to use the new arrangements to continue their dominance.

Effective participation

Boat crew and women, in particular, need support and capacity building to ensure they can effectively participate in decision making within BMUs and are able to resist attempts by certain boatowners to

dominate the management of, and the share of benefits (legal and illegal) from, fisheries resources.

In terms of planning for, and managing, fisheries resources, what are BMUs doing? The statutory instrument clearly sets out their roles and responsibilities, but the main areas of activity can be summarized as:

- collecting information that can be used in planning and making management decisions, for the fisheries, but also for development of the landing sites;
- using this information for taking local and lake-wide management decisions and making management plans, by BMUs, lake management organizations and government;
- monitoring fishing activities and working with local and central governments to enforce management rules and regulations; and
- participating in control of access to the lake for fishing. Participatory processes for the licensing of boats promotes greater transparency and accountability within local communities.

From these roles, many benefits are expected from BMUs, both in terms of better management and, therefore, higher productivity, but also in terms of empowerment and poverty reduction. BMUs provide an entry point to fisheries communities and have enabled local government and non-governmental organizations to work more effectively with these communities, now they are organized and the structures are inclusive. BMUs are mandated to contribute to local government development planning and the new government-led, community-based planning approach to local government development planning provides an ideal route through which BMUs can participate in planning and lobby for resources.

In 2002, prior to the formation of BMUs, the government decentralized licensing powers to the administrative heads of local government. On Lake George, a lake with a fixed number of boat licences, this coincided with an evaluation of the number of licences and the procedures of issuing licences. It was agreed between all stakeholders that a participatory process would be developed that would increase access by boat crew and women to boat licences, while also ensuring continuity of licensing for livelihood security. New procedures are now in place, with benefits for resource management and local livelihoods.

Table 2: Performance of BMUs

Lake	No. of BMUs sampled	Percentage of BMUs				
		Holding meetings	Recording views of women & crew	Book-keeping	Collecting fisheries information	Reducing illegal gear use
Edward	5	100	100	40	100	80
George	8	100	88	25	100	50
Kyoga	186	69	53	14	52	48
Total	203					

Although BMUs were only formed on Lakes Edward, George and Kyoga in late 2003, their performance was assessed in June 2004 to provide baseline data and to identify areas where capacity building and support are particularly needed. The ILM project spent five years working on Lake George, compared to three supporting Edward to some extent, and three on Kyoga. The scale of Kyoga meant that capacity-building efforts required considerable resources and, so the Kyoga BMUs have not performed as well as the fewer BMUs on Lakes Edward and George. Further capacity building and support is needed to build on the capacity building already provided.

Performance was assessed using a monitoring framework provided in the Guidelines for BMUs, issued by DFR in 2003. A selection of the results from this monitoring programme is shown in Table 2.

The results show that many of the BMUs have already held meetings and that over half (55 per cent) are recording the views of women and crew in minutes of meetings. All the BMUs on Lakes Edward and George and over half on Kyoga are collecting fisheries information. This is very encouraging, as ILM had only recently rolled out training on fisheries information collection on Kyoga. Almost half the BMUs are addressing the challenge of the use of illegal fishing gear. The performance of BMUs, in terms of bookkeeping, is disappointing, and highlights the need for more support on financial management for BMUs.

Fisheries provide a significant livelihood from lake resources. However, for effective lake and fisheries management, BMUs must come together for co-ordination and coherence between management plans.

BMUs can associate with one another, both between BMUs at different landing sites and to form different levels of association. They may wish to associate at different levels of local government. On both Lakes George and Kyoga, LMOs have been formed to develop and implement lake management plans.

The Lake George Basin Integrated Management Organization (LAGBIMO) and the Lake Kyoga Integrated Management Organization (LAKIMO) are founded upon the BMUs, with representatives attending the lake-wide assembly and represented on the executive committee to ensure that their concerns are addressed across the lake. The organizations are associations of local government, formed under the Local Government Act, 1997, though the BMU statutory instrument also allows for BMUs to associate.

Improved management

The LMOs bring communities and local governments together for improved lake management. Such organizations are essential for developing a harmonized approach to managing a lake and for development interventions in the area. The LMOs are doing much to support the role of women and boat crew in fisheries management and beach development, through supporting their participation in

decision making, capacity building and through targeted interventions, as set out in the management plans.

The fisheries sector generates significant revenue. Not only is fish one of the biggest agricultural export earners for Uganda, it also generates revenue for local communities and local government. Some of these resources are being ploughed back into the management of lake resources through both BMUs and local government.

Money from fish movement permits, profits from fish-landing site tenders and collection of fish or money per boat landing (as determined through bylaws) is generating revenue to enable BMUs to hold meetings, collect valuable information, plan and implement decisions and monitor fisheries activities.

The collection of landing fees is tendered by local government to an external contractor. The tenderer is contracted to remit a certain amount to local government but can collect far in excess of that amount, removing vast sums from fisheries resources.

To address this removal of funds that could be used for reinvestment, the new draft Fisheries Bill 2004 includes provisions for BMUs to collect a Landing Site User Fee (LSUF). Financial analyses

reveal that this system, if adopted, will decrease the charges to resource users, particularly the poor, but, at the same time, increase the amount going to local governments for wider development, and leave a substantial amount for fisheries management and development by BMUs.

BMUs are set firmly alongside the government system. Although they are not formally part of the government system, many of the functions set out in the statutory instrument require close collaboration with local and central governments.

In fact, the parish or village executive committee is charged with monitoring and supervising the operations of BMUs. The Chief Administrative Officer of the district local council has overall responsibility and reports directly to the Commissioner of the Department of Fisheries Resources.

Local plans

In order to be effective in management, BMUs are required to develop local fisheries management and beach development plans and advocate for their integration in other local development plans. Integration of their plans into local government development planning, through Parish Development Plans, will increase the opportunity for funding and implementation. This strong integration into the local government system ensures

that a BMU works closely with government and that its plans and activities are integrated into local government development and work plans.

The policies and legislation are in place and over 200 BMUs have already been formed. It is, however, very early days for fisheries co-management in Uganda, and it is critical that the government, at national and local levels, provides the support that BMUs will continue to need to operate effectively and to ensure that all fisheries stakeholders benefit.

The need for support to, and capacity building of, BMUs and LMOs is clearly set out in the draft revised PEAP of March 2004, the PRSP of Uganda. This recognition is critical for DFR and others to lobby for resources to support fisheries co-management institutions.

Women and boat crew are already actively involved in BMUs and are speaking out on issues of concern to them. They recognize the opportunities brought by fisheries co-management. A woman member of a BMU committee on Lake George remarked, "I have gained confidence and exposure. Now I can contribute to discussions at the BMUs and in workshops when called, even if men are present".

Uganda has embarked upon an innovative co-management approach to fisheries management that, if effectively implemented, will result in increased productivity and improved livelihoods. This will, however, require greater financial support to the sector to ensure the new institutions have the capacity to operate effectively and deliver these critical outcomes.

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