

ESA workshop

## Empowering co-management

The issue of co-management came up for detailed discussion at the ESA Fish Workshop organized by ICSF at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

The workshop on “Fishing Communities and Sustainable Development in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA): The Role of Small-scale Fisheries” was organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) in collaboration with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), the Masifundise Development Trust and the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA). It was held at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from 14 to 17 March 2006.

Among the various issues discussed, considerable interest focused on co-management in fisheries. Simeao Lopes of the Institute for the Development of Small-scale Fisheries (IDPPE), Mozambique, said fishing contributes to the country’s employment, food security and foreign exchange. The sector is organized into the industrial, semi-industrial and artisanal fisheries. Private and joint-venture companies engage in industrial fisheries, especially for shrimp resources in the Sofala bank. The semi-industrial fishing vessels are mainly Mozambique-based trawlers that target shrimp. They also include handlines as well as freshwater fishing platforms for *kapenta*. The artisanal fisheries are spread along the seaboard and the inland waters, employing about 130,000 in canoe fishing and fish processing. There are about 11,000 artisanal fishing vessels, only 3 per cent of which are motorized. Beach-seines, gillnets and handlines are the popular artisanal fishing gear.

The development of co-management in Mozambique began, Lopes said, with the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in the post-Second World War era, as demands increased on Africa to democratize and implement SAPs, from

its traditional Western donors, led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who stressed resource management based upon participatory approaches, devolution of authority and decentralization of powers. Thus, by the early 1990s, user participation had become almost a *given* requirement for donor-funded development projects in Mozambique.

Within the fisheries sector, studies were conducted to evaluate fisheries programmes and projects implemented during the previous two decades so as to draw lessons and propose appropriate future interventions. A Fisheries Master Plan (FMP) was developed and approved by the Mozambican government in 1994. The process of elaboration of the FMP involved many central fisheries institutions, fishing communities and other stakeholders, Lopes said.

The FMP laid out the priorities and strategies for development to be pursued in the subsequent years. With regard to the management of small-scale fisheries, the FMP emphasized the involvement of fishermen in setting and enforcing management regimes. It was from the FMP that co-management approaches were formally declared as part of the general new strategic interventions for fisheries management and development.

### Better analyses

A subsequent evaluation underscored the importance of more careful and comprehensive analyses and discussions, and the development of more active participation of beneficiaries. Pilot measures for user-sensitization began in the late-1990s. Several co-management committees were since set up in the marine coastal areas of the country to improve the efficacy of fisheries

management through developing a sense of ownership of management programmes amongst active fishers.

**H**owever, Lopes identified several constraints to realizing co-management goals in Mozambique. Firstly, the State acts as the custodian of all natural resources, including marine resources. Through the Ministry of Fisheries' directorates and autonomous institutes, the State has the right to manage marine resources for the benefit of the people. In artisanal fisheries, the users (coastal communities) have the right to use fisheries resources; however, they do not have the right to participate in planning for the use nor the right to legally act, individually or collectively, in respect of management of the fishery resource. This is a serious constraint to the goal of better resource management.

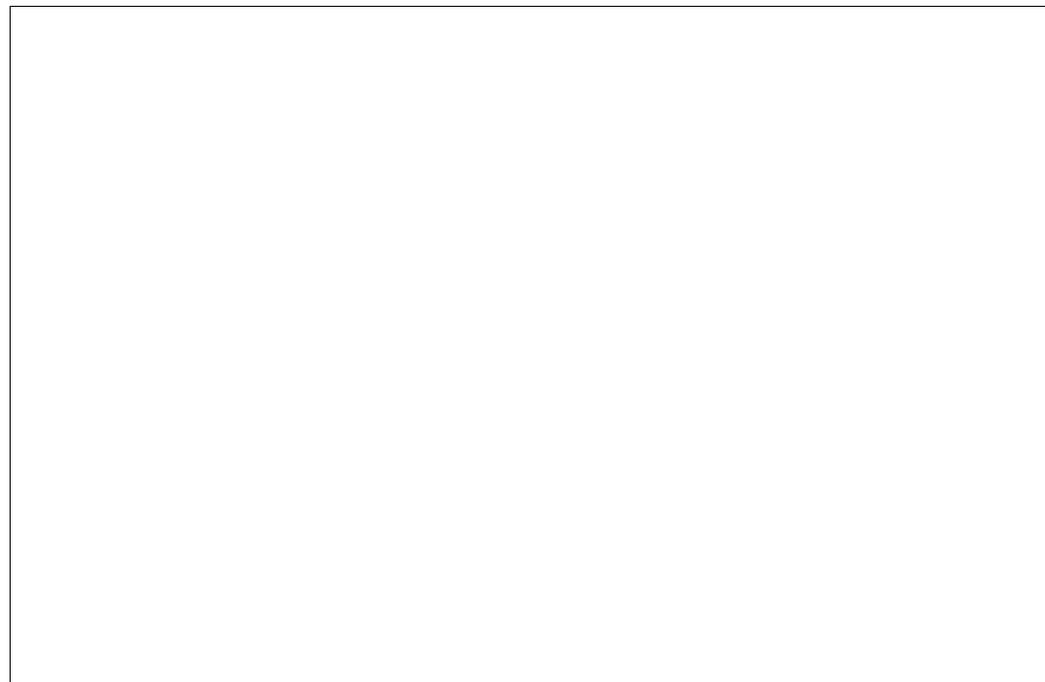
Secondly, there are restrictive meanings associated with the concept of participation. Thus, for example, as far as fishing communities and their traditional leadership are concerned, participation does not apply to the crew on board fishing vessels. It applies only to those who have the political and economic power to take strategic decisions, to the local elite, the traditional and religious leaders and other individuals who are willing to offer their services on behalf of others. These people may not be the most

appropriate to deal with issues related to fisheries co-management. There could thus be conflicts between participatory democracy as demanded by the main donors, and effective fisheries management. However, to guarantee the success of co-management, the government should understand these sociocultural aspects (as traditional leaders are still respected by the majority of rural people), and ensure that all relevant institutions, individuals or interest groups, which are considered legitimate by different members of fishing communities, are engaged in the process, Lopes added.

Thirdly, the government has not been able to empower fishing communities (legally, through economic incentives or through capacity building) to cope with resource management responsibilities. Neither has there been an effort to use local knowledge in decision-making processes or to explain the criteria used to make some management decisions. As long as there is poor understanding of fisheries management amongst the fishermen, there might be unwillingness to comply with fisheries regulations.

#### **Local knowledge**

It is important to integrate traditional/local authorities, as well as local knowledge, into co-management as a means to connect political and scientific objectives of the government to the



community. For the fishing community, it could be a way to reach full control of their marine resources through the devolution of power and responsibilities from government, Lopes observed.

**T**he pressures on the coastal fishing resources in Mozambique result, among other things, from the overall unhealthy economic situation in the country, he added. To raise enough income for subsistence, fishing communities are putting pressure on the resource by increasing fishing effort through the use of inappropriate fishing gear like fine-meshed nets in beach-seines that target small pelagic fish. Open access to fisheries resources further complicates the matter, resulting in serious threats both to the resource and to the economic development of fishing communities.

The fishermen themselves say that the catch rates from the nearshore waters have declined, and the average size of commercial fish species have decreased. The falling productivity of fishing units indicates the need to manage the fishery and exercise caution in promoting any increase in fishing effort. Co-management arrangements should be able to reconcile conservation with the subsistence or livelihood interests of fishing communities.

The competition for the marine coastal resources of Mozambique is becoming increasingly evident, with both artisanal fishing communities and tourism relying on the resources for livelihoods and development. At present, the Government of Mozambique (GoM) is encouraging tourism as a way to rapidly develop the economy, Lopes said. As part of this process, the GoM has delegated the management responsibility of some areas of the coastal zone to private tourism developers.

Artisanal fishing communities are concerned about the use of, and access to, the same coastal resources, leading to conflicts where fishing communities have been displaced from their traditional living and fishing grounds. These are more evident where tourism interests are promoting the preservation of marine coastal resources as their primary asset, which contrasts with the extractive value

of the coastal fishery resource, as perceived by the fishing communities.

On the one hand, the GoM is supporting the development of co-management in the artisanal fisheries sector without the legislative framework that can delegate resource management responsibilities to the communities. On the other, it is providing the legislative framework for delegating resource management concessions to private tourism developers without the co-management institutional framework that would consider the needs of all resource users. In both instances, the result of partial regulation and control over each resource user group risks overexploitation of marine coastal resources.

Co-management is seen by the GoM as a means to better control fisheries activities (especially the fishing effort and conflicts of interest) through sharing or decentralization of some responsibilities to the local institutions. But the communities view the arrangement as a step to achieve full control over the fishery resources through the devolution of power and authority to the local institutions.

However, the GoM may not be able, or even willing, to devolve the authority, as that would require some changes to the country's constitution. Sufficient financial capacity would also be needed to ensure appropriate collective organizations among the communities.

Lopes raised the following questions in the light of the experience of Mozambique with co-management: (i) What are the different approaches of different players in co-management and what is their understanding of 'sustainable development'? (ii) How could balance between conservation objectives of governments and the livelihood needs of fishing communities be established while implementing co-management programmes? (iii) Could co-management achieve the objectives of all players, given that the outcome might not always be exactly the same and may often be contradictory in nature? (iv) How could participatory and traditional elements work together? (v) Are co-management institutions willing, or able, to use

multiple sources of knowledge in management decisionmaking? (vi) What could be the implications of the two models—decentralization and devolution—for fisheries co-management arrangements? (vii) What are the impacts of participatory development approaches on the traditional and (new) economic power structures in a co-managed resource environment?

In the discussion that followed Lopes' presentation, it was observed that co-management basically referred to shared management responsibility between the government and the community. It was noted that it is important to have an understanding of what definition to use in the ESA context. It was further observed that the participation of women in co-management initiatives is poor.

Friday Njaya of the Fisheries Department of Malawi spoke about the status of participatory fishery management (PFM) in Malawi lakes. PFM was introduced in Lake Malawi at the behest of international agencies in the 1990s in response to declining lake fishery resources and intensifying conflicts between small-scale and commercial fisheries. Historically, there were traditional controls over fisheries resources in some parts of Lake Malawi and Lake Chiuta, and user committees and associations called beach village committees (BVCS) were formed to establish PFM in all the lakes.

The composition of the BVCS varied from lake to lake. While some were associations of chiefs, others had mixed composition. The issue of devolution of fisheries responsibilities to local district assemblies is still an outstanding one. BVCS have to be redefined to allow for the participation of all representatives of different fishing activities. Formal bye-laws are yet to be developed for effective devolution of fishery management powers.

There are doubts whether or not PFM could work in Lake Malawi, which is a large water body supporting small-scale, semi-industrial and commercial fisheries, including trawling. The fishing communities along Lake Malawi are multi-ethnic. There are problems in successfully imposing access regulation

on fishing, in demarcating boundaries and in enforcing fishery regulations, Njaya said.

Yet, despite difficulties, it is possible to set up "broad-based co-management" in Lake Malawi, with the participation of stakeholders such as the police, magistrates, chiefs, natural resources-based government departments and the district assembly. There is a move now to introduce a closed season for trawlers. In smaller lakes such as Lake Chiuta, PFM structures are useful mechanisms to resolve transboundary conflicts between Malawi and Mozambique. Njaya said co-management should be based on local conditions, and defined and developed in a contextual manner. It is important to make a policy distinction between the rural poor and the village elite in co-management programmes. There should be clarity on the introduction of property rights or access regulation regimes. Sufficient caution should be exercised while applying theories in practice. Implementation of a co-management initiative is a learning process and it evolves with time, Njaya concluded.

Mafaniso Hara of the University of Western Cape, South Africa, gave a presentation on the implications for coastal communities of co-management perspectives and experiences in the ESA region. The objectives of fisheries management mainly involve three aspects: setting management objectives; defining and providing the knowledge base for management decisions; and implementation of management decisions. Historically, fishery management decisions have been top-down. The fisheries resources have been treated as State property, and the objectives of fisheries management have mainly been confined to conservation of fishery resources, relying on biological sciences. The implementation of fishery management was through policing measures.

#### **Conventional regimes**

Co-management of fishery resources was proposed in light of the failure of conventional fishery management regimes to prevent overexploitation of fishery resources. It is also proposed as an

effective mechanism to break the barriers between fishery administrators and user communities a legacy of the top-down approach through democratic decentralization, Hara said.

**C**o-management of fishery resources mostly as short-term, externally funded projects—was led by government line agencies through the creation of ‘user’ representative organizations (‘democratically’ elected committees). The process has sometimes lacked flexibility because of specific donor requirements.

The experiences with co-management in the ESA region have so far been mixed. The most common types of co-management have been ‘instructive’ or ‘consultative’. Hara discussed several critical aspects of co-management as it is currently practised in the region. Firstly, there are conflicting objectives between conservation of fishery resources and socioeconomic development of fishing communities. The government approach has usually been instrumental; it co-opts users into the management process to achieve the same old conservation objectives without really accepting alternative knowledge, ideas and views from them.

By and large, governments do not perceive co-management as a means of introducing more democratic principles

of fisheries management, but as a means to better achieve the government’s original conservation objectives.

Secondly, co-management has been proposed as a way to deal with open-access problems. The introduction of access rights has been with the idea of enabling effort control. However, such measures often clash with historical fishing practices. Enforcing access control was particularly problematic in areas lacking alternative economic opportunities.

Thirdly, centralized co-management systems are favoured that rely on the government’s natural scientists. Very few inputs from users are incorporated into such systems. Usually, only tasks that the governments have failed to implement, or are costly, are left to the user groups. The local communities are usually not legally empowered. Their negotiating position in relation to the government is still weak. The governments are also reluctant to devolve real power and genuine authority to user groups.

#### **Customary power**

Fourthly, co-management usually requires customary sources of power held by traditional leaders for effective application of sanctions. There is thus a need to involve traditional authority. The traditional authorities or local elites often capture power to offset any challenge to

their authority that could crop up from co-management programmes.

**F**ifthly, while the governments may lack appropriate skills and capacity to undertake co-management, communities might not have the economic, social and political incentives or capacity to undertake some responsibilities required under co-management.

Finally, the definition of 'user community' and 'stakeholders' can be evolving and dynamic in a temporal and spatial sense. Existing mechanisms cannot define the users and decide on how to represent them in co-management structures. There is also the problem of lack, or low degree, of downward accountability of representative organizations. However, tacit threats of governments to revoke powers and authority force upward accountability.

Hara had the following recommendations for "efficient, equitable and sustainable fisheries management" in the ESA region. Firstly, co-management models should acknowledge and integrate the role of poverty in community/individual decisions, and occupational and geographic mobility in community/individual livelihoods. The role of fishing in the community's livelihood interests should be better understood. The community should know the status of fishery resources and be better informed about alternative sources of livelihoods that could possibly combine with fishing. In this context, how far occupational and geographic mobility could help improve socioeconomic status is important, Hara added.

Secondly, there is a need for "empowering co-management" by fully involving users in setting up management objectives, in integrating 'user knowledge' into formal science and in the implementation of management decisions.

And finally, it is important to improve the ability of communities to agitate. They should challenge formal science (including international conventions) using their local knowledge to balance conservation with local socioeconomic concerns. They should agitate for enabling

legislation and improvement in the attitude of governments to their concerns. They should agitate for better information and better organization of co-management structures with improved human and financial resources, Hara concluded.

This report has been filed by Sebastian Mathew (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Adviser, ICSF. A complete account of the ESA workshop can be found at <http://www.icsf.net/jsp/conference/eastAfrica/report.jsp>