

Shared Success

Some valuable lessons—a replicable model—on protection of aquatic resources and small-scale fisheries

The term co-management has been researched in Vietnam since the 1990s. A number of pilot projects have been conducted to find appropriate distribution and management sharing responsibilities between the government and the community. April 25, 2019, was a crucial milestone because a dramatic change came into effect that day: Decree No. 26 on the implementation of co-management of fisheries resources, via Article 10 of the Fisheries Law of 2017.

Binh Dinh is a province located on the central coast, with a 134-km-long coastline. Eighty per cent of the local fisher population—owning 6,115 vessels—benefits from small-scale fishing in both inshore and offshore areas; it contributes 10 per cent of the province's gross domestic product (GDP). However, overexploitation of fishery resources is now a major concern in the province due to its negative impacts on important ecosystems (like coral reefs and seagrass), and because it rapidly reduces incomes from fishing activities.

In order to improve the situation, on 16 May 2019, Decision No. 1636/QĐ-UBND on Implementation Plan of the Fisheries Law in Binh Dinh Province was issued. It mentioned co-management as a method in managing fisheries resources. This method was then applied in four communes, namely, Nhon Chau, Nhon Ly, Nhon Hai and Ghenh Rang, located in a 36,357-hectare Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA), the Quy Nhon Bay. The pilot project for the co-management model was implemented with the support of the Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development (MCD), the Binh Dinh Fisheries Sub-Department and the Binh Dinh Fisheries Association between January 2019 and May 2020, based on the ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM), which

has been practised in this LMMA since 2017.

The implementation of the co-management practice in the Nhon Ly commune can be taken as a typical example for the Quy Nhon Bay LMMA. The management responsibilities are divided into six levels, starting with the People's Committee in Quy Nhon Province, down through the Inter-Communal Co-Executive Association, the People's Committees of various communes, fisheries co-management groups, core groups and community members. The core groups play a key role in gathering and unifying members and promoting

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their participation in managing the exploitation and protection of aquatic resources, and engaging in tourism and related activities in accordance with local government regulations. The core groups created units to protect the coral reefs and fisheries resources through frequent checks and annual monitoring reports in order to introduce timely adjustments to the management method.

First phase

The first phase of the implementation of the co-management plan began in January 2019. It first created a network to enhance community participation for the upcoming phases. The most important result of the first phase was reaching unanimous agreement among all the representatives from each

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MCD



Meeting on developing strategies to monitoring coral reefs. The 60 core members from the community groups were chosen to participate in identifying the negative impacts on coral reefs and benthic species

group, at all management levels, on the need to protect the coral reef ecosystem in Bai Dua.

After four months, the second phase was launched during which time core members were identified for implementation; a number of regulations, action and media plans were drafted. The 60 core members from the community groups were chosen to participate in identifying the negative impacts on coral reefs and benthic species. From those inputs, a draft plan of action for solutions was drawn up, not only for fisheries resource protection and exploitation activities but also to identify the beneficiaries from tourism and impress on them the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism in coastal areas, resulting in stable incomes.

The Bai Dua beach area is located in the Nhon Ly commune, which has high biodiversity, with the coral reef area estimated to cover about eight hectare. With a fairly dense distribution, these reefs offer a high diversity of species, shapes and colours—a beautiful marine landscape. The Nha Trang Oceanographic Institute's 2017 survey recorded 207 types of aquatic species in Bai Dua, including 11 species of seaweed, 87 species of hard coral, 23 mollusc species, 14 echinoderm species and 69 fish species. Bai Dua has some

of the highest species diversity in the whole Quy Nhon Bay area and is a spawning ground for big-fin squid, snails, lobsters and other species.

Bai Dua's co-management area was divided into three sub-areas for different economic purposes—namely, one, strictly protected area; two, fisheries exploiting area; and, three, area for tourism related to coral reefs—with correspondingly appropriate management methods prescribed. Besides this, two levels of conflict resolution and prevention mechanisms were drafted. The funds required annually were to be drawn from the Community Fund. But each member whose livelihood stood to benefit directly from the conservation efforts was supposed to contribute an additional amount.

Third phase

In June 2019, the third phase began to survey and identify areas overlapping with other projects within Bai Dua. The most important outcome of this phase was the creation of a localized map for protecting coral reefs in Bai Dua, a valuable document in the fisheries co-management process. The management responsibility for this area was handed over to the Nhon Ly community.

After the fourth phase of final consultations in July 2019 to identify

community groups and to draft regulations for protection and exploitation, the fifth phase was organized the following month. This aimed to seek approval for the list of core members in each community group, to put into action the draft plan schemes. Seventeen core members were elected to form a representative board for the community group.

It took nearly six months to finalize all legal records and documents. On February 4, 2020, the community co-management group was officially and legally recognized and handed over the rights to implement co-management and protection of the aquatic resources in Bai Dua.

After one year of implementing the co-management plan, about 329,000 tourists had visited the Quy Nhon Bay LMMA, a 6.2 per cent increase over the previous year. The total revenue was 6.1 billion Vietnamese dong (VND), equivalent to 42.9 million VND per capita; this was 18 times higher than in 2015. As one of the first models nationwide of co-management of fisheries resources in accordance with the Fisheries Law of 2017, it demonstrated that sustainable fisheries and ecotourism could co-exist, leading to a stabilization of incomes, an improvement of living standards, and protection of fisheries resources. Especially notable is that this successful model can be replicated in other areas—provided the crucial technical guidelines are followed.

In 2010, Nhon Ly was a fishing village where the main source of livelihood was fishing, primarily from coastal areas, and processing of aquatic products. Seventy per cent of community members made a living through fishing activities, 12 per cent through industrial construction, and 28 per cent through services and trade. By 2019, the structure of the village economy had shifted significantly: revenue from agriculture, forestry and fishery products decreased from 70 per cent to 42.49 per cent, while revenue from construction increased slightly to 14.82 per cent, and revenue from trade and services increased to 42.69 per cent.

The rapid and successful completion of six phases in just one year shows the high determination of local people and

related agencies, especially MCD, the Binh Dinh Fisheries Sub-Department and the Binh Dinh Fisheries Association. The positive outcome of the project offers a great opportunity for people to understand the importance of the co-management method for both the environment and the economy, especially when it is supported by detailed legislation. Nonetheless, it is still a considerable challenge to produce the right mix of appropriate management ability, stable funding, participatory initiatives and concrete legislation. Once this is achieved, the community is almost certainly on the way towards sustainable and responsible fisheries.

In May 2020, MCD coordinated with the Sub-Department of Fisheries in Binh Dinh Province to organize a conference on co-management sharing, recognizing the assignment of management and protection rights of aquatic resources in the LMMA Quy Nhon Bay.

At the conference, Nguyen Thanh Danh, the vice president of the Commune People's Committee and

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Head of the Representative Board, said that by successfully promoting and encouraging community member participation in protecting the coral reef ecosystem, they were able to collect two million VND per year per household for the community protection fund.

Valuable chance

Mai Thi Huong, Chairwoman of the Seafood Processing Co-operative in Nhon Ly and a member of the community co-management group, said: “Co-management is a valuable chance to build up sustainable livelihoods, educate the community on resource protection, reduce overexploitation and increase product value to generate income not only for the women but also for entire households.”

Table 1. The roles of key stakeholders in the Nhon Ly co-management plan

No.	Stakeholder	Role
1	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Binh Dinh Province	Direct the Sub-Department of Fisheries to coordinate with other stakeholders and community groups to establish a co-management implementation plan that complies with the Law of Fisheries (2017) and Decree No. 26.
2	Sub-Department of Fisheries in Binh Dinh Province	Provide technical support for community groups in proposing and implementing co-management, protection and exploitation plans in the assigned areas, with appropriate targets regulated by the government; report to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Provincial People's Committee about the results obtained from the community groups for prompt and timely amendments.
3	Fisheries Association in Binh Dinh Province	Support consultations on establishing the co-management and plan; advise stakeholders on completion of the project.
4	People's Committee in Quy Nhon City	Consult stakeholders and approve the co-management profile; support and monitor the implementation of the co-management plan in the Nhon Ly commune.
5	People's Committee in Nhon Ly commune	Direct all relevant actors in the Nhon Ly commune to support community groups in submitting a co-management plan to the authorities for approval and subsequent implementation.
6	Community group	Represent the community; develop the co-management profile, and methods for operation and regulation of the co-management plan; elect and agree on the representative board for the community group.
7	Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development	Facilitate stakeholder participation and implementation of the co-management plan, including forming advocacy groups, community groups, co-management plan regulations, and community communication and capacity-building schemes.

Tran Van Vinh, a representative from the Sub-Department of Fisheries in Binh Dinh, said: "The Nhon Ly commune is a coastal area with traditional features of diverse fisheries resources and high biodiversity; assigning management rights to the

applying the model, the selected area should have a high biodiversity, should not be vulnerable to anthropogenic impacts but provide important resource habitats as a source of livelihoods for communities. Importantly, it should be ensured that the area does not come under the management of any private-sector organization. If there is harmony between protecting ecosystems and developing livelihoods by raising community awareness and capacity, alongside clarifying the benefits and obligations of practising co-management, the living conditions and incomes of the coastal community can be raised. A sustainable financial mechanism should be identified at the early stages of co-management. In order to achieve these goals, the government should frequently update changes in the application of principles and policy in the co-management of ecosystems and fisheries resources.

Considering the remarkable outcome of the co-management model in the Nhon Ly commune, replication

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community groups, also called co-management, is necessarily needed for more effective protection of fisheries resources, with responsibilities shared with the government as stipulated in the Law of Fisheries."

Through the preparation and implementation of the co-management model, MCD realized that in order to achieve a positive outcome from



The boundaries of the co-management areas were identified by the team members. The positive outcome of the project offers a great opportunity for people to understand the importance of the co-management method for both the environment and the economy

should be considered in other LMMAs, not only in Quy Nhon (Binh Dinh) but also along the central coast—for example, in Quang Nam and Khanh Hoa provinces—to improve the environment and the living conditions of coastal communities. Case studies and good practices from the Nhon Ly model could be identified and shared at national or regional workshops to disseminate and fine-tune the technical and legal aspects for an improvement of the model.

In the early stages, regular support from government bodies is the key to handling difficulties and limitations in management capacity. Fishers from nearby regions who exploit the fisheries resources of Bai Dua can also be involved in, or invited to, the community groups to expand their scale and internal capacity. Furthermore, to avoid problems in trading, the legal status of the community groups should be ascertained with strong support from the local government.

The voluntary Community Fund—inherently rather unstable—requires supplementary support from the collection of service fees from tourism and related services. ↴

For more



FAO - ICSF's Project: Small-scale fishing communities are better informed about co-managing local aquatic and coastal ecosystems and benefits of community-based MCS systems to deter, prevent and eliminate IUU fishing practices

<https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1090-Vietnam.html>

Vietnam: Learning from Warnings

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/80-4369-Learning-from-W.html>

Fisheries Co-management: Learning from Experience

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/82-4415-Learning-from-E.html>

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