Community Participation

Introduction

Community-based coral reef management (CBCRM) is a process by which the public is given the opportunity and/or responsibility to manage their own resources, define their needs, goals, and aspirations, and make decisions affecting their well- being (Fellizar 1994). It starts from the basic premise that people have the innate capacity to understand and act on their own problems (Katon et al. 1999). Essentially, CBCRM builds on what the community thinks and allows each community to develop a management strategy that meets its particular needs and conditions (White et al. 1994; Ferrer and Nozawa 1997). Its approach is people centered and consensus driven. At the core of CBCRM is community organizing, where empowerment is a primary concern. CBCRM has been responsible for activating social processes.

Underlying many local CBCRM initiatives is a sense of ownership of management arrangements that tends to foster a high degree of commitment and rule compliance (Pomeroy et al. 1996). For example, involving communities in environmental monitoring programmes provides them with first-hand information of the impacts of their management interventions. Natural resource monitoring by communities is an economically attractive option provided experts properly train and calibrate monitors. The participatory establishment of closed areas (‘reserves’) encourages compliance and reduces the costs and needs for an extensive enforcement system.

Purely community-level management can be difficult in a complex world of multiple stakeholders (Berkes 1997). Communities, by themselves, are unlikely to solve problems that originate outside their community (White et al. 1994; Claridge and O’Callaghan 1997). Resource management cannot operate without supportive policies, legislation, enforcement, conflict resolution, and other types of assistance (Pomeroy et al. 1996). Policies and legislation need to clearly spell out jurisdiction and control, provide legitimacy to decision-making arrangements, and clarify rights and rules on resource access and resource use. Arbitration and settlement of disputes, moreover, are imperative when conflicts arise between local resource users and between communities (Katon et al. 1999). Thus, comanagement has emerged as an important concept. Comanagement refers to the sharing of responsibility and/or authority between the government and community of local users to manage a resource (Pomeroy and Williams 1994). It makes two basic assumptions:

1. Local people must have a stake in resource conservation and management, and
2. Partnership of local communities and resource users with government agencies is essential (Berkes 1997).

Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Social and cultural context

The cultural and social context is important for understanding impacts of coral reef and project management. In general, coral reef management projects should:

- increase efforts directed towards education, awareness, and collaboration needed to build consensus in multi-cultural communities.
- foster a greater understanding of the community and its traditional and cultural relationship with the resource (current and historic use patterns, values, attitudes) for effective community engagement.
- translate the goals and objectives of the project such that they are understandable to the target audiences and the community context.
- create a forum for stakeholder interaction, query, and debate to provide opportunities for collaboration and mediation within the context of social interactions and conflicts. This and other anticipatory strategies should be explored (e.g. advisory communities and user group agreements).
- nurture charismatic leadership within the community, as it is invaluable to facilitating community participation.

Community empowerment

Community empowerment promotes project ownership, participation, and management which increase the likelihood of success. Some key lessons include:

- Information and experience sharing is promoted through practical exercises (e.g. pilot projects) that involve peer to peer exchanges, networking, and good practice field examples.
- Special effort to involve communities, especially marginalised user groups (gender and ethnic equality) and functional community leaders can promote good will, improve project management, and equitable distribution of benefits. This will also increase human capacity and strengthen technical capacity.
- Devolution of decision making to local governments and important community figures can enhance resource stewardship when users play an important role in the management of their resources.
- Exploring bottom-up and co-management approaches, recognising that varying management structures and strategies, improves project outcomes.
- Community participation at the project planning, design, implementation, and management levels ensures transparency and inclusion in the management process.
- Community involvement increases human capacity and strengthen technical capabilities.
- Buy-in from all levels improves compliance that should effectively reduce enforcement costs.

Conclusions

- Projects that did not emphasize CBM did not achieve full potential. Successful projects had strong comanagement structure, community empowerment and a decentralised decision making process.
- Dynamics, diversity and respected leadership within the community increase chances of success.
- Involving key community leaders and marginalised groups can provide critical support that could not be otherwise sourced.
- There is no single approach to community engagement.
- Social context research is a prerequisite to the design phase.
- Knowledge management and information flows need to be relevant and shared within the local community.