

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **PARTICIPATORY FISHERIES GOVERNANCE – THREE CENTRAL THEMES**

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#### **Abstract**

Three central themes about participatory fisheries governance that lie at the heart of the chapters of this book are discussed in this final chapter: the benefits and deficiencies of stakeholder participation; the relationship between stakeholder participation and the ecosystem-based approach; and the role of fishers' knowledge in fisheries governance

#### **20.1 Introduction**

In this concluding chapter, by way of summarising the findings of the previous chapters, I would like to discuss three major themes that have emerged. The first theme is the justification for stakeholder participation: do the benefits outweigh the costs? The second theme is the relationship between participation and the ecosystem-based approach: is it an essential link? The third theme is the role of fishers' knowledge alongside fisheries science: does it improve decision-making? My overall conclusion is that although contemporary currents in fisheries governance suggest an affirmative answer to each of these questions, we must reserve judgement on how far such affirmations rest on rhetoric rather than conviction.

#### **20.2 The benefits and deficiencies of stakeholder participation in fisheries governance**

The deficiencies of stakeholder participation in fisheries governance have already been touched on directly by Coffey and Knapman, and indirectly by Hatchard. They are not, however, discussed at length in the fisheries governance literature, largely because participation is seen to be such an obviously 'good thing'. As a result, most of the debate has been about what kind of participation to choose, not whether there should be participation. By contrast, in the development governance literature, the value of participation, which was equally taken for granted during the 1980s, has been increasingly questioned since the mid-1990s, and there is now a lively debate about its deficiencies (Hickey and Mohan 2004a:3). This backlash against the participatory mode of governance in the development sector has come from both the right and the left wings of the political spectrum. From the right, critics have argued that participation has gone too far; from the left, critics have argued that participation has not gone far enough. In this section, I want to apply to fisheries governance this twin critique of the participatory mode in the development governance literature. I will first rehearse the benefits of participation; then I will discuss the backlash from both the right and the left. I will

conclude that if advocates of the participatory mode in fisheries governance are to withstand such criticisms, they must address them much more directly than at present.

### 20.2.1 THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

In fisheries governance, as in development governance from the mid-1980s, “participation has...become an act of faith...something we believe in and rarely question” (Cleaver 2001:36). Indeed, the term has assumed the status of a ‘hurrah-word’ – a “‘warmly persuasive’ word which seems ‘never to be used unfavourably’” (Hildyard *et al* 2001:58). Advocates of participation appear to “sit on some moral high ground and as such are immune to criticism” (Hailey 2001:97). Henkel and Stirrat (2001:168) describe participation as the “new orthodoxy”, noting that it “is now difficult to find a development project that does not in one way or another claim to adopt a ‘participatory’ approach involving ‘bottom-up’ planning, acknowledging the importance of ‘indigenous’ knowledge and claiming to ‘empower’ local people.” The same is now happening with fisheries management regimes.

Why did participation become such a buzz-word in the development sector, and now in the fisheries sector? Cleaver (2001:36) refers to the “heroic claims” that have been made for participatory approaches, some of which are rehearsed by Coffey and by Hatchard in this volume. Participation is held to be “intrinsically a ‘good thing’” (Cleaver 2001:36). According to Cooke (2001:104), the argument that participation is an “end in itself...means giving people control over development processes from which they had traditionally been excluded.” This would enable “people who are often marginalised by their...isolation from the...formation of policies...to be included in decisions that apply to their lives” (Kothari 2001:139). Moreover, participation is said to empower people, confirming their status as rational and moral beings, with a capacity for self-determination (Meeuwig *et al* 2003:208).

Also, it is claimed that participation leads to more efficient and effective policies, because people who are subjected to regulations, know which policies work, and which do not work; that participation results in policies that are fairer and more equitable between different groups, because all of the groups can voice their claims; and that participation ensures a higher rate of compliance with the rules, because people are more ready to accept rules that they have participated in formulating (Hall-Arber, this volume).

As we shall see, many of these claims are contested, but, if they are taken at face value, it is not surprising that one commentator refers to “the ‘benign virus’...of participation” (Williams 2004:95). Let us now turn to the criticisms of participation.

### 20.2.2 THE DEFICIENCIES OF PARTICIPATION

During the last ten years, there has been a backlash against participation in the development sector, with criticism coming from both the right and the left. Many of these criticisms are applicable to participation in the fisheries sector, and, in this section, I consider the most important of them.