

EXPERIENCES WITH FISHERIES CO-MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND BANGLADESH

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1. INTRODUCTION

The countries of Southeast Asia, ie Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, have a current population of over 510 million, of whom approximately 35 percent live below the poverty line. The population of these nine countries is expected to reach 650 million by the year 2020. The average fish consumption for the region is relatively high at 22 kg per capita per year and is higher in coastal communities. In some countries and coastal communities, such as in the Philippines and Indonesia, fish provides the main source of animal protein. Fishing and the extraction of coastal resources provide the main livelihood for millions of families. It is estimated that the demand for food fish in the year 2010, calculated at a constant per capita consumption rate of 22 kg/year, would be 18 to 19 million metric tons. Production from marine capture fisheries is not expected to keep up with the demand, causing concerns for food security in the region. The increasing demand for fish from the expanding population will create more stress on the already depleted coastal and inshore fishery resources in the region.

It is now almost universally accepted that most of the coastal fisheries in Southeast Asia are overfished. Coastal resources and ecosystems are degraded and in decline from a variety of factors. While the governments of these countries are working to attain sustainable development of coastal and marine resources and to improve the social and economic conditions of coastal residents, funds and other resources for these purposes are limited. This is not new information. However, new actions must be taken to deal with these issues. With limited government resources, the resource users will need to take more responsibility for finding solutions to their problems and needs. The resource users must be involved in making management and development decisions. They will need to be educated, informed and empowered to take action. New governance arrangements for fisheries and coastal resources must be examined and put into place. Resource management policies must shift

from a use orientation to a conservation and resource management orientation. Attention must be given to policies that address issues of food security and people's well-being and livelihood, not just fisheries management.

To prevent further overexploitation and degradation of coastal and marine resources for those who depend on them, there is an imperative for better management. Many present resource management arrangements in Southeast Asia have not succeed in the effort to coordinate and restrain the many users. They have not kept pace with the technological ability to exploit the resource or with the driving incentives to exploit and degrade - economic returns, population growth, food, and employment. Management systems have focussed on development but have not succeeded in addressing the issues of economic efficiency, equity and user conflict. Increasing competition for and conflict over scarce resources will further stress coastal and marine management systems.

Mixed with concerns about improved resource management and conservation is the need to directly address problems of poverty, unemployment and decreasing quality of life in fishing communities in Southeast Asia. The main brunt of such economic and social distress is borne by women, children and unskilled fishers, as well as by those unskilled people who are directly and indirectly dependent on the fishing industry. Integral elements of this prevailing scenario are a high level of unemployment or underemployment, lack of ready alternative and supplemental employment and livelihood opportunities within the fishing community, a growing population and pressure to find additional fisheries resources, lack of credit and markets, and the paucity of institutional mechanisms to undertake system-wide development.

There is a growing consensus among many fisheries researchers and managers working in Southeast Asia that solutions to the current problems in the sector rest outside its traditional realm. This dilemma calls for a broader vision of the fisheries system, going beyond fisheries sector-specific policies to the vast array of seemingly unrelated policies that may have beneficial side effects for the fisheries sector. The broader policy context is justified by the interlinkages among fisheries resource management issues, on the one hand, and issues of economic and community development, on the other hand.

Co-management and community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) strategies are increasingly seen as an approach for such linked development and management initiatives. Community-centred co-management can serve as a mechanism for not only resource management, but for social, community and economic development by promoting participation and empowerment of people to actively solve problems and address needs in their community. Throughout Southeast Asia, co-management and CBNRM has reemerged, through the initiatives of the people, NGOs, government and international agencies, as a way to involve resource users, provide greater localized control over resources, and utilize indigenous institutional arrangements and knowledge in fisheries management.

This chapter discusses current approaches to co-management for the sustainable governance of coastal fisheries in Southeast Asia. Specific examples of co-management taken from a number of Southeast Asian countries are discussed. While not a Southeast Asian country, a brief review of co-management activities in Bangladesh are included in this chapter due to the significant number of experiences in co-management, especially in inland open-water fisheries.