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Participatory and integrated policy processes in small-scale fisheries

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• Introduction

The implementation of policies in small-scale fisheries has not, in the main, achieved balanced, sustainable use of fisheries resources and the aquatic environment. Our research has indicated ways in which the policy formulation and implementation process can be made more effective and thus can potentially reduce many of the problems facing the sub-sector. This involves a more participatory approach to policy formulation and implementation which integrates activities within fisheries, and between fisheries and other sectors. This approach is referred to as the *participatory and integrated policy* (PIP) process¹.

The effectiveness of small-scale fisheries policies

In the 1980s many of the international development agencies carried out reviews of their efforts to address the needs of the fisheries sector and found them to fall short of expectations. The reasons for this were, *inter alia*, attributed to a widespread poor understanding of the social and economic needs of the small-scale sub-sector. The FAO World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development was convened in 1984 to address this and other issues. The resultant *Strategy for Fisheries Management and Development* reflected the need for an improved focus on social and micro-economic issues, particularly in the small-scale sub-sector. However, a

review of the FAO Strategy in 1993 indicated that progress had been slower, and/or less complete, than anticipated and desired. It emphasised:

- The need to place fisheries resource conservation in the wider sphere of the sustainable use of the aquatic environment;
- For greater participation by fisherfolk in resource management; and,
- For greater integration between sectors.

Evolution of policies

Initially fisheries policies were concerned with the development of industrial fisheries, often dominated by non-local vessels. These policies later slowly changed towards greater emphasis on domestic small-scale fisheries and social issues. The imbalance between the social, economic and environmental aspects of policies in small-scale fisheries and the lack of skills to fully appreciate the complex interactions between policies in these different areas, has led to conflict within the sector. This has greatly reduced the effectiveness of the efforts of different development agencies (government departments, external funding agencies, or NGOs).

• Policy research response

A concern for the consequences of this conflict led to research into the ways in which different policy areas could conflict and how this might be overcome. The focus of the research was on three key policy areas which arise from the following development themes:

- Bringing about economic development through the growth of commerce (private sector development);

¹ This research was funded by the DFID. For more information and documentation relating to PIP, please contact the authors.

- Redistributing both the opportunities to participate in that development, and access to the benefits from it, towards the poor (poverty alleviation); and,
- Ensuring that equitable development is environmentally sustainable and will be accessible to future generations (concern for the environment).

Our research focused on small-scale fisheries and was carried out in two phases: the first in the UK and the second in the field. The field work was implemented mainly in Malawi and Ghana but drew on practical field experience from many other countries world-wide. The results of the research can be broadly summarised as follows:

- That conflicts do exist in the policy formulation and implementation process;
- Conflicts very often exist between the strategies employed by development agents and the coping strategies of the fisherfolk;
- Conflicts can exist between fisheries strategies and strategies in other sectors;
- Conflicts can also occur between fisheries policies and policies formulated at the international, national and sub-national levels;
- That these conflicts can waste considerable amounts of scarce development resources;
- That the conflicts can cause friction between development agents and the people they aim to assist; and,
- It is possible to reduce these conflicts by modifying the ways policies are formulated and implemented so that policies complement each other rather than conflict.

The research resulted in the development of the PIP as a different approach to policy development. The PIP process is a structured approach to research, dialogue, decision making, institutional reform and development-resource allocation, which promotes greater involvement of all stakeholders in the policy process and harmonises their conflicting objectives, strategies and capacities.

This approach is a formal and structured way of providing:

- A more balanced approach to the social, economic and environmental aspects of fisheries sector, and increased harmonisation between policies in the three areas of private sector development, poverty alleviation and concern for the environment;
- Greater involvement of the fisherfolk in the decision making processes of policy formulation and implementation;
- Increased vertical integration of policy formulation and policy implementation between different administrative levels, and between fisheries development agencies and different geographical administrative levels;
- Increased horizontal integration of policy formulation and policy implementation between the fisheries sector and other sectors; and,
- Increased harmonisation between the policies of the fisheries sector, and those of the national government and of other countries.

Such an approach requires that a much more participatory and integrated approach to the *whole* policy process is adopted, not just to the implementation of policy. While much work has been done in the past on how development workers can facilitate and catalyse participation in development planning at the local level, less attention has been paid to how those local-level plans can link-up with, and inform, sectoral and national-level policy processes or how conflicts can be resolved. As a result, participatory development approaches have tended to be limited to localised interventions.

To be effective, however, participation in local-level planning must be an extension of, and not separate from, the policy process. Without a participatory policy process acting as the foundation of planning, and as a link between the different planning levels, it is likely that even participatory planning techniques will fail to incorporate the needs, capacities and aspirations of all participants. Participation should not be merely the right to participate in someone else's policy, it should be the opportunity to define the policies in the first place.

Practical ways in which the PIP approach can encourage the harmonisation of policy objectives and strategies are outlined below.

Harmonising policies with fisherfolk coping strategies

Involving fisherfolk in the process of policy formulation is a vital part of the PIP process. The strategies of the development agency need to be closely linked to those of the fisherfolk, especially the poor. In many cases it was found that fisherfolk already have well developed coping strategies to overcome at least some of the adverse effects of the problems they face and PRA has been an important tool with which to identify these. For example, to achieve a balance of strategies, a cyclone relief project in Andhra Pradesh State in India recently formed a planning committee consisting of fisherfolk, community-based organisations, NGOs and Government staff. These formed the core decision making body in the planning and implementation of the project.

Harmonising policies in different areas

Harmonisation of strategies across policy areas is another important component. Policies aimed at *private sector* development, *poverty alleviation* and concern for the *environment* were often found to be in conflict with each other but the strategies in the three policy areas can be modified so that they begin to work together.

All strategies aimed at preserving the aquatic environment, will, in the long-term, provide increased opportunities for resource use by both the poor and the private sector. Where aquatic habitats are degraded, employing the poor to participate in environmental rehabilitation can provide benefits for the environment and for poverty alleviation.

Often the poor degrade the environment out of necessity when they are marginalised by other resource users. Improving support to the poor can, in time, lead to reduced pressure on the environment. Targeting private sector development strategies at the poorer end of the private sector spectrum can encourage a

greater number of the poor to establish or expand micro-enterprises.

Specific economic measures to protect the environment, such as taxes and regulations, can support graduation from poverty and micro-enterprise growth if appropriately targeted. Encouraging economic development through the use of labour intensive and environmentally benign technologies can also enhance sustainability.

Harmonising policies across different sectors

Where several ministries are implementing policies in the same area, such as in the coastal zone or on lakes and rivers, the potential for conflict is high. It is thus important to ensure that all of the objectives and strategies in these different sectors are harmonised with each other. This can be achieved by ensuring that the different broad sectoral policies are harmonised through improved policy research, planning, and inter-sectoral communications and co-ordination through both formal and informal mechanisms.

This not only requires more effective co-ordination at the ministerial policy level but also at the operational level through a breaking down of the strict sectoral boundaries which exist. Involving fisherfolk through appropriate fora can be a very effective mechanism for this. In Bangladesh NGOs operating across a range of sectors in the coast have recently formed an umbrella organisation to harmonise their development strategies.

At the project-level, inter-sectoral co-ordination can be increased through improved environmental impact assessment. A more integrated approach to community development can also be adopted but within a planning framework which has evolved with the full participation of the community concerned. Achieving a greater understanding of the complexities and inter-sectoral nature of the activities of resource-users can also improve the way support is provided at the community level.

Harmonising fisheries sector strategies with international agreements

National and international policies and agreements which conflict with what is happening at the village level need to be translated into terms which are easily understood in the local context of the village. Improved communications with local communities can also form the basis of discussion on the most appropriate methods of implementing such policies and agreements.

participatory methodologies and takes them to a next stage in the development process.

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· Implementation of PIP

The PIP process is designed to systematically address conflicts and to identify ways of harmonising policies and strategies. It uses, builds on and complements existing participatory approaches. But whereas participatory research and survey techniques have developed to address problems at the local level, the mechanisms for linking the results of such tools to national development processes can be weak.

The PIP process aims to form a bridge between those broader national-level development policies and the different needs, aspirations and capacities of the different people making up the rural poor. The proper functioning of this bridge and the availability of systematic but flexible procedures for allowing stakeholders to channel their priorities and aspirations into the policy-making process is obviously crucial to the formulation of 'appropriate' policies.

PRA techniques used at the field level facilitate the interaction between local stakeholders and those more formally involved in the policy process. The results of this interaction form the basic inputs and working material for the PIP process. Viewed from the other end, PIP can be regarded as a framework which enables the extension of PRA results from local-level action to broader planning and policy initiatives at higher administrative levels. The PIP process can thus provide a systematic approach to policy formulation and implementation which strengthens other