

Caribbean Coastal Co-management Guidelines Project Information Update — 6 January 2003

Updates to focus on research framework and findings

In an effort to disseminate more of the project processes and findings we will be addressing the research framework, findings and strategies for communication and uptake of the outputs. In this issue we look closely at the Fisheries Advisory Committee in Barbados. Updates with a focus on a particular case study will be more widely circulated in the location of the research and with the local case study partners.

What is a focus group?

A focus group is 4-12 specially selected people who take part in a facilitated discussion focused on answering questions about a research topic.

It is a group interview method where interaction amongst the respondents is encouraged in order to get greater insight into the subject. It is not simply a discussion, but neither is it a forum for making decisions or necessarily reaching consensus. The method has to be carefully designed to achieve acceptable results.

Outputs can be qualitative or quantitative, but focus groups are used more for qualitative understanding of specific issues. This may guide a quantitative analysis later in the research.

Focus on Barbados Fisheries Advisory Committee findings

Previous updates introduced the Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC) in Barbados. There have been two FACs under two ministers. A focus group of past FAC members met in September 2002. This summary takes you through some of the highlights of the session. It is part of the case study analysis in progress. We introduce the findings by looking at responses to some of the questions discussed.

How adequate is the legal mandate of the FAC for it to function as a means of co management?

- The FAC is mandatory under the Fisheries Act, but is only advisory. Fisheries ministers have rarely sought or accepted FAC advice.
- If it were not provided for in the law, there would be no demand for the FAC to exist.
- The FAC can be okay for consultation but it does not necessarily encourage collaboration.
- The legal mandate of the FAC is too weak for it to function well as a co-management body.

How appropriate is the structure of the FAC for it to function as a means of co management?

- The revised composition of the FAC is okay if supplemented by invited participants.
- Industry members are appointed in personal capacity, but the FAC would be stronger if they functioned more as industry representatives.
- The absence of a written structure for formally reporting to the minister is a weakness.

How satisfactory are the operational resources available to support the FAC in carrying out its mandate?

- The FAC needs a suitable secretary, active subcommittees, its own budget and less reliance on the Fisheries Division to act on its behalf.

How would you describe the relationship between the FAC and minister of fisheries?

- It is a weak relationship with insufficient communication, especially from the ministers.
- Chairman of the FAC should have a direct link to the fisheries minister for communicating and getting feedback for it to do its work.
- The minister needs to delegate follow-up on FAC matters within the ministry through the PS

How would you describe the relationship between the FAC and the fishing industry?

- Vague: the industry does not know much about the FAC but sometimes asks questions
- Members are unsure how much of FAC business they can share with fishing industry
- No regular means of communicating the business and concerns of the FAC to the public

Name successes of the FAC and the favourable factors that helped them to be achieved.

- Fisheries Management Plan, Fish Stocks Agreement, fish kill compensation, conditions in some fish markets, revising import duty, training fisherfolk, relevance of National Insurance
- Better rapport especially between Markets and Fisheries Divisions, plus other agencies
- Personal development, sense of unity and purpose, camaraderie, information exchange

Name failures of the FAC and the unfavourable factors that caused the deficiencies.

- Bridgetown fish market still problematic, no fishing agreement with Trinidad and Tobago
- Weak relationship with the minister results in little follow-up to advice; frustrates members
- FAC roles and responsibilities are unclear

From your experience, what conditions are most likely to sustain a successful Fisheries Advisory Committee as a means of co management?

- Minister must be more involved in the FAC
- FAC should report its work to the industry
- Public needs to be told more about the FAC
- Stronger legal mandate for co-management
- Members should represent the industry
- Upgrade to statutory body with own budget
- Clearer mechanisms for the acceptance of FAC advice and implementation of decisions
- Improve support service for follow-up action
- FAC needs to see that it is taken seriously
- Representation from Police, Coast Guard

What else is there about the FAC that a person should know in order to increase the chances of it succeeding as a means of co management?

- Determine the type of co management to be aimed for by the FAC. Collaborative seems to be preferable, however the FAC can work as an advisory committee (consultative).
- Important to understand what would make a minister more inclined to take advice from the FAC and to ensure advice is followed up.

Following up on FAC findings

The findings presented above are only the tip of the FAC iceberg, but they provide plenty of good ideas for follow-up. Not all of these may be done within this project, but the project will provide a forum for developing them into plans of action that stakeholders can pursue collaboratively.

A new FAC has recently been appointed, with a few of the former members retained, and this should provide the perfect opportunity for some co-management demonstration activity. Uptake of the project findings is an important phase. Initiatives that can be evaluated for acceptance and effectiveness may include:

- Ø Production of public information on the FAC
- Ø Requests from the FAC to meet the minister on a regular basis such as quarterly
- Ø Request for the FAC to have its own budget
- Ø Establish permanent or temporary special interest subcommittees for critical issues
- Ø Have a regular calendar of public meetings
- Ø Evolution of membership towards being more representative, especially of the fishing industry through organisation representation
- Ø Strengthen BARNUFO and its members to act more effectively as channels for fishing industry matters and feedback to the FAC
- Ø Strengthen the legal mandate of the FAC to include greater transparency on action or non-action as follow-up to advice tendered
- Ø Compare the FAC to other statutory and non-statutory government advisory groups so as to learn from both the positive and negative differences
- Ø Set up within the FAC a system for self-monitoring and evaluation that allows better assessment and adjustment of its operations

There are, of course, many more initiatives that can be taken to improve the success of the FAC as a co-management institution, whether merely consultative or fully collaborative. However it is important to take small steps and a systematic approach to increasing chances of success. The framework for co-management research used in this project also gives guidance for such action.

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