

Symposium on Caribbean Marine Protected Areas: Practical Approaches to Achieve Economic and Conservation Goals

A special event at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI),
Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands, 12-17 November 2001

Report of the workshop on “Human system connectivity:
A need for MPA management effectiveness”

Introduction

Near the conclusion of the GCFI meeting and its special MPA symposium a workshop was convened to address the topic of “Human system connectivity: A need for MPA management effectiveness”. The title was inspired by the marine science sessions that examined facets of ecosystem connectivity. The social scientists, MPA managers, and marine ecologists present thought that our understanding of MPAs would be enhanced by a session in which the human system and its connectivity, both to the marine system and within itself, was prominent. This workshop was loosely linked to presentations in the session on “Capacity Building and Community Involvement in MPA Implementation and Operation” that was concerned mainly with the socio-economic aspects of MPAs.

The workshop was managed by Patrick McConney (Caribbean Conservation Association), Leah Bunce (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and Georgina Bustamante (The Nature Conservancy). About 25 participants with a wide range of backgrounds contributed to the outputs of the workshop. With a human system perspective, the questions and areas of concern addressed were:

- Positive MPA experiences, and how to enhance or build upon them
- Negative MPA experiences, and how to avoid repeating them in the future
- Gaps (e.g. in knowledge, capacity) to be addressed, and how to fill them

Positive MPA experiences (good lessons to be learned)

Participants discussed areas in which MPA experiences had been positive in terms of improved management, benefits for the beneficiaries and contribution to knowledge.

1. Learning from others' experiences: sharing the do's and the don'ts of MPAs
2. Integrating community participation into MPA planning and management
3. Recognising co-management has potential for success in many MPA situations
4. Having legal frameworks early in the process of establishing MPAs, regardless of differences in area habitats and uses
5. Benefiting the community at large from multiplier effects of community participation
6. Networking through GFCI, CaMPAM, etc. based on common interests in MPAs
7. Collective learning through task-oriented types of cooperation opportunities
8. Improving the authorities' involvement of fishers and other users in management
9. Recognising that fishers need tangible livelihood benefits from MPAs, and seeing evidence of managers paying attention to this demand
10. Learning to respect other MPA stakeholders (e.g. their values, knowledge, inputs)
11. Using psychology to learn about, and to change, people's attitudes towards resource use within MPAs

12. Creating successful strategic alliances with economic sectors and stakeholders to establish and manage MPAs
13. Linking MPA managers to broader contexts of integrated coastal management
14. Realizing the need for flexibility in thinking and decisions, so systems can adapt to unplanned events and surprises (e.g. natural disasters, environmental changes)

Negative MPA experiences (challenges for the future)

A similar exercise was undertaken to identify MPA challenges for the future.

1. Overcoming the difficulty in maintaining involvement of users, and the use of inappropriate communication mechanisms that might alienate stakeholders
2. Obtaining sustainable funding at planning stages, since donors do not recognize that changing peoples' attitudes takes time and longer funding periods are needed
3. Eliminating situations where authorities and others enter participatory processes with pre-conceived ideas about the outcomes of these planning processes
4. Broadening alternative livelihoods for displaced fishers that still typically focus too narrowly on tourism
5. Prolonging government commitment (which can change with elections) that is now seldom available long enough for the MPA community
6. Improving on situations where, by not delivering promptly, managers do not meet local communities' expectations, or expectations of communities are so high that governments do not meet them
7. Correcting the lack of recognition and respect for users' (fishermen, others) knowledge that still persists in some quarters
8. Widening the focus that continues mainly on restricting fishing rather than a full range of MPA uses
9. Addressing the lack of recognition of the important role of governments in decision-making (e.g. governors, ministers, politicians) that presently constrains flows of information to key people

Gaps to be addressed, and how to fill them

Participants turned their attention to the gaps that presented opportunities for building on positive experiences or reducing negative factors. The group identified, as priority, the following general aims and specific actions.

1. Provide innovative economic incentives and opportunities for resource users:
 - Identify market niches for new product development
 - Use an eco-enterprise fund for starting new businesses to generate income for the MPA, and for alternative livelihoods based on local experiences and skills
 - Develop eco-labeling system for marine products (fish and lobster "sustainably" harvested from the MPA)
2. Strategize MPA issue awareness programs in a pro-active manner:
 - Develop a regional database of managers and decision-makers (recurrent suggestion)
 - Invite decision makers to special events to get them personally involved
 - Develop basic education materials targeted for specific audiences like fishers, divers, developers; and others targeted at policy makers (educate at top levels)
 - Get more funding linked to provision of community participation activities
3. Improve managers' communication skills:
 - Train managers in communication skills, business operations, and management of conflicts (workshops, training courses by UNEP, UWI, etc.)

4. Enrich managers' knowledge of methods and tools for coordination and participation:
 - Provide training in facilitation and community mobilization, especially for those with natural science backgrounds (workshops, training courses by UNEP, UWI, etc.)
5. Build up stakeholder analysis skills:
 - Understand stakeholders needs via improved stakeholder assessments
 - Train managers in how to conduct stakeholder analyses themselves
6. Provide the incentives for the representatives of communities participating in the planning process to report back to their constituencies:
 - Clarify representatives' responsibilities and publicize their identities
 - Select the best representatives by having clear criteria for selection and a transparent selection process based on understood roles and responsibilities
 - Build capacity of representatives (e.g. how to conduct meetings) and provide them with the necessary tools, equipment and rewards
7. Engage more fishermen and other resource users in the research and monitoring programs to foster their interest in conservation:
 - Publicize research results in the best way to reach the widest audience in the particular situation e.g. radio programs to disseminate research findings
 - Employ resource users as data collectors and analysts wherever feasible
 - Allow users to design their own data collection programs within guidelines
8. Enhance communication between natural and social scientists:
 - Educate natural scientists on the need to link and work with social scientists
 - Promote interdisciplinary work and hold interdisciplinary workshops and conferences to share information, with attendance as a funding or permit clause
 - Require both natural and social scientists to meet together with the community in the beginning in order to understand their needs and share perspectives
9. Improve practical experience exchanges for MPA managers and resource users:
 - Clarify the goals of experience exchanges and study tour projects
 - Show benefits of exchanges based on experiences that worked and compile testimonials of success for future proposals
 - Work with stakeholders to develop exchange proposals (site managers and conservation NGOs are not taking advantage of funding opportunities where major NGOs can help prepare successful proposals)
 - Overcome incorrect perceptions of what is easy and difficult in experience exchanges, and that might be misleading the developers of guidelines for proposal writing
10. Expand coordination and communication among sites using different mechanisms and vehicles (national and international - e.g. GCFI, CaMPAM, OECS, WCPA-Marine, etc.):
 - Focus on a few networks to improve coordination rather than start new ones
 - Establish region-wide planning for site selection to ensure better coordination
 - Use multiple avenues for communications simultaneously
 - Use SPAW protocols and other instruments for governments to establish national and regional systems of MPAs

Conclusion

The workshop provided an excellent opportunity for a wider cross-section of MPA managers, researchers, users and other interested parties than is usually found at typical technical and scientific meetings to frankly and informally share information on the human aspects of MPA operations. Exchange of information is one of the main objectives of GCFI, and

through such communication the GCFI assists in advancing marine science and management in the Gulf and Caribbean region. This workshop report is to be published in the 54th GCFI Proceedings, placed on the GCFI web site, made available for press releases or newsletters, and distributed to other media for exchanging information. The GCFI also wishes to promote the sharing of Wider Caribbean knowledge and experiences at the World Parks Congress in 2003. This workshop was a small step in this direction. Feedback on the report, and information on initiatives relevant to filling the gaps identified, in the ways listed above or by alternative means, is very welcome. This connectivity shall continue at GCFI 2002 and beyond.

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