



First Regional Symposium on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea

27–30 November 2013, St. Julian's, Malta

Background paper – Thematic session II Management and co-management options for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Self-management of natural resources has been around since early times. However, fisheries co-management is an approach that has been more recently adopted globally in response to the perceived failure of centralised management of fisheries in avoiding the decline of fish stocks. Bringing together fishers, government officials and others operating within a fisheries sector, co-management systems vary in terms of the nature of power sharing, composition and functions. In fact, co-management refers to a suite of arrangements with different degrees of power sharing allowing joint decision-making by the state and user groups. Ad hoc public participation in management decisions or mere consultation is often not regarded as co-management.

True co-management requires a departure from thinking about the role of local, regional and federal governments and considers the political changes that are necessary for power devolution. Moreover, effective participation of main stakeholders in co-management requires a certain level of empowerment, a key principle for successful co-management.

Historically, fishing communities have used traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to define the rules for resource management and governance. By the late 1980s, a general disillusionment of stakeholders, development agencies and academics in the ability of centralized governments to plan, administer and implement fisheries management created the right incentives to move towards decentralization. In many situations, cooperative management has often arisen out of crises caused by stock depletion and a growing perception that central governments are incapable of managing stocks sustainably.

Given that co-management is a partnership between central government and local users, the basic point of departure is a situation in which several actors bearing different interests and concerns for management join their efforts and agree on a way to manage their resources together.

Essential pillars for successful co-management include: (i) enabling legislative environments; (ii) community empowerment; (iii) effective linkages and institutions; and (iv) adequate resources. Although there are no simple formulae to ensure success in fisheries co-management, a critical step in the implementation of co-management is the government's willingness to change policy, involve communities in the preparation of policy and regulations, define roles and responsibilities of organizations and devolve power to local cohesive institutions. Moreover, key attributes for successful co-management in small-scale fisheries include strong community leaders, social cohesion, individual/community quotas or TURFs as incentives for access rights, and efficient mechanisms for monitoring, control and surveillance.

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An example of a successful co-managed system in the Mediterranean is the sandeel fishery in Catalonia (Spain). A co-management committee was created in 2012 with the purpose of achieving a sustainable exploitation of the resource. Management measures decided by the committee are being regularly followed up by its permanent commission. Some indicators of success for the co-management of this fishery include community empowerment and sense of ownership of the management process among all relevant stakeholders, which derived in high adherence to rules and regulations, reduction of fishing effort and increase in profits for fishers, and strong buy-in from the two administrations involved, who are already promoting the replication of the model to other fisheries.

There are other examples in Mediterranean countries where co-management, or at least some elements of it, are present. In Turkey, the government has devolved power management to local cooperatives resulting in more effective management and economically viable fisheries. In Italy, the inefficiency of the central government in managing a clam fishery has shifted the responsibilities to local institutions, and the benefits of a marine protected area has driven local fishers to actively comply and enforce fishery regulations. In France, the government organized the *Grenelle de la Mer* aimed at developing co-management regimes, where administration, industry, and scientists decide together the management needed for a sustainable use of resources.

Independently of the social-ecological conditions of the fishery, or whether it is centrally or co-managed, there is a need to collect information to assess the state of the resource. Community-based data collection programmes (CBCP), where fishers are trained to collect information, are a cost-effective way to gather the necessary information to assess the status of the resource and monitor the fishery. These CBCP are usually more feasible and effective under strong co-management regimes, improving the quality and quantity of relevant fishery information and significantly reducing the monetary costs of data collection. In fact, CBCP are probably the only way to move from data-poor to data-rich situations in artisanal, small-scale fisheries.

Co-management not necessarily implies exclusive access rights; these may offer complementary effects enhancing the fishers' sense of ownership and stewardship over the resource. A meta-analysis of 130 co-managed fisheries around the world showed that access rights, that can take the form of individual or community quotas and territorial use rights in fisheries (TURFs), are an important attribute for co-management success. A more detailed analysis showed that these forms of access rights gain even more relevance when dealing with small-scale co-managed fisheries, or those in developing nations.

The fisheries legal framework in the Mediterranean and Black Seas is found both in the national legislation of the member States and in binding instruments adopted at the international level. Several legal instruments adopted, and particularly those within the domain of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) confirm the trend towards regional co-operation among the member States. The GFCM, within its mandate to promote the development, conservation, rational management and best utilization of fishery resources, adopts legal instruments that are binding for its members. In this respect, the legislation needs to ensure an enabling legal framework for co-management. Although this enabling or supporting framework can facilitate the implementation and continuity of co-management regimes, political will is the most critical element for the establishment of co-management mechanisms. It is a necessary pre-requisite without which co-management initiatives are unlikely to succeed.

Capacity building is also critical in empowering fishing communities to actively participate in fisheries co-management. Generally, fishers' motivation and leadership, attitudes that cannot be provided from outside, are essential conditions for successful co-management. Moreover, the first element that should be supported is the capacity to think collectively and develop an internal consensus on what is needed to be done or which local capacities are needed.