

Evaluation of Caribbean Experiences in Participatory Planning and Management of Marine and Coastal Resources

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interest in participatory approaches to natural resource management has been growing in recent years, but there is little documentation of their characteristics, requirements, and effectiveness, which is needed in order to assist practitioners in the implementation of these approaches. This paper provides case studies and draws lessons from recent experiences from the Caribbean in participatory and collaborative management of coastal and marine resources.

The term “participation” is subject to a wide range of definitions, and some processes described as participatory do not achieve the basic objectives of participation, which include improved management through the incorporation of a wide spectrum of ideas and popular knowledge and practices, increased support for decisions and actions, and community empowerment. Effective participatory processes are characterized by:

- the identification, effective sensitization, and active involvement of all relevant stakeholders;
- the recognition of and adjustment for power imbalances among stakeholders and stakeholder groups;
- respect for the process and the decisions that are reached.

In the Caribbean region, experience in participatory planning and management dates back to experiments in the early 1980s, which influenced donor attitudes and stimulated a number of programmes and projects over the past decade. Notable initiatives, which are described in brief case studies in the appendices to this document, include:

- in St. Lucia, the preparation of a plan for a national System of Protected Areas (Appendix 2), development of the Soufriere Marine Management Area (Appendix 8) and planning for the Pointe Sable National Park (Appendix 10);
- organized community participation in coastal zone management planning in Negril, Jamaica, resulting in the establishment of the Negril Environmental Protection Area (Appendix 9);
- the Environmental and Coastal Resources (ENCORE) Project that sought to build community participation in coastal area management in the countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (Appendix 4);
- the participatory development of a biosphere reserve in the Samaná Bay area of the Dominican Republic (Appendix 3);
- a community-based approach to heritage tourism planning in the Windward Islands through a project led by a team from York University in Canada (Appendix 5);
- a pilot integrated coastal fisheries management project for the Gulf of Paria, Trinidad (Appendix I);
- a participatory tourism planning process carried out by the indigenous Caribs in Dominica (Appendix 7);
- participatory planning, involving fishing communities, for a small marine reserve in La Parguera, Puerto Rico (Appendix 6).

The level and effectiveness of participation varied considerably among these projects. As a body of experience, however, they reveal the following general trends and characteristics:

- The use of participatory approaches is increasing in the region;
- There is widespread acceptance of and support for these approaches;
- This acceptance is resulting in more inclusive planning and policy processes at all levels;

- However, there has been little progress in the development of enabling policies for participatory approaches;
- The coordination of these initiatives is generally assumed by NGOs with a sustainable development orientation and led at the local level by recognized community leaders;
- The initiatives are often stimulated by coastal degradation and conflict issues;
- Participatory approaches are seen by planners as an effective way to integrate community development objectives into natural resource management;
- The design of these initiatives often suffers from limited social science technical input;
- Donor and technical assistance agencies tend to function as powerful stakeholders in these processes;
- There has been only limited success in moving participatory processes from the planning stage to implementation.

A number of lessons can be extracted from the Caribbean experience in the planning and management of coastal and marine resources. Future efforts can be guided by the following:

- The most effective level of participation at any given time is determined by a range of local factors, and the highest levels of participation are not always possible or desirable;
- Effective participatory processes require skilled application of appropriate methods;
- True participation can only be achieved when participants are provided with the information required to make decisions;
- When full-scale participation is not an option, even limited participation can contribute to improved planning processes;
- Initiatives that incorporate all relevant stakeholders from the outset are likely to be the most enduring;
- Efforts and projects that appeal to the motivations (most often economic) of the stakeholders are the most likely to secure their participation;
- With Caribbean coastal areas undergoing constant and rapid transformation, participatory planning must be a continuous process;
- Data collection on stakeholder communities does not equal participation;
- Continuity requires an effective institutional framework for participation;
- Participation requires the support of effective local organizations;
- Participation can require changes in both the cultures and the structures of the organizations involved;
- Participation requires changes in attitudes towards power and authority;
- More powerful stakeholders will circumvent participatory processes when it serves their interests to do so;
- Participatory processes cannot be prescribed;
- Implementation of participatory planning decisions and management actions requires political support and adequate technical and financial resources;
- The effective design of coastal management regimes employs both popular knowledge and scientific research;
- Experience sharing can result in benefits for the entire region.

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