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**Institutional Arrangements for Coastal
Management in the Caribbean**

**Experiment 2: Testing the Uptake of Co-management Tools and
Messages in Training Natural Resource Users and Managers**

**BELIZE CASE STUDY:
MARINE PROTECTED AREAS
CO-MANAGED BY FRIENDS OF NATURE**

A SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNT

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About this document

This summary of lessons learnt was developed from the Belize case study: Marine protected areas co-managed by Friends of Nature, Caribbean Coastal Co-management Guidelines Project, Caribbean Conservation Association as an output of Experiment 2: *Testing co-management tools and messages for Training Natural Resource Users and Managers*, which forms part of the DFID funded research project “**Pro-poor Policies and Institutional Arrangements for Coastal Management in the Caribbean**”. The goal of the project was to ensure that integrated coastal management Research in the Caribbean is promoted and benefits those who depend on the resources of coastal areas, especially where there is poverty. The purpose was to test the uptake of products of a previous DFID funded project R8134: Caribbean Coastal co-management guidelines, focussing on establishing and sustaining successful co-management of coastal resources in the Caribbean. This summary of lessons learnt is aimed at the users and managers of coastal resources in the Caribbean and will be most useful for teaching students with an undergraduate degree, or training others with some prior experience in coastal resource management.

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Executive summary

This case study focuses on Friends of Nature (FON), a non-governmental organization based in Placencia, Belize which has co-management responsibility (with Forest Department and the Fisheries Department) for day-to-day management of Laughing Bird Caye National Park (LBCNP) and Gladden Spit Marine Reserve (GSMR). The areas of specific interest in this case study are the southern coastal zone and the Southern Reef Complex that includes the two MPAs that are co-managed by FON and the government. Both MPAs lie within the Meso-American Barrier Reef Reserve System. In addition to the two MPAs, FON has become active in the management of the Placencia Lagoon. Fishing and tourism dominate the caye-based economy of the area. Threats to the marine and coastal resources include unsustainable fishing practices, tourism industry, improper land use, effluent discharges, policy and enforcement, and transboundary issues. The type of co-management used by FON is that of co-management of public protected areas between government and FON with a local advisory committee. This is regarded as a delegated form of co-management where management authority is delegated to local institutions (in this case FON). In return, the government is informed, and reviews and endorses, where it sees fit, decisions to be taken by FON. The establishment of co-management can be viewed as having three phases: pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation. The co-management arrangement with FON is currently in the implementation phase. FON has a strategic plan, a Board of Directors, an Executive Director and staff. It has an office and equipment. A management plan exists for both MPAs. Financing has been secured for the immediate future. The MPAs are in operation and the resources are being conserved. However, there are both positive and negative aspects of the co-management arrangement with FON.

Lessons Learnt

In this document we present the conclusions or lessons learnt about co-management based on the Belize case study: Marine protected areas co-managed by Friends of Nature. The lessons learnt are presented under headings which represent the key characteristics of successful co-management institutional arrangements. Emphasis is placed on understanding the conditions for successful co-management as perceived by the stakeholders at the case study research sites. The choice of conditions is also supported by empirical evidence from initiatives at more advanced phases of development in other regions of the world. Effort was also directed towards promoting the uptake of concepts and practices that may lead to co-management success.

The data collected for use in the case study came mainly from three methods:

1. Document analysis. An extensive collection of secondary data was reviewed and included statistical reports, MPA reviews, government documents and reports, 'gray literature' including theses and academic project reports, non-governmental organization reports, and internet searches.
2. Focus groups. Focus group meetings were held with staff and Board of Directors of Friends of Nature, fishermen in Placencia, and government officials from the Fisheries Department and Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute.
3. Key informant. Key informant interviews were held with senior fishermen, government department heads, business-people in Placencia and Independence, FON staff, and FON Board of Directors.

Type of co-management

The type of co-management that FON is engaged in is that of co-management of public protected areas between government and NGO (FON) with a local advisory committee, composed of community officials and members, contributing to this process. This is one of several types of co-management being implemented in Belize which also include: 1) co-management of public protected areas between government and NGOs; 2) co-management of private reserves between the landowner (normally an NGO) and government; and 3) co-management between government and communities bordering or nearby a protected area and the community is represented by a community-based organization (Ravndal 2002). This is regarded as a delegated type of co-management where management authority is delegated to local institutions (in this case FON). In return, the government is informed, and reviews and endorses, where it sees fit, decisions made by local institutions.

Phase of co-management

The establishment of co-management can be seen as having three phases: pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation. The pre-implementation phase includes problem recognition, discussion, consensus building, seeking assistance, and project planning. The implementation phase including a variety of activities such as community entry, research, organizing, education, plan and strategy, and plan implementation. Post-implementation includes evaluation, phase-out, and operation of interventions (Berkes et al 2001). The co-management arrangement of FON is currently at the implementation phase.

Conditions for co-management

Over the last decade, research on co-management around the world has identified a number of conditions that favor the successful implementation and performance of co-management. This final section is based on findings that have been presented and these conditions will be reviewed in the context of FON's co-management activities.

Boundaries

The physical boundaries of LBCNP, GSMR and Placencia Lagoon are distinct and recognizable to FON and stakeholders.

Membership and stakeholders

The co-management process and arrangement that FON is undertaking does not inherently involve a high level of community participation. The concept of co-management at the community level involves FON appointing a representative from the community, regardless of whether that representative truly reflects the interests of all groups in the community or communicates the actions back to the community. Community members are not truly empowered to participate in the co-management of the MPAs. Communities have very little determinative impact on the decisions made about resource management or about the operation of FON.

Resource use problem

There is a high recognition of a number of resource use problems and potential threats to food security and livelihood. This was a central factor for the establishment of FOLBC and all the activities which have followed.

Management objectives

FON has a strategic plan developed in 2002. It provides clear management goals and objectives for both FON and for its management of the MPAs. Both of the MPAs have management plans with well articulated goals and objectives.

Scale of management

The scale of management of LBCNP and GSMR are within the capacity and capability of FON. This said, however, there is still a need to further develop the capacity of the Board of Directors to effectively govern FON and the two MPAs. There is also a need to further develop the capacity of current staff to undertake all the functions of management which have been delegated to them. There is also a need for more rangers and a senior biologist. Additional staff will be needed if FON is to undertake active management in the Placencia Lagoon.

Management adaptation

FON is a relatively young NGO. It has grown to take on a great deal of responsibility and authority for management of the two MPAs. Management has adapted to changing conditions in the area, such as integrating with Friends of Placencia Lagoon to address the needs of managing the Lagoon. They have also adapted to changing conditions as a result of the impacts of Hurricane Iris. As mentioned above, there is still a need to develop greater capacity of the staff and Board to improve management of both FON and the marine resources. There is also a need for better communication between the staff and the Board to adapt to changing managerial needs.

Cooperation

There is a lack of real buy-in by the stakeholders into the MPA management process. This can be attributed in part to the lack of active participation of stakeholders, lack of understanding of co-management, and the need for stronger environmental education activities.

Leadership

Leadership and motivation of the stakeholders is critical. There is a real need to focus on empowerment and on leadership management training for community members and resource users.

Collective action

There is not a strong tradition of collective action for marine resource management in Belize. Collective action could be strengthened through expanded education and awareness programs for the community.

Conflict management

As competition from a more diverse set of resource users of the marine and coastal resources in the area increase, so do conflicts. Traditional means of solving conflict no longer function. Increasingly, FON is being asked to manage conflicts between stakeholders and resource users. This is a task for which FON is not fully prepared and there needs to be training on conflict management.

Effective communication

There is a lack of transparency and accountability between FON and the stakeholders. For example, there is limited reporting on FON finances and activities to community. Lines of communication will need to be improved.

Effective coordination

FON works with five communities – Placencia, Seine Bight, Hopkins, Monkey River and Mango Creek/Independence. The coordination between FON and these communities varies. Relations with Placencia and Monkey River tend to be more positive than with Hopkins. The historical animosity between Seine Bight and Placencia may affect the current management relations between FON and Seine Bight.

Trust and respect

FON is seen by many as merely an extension of government rather than a true representative of the people and resource users in the community. There is little transparency and accountability of FON, especially concerning funds and decision-making that affects key user groups (fishers and tour guides). There is a lack of real respect by many stakeholders for FON, although this is changing. There needs to be more daily interaction between FON staff and the community.

Organizational capacity

Outside of the two fishing cooperatives and the tour guide association, there are few organizations to represent stakeholders at FON or in the MPA management. Community organizing and stakeholder empowerment will need to be expanded to improve stakeholder participation in MPA management.

Financial resources

FON has adequate financing for the near future. This funding is primarily from international donors and may not continue for the long term. There is a need for FON to develop a self-financing mechanism. FON does have a strategy to develop long term funding of its activities. The lack of effective self-financing mechanisms may detract from the MPAs becoming economically viable and for long-term operation and sustainability of FON and the MPAs.

Net benefit

Positive economic benefits are accruing to stakeholders in the area as a result of MPA management. Tourism is increasing and local people are getting new jobs as tour guides, dive operators, and hotel, restaurant, and shop owners and staff. There do not seem to be many negative economic impacts of the MPA, however, the closing of the fishing areas near the spawning grounds in GSMR will need to be evaluated.

Representation in decision-making

There is concern that FON doesn't really represent the interests of the people in the communities. FON is felt to only communicate with certain people or groups in the community. The FON Board is not felt to be representative of all the stakeholders. Consultations are not well facilitated. There is also a concern that FON is a sort of 'elite' group that favours certain individuals and villages over others. In general, confidence in the representation of stakeholders in FON is quite low.

Enforcement

There is illegal fishing operating in the waters around the MPAs, primarily by fishermen from Guatemala and Honduras. There is a need for better enforcement of existing regulations. There is a need to increase education about fisheries laws and marine ecology to both domestic and foreign fishermen. There is a need for better coordination and harmonization of laws with neighbouring countries.

Property rights

Property rights in the MPAs are clear and well-defined.

Sharing decision-making

In general, creoles have a tendency to not go to meetings, while Garifuna and Mayans are more willing to attend meetings and participate. Generally speaking, meetings are held at a time convenient for FON as opposed to user groups (for example, evening meetings that go on until late at night are not viable for fishers who get up at 4 am to go out on the water). One strategy that has been adopted is for a group of fishers/family to send one 'representative' to a meeting and subsequently inform others about what took place. Also, FON tends to set the format and agenda of these meetings.

Decentralization and delegation

There is a need for more support from government agencies (Forestry, Fisheries) for the co-management activities. There is a need to give real power to the communities and NGOs to manage their own resources. Politicians need to understand the positive and negative consequences of community empowerment.

Social and cultural fit

Fishermen have become a powerful political force in Belize. However, they tend to focus more on their rights than their obligations. Fishermen will need to take more responsibility for resource management and focus less on income generation. Alternative livelihoods have been provided to local stakeholders, such as training on sport fishing, which has fit into the social and economic structure of the community.

Priority Action

FON as an institution is in a process of growth and maturity. FON has done a very good job of starting from a grassroots organization of local citizens concerned about use of marine resources to an NGO providing a range of functions for MPA management. As an institution, FON has adapted well to the changing needs of the MPA and its stakeholders. The priority action items reflect this maturity of FON as it seeks to improve the functions and services that it provides for marine resource management.

Priority action items to improve the activities of FON as reported by respondents include:

- Improved community involvement,
- Improved representation of stakeholders in FON management,
- Increased empowerment of stakeholders,
- Improved environmental and participatory education programming,
- Improved transparency and accountability for FON management,
- Strengthened self-financing mechanisms, and
- Improved trust and respect between FON and stakeholders.

FON has a strategic plan to address many of these issues and needs to implement these objectives and actions.

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