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A National Framework for Fisheries Co-management in Ghana

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Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island

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A National Framework for Fisheries Co-Management in Ghana

Issue Brief 4
February 2013

Hen Mpoano

Our coast
Our future !

SUMMARY

This brief proposes a dual structure for adaptive fisheries co-management. Building upon the disappointments of earlier attempts at community based fisheries management, it recognizes the differences inherent in the management of highly migratory pelagics while encouraging local management units to develop and implement plans that improve conditions at landing sites and manage artisanal fisheries for non-migratory species in selected near-shore areas.

The Urgent Need For More Effective Fisheries Governance

Marine fisheries have long been a pillar of Ghana's coastal economy and a primary source of livelihoods in every shorefront community. The wealth of protein provided by fish has for centuries been critical to the Ghanaian diet. Ghana's most important fishery is for the small, highly migratory pelagics – fish that feed near the surface (principally sardines, mackerels and herrings). The second and lesser category of fish harvested are the demersals, species that live on, in, or near the bottom. National fisheries statistics reflect what the fishers already know: despite massive increases in efforts to catch fish (more boats, larger nets, finer mesh, and new technologies such as light fishing), catches are getting progressively smaller (Box 1). Harvests of small pelagics by the canoe fleet have decreased by 60% in the last decade. Since the management of fisheries is concerned primarily with the management of fishermen, this is particularly challenging because hundreds of thousands of fishers from the canoe, semi-industrial, industrial and trawler fleets are competing for the same fish.

The Evolution of Fisheries Management in Ghana

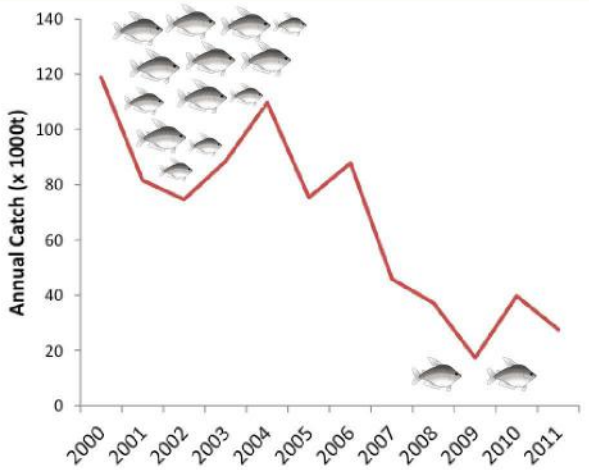
Traditionally, Chief Fishermen and Chief Fishmongers in each shorefront community have been responsible for defining and enforcing the rules by which fish in their immediate area are caught and sold. With varying degrees of success they regulated the number of fishing days, the amount of fish landed and the types of gear used. In 1946 the colonial government established a Department of Fisheries with the goal of maximizing catches. After Independence, the Fisheries Law of 1964 continued to promote the "development" of Ghana's fisheries by introducing new methods of fishing and providing technical support and subsidies. As overfishing became increasingly apparent, national fisheries managers attempted to regulate fishing in order to sustain this important source of food, employment and income. Some Chief Fishermen tried to institute rules restricting some types of fishing gear, but they were not supported by the courts and were sidelined. Today these traditional authorities remain respected members of fishing communities and often assume leadership roles.

In the late 1980s, the movement to decentralize government gave the District Assemblies explicit responsibility for the licensing of canoes and the preparation of by-laws that support the implementation of national fisheries regulations. Issue Brief #1 describes the constraints that have prevented the Districts from acting on many of the responsibilities delegated to them.

In the mid-90s, externally funded projects worked with government agencies in forestry, water and fishery systems to establish co-management institutions. The largest of these projects was the Word Bank funded 'fisheries sub-sector capacity building project' initiated in 1997. This project created 133 Community Based Fishery Management Committees (CBFMCs) along the ocean coast. Unfortunately, these institutions were not effective and little evidence of this effort remains today.

The result is that enforcement of any regulation for many decades has been weak or non-existent and the evidence of severe overfishing has become ever more visible. The formulation of fisheries policy and regulations, monitoring and enforcement have remained with central authorities and the management system is top-down. Today Ghana's fisheries are in crisis. The pelagic stocks could collapse and this would bring a massive crisis that would dramatically affect all coastal communities and the nation as a whole.

Box 1: The massive decline in the catch of small pelagics by the canoe fleet since 2000



The Enabling Conditions for Successful Implementation of Fishery Reforms

Ghana's experience since the colonial era underscores what is being learned from the management of fisheries in other regions of the world. In cases where there are many fishermen, many species and multiple modes of fishing, top-down management does not work. Those who are most affected by fisheries management rules must participate in shaping and adjusting the rules. Responsibility and authority must be distributed. International experience confirms that solutions built around principals of adaptive co-management, while difficult to design and implement, are most likely to be effective and sustainable.

CO-MANAGEMENT, or collaborative management, requires that key stakeholders, most notably the resource users themselves, have significant roles and responsibilities in the management process. In such systems, local management units well connected with fishing, marketing and processing operations, and well aware of social conditions in fishing communities, are 'nested' within higher level governance institutions at the district, region and national scales.

ADAPTIVE CO-MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS are designed to encourage 'learning-by-doing' and feedback loops that promote experimentation. In adaptive systems the rules governing a fishery can be modified to quickly respond to new information or changing operating environments. Regular re-assessments based on specified indicators serve to assess performance and progress towards objectives.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE. The initial failure in fisheries co-management in Ghana must not be repeated but rather be seen as the source of a number of valuable lessons. The first, and most significant, is that co-management requires a legally binding mandate that specifies the roles and the authorities that can be assumed by local co-management authorities. Currently, such a mandate is not provided for in Ghana's legislation. A second lesson, confirmed by experience worldwide, is that fisheries management at the community level can only be effective in small and readily definable areas over which the community can regulate how fish and shellfish are harvested and who does the harvesting. Another crucial lesson is that co-management requires sustained financing in addition to the active support and engagement of the national fisheries authority. Other conclusions, all of which are confirmed by international experience, are as follows:

THE GOALS OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT. These lessons underscore the importance of defining the goals of a fisheries management system. Fisheries can be managed to maximize yield, to maximize employment, to maximize economic return, and to protect the environment or a number of other outcomes or combinations of outcomes. How these goals are defined will produce distinctly different outcomes (see Box #2). For example, a fishery managed to optimize yield or economic efficiency will employ substantially fewer people than a fishery managed to maximize employment and social benefits. Ghana's Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy has selected such goals and states that fisheries will "....contribute to socio-economic development through food and nutritional security and poverty reduction in a sustainable and economically efficient manner"... and the associated Strategic Development Plan states that "the canoe sector will remain the heart of the Ghana fishing industry and will be the key target sector for investments."

THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY IN A CO-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.

The heart of co-management is that the rules that govern how fisheries are conducted require both top-down and bottom-up initiative and responsibility. The allocation of responsibility for the management of a fishery must be appropriate to the nature of the species being managed. In Ghana, the management policies and rules for the dominant fishery of highly migratory small pelagics, must necessarily be defined at the national scale. However, the rules that regulate such a fishery, in a co-management system, must be formulated with representatives of the people affected. In this case the contributions from the community of fishers, processors and marketers must be in the form of representational co-management. On the other hand, where there are small, near-shore geographic areas where the species harvested

Box 2:
Ghana's Future Fisheries:
What's The Goal?

1 LOCAL INSTITUTIONS MUST BE LOCALLY DESIGNED TO REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF FISHING LIVELIHOODS AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNITIES INVOLVED; A UNIFORM STRUCTURE SHOULD NOT BE IMPOSED FROM OUTSIDE.

2 TRADITIONAL LEADERS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN LOCAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT UNITS, BUT WILL NOT ALWAYS LEAD THE PROCESS.

3 THERE MUST BE STRONG FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE. FUNDS FROM DISTRICT OR CENTRAL SOURCES SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO LOCAL MANAGEMENT UNITS BASED ON VERY SPECIFIC 'GOOD GOVERNANCE' CRITERIA.

do not migrate widely, co-management by local units may be instituted to set harvesting rules for artisanal fisheries in clearly defined areas and are granted the authority to implement them. These realities suggest that Ghana needs dual systems for fisheries co-management.

CO-MANAGEMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

Local co-management units should be encouraged to prepare two types of plans. The first, locally managed coastal areas, would address the facilities and functioning of landing sites and the associated activities that contribute to community well-being. The approval of these plans lies with the District and such initiatives should be encouraged through the Medium Term Development planning process.

Once a legislative mandate for local level fisheries management is in place, a second category, termed local fisheries management plans would address fishing in areas where a local body can reasonably monitor and regulate the harvesting of non-migratory species in lagoons, estuaries, lakes and sites within the 6 mile artisanal zone in which trawling is prohibited. Such local fisheries management plans would be guided by, and approved, in accordance with standards for local fisheries management that would be promulgated by the Ministry of Fisheries. Those preparing either category of local plans would be encouraged to begin with a limited agenda and then expand the initiative incrementally if the results are positive. International experience suggests that the engagement of top level officials is not necessary for the approval of local fisheries management plans so long as they are consistent with national fisheries policies and plans. In the case of Ghana, this suggests that local fisheries management plans which meet national standards could be approved by the Regional Office of the National Fisheries Commission.

REPRESENTATIONAL CO-MANAGEMENT.

The management of pelagic species and the development of fisheries management plans for demersal stocks must remain at the national level. At this large scale a co-management approach would require the establishment of a National Fisheries Management Advisory Committee that would work with the Commission's technical staff to prepare fisheries management plans and the associated regulations to be submitted to the Fisheries Commissioners and approved by the Minister of Fisheries. The purpose of the Advisory Committee would be to introduce the Commission to the views of the fishers, fish processors and fish marketers and to assure that lines of two-way communication are kept open. The membership of the Advisory Committee should include both regional and national representatives. The Fisheries Act of 2002, requires that all fisheries plans must be approved by the Cabinet. International experience suggests that this is an overly complex process which should be simplified.

Structural	Social	Governance	Trade
• A large number of canoes • Ownership by households or small companies • Landing at large number of landing site	• Fishing provides livelihoods to many • Most fish available to women processors • Traditional roles and social structures persevered	• More complex system is difficult to manage • Centralised management has failed – new systems required • More difficult to collect license fees and taxes	• Traditional system of selling at landing sites • Decentralized processing and marketing system
• A small number of large, efficient boats • Concentration of 'ownership' to a few large companies • Landing at a few large ports only	• Far lower employment levels in fishing, processing and marketing • Loss of traditional roles in trade and processing	• Easier to manage for maximum yield • Easier to enforce rules based on small number of landing sites • Collection of substantial license fees and taxes possible	• Companies control catch, processing • Profits and distribution in the hands of a few

Governance Structure	Jurisdiction/ Ecosystem Type	Potential Stocks Subject to Management Plans
Local management units (w/ decentralized authorities) Representational (w/ centrally retained authorities)	River, lagoons, estuaries, lakes, nearshore bottom living (demersal) marine species (0 - 6 NM) Pelagic and demersal marine stocks (0 – 200 NM)	Tilapia, catfish, bivalves, mollusks, crustaceans, demersal marine finfish Pelagic and demersal marine species managed at the national scale

A WAY FORWARD

An effective co-management fisheries system for Ghana's marine fisheries will only emerge if it is open to experimentation at the community level guided by clear standards of accountability and performance as well as sustained support from the National Fisheries Commission. The following actions are crucial to assembling the enabling conditions for the success of a national fisheries co-management structure and process.

1. Sustain and expand the dialogue on fisheries issues and management goals by bringing together representatives of fisheries organizations ,fishing communities and the national Fisheries Commission

2. Prepare and promote a Legislative Initiative to be submitted to Parliament that provides a legal mandate for co-management with the dual structures suggested by this Brief.

3. Work with the Fisheries Commission to shape the co-management structure and to design a simplified procedure for the approval of fisheries management plans at both the national and local levels.

4. Secure sources of funding for the formulation and long term implementation of local fisheries management plans. Such funds may be provided through district medium term development planning process, national sources and the proposed Coastal Fund. Such funds should be distributed through the application of performance and accountability standards.

5. Develop standards for locally managed fisheries and locally managed coastal areas. Such standards should encourage experimentation; the processes of approving plans that meet these standards should occur with minimal delay at the district and regional scales.

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