

Policy Perspective

Perspectives on resource management and environmental policy from the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.

The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) has initiated this outreach publication, **Policy Perspectives**, primarily in order to share some of the lessons learnt from recent projects.

These interdisciplinary applied research projects emphasised learning-by-doing through the collaboration of researchers, beneficiaries and other interested parties. The information in these policy briefs may be used by policy-makers and their advisers to strengthen the linkages between research outputs and policymaking in the Caribbean. This connection is often weak in the area of natural resource management.

The Role for Organisational Memory in Advancing the CFP Process

Since the 14th Inter-Sessional Meeting of the CARICOM Heads of Government in Trinidad and Tobago in February 2003 that instigated the creation of a Common Fisheries Policy and Regime (CFP&R), the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) has held 20 meetings directly or indirectly devoted to advancing the development of a CFP&R agreement. Yet, consensus on some of the more vexing issues within the CFP&R, such as right of access to fishing grounds and the establishment of designated communal fishing areas, continued to elude the 18-member CRFM, leading to the decision in 2009 to defer discussions on the mode of implementation until agreement on what constitutes the policy (CFP) could be reached.

Continuity and its effects on consensus building

One of the major constraints to achieving consensus on CFP issues in a timely fashion has been a need to improve communications during and between meetings in order to foster a shared understanding among participants. While it is acknowledged that the participants in the CFP process are members of a policy community with a common understanding of the problem that a CFP would solve

(the sustainable management of the Caribbean's fisheries resources), the reality is that participation by country or agency representatives have been inconsistent. This has led to instances of misunderstanding and miscommunication between members when it comes to key concepts within the CFP.

Participation levels in the CFP process

An analysis of the participation lists from CFP-related meetings between the first Caribbean Fisheries Forum (CFF) in Belize in March 2003 and the sixth CFF in Suriname in 2008 shows that the 150 individuals have been present at these meetings. However, the trend is for there to be a large turnout by representatives from the meeting host country, but low maintenance of participation levels by the representatives when the meetings are held elsewhere. While there are financial constraints that make it understandable for countries not to send large delegations to meetings in other territories in the region, the fact is that countries often rotate representatives and therefore there are continuity breaks between meetings. Of the 111 country representatives who participated in the 17 CFP-related meetings over that six year period, only 14 individuals attended more than 3 meetings with 9 being the most meetings attended by any one representative.

Accessibility of CFP information and knowledge

The low rate of consistent participation for individual representatives speaks to the need to create a more robust organisational memory. While the CRFM does circulate minutes and agenda item documents to participants of its annual and special CFFs prior to the meetings, it is then reliant on the individual actors to retain and or circulate the documentation within their own institutions. There is currently no central store for these documents that can be accessed by all those who are interested in the CFP development, nor any provision for records of decision-making. This can be seen as a current constraint to the implementation of the CFP if we consider the capturing, organizing, disseminating and re-using knowledge to be the key attribute of organizational memory.

In the cycle of the creation, production, dissemination of information and knowledge on the CFP, a lack of access to timely, relevant and accurate information could constrain the effective use and sharing by the current policy makers as well as its preservation for the future. Unlike information, knowledge cannot be encapsulated in the form of messages. Knowledge is arrived at through interpretation by individuals and communities of the information that they receive and how they process it. This necessitates capturing formal (books, manuals, reports, etc.) and informal (the process of creating these formal results) knowledge. The capturing of this informal knowledge is a key asset as it provides the history and context for the decision-making, which is lost if more emphasis is placed on the output rather than the process. The documentation of the evolution of the CFP so far has placed a premium on recording the formal knowledge involved but little attempt has been made to preserve the process of decision-making. This absence of informal source material hampers continuity from meeting to meeting, as well as the ability to preserve the

context under which decisions were made, which would give the document meaning in the future when the context has changed.

Building an organizational memory architecture

The formulation of the CFP can be considered as a further step in the evolution of regional fisheries management toward more decentralized, participatory, and cross-border collaboration focused. If the CFP is to serve this process and conform to the good governance model, then a structured approach toward building the type of organizational memory referred to above should be considered. The development of such organisational knowledge architecture could improve the transfer or sharing of CFP information resources to its stakeholders beyond Government departments and observer organizations as part of the commitment toward decentralized management. Such architecture could be achieved through the codification and storage of the experiences of its members and methods for problem solving. This capturing and organizing key ideas, facts, assumptions, meanings, questions, decisions, guesses, stories, and points of view would support a framework of shared understanding, especially about key concepts and terms, that is accessible by everyone.

References and Further Reading

- Neilson, Stephanie. 2001. Knowledge Utilization and Public Policy Processes: A Literature Review. IDRC. 45 pp.
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- Conklin, Jeff. 2001. Designing Organizational Memory: Preserving Intellectual Assets in a Knowledge Economy. CogNexus Institute 41 pp.

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