

## Comment

# The power of co-management

Co-management, intended as a collaborative and participatory arrangement between governments and resource users to share the responsibility for resource management, is increasingly being put forward as a framework for the management of fisheries resources, partly also due to the perceived failure, or inability, of centralized fisheries management regimes.

Co-management arrangements may be more effective in a context where property rights are well defined. As pointed out by Svein Jentoft (see pg 8), co-management arrangements in situations where community property rights are established and recognized, are likely to be more effective, as they enable communities to control access, to sanction, and to exclude others. However, the co-management framework also has relevance in fisheries where property rights are not defined, undoubtedly a more common situation in fisheries across the world where governance structures are still poor. The advantage of co-management is that it enables governments and fishery gear groups to adopt and develop meaningful fisheries management measures that can minimize costs and that can also expect realization of management goals in a reasonable time frame. At least, it is one way to develop appropriate fisheries management measures that can engender ownership among all user groups even in the absence of property rights.

To the extent that co-management recognizes the significance of the participation of resource users at all stages of resource management, it is important. However, experience from various parts of the world indicates that often the government commitment to participation of actual users remains on paper. The article from South Africa (see pg 36), for example, points out that all too often, brief consultation takes the place of genuine local involvement in decisionmaking in the co-management of resources, in this case in the management of marine protected areas (MPAS).

Co-management of fisheries resources needs to ensure genuine involvement of gear groups, and consultation with their representatives. Particularly where traditional institutions for management and conflict-resolution exist, it would be essential to recognize them and ensure their integration within co-management arrangements.

Co-management efforts will also need to recognize the fact of large power differentials between various stakeholders in the co-management process, and, in the interests of equity, will need to take steps to prioritize the concerns and participation of those lower down in the power hierarchy—small-scale fishing communities, and, particularly, the women in these communities. Conversely, it would be imperative to work towards developing the capacity of communities to engage with co-management.

Co-management should not mean pushing all costs on to local communities, as is happening in certain situations. Some costs, such as, for example, the costs of effective enforcement and keeping in check encroachments by the industrial/large-scale/mechanized fleet, should be borne by the State. The need is not for 'less' State, but for a more effective, accountable and responsive State.

And finally, in the context of so many donor-supported co-management projects working in specific locations with communities, there is a risk of a fragmented approach to resource management. It makes little sense if communities and local governments were to manage adjacent areas, while rampant fishing by the large-scale/industrial/mechanized fleet continues unchecked just outside the managed areas. Co-management arrangements must be developed at the larger level, taking into account the natural management unit, with both small-scale and large-scale fisheries being viewed through the same lens, as it were.