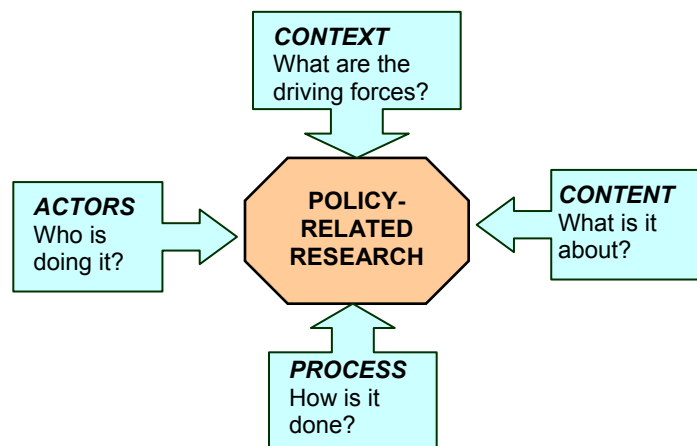


The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) has initiated this outreach publication, *Policy Perspectives*, primarily in order to share some of the lessons learnt from recent projects. These interdisciplinary applied research projects emphasised learning-by-doing through the 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 policy-making in the Caribbean. This connection is often weak in the area of natural resource management.

## *Relationship between policy and research: finding the best fit*

Translating or applying the results and lessons of research to the arena of public policy is challenging. Often also equally challenging is designing policy to incorporate research from the start rather than as an afterthought. The gap and barriers between policy decision-makers and researchers can be very daunting. However, for developing countries in the Caribbean it is vital that this gap be bridged, barriers overcome and close relationships forged in order to minimize the extent of unproductive trial and error related to policy implementation.



There are several ways in which to examine and improve the relationship. One option is to focus on the dimensions of context, content, process and actors. This policy perspective looks at some of the factors to be taken into consideration in bringing coastal policy and management research closer together in the Caribbean region.

## *Policy issues drive movement towards coastal resources co-management*

Worldwide, the focus of managing natural resources has shifted from centralized, top-down, single-species approaches to more decentralized, people-centered, holistic, ecosystems-based approaches. These important policy changes have come about due to an improved understanding of the complex interactions and dependencies that exist between ecological and socio-economic systems. In the coastal and fisheries arena, degradation of coastal habitat, overexploitation of fisheries resources and conflicts amongst coastal users have prompted calls for more innovative policy and improved approaches to integrated coastal management.

One management approach, which is often seen to offer possibilities and promise, is co-management. The term 'co-management' refers to a paradigm shift in natural resource governance and management that supports the participation of resource users in decision-making and management. Resource users typically consider co-management arrangements to be more legitimate than "command-and-control" measures taken by government authorities alone, however well intentioned they may be.

## *Conventional approaches often fail*

Conventional, top-down, command-and-control approaches to coastal resource management do not work well in the Caribbean. The people whose lives depend on coastal resources need to be intimately involved in management, whether they want to or not. Stakeholders may have no choice but to actively take part in management since most government agencies cannot manage coastal resources in the absence of inputs from them. This is due to limited organizational capacity and management information.

Even using the precautionary principle of not delaying management until resource characteristics are fully known, the success of coastal governance ultimately depends on the availability of data and information for management decision-making purposes. The best available scientific information need not be the most expensive or elaborate. Much can be accomplished through effective communication and information exchange between the knowledgeable stakeholders and partners involved in management. The content of policy-related research is changing.

More Caribbean fisheries administrations are beginning to tap into local knowledge and involve the fishing industry and

other coastal area stakeholders in management research. They have accepted the need to inform stakeholders, and monitor the impacts management decisions have on them and natural resources. However wise administrators and advisors are also accepting that they can learn a lot from listening to various stakeholders, even when they are not in agreement amongst themselves. Discord or conflict can have positive aspects.

Deficiencies in information constitute a major impediment to improving the benefits from co-management. Deficiencies usually lie in information about the economic and social aspects of stakeholder livelihoods and resource uses, although other important gaps exist in information about ecological and environmental elements as well. Efforts to reduce these gaps through the use of co-management will be useful in stimulating governments to move toward more effective management, both by demonstrating the significance of the benefits and the ways in which benefits can be achieved.

### ***Applied research on co-management***

There is at present no central database or information service in the Caribbean that reviews and communicates coastal management and fisheries research to Caribbean authorities and stakeholders. Applied research on co-management, in the context of coastal management, is often undocumented or is known about only by those who are intimately involved with it. Although often not called 'research', government agencies carry out investigations and experiments on various systems of coastal governance. Many of these efforts are participatory and progressive. Examples abound in the small islands of the eastern Caribbean such as St. Lucia and Dominica. These events and activities have an influence on policy directly or indirectly as people observe their success or failure. For example, the evolution of the arrangements for the Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) in St. Lucia has been closely watched by many observers.

An asset at the SMMA that is conspicuously absent in many other locations is use of analytical conceptual and research frameworks that help to structure the investigations and experiments. The SMMA has been subjected to the scrutiny of regional and international researchers of many disciplines. The interest of NGOs and other groups is also quite high. As a result, documentation on the SMMA is readily available.

### ***Practical communications, learning***

In Caribbean countries, the extension arm of the fisheries unit and the government information service are normally used as mechanisms for communicating with stakeholders and the public. Alone, these systems are inadequate for achieving good coastal and fisheries governance. If knowledge gained from research is to be used effectively in management it has to be imparted interactively to the stakeholders and partners.

One good way to achieve this in a cost-effective manner is through co-management. Collaborative research between scientist, resource managers, and fishers for conducting and

evaluating research, and disseminating research results, should be employed whenever feasible. Intra-regional linkages, inter-regional linkages and South-South sharing of information between research institutions is also necessary.

While some lessons about co-management can be learned from other regions of the world, processes, structures and arrangements suitable for the diversity of the Caribbean region will have to be researched and developed based on site and country specific conditions and through experience. This can be done through pilot projects and participatory research which build on the policy, knowledge and experience already existing in the region. The lessons learned from successful pilot projects and research builds the system-wide confidence required for scaling up co-management. Communications in this context are an essential part of the research process and not a last phase dissemination of results.

### ***Evidence and actors in the process***

Since co-management is new to the region, progress towards the establishment of co-management institutions has been slow. However, it has led to initiatives such as several marine protected area (MPA) co-managed in Belize, the Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation (CCAM) in Jamaica, Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) in St. Lucia and Soufriere-Scott's Head Marine Reserve (SSMR) in Dominica and sea urchin fishery management in Barbados. There are several additional examples that provide evidence of ongoing changes in the approaches to coastal management.

However, various impediments and constraints cause significant differences in the rate of progress and the forms of co-management arrangements in different areas. In spite of this, agencies in the region have not lost sight of the fact that co-management of coastal resources is usually effective for the involvement of resource users in sustainable development and management. Actors who should be leading the quest for integrating research in to policy, such as university students and researchers, need to become more prominent in shaping co-management initiatives. Researchers need to get into the policy arena and meet the demands of decision-making..

In conclusion, effective policies for co-management depend in part on a foundation of good research and information, and cooperation among stakeholders and policy makers. Because co-management is new to the Caribbean, there is a lot of learning and research to be done. There is an urgent need to keep the coastal governance momentum going. Innovative approaches to coastal and fisheries management are needed.

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