

MARICA Policy Brief 1:2023

Mapping marine resource conflicts across sub-Saharan Africa: patterns, drivers and solutions for coastal communities

Community focus on small scale fisheries conflicts limits the potential to address broader sustainability goals - Kenya

Introduction

The MARICA project aims to better understand scales of governance and their potential coordination problems in addressing conflicts in nearshore small-scale tropical fisheries. These recommendations are the result of the project's Kenyan case study.

Ostrom's Framework for Resource Management

The principles of common-pool resource management, also known as Ostrom's governance principles provide a helpful framework to diagnose common's problems. Specifically, by examining group identity, the balance between costs and benefits, decision making, monitoring, sanctions, conflict resolution, and autonomy, we can identify areas of governance that need attention.

Evaluating Marine Fisheries Conflicts

The scales of conflict identification and mediation among small-scale marine fisheries were evaluated to better understand their potential to govern the recovery of these fisheries. Specifically this includes conflicts, sources of information, solutions, trusted mediators, and knowledge of the value and current application of commons principles to common fisheries problems.

Local vs. Broad-Scale Challenges

Although there is potential for high variability in conflicts and mediation approaches, there were notable similarities that reflected a focus on localized fishing conflicts. Predominant issues included local or proximate problems such as limited space, disagreement about gear, poor resource conditions, and inadequate local benefits relative to costs.

The localized nature of both the communities and conflicts suggest opportunities for local solutions but also a failed potential to seek and integrate solutions arising from broader-scale knowledge and governance mandates. The most frequently reported conflicts were spatial, gear-related, poor resource condition, and low net benefits. These represent proximate conflicts that are locally observable, easily remembered, communicated, and therefore received the most attention. In contrast, secondarily reported conflicts likely to be ultimate causes included inadequate governance, enforcement, conflicting regulations, acute food shortages, and border disputes. These were often perceived as more distant and abstract to respondents and possibly seen as outside of local control.



Root Causes of Overfishing

The widespread state of overfishing arises from distal or larger-scale processes that were poorly acknowledged by local stakeholders. These included distal problems, such as inadequate large-scale governance, enforcement, conflicting regulations, acute food shortages, and inter-community border disputes.

Community Interactions and Leadership Views

If a community raises its stocks, they can expect the excess to be captured by neighbors with fewer stocks or more competitive gear. While this may be understood, the solutions or commons principles to address inter-community problems were seldom recognized as solutions.

Key informants and community leaders tended to report more conflicts related to fishing gear and fewer related to spatial issues. They also perceived a greater sense of fairness and less ambiguity in decision-making processes. They also focused on direct problems created by different gear use and underplayed the spatial conflicts that arise from inter-community and cross-ethnic relationships. Their positions may require more diplomacy with neighbors and inter-governance actors than household members. However, this engagement and subjectivity can potentially erode a critical view that may be necessary to evaluate problems more objectively.

Dynamics of Small-Scale Decisions

Small-scale decisions can undermine the capacity to recover stocks, lost profits, and biodiversity that would be gained from optimal yields. This is the common poverty-trap dynamic that often unfolds in many common property situations. In Kenya, total per area yields have steadily declined even as the BMU systems has unfolded, which has occurred as fishers exit. When fishers exit, the absence of

negative self-regulatory feedback mechanisms hampers the potential for fish stocks to recover. If both fishers and managers are missing these negative feedbacks, such as data on decreasing yields per area, they will be unable to effectively manage community fishing efforts to achieve optimal yields per area. Therefore, developing the capacity to continuously measure and evaluate catch per unit area will be a key step towards community regulation of the catch.

Co-Management: Towards Sustainable Fisheries

Co-management provides a framework to address both proximate and more distal problems of the commons. It is particularly suited to addressing inter-community competition, legal accountability, and develop the institutions and principles needed to overcome poorly connected commons tragedies. This will require donors and managers to acknowledge the counterproductive value of the political patronage of subsidizing community-based management. Financial resources would be better spent attempting achieving long-term goals of constructing stock recovery and maintenance projects. The goals include resolving inter-community conflicts, ensuring broad-scale compliance with national fisheries laws and working towards a financial system where benefits exceed costs, ultimately aiming to restore fish stocks to levels that optimize both production and income levels.

Recommendations:

- **Move** governance towards greater objectivity and integration of co-management principles such that both local and distant conflicts are addressed;
- **Support** community-based management to address local conflicts;
- **Leverage** higher scales of governance to address the broader scale depletion of stocks, resolving inter-community conflicts, and achieving broad-scale compliance with national laws.

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Full references: McClanahan, T.R. (2023) Usage and coordination of governance principles to address proximate and distal drivers of conflicts in fisheries commons, *Conservation Biology*, DOI:10.1111/cobi.14178.

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