

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF COMMON PROPERTY

COMMON PROPERTY CONFERENCE

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, September 26-29, 1991

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INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT

IN THE CARIBBEAN

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Introduction.

The purpose of this paper is to provide guidelines and directions for institutional arrangements and procedures that would facilitate and enhance community-based management in the Caribbean. It is informed by the relatively poor record of resource management initiatives in the region to date, and by the urgency of institutional reform to achieve the goals of sustainability and equity in the use of, and the benefits from, natural resources. The paper therefore deliberately adopts a practical perspective, to outline an action agenda and to define some of the priorities which the region should consider at this stage.

The primary geographical focus of this paper is the English-speaking Caribbean, including countries which share a common history and political structure. The scope of the observations and recommendations below however extends to other parts of the insular Caribbean as well. Because of the general nature of the approach adopted here, it is indeed hoped that the paper can find relevance beyond the boundaries of the Caribbean region, to offer a framework for institutional reform which could be useful to other contexts and regions.

## **Premises.**

This paper is based on a number of premises which one should enunciate at this stage in order to establish the context against which a number of options and recommendations will be formulated. In doing so, it will borrow from earlier work (Renard *et al*, 1991), to offer two initial definitions:

\* community : a community is defined as a group of people who share a common functional link, such as kinship, occupation, place of residence, hobby or religion;

\* management: as applied to natural resources, is defined as the set of rules, labour, finance, and technologies that determine the location, extent, and conditions of human utilisation of these resources, and consequently determine the rate of resource depletion and renewal.

These definitions imply that the activity of management is one that involves a diversity of actors in a diversity of situations. Management is not only the scientific and technical effort of resource management agencies, it is the sum of the actions, inputs and resources applied by the community as a whole, and notably by the users of the resource. The premises, therefore, are that management is by no means necessarily a modern activity, that the users of a resource are also its managers, and that there are indeed many forms of traditional or customary resource management that have been developed and practised for generations.

The second set of premises, which are important to understand the rationale and opportunities for community-based management, are based on the observation that management responsibility and resource ownership are different. The owner is not necessarily the one who decides, who chooses and sets rules, who makes inputs and derives benefits, who manages. In practice, we observe that there are many possible resource management strategies, involving one property regime (open access, state, private and communal) and one or several management responsibilities (free-for-all, government, private, community). Indeed, it has been argued (Renard *et al*, 1991) that this diversity of possible management regimes is an invaluable asset which has helped to conserve much of the region's natural resources and biodiversity.

## **The rationale for promoting community-based management.**

Current efforts of governments and other agencies are directed primarily at a simplification and reduction of resource management regimes in favour of private management of private property, and public management of state property. It is proposed that this simplification is not in the best interest of development and resource management in the region, and that there is value in preserving and enhancing the diversity of management regimes, and in establishing partnerships in management responsibilities.

Among these, community management is advocated, not as an exclusive responsibility, but as one element in a co-management arrangement involving public and private interests to manage resources which may be under private, public or communal ownership. The justification for community management can be found at four levels.

First, community-based management promotes democracy and equity because it gives members of the community a greater opportunity to share in the decisions about how resources are used, and thereby a greater share in the benefits that are gained from their use. Priorities are no longer pre-determined from the outside by bureaucracies or in boardrooms far removed from the every day concerns of the users. Rather, they are developed from within by those whose livelihoods are directly affected by those choices. Similarly, it enhances the opportunities to increase the local benefits of resource use because means of production are more likely to be smaller in scale and owned by the resource users themselves.

Second, community-based management is economically and technically efficient. Users have more clearly defined responsibilities for their decisions and actions and can provide a wide variety and considerable quantity of local resources (land, skills, technology, labour, capital, knowledge, infrastructure) to implement them. In particular, local and traditional knowledge and resource monitoring by community members can provide significant information to planning and development agencies on the characteristics of a resource. Local responsibility also decreases the need for costly outside enforcement which many governments cannot afford.

Third, community management is effective because it is adaptive and responsive to variation in local social and environmental conditions and changes in those conditions. Often it is the failure of centralised strategies to accommodate the local socio-cultural conditions, not the resource conditions, that leads to the failure of the strategy. Furthermore, resource users are constantly aware of the condition of the resources upon which they depend, and they can be quick to respond and adapt to changes in the condition of those resources.

Last, local community control brings a measure of stability and commitment to management that a centralised government approach cannot duplicate. Government decision-making usually operates over a relatively short-term time horizon and is often met with resistance on the ground. On the other hand, people will show more commitment to decisions which they have made themselves based on priorities which they have identified. These priorities should reflect the objectives of long term socio-cultural and resource sustainability which are clearly in their best interest to ensure.

The promotion of community-based management requires change and action on several fronts. This paper examines the institutional front, with five primary directions.

## **Strengthening community-based organisations.**

Resource users' groups and community organisations have, by definition, a central and essential role to play in the formulation and implementation of a community-based approach to the management of natural resources for development. This role can be more precisely defined to include the following elements:

- \* representation and advocacy;
- \* policy influencing and participation in policy formulation;
- \* research and monitoring;
- \* planning, management action and regulation;
- \* enforcement and policing;
- \* documentation and dissemination of experiences.

Currently, there is a limited capability among the community organisations to perform such varied functions, because of a tradition of non-participation, because of the predominance of a centralised approach to development planning, and because of the dependence on externally generated and driven development actions. Yet, the challenge is not so much to create new community institutions for resource management, but to investigate how existing community structures can be strengthened to participate in the management of the resources which they use or could use. The strengthening of community-based organisations therefore requires action at a number of levels, if one is to reverse the trend of dependency and promote local responsibility in resource management for development. Five key directions are identified:

- \* research and documentation of popular resource use and management systems: there is very little documentation of the popular knowledge and management of natural resources in the Caribbean, but the available literature demonstrates the existence of traditional systems which include self regulation and mechanisms for dispute resolution (Berkes, 1987; Wylie, 1989; Smith and Berkes, 1991), and the importance of understanding the complexity of popular resource management systems (Koester, 1986; Valdes-Pizzini, 1990). This is therefore an area for attention by research institutions and management agencies, to incorporate the social perspective into resource management, and to analyze the social, cultural, economic and political issues and factors that determine resource management efforts;

\* definition and provision of legal instruments : such instruments are needed to provide a legal basis for the transfer of the management responsibility from a central government agency to community organisations. In this regard, the example of the standardized Fisheries Acts which are now in force in the member countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States is useful, as it provides for the creation of Local Fisheries Management Authorities. Legal instruments are also required to provide for joint regulation and enforcement at the community level, for example with the appointment of officers within a community or a community organisation;

\* use of a participatory planning approach: the third direction to be taken for the strengthening of community-based organisations is the use of participatory planning instruments. At this stage, it is largely the responsibility of governmental and non-governmental agencies to initiate such processes and to design and implement planning activities which provide for the genuine and effective participation of resource users. These activities include: (1) early consultation on needs, priorities and opportunities; (2) formulation of common agendas for investigation and action; (3) involvement in research and redistribution of research results; (4) participation in decision-making mechanisms; and (5) representation on implementation bodies;

\* definition of clear management agreements : the effective involvement of community groups in resource management efforts demands that clear agreements be worked out, especially when co-management arrangements are made. This is particularly important to protect the interests of the community and to ensure that duties and rights are clearly spelled out. It is also necessary to establish the rules of resource use and to define means of coercion against persons who would not respect such rules.

\* building and developing community institutions : the directions above must be complemented and supported by targeted efforts towards the overall strengthening of community institutions, through financing, training, organisational development, networking and outreach programmes. Of particular importance in this regard is the provision of training to communities and their organisations in a diversity of disciplines, including those of resource management (resource monitoring, resource enhancement and restoration, transformation and use of natural products, impact mitigation, use of the legislation, advocacy, public information, etc.).

### **Defining the role of other non-governmental institutions.**

The functions and operations of community-based organisations must be seen within the broader context of the role and activities of all non-governmental entities. In this regard, it is important to stress the role of the other non-governmental organisations, which may not be directly involved in the management of a particular resource, but which have a significant role to play in community-based resource management arrangements, notably with regard to the following:

\* NGOs could and should be active in promoting the overall concept of community management, in advocating community rights and in serving as "buffers" to facilitate dispute resolution and to give legitimacy to local concerns in cases of conflicts between a community and other interests;

\* NGOs have an important role to play as "brokers" of institutional, technical and financial support, and as a source of technical assistance to community groups;

\* NGOs are also in the unique position of being able to experiment with new actions and approaches and being catalysts for change.

Currently, these organisations have limited capabilities. Indeed, it should be noted that environmental NGOs can sometimes act in contradiction to the interests of these communities, when they fail to recognize and respects local rights, and promote conservation measures which result in dislocation and alienation. There is therefore a need, not only to strengthen these organisations, but also to clarify their policy orientations to ensure that they contribute, as much as possible, to a process of community responsibility and empowerment.

Reforming governmental institutions and their operations.

Perhaps the most critical -or should one say the most difficult- task is to reform governmental institutions. It is difficult because it demands that we dispel the myth that governments have the exclusive mandate and capability to manage common property resources.

It is therefore necessary to define, in more precise terms, the role that public sector agencies should play in a new management framework where communities would obtain or retain a significant amount of responsibility over the management of the resources upon which they depend. These functions can be seen at six main levels:

\* facilitating policy formulation : policy formulation is seen as the product that arises out of a process of public sensitization, community consultation and popular participation, not as an exercise carried out by an elite in isolation from those who are to be served by such policies. In this process, government agencies have a central role to play as animators and facilitators, to define the policy directions which a country or a group of countries may wish to follow;

\* harmonizing the actions of various partners and coordinating the implementation of programmes: the role of government agencies is also that of co-ordinators, to set overall goals and parameters, and to ensure that the actions and initiatives of various groups or sectors are compatible;

\* providing incentives for collective action and self-regulation : the success of community-based action to manage common property resources often depends on incentives which would increase the benefits to participants. These can take various forms, for example with market incentives for products and services, or with social incentives in the form of public recognition;

\* enforcing regulations and policing : the function of government agencies in these areas needs to be defined, if we accept the principle that joint regulation by a community of resource users is the preferred option in many instances. In that case, the role of the government is first to delegate the enforcement responsibility, but also to enforce directly when it is necessary. The government agency is available to the community for enforcement in cases where local arrangements are not effective or sufficient, and it can act itself if it is not satisfied that management agreements are respected. This implies that these agencies must develop a monitoring capability to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based management initiatives;

\* resolving conflicts and providing arbitration : the role of government agencies is also to provide arbitration and to resolve disputes, especially those which arise between different groups of resource users or different communities;

\* providing technical assistance : lastly, the role of the government agencies is clearly to provide technical and financial assistance to communities in their efforts to manage natural resources.

Revising the role of multi-lateral, bi-lateral and donor agencies.

The role and operation of international institutions in the context of the Caribbean's search for more harmonious and sustainable forms of development has been adequately described elsewhere (Cropper, 1990), with the identification of the structural and relational difficulties inherent in the current forms of cooperation between the Caribbean region and international agencies. These difficulties are exacerbated when one considers the needs of local communities in relation to resource management and development.

In this regard, the reform agenda outlined above for the benefit of community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations and public sector agencies implicitly defines a number of important guidelines which should be followed by multi-lateral, bi-lateral and donor agencies, if these wish to support a process of community participation and empowerment. These guidelines could be sketched around certain key principles:

\* size : mechanisms and structures must be put in place to accommodate small-scale community-oriented initiatives;

\* flexibility : innovative approaches to natural resource management require flexibility and long-term efforts. At present, international institutions favour the short term approaches with pre-determined outputs and schedules;

\* institutional building : project activities are largely irrelevant if they are not accompanied by a concerted effort to strengthen institutions and to build an indigenous capacity to sustain resource management and development actions;

\* respect of diversity : operations of international institutions must recognize and respect the diversity of needs, opportunities, arrangements and capabilities which exist in the various countries and communities, and must avoid applying external models to these varied situations.

### **Designing new approaches to training and education.**

Because the approaches and actions described above depend so much on attitudes and skills which may not be prevalent at this stage, it is particularly essential to examine the new training needs that are revealed here. Within this broad area, a number of preliminary directions can be identified as follows:

\* a better dissemination of information on resources and development issues, especially for the benefit of community organisations and the wider public;

\* a multi-disciplinary approach to resource management training at the graduate and under-graduate levels, and the integration of these concerns into other training programmes, notably in the disciplines of economics and other social sciences;

\* the incorporation of field-based community-oriented courses into the curricula of resource management training;

\* the provision of training in community-based approaches to resource management for development workers, extension personnel and professional resource managers;

\* the dissemination of specific skills in various domains of resource management (monitoring, enhancement, impact mitigation, etc.) for the benefit of community organisations.

### **Conclusion.**

Resource management is a political process which is determined by factors of ideology, political economy and social relations. The orientations and approaches offered in this paper clearly seek to contribute to a process that promotes social equity, respects popular needs and wisdom, and maintains cultural integrity and sovereignty. It is therefore perhaps not surprising to see that these orientations would meet with opposition and resistance, where there is fear of such a participatory process, capable of releasing new talents and redistributing power and responsibilities. Institutional change will be slow, but it remains indispensable to achieve the goals of resource management and community development, in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

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