



Navigating change: Second-generation challenges of small-scale fisheries co-management in the Philippines and Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Early efforts to apply the concept of fisheries co-management in Southeast Asia focused primarily on building the effectiveness of local management institutions and advocating the merits of the approach so that it would be applied in new sites, while gradually learning and adapting to a range of obstacles in practice. Today, with co-management widely embraced by the research community and adopted as policy by an increasing number of governments, a second-generation perspective has emerged. This perspective is distinguished by efforts to navigate and influence change in the broader institutional and governance context: (a) a more sophisticated appreciation of politics, power relations, and the role of the state, (b) efforts to manage resource competition beyond the fisheries sector, (c) building institutions for adaptation and learning, and (d) recognizing divergent values and goals influencing fisheries management. This paper traces the evolution of this second-generation perspective, noting how it has built on learning from early practice and how it has been cross-fertilized by theoretical innovations in related fields, notably resilience thinking and political ecology. We illustrate this evolution through analysis of experience in the Philippines, with a relatively long experience of learning and adaptation in fisheries co-management practice, and Vietnam, where fisheries co-management policies have been embraced more recently. Characterizing the second-generation perspective helps identify points of convergence in the research and policy community about what needs attention, providing a basis for more systematic cross-country and cross-regional learning.

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1. Introduction

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the most comprehensive effort to date to characterize the status and trends of change in global ecosystems, highlighted the importance of cross-scale interactions, both in the drivers of change in ecosystem services, and in the institutions of governance needed to respond (MEA, 2005). Researchers working under the rubric of social-ecological resilience, a particularly fertile ground for collaboration between ecological and social scientists, have prioritized the study of governance processes that enable learning and adaptation across multiple scales, as well as fundamental shifts towards more sustainable patterns of resource use (Folke et al., 2005). The practice of co-management—the sharing of authority and responsibility between state and community in the management of forests, fisheries, rangelands and other

common-pool resources—is recognized as an important source of learning about the evolution of effective governance processes (Carlsson and Berkes, 2005; Berkes, 2009).

Recent cross-regional comparative analyses (Gutierrez et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2011) confirm the importance of governance arrangements in determining outcomes from fisheries co-management but describe little of the process by which governance reform takes place, nor how various initiatives manage more or less successfully to navigate a changing governance context. Impact assessment for fisheries co-management in developing countries is still very limited, making cross-country and cross-regional comparisons difficult, so that generalizations about the results of co-management interventions remain very preliminary (Evans et al., 2011). One recent attempt to synthesize experience from 130 cases of community-based co-management globally found that successes are more likely in more developed countries (as measured by human development index rank) and in industrial rather than small-scale fisheries. While strong local leadership and robust social capital are the top explanatory variables across all

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types of fisheries, the differences in these outcomes are attributed largely to governance and enforcement mechanisms (Gutierrez et al., 2011). Better understanding pathways to improving the governance context for fisheries co-management specifically in the small-scale sector of developing countries therefore remains an important challenge for research and practice.

“Effective co-management,” writes Berkes (2009), “requires flexible, multi-level governance systems designed to enhance institutional interaction and experimentation to generate learning... but there is little experience on how to accomplish this.” This paper addresses this gap in documented experience by describing an evolution over several decades in the challenges confronted by practitioners in the Philippines, with a relatively long experience of learning and adaptation in coastal fisheries co-management, and in Vietnam, where fisheries co-management policies have been embraced more recently. The analysis combines the reflections of a practitioner engaged centrally in the development of co-management in Southeast Asia over three decades (Pomeroy et al., 2009; Pomeroy and Ahmed, 2006), interview data and participant observations from recent field work in Vietnam on cross-scale interactions in fisheries co-management (Oh, 2010, 2011), and a range of practitioner reports from both countries, supplemented by a comparative review of the evidence-based research literature addressing multiple regions.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we describe the transition from a first-generation to a second-generation perspective, noting the factors motivating practitioners to increase attention to the broader governance challenges in the Philippines and Vietnam (section 2). Next we elaborate each of the four defining features of this second-generation perspective (sections 3–6), noting a convergence of principles identified by analysts working across a wide range of countries and resource systems and identifying how recent research has built on learning from early practice and been cross-fertilized by theoretical innovations in related fields, notably resilience thinking and political ecology. In the conclusion (section 7), we argue that a focus on the four dimensions of this second-generation perspective can help orient comparative research addressing the governance challenges of small-scale fisheries co-management across regions, and assist in consolidating lessons across different natural resource sectors.

2. The evolution of a second-generation perspective

The history of fisheries co-management in Southeast Asia follows a shift from community-based fisheries and coastal resources management to co-management, linked to broader trends in administrative decentralization in natural resources management and rural development. Community-based initiatives to rehabilitate, conserve and protect natural resources based on broad local participation and use and enhancement of local knowledge began in irrigation programs in a number of Southeast Asian countries in the 1960s, followed by community forestry initiatives (Korten, 1980; Sajise, 1995). Community-based programs focused on improved resource management and conservation but also responded to community and NGO concerns over poverty and food security, aiming to empower communities by building local capacity to confront these problems (Sajise, 1995).

Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) started in Southeast Asia in the mid-1980s, primarily through the work of NGOs and some donor-supported projects in the Philippines. The Philippines has a long history of traditional fisheries rights and allocation (Kalagayan, 1991; Lopez, 1983). However, under both Spanish and American colonization, community authority and rights were superseded by municipal government control of local fishing grounds. This administrative structure of municipal

authority remains in place today. Although natural resource management policy in the Philippines since the colonial era has been centrally-determined and non-participatory, in reality local-level decisions and willingness to recognize the laws and regulations has played a strong role in the use of natural resources in sectors such as forestry, fisheries, mining, and water.

In the mid 1970s, Philippine biologists and conservationists had begun to document unmistakable signs of degradation of coastal environments and depletion of fish stocks. A nationwide study on the state of coral reefs deemed only 5% of the areas surveyed in excellent condition and 75% in poor to fair condition (Gomez et al., 1994). In the early 1980s, social scientists joined in spotlighting the seeds of ecological disaster in the Philippine marine environment and called for community-based coastal resources management, “...a community initiated, run and controlled social organization as essential instrument in giving meaningful expressions to the views, interests and demands of the rural poor” (Ferrer, 1992).

Community-based fisheries and coastal resource management, as defined by NGOs in the Philippines and more broadly in the region, often had very little government involvement. CBFM practitioners often viewed government in an external role only to be brought in to support local activities at a later stage or as needed. This often led to misunderstandings and lack of full support from government for these initiatives (Pomeroy and Rivera-Guieb, 2006). Through the 1980s as NGOs supported CBFM, they learned what worked and refined processes and tools for implementation. This differed somewhat by country and implementing agent but usually involved participatory research, education and capacity development, community organizing, and conflict management.

In subsequent years, community groups and civil society activists increasingly acknowledged that government could provide essential elements needed to make CBFM work better, such as legislation, enforcement and technical assistance. “Community-based co-management” emerged in the region as a new approach, which included the characteristics of CBFM and co-management, i.e., an approach that was people-centered, community-oriented, resource-based, and partnership-based, featuring complementary roles for local communities and government (Pomeroy and Rivera-Guieb, 2006). In the Philippines, this coincided with the introduction of decentralization reforms that enabled municipal governments to provide more direct support to civil society initiatives.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, co-management was gaining broader acceptance as a new fisheries management paradigm in the region, and government and donors showed increasing support. Legal reforms emerged in several countries, through new legislation or amendments to existing fisheries laws and local ordinances (Pomeroy and Ahmed, 2006). The Philippines provided a testing ground for much of the early experimentation and validation of the approach, which influenced parallel efforts in other countries, including Thailand, Bangladesh, India, and Indonesia. To date, government, NGOs, fishing communities, and academic and research institutions in the Philippines have implemented well over 250 community-based co-management projects. No country in the world has the range of experience with community-based coastal resource management and fisheries co-management as the Philippines (Pomeroy and Carlos, 1997), making it a natural hub for regional exchange of experience.

Vietnamese fisheries professionals were among those engaged in this exchange. In the mid-1990s, the Vietnamese Ministry of Fisheries began to develop an interest in the concept of co-management. The Ministry endorsed the principles of co-management and stated it would work toward the “selection of, formal recognition of, and funding for pilot test sites for the establishment of co-management activities in coastal fisheries including marine protected areas... and aquaculture” (ADB, 1999). Subsequently, the concept of co-management, including the need for more participation of fishers

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