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Participatory evaluation in times of governance transition: The case of small-scale fisheries in Uruguay

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ABSTRACT

As fisher participation in management has become more prominent, the trend to evaluate fisheries governance has been growing. Participatory evaluation, an approach in which government and fisher stakeholder groups collaborate in the different stages of the evaluation, has been recommended for fisheries co-management, but little research has addressed these interconnected processes. This study analyzed a participatory evaluation process in a context of fisheries governance transition in Uruguay, where multi-stakeholder councils for small-scale fisheries co-management started to be implemented in 2012. Using a case study research approach, the objectives were: (i) to investigate stakeholders' perceptions about the first of these councils on the coast of the Rio de la Plata; (ii) to analyze the process of defining the indicators during the participatory evaluation of the council; and, (iii) to explore the policy implications of this evaluation initiative. The engagement of multiple stakeholders during the evaluation led to a diverse list of indicators to assess the co-management council. Fishers and government stakeholders have different expectations, but the participatory evaluation enabled collective discussion and definition of agreements of procedure for the council, which may help overcome several of its weaknesses. Incorporating participatory evaluation early opens valuable opportunities for bringing together stakeholders and defining meaningful indicators to assess governance reforms.

1. Introduction

Fisheries throughout the world are confronting a myriad of issues, with the consequences (ecological, economic, social) being especially pronounced for small-scale fishers. Several studies and regular assessments capture the 'state of the world's fisheries' (e.g., Hilborn et al., 2003; FAO, 2014). While disagreements certainly exist among fisheries scientists about the precise status "…it is fair to say that global fisheries experts continue to call attention to growing problems that threaten ecosystem services, food security, livelihoods, cultural meaning, and economic welfare as the world's stocks continue to decline" (Jacques, 2015:165). While small-scale operators account for over 90% of capture fishers (FAO, 2014), they have been marginalized in terms of policy, underestimated in terms of the importance of their contribution, and underappreciated (Chuenpagdee, 2012; Trimble and Johnson, 2013). The need to rectify this situation has been identified (see Chuenpagdee, 2012), and this recognition is "…leading to the vigorous promotion of alternative approaches for their governance" (Davis and Ruddle, 2012:244).

Within the broad and ongoing discussion about fisheries governance, Chuenpagdee (2012: 23–24; see also Jentoft and Chuenpagdee, 2009) observes "…that current governance systems are aimed largely at large-scale fisheries and do not sufficiently address the interests of small-scale fishing people, nor enable them to become directly involved in the process of governance. The diversity, complexity and dynamics of small-scale fisheries worldwide, and the differences between small- and large-scale fisheries, pose major challenges to governance". With due acknowledgment that the nature of small-scale fisheries (complex, diverse, dynamic) precludes finding a governance panacea (Davis and Ruddle, 2012), the search for governance reforms and mechanisms has generally found expression as decentralization, devolution, co-management and participation (e.g., Béné and Neiland, 2006; Suárez de Vivero et al., 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Davis and Ruddle, 2012). This is accompanied by, most recently, emphasis on shared decision-making by resource users and governments who adapt and learn from monitoring and evaluation in a continuous process (e.g., Garaway and Arthur, 2004; Plummer, 2009; McConney and Charles, 2010; Trimble and Berkes, 2015).

Participatory evaluation is an approach which resonates with the engagement of stakeholders as well as a platform for learning and

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adaptation. In this approach, also known as empowerment evaluation, stakeholder-based evaluation or participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME), various actors or stakeholder groups collaborate in the different stages of the evaluation: design, identification of indicators, data collection, data analysis through learning by doing, and use of results (Estrella et al., 2000; McDuff, 2001; Fernandez-Gimenez et al., 2008; Izurieta et al., 2011). The benefits of participatory evaluation supporting its use in development programs and conservation initiatives are multiple and include: greater external validity, since a diversity of viewpoints is expressed (Plottu and Plottu, 2011); enhanced selection of indicators through negotiation (Izurieta et al., 2011); increased utilization of evaluation results (Papineau and Kiely, 1996; McDuff, 2001; Sayer et al., 2007; Plottu and Plottu, 2011); increased group cohesion and self-confidence (Aguilar Idañez, 2011); improved communication between stakeholders (McDuff, 2001); individual and organizational learning (McDuff, 2001; Ferreyra and Beard, 2007); acquisition of new skills and of specialized knowledge about conducting an evaluation (Papineau and Kiely, 1996), and empowerment of disenfranchised stakeholder groups (Papineau and Kiely, 1996). Nonetheless, participatory evaluation is not without challenges. Negotiating differences among actors and building consensus (such as when selecting the evaluation indicators) can be difficult and it is a time-consuming process (McDuff, 2001; Ferreyra and Beard, 2007; Izurieta et al., 2011; Plottu and Plottu, 2011). Also, there is a risk of co-optation by some stakeholders seeking to promote their interests (Papineau and Kiely, 1996).

Participatory evaluation has long been recommended and used in small-scale fisheries. In 1996, the FAO published a manual on "Participatory analysis, monitoring and evaluation of fishing communities" to aid and encourage community participation in monitoring and evaluating activities of projects and programs in fishing villages (Maine et al., 1996). The fisheries literature shows that participatory monitoring and evaluation has been used most often to assess fish resources (Obura et al., 2002; Uychiaoco et al., 2005; Léopold et al., 2009; Ernst et al., 2010; Malafaia et al., 2014) and fisheries as social-ecological systems (Oviedo and Bursztyn, 2016). Although participatory evaluation has also been recommended for fisheries co-management (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004; Pomeroy and Rivera-Guieb, 2005), academic articles about this are scarce. Participatory evaluation is most commonly found in the field of protected areas management (e.g. Heylings and Bravo, 2007; Izurieta et al., 2011; Garces et al., 2013; Stacey et al., 2013). For example, Heylings and Bravo (2007) organized a participatory evaluation exercise to assess governance in the co-managed Galapagos Marine Reserve, where fisheries are an important activity. Nonetheless, attention to the participatory evaluation process was not given since the article focused on the evaluation results (Heylings and Bravo, 2007).

We intended to fill this research gap by analyzing a participatory evaluation process in a context of fisheries governance transition. Fisheries in Uruguay, as in many other countries, are in crisis; yields of the main species are decreasing and so is the number of workers in the sector (Trimble and Johnson, 2013; Gianelli and Defeo, 2017). Small-scale fisheries (locally known as artisanal fisheries) have been traditionally managed by the national government (DINARA – National Directorate for Aquatic Resources) but in 2012, multi-stakeholder councils for consultative co-management started to be implemented. We took the first of these councils on the Rio de la Plata coast as our case study. There we facilitated a participatory evaluation process of the council with involvement of the four stakeholder groups (artisanal fishers, DINARA, Coast Guard and local governments). No evaluation or assessment of the council had been conducted since its origin in 2012. The objectives of this study are: (i) to investigate stakeholders' perceptions about the newly created council, (ii) to analyze the process of defining and selecting (prioritizing) indicators to evaluate the council, and (iii) to explore the implications from the participatory evaluation in terms of operational agreements for the council.

The article starts by setting the context of the governance transition of artisanal fisheries in Uruguay, after which conventional and participatory evaluation approaches are presented and contrasted. The case study (local council for fisheries co-management in coastal Canelones) and the research methods are described next. The results are presented in sub-sections that address the three objectives, which are then followed by a discussion of the main findings and directions for future research.

2. Governance transition in artisanal fisheries in Uruguay

Until 2013 Uruguay did not have a "fisheries law" as such but rather a law of "the wealth of the sea" (Law No. 13.833, 1969) and associated regulatory decrees. In 2009 DINARA presented a Fisheries Law before the Parliament, which was passed on December 2013 (Law N°19.175). The main drivers leading to new legislation were that the existing law (from 1969) was outdated, and that most fishing resources were fully exploited. The new law stipulates that associated regulation be developed within 180 days. At the time of writing this article, it is yet being reviewed at the Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries (MGAP).

The chapter of the law dedicated to artisanal fisheries determines the creation of Fisheries Zonal Councils for resources co-management among fishers and government agencies. For the first time, fisher participation in management was included in the legislation in Uruguay (Trimble and Berkes, 2015). However, before the new law was passed, a project by DINARA and international funding aiming at ecosystem-based management of coastal fisheries (known as GEF-DINARA-FAO Project), implemented co-management councils in three pilot areas (Ciudad de la Costa-Canelones, La Coronilla-Barra del Chuy and San Gregorio de Polanco).

There are currently eight of these councils for artisanal fisheries co-management in the country (Fig. 1). The law (Article 49) determines that they should be composed of: (1) one representative of DINARA, (2) one representative of the departmental government (Uruguay consists of 19 administrative units called departments) and the Mayors of the municipal governments of the area (these administrative sub-divisions were created in 2009 through the decentralization law), (3) one representative of the Coast Guard, and (4) two representatives of fisher groups. Fishers' organizations in Uruguay are not common, and fishers are generally informal workers. Government actors like DINARA expect that the implementation of the co-management councils will help increase fishers' organization (Trimble, 2013). The eight existent councils have varied origins: (i) three originated as pilot councils during the GEF-DINARA-FAO Project, (ii) three were implemented by DINARA after receiving a request from the fishers (Piriápolis, Punta del Este and San José), (iii) and the other two (Salto and Andresito) were formed by DINARA to address specific problems of these locations.

Moreover, as mandated by the new fisheries law, a national advisory board, the Fisheries Consultative Council, was formed in 2016 by representatives of DINARA, additional ministries (Defense; Foreign Affairs; Housing, Land Planning and Environment), owners of industrial fishing vessels, artisanal fishers, companies dedicated to the transformation of fish products, and the fisheries labour sector. Although it is in an initial phase, this national fisheries council could provide the opportunity for addressing conflicts between fisheries stakeholders at multiple levels (e.g. between the small- and the large-scale fishing sectors, Trimble and Berkes, 2015).

3. Conventional and participatory evaluation

Based on who conducts the evaluation, and other traits, there are two main evaluation traditions: conventional and participatory, each with variations. In conventional evaluation, also known as traditional evaluation, external actors (such as professional evaluators, academics, etc.) are in charge of planning and conducting the evaluation, using