Towards Establishment of Small-scale Fisheries Coastal-Marine Joint Co-management Areas in Kenya

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There is no doubt about the potential that the co-management management approach holds towards sustainability and improvement of small-scale fisheries livelihoods. Co-management is often formulated as an arrangement of sharing responsibilities between statute institutions and community resource users. This paper views a co-management approach as continuous decision making process towards sustainable management of fisheries resources, rather than a problem solving process. This presumption implies that establishment of co-management areas should preferably focus on forging and sustaining relationships for fisheries decision-making processes between statutory institutions, the community and other interested parties. Co-management is further viewed as a deliberate management approach that safeguards the interest of the state, the resource users and other interested parties.

Owing to the potential of co-management management approach in the small-scale fisheries, attempts to establish co-management areas along the Kenyan coast have been on the rise. Whereas some success has been reported in some areas, establishing of co-management areas has not gone without its challenges ranging from how they can best be formulated, effectively managed and sustained. While Beach Management Units (BMUs) unanimously agree on the need for a joint co-management area, the concept of joint co-management has not been well understood. Of interest is the perception fishers have on co-management areas approach to small-scale fisheries management, the use of BMUs as foundation and building block for joint co-management areas. A baseline survey was conducted to establish how best co-management areas can be established in preparedness for the development of Joint Co-management Areas Establishment guidelines. The finding is that the underlying risks in use of BMUs as a foundation for establishing joint co-management areas is the need to develop a shared purpose among partnering BMUs, and building cohesiveness for collective decision making. The uniqueness of individual BMUs serves as a drawback to establishment of joint co-management areas.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between the Kenyan Coast between May and July 2017. The questionnaire was structured to capture familiarities with resources of importance by
small-scale fishers, identification of shared resources amongst stakeholders, identification of spatial seasonal fishing patterns, co-management area potential success factors, barriers and risks. A total of 24 Beach Management Units were interviewed, with 113 respondents, and 13 key informants from organizations and statute institutions that directly work with fishers or have interests in small-scale fisheries along the Kenyan Coast. Simple quantitative and qualitative analysis were undertaken to interrogate and draw conclusions on the information collected.

Results

There was a unanimous agreement by both the fishers and statute institutions on the need for establishment of joint co-management areas. The result showed that fisheries resources were shared beyond the individual BMU co-management area (area of fishing activities). 58% of the fishermen fish beyond their BMU designated fishing area, and thus the need for larger joint co-management area with other BMUs that they share resources. The following are key findings:

- There is a widely acceptance of need for joint co-management areas by BMUs, based on the traditional fisheries patterns in the different seasons in the year.
- There is a wide divide between theory and practice of BMUs, the perception on the ground differs from the actual practice on the ground. BMUs are viewed as small-scale artisanal fishers’ organizations and this is what is practiced. From a practical perspective, membership of BMUs does not correspond to what is articulated in the BMU regulations;
- The individual BMU co-management areas of jurisdiction are not viable for sustainability of communities’ fisheries activities, sustainability of individual BMU fisheries activity rely on some sites and resources beyond the BMU co-management areas.
- BMU are overtasked with the responsibilities, while they may handle tasks/issues at local level, challenges are faced at larger joint co-management level;
- Creating a shared purpose for a joint co-management area amongst BMUs remains a mirage considering BMUs have individual unique interests and expectations of CMA, meeting each BMUs interest is a key to success factor for CMA. Harmonizing By-laws between BMUs in a joint co-management areas remain a challenge;
- Motivation of the CMA establishment may not directly relate with the CMA development purpose, getting to understand the link is crucial for success.

Conclusion

Joint co-management areas approach to small-scale fisheries remains promising in achieving sustainable management and use of fisheries resources, however the co-management and joint co-management areas concept are yet to be better understood by fishers and interested stakeholders. For joint co-management areas to be self-organizing to promote compliance and sustainability, individual BMU unique interests, shared fisheries resources and indigenous and cultural fisheries patterns have to put into consideration when establishing a joint co-management area.