

Networking for Partnerships

The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO) is trying to improve fishing communities' livelihoods and their participation in governance

From the tip of southern Florida in the United States to the northern shores of South America, the 2,754,000-sq km (1,063,000-sq mile) Caribbean Sea is a diverse and complex space bordered by, and containing, over 30 countries and territories, most of which are small island developing States. With almost as many languages and dialects as countries, the wider Caribbean directly and indirectly sustains millions of people whose livelihoods depend on shared marine resources. Although fishing is an important livelihood in the Caribbean, tourism is frequently the main economic use of coastal and marine areas, especially in the small islands. Fisherfolk often compete and conflict with other users of marine resources and space.

In the Caribbean, fisheries provide direct or indirect employment for 200,000 - 500,000 fisherfolk who are mostly from rural communities and who lack other major income-earning opportunities. Fishers harvest resources ranging from internationally managed highly migratory tunas to less-managed small coastal pelagics, coral reef species, shrimp and groundfish. Small-scale fishing predominates. Some fisheries are high-value for export such as lobster, conch, shrimp and tunas. Others are important for local food and bait. The global fisheries situation is reflected in the depletion of many resources, especially in the nearshore and reef habitats that are becoming increasingly degraded.

The majority of fisheries resources are shared among many countries at some point in their life cycle, but there is no regional fisheries management organization that covers the entire

area or all fisheries. However, fishers in the English-speaking Caribbean are now active in regional fisheries organizations, such as the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI). One avenue for active participation in fisheries governance has been through the creation of the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO).

Stemming from a CRFM developmental project, this new regional network is involved in activities aimed at building the

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capacities of fishers and fisherfolk organizations in leadership, management, sustainable livelihoods, advocacy and more. The project is implemented in partnership with the Centre Technique de Coopération Agricole et Rurale (CTA), based in the Netherlands, and the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Barbados.

Needs assessment

The genesis of this project can be traced to 2004 when the CRFM undertook a needs assessment of Caribbean fisherfolk organizations, which recommended the formation of a regional network of national fisherfolk organizations (NFOs). There was a need to strengthen the

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capacities of fisherfolk organizations to participate in the management of the resources affecting their livelihoods. The establishment of this regional network of fisherfolk organizations was a prime strategy for addressing issues revealed by the needs assessment, including:

- fisherfolk organizations' weak management skills;
- insufficient access by fisherfolk to relevant information; and
- fisherfolk's limited communication and advocacy skills.

A Strategy and Medium-term Action Plan for the Institutional Strengthening of Regional Fisherfolk Organizations—2006 to 2010 was then developed through a participatory process in order to address some of the gaps identified by the needs assessment. The overall objective is to contribute to improved income earnings, higher standards of living for fisherfolk, and sustainable use of fishery resources in the Caribbean; the more specific purpose is to have the institutional capacities of fisherfolk organizations developed at the regional, national and community levels.

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As in most region-wide programmes in the Caribbean, establishing the CNFO has been challenged by the diversity of nation States, which calls for equally diverse approaches to organizing. The first phase, from 2006 to 2008, confirmed the potential for a regional network of fisherfolk groups, and saw the formal establishment of several national organizations that were necessary to form the backbone of the regional network. It was also a time for capacity building as fisherfolk leaders were trained in areas related to network management and utilization of communication tools; institutional strengthening was carried out primarily through workshops,

supplemented in between by support, encouragement and mentoring from CRFM and CERMES and peer support and information exchange between key members of CNFO.

Some of the highlights of the project, between 2006 and 2009, were the following:

- provision of technical assistance to a number of countries in the organization and convening of the national consultations to launch NFOs;
- organizing and convening the September 2007 Regional Fishers Stakeholder Workshop in Grenada to get expressions of interest and views on the creation of CNFO and the immediate training needs of leaders and members of national fisherfolk organizations and groups;
- organizing and convening the October 2008 Training Workshop on Management, Communication and Advocacy for Fisherfolk Organizations, in St. Lucia;
- preparation and distribution of quarterly issues of the Fisherfolk Net newsletter;
- preparation and publishing of the 2008 and 2009 versions of the Fisheries Stakeholders Directory; and
- creation of a website.

Two major activities which raised the profile of CNFO and the confidence of the co-ordinating unit charged with steering its fortunes in the interim stages was the regional fisherfolk policy influence and planning workshops organized by CNFO in partnership with the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), CRFM and CERMES, with support from the CTA and Commonwealth Foundation in January and April 2009. It was during the January workshop in St. Vincent and the Grenadines that the fisherfolk shaped the following vision and mission for their organization:

Vision: Primary, national and regional fisherfolk organizations with knowledgeable members collaborating to sustain fishing industries that are mainly owned

and governed by fisherfolk who enjoy a good quality of life achieved through the ecosystem-based management of fisheries resources.

Mission: To improve the quality of life for fisherfolk and develop sustainable and profitable industry through networking, representation and capacity building.

With these as their guides, the fisherfolk participants prepared a strategy and work plan. They also used the subsequent staging of the first-ever CRFM Ministerial Council Meeting to make a case to the fisheries ministers for a greater role for fisherfolk in the policy and management decisions on marine resources. The April CNFO workshop coincided with a Special Meeting of the CRFM's Caribbean Fisheries Forum in Dominica. CNFO had been granted observer status by CRFM in December 2008 and representatives participated in discussions around the table with fisheries management representatives from across the region as they debated the intricacies of the common fisheries policy being developed by Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). CNFO has since then participated as the fisherfolk representatives in six CRFM meetings, and represented fisherfolk interests at the May 2009 CARICOM Consultations on the Implications of the WTO Doha Development Agenda Negotiations for Fisheries.

CNFO played an active role in convening the first-ever regional summit of fisherfolk during the annual Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI) conference in Venezuela, November 2009, and is a significant player in the GCFI Fisheries for Fishers initiative. CNFO Co-ordinator Mitchell Lay was also honoured as a leader in the sustainable use of fisheries resources by being named one of the Gladding Memorial Award winners for 2009 during the GCFI conference. The network has also been engaged in regional projects having implications for fisheries governance, such as the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem



A catch of fish landed in Dominica. A common fisheries policy is being developed by Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

project and the ACPFish II project. Pursuing its vision, CNFO is involved in sharing information on fishing gears and techniques that contribute towards sustainable fisheries. It has also taken an active role working with CERMES in advocating for the application of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), by promoting the incorporation of the ecosystems approach to fisheries, encouraging participation in fisheries management and sharing of lessons learned.

These activities have strengthened national fishers' organizations in CARICOM countries such as Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, while facilitating the formation and revitalisation of organizations in Dominica, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and Suriname.

Beneficial relationships

There is ongoing work with national steering committees in Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The important and mutually beneficial relationships that have developed with organizations such as CRFM, GCFI, CERMES, CANARI, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Commonwealth

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A fish vendor with flying fish at Oistins, Barbados. Fishers are keen to acquire knowledge to better manage the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries

Foundation have allowed CNFO to benefit from needed technical and financial support, and demonstrated that strategic partnerships are critical to the development of networks such as CNFO.

However, these gains made by CNFO over the life of the project do not obscure the facts that yet more capacity building is needed if this unique fisher-driven initiative is to achieve its true potential. The series of training and other workshops conducted for the fisherfolk leaders so far demonstrate that they are keen to acquire knowledge to better manage and operate their organizations as well as become good advocates for the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries. However, it is clear that their skills in Web-based areas need to be further developed in order to improve effective networking and multi-faceted communication among themselves, their partners and collaborators. Furthermore, the need has been recognized by the fisherfolk themselves that if they want to be in a better position to make informed contributions to fisheries policy development at the national and regional levels, they have to keep themselves informed, as well as share information about current fisheries policy and related matters.

With this in mind, CRFM pursued, and were recently granted, approval by CTA for Phase II of the project, to further develop the capacities of fisherfolk organizations so as to lead to more effective member and policy representation at national, regional and international levels. Top among the activities to be undertaken is the identification and ranking of the most feasible options for the structural-functional arrangements of the network (membership, objectives, roles, functions, authority, financing, status, internal regulations, etc.), and, subsequently, the initiation of legal procedures to make it a formal entity.

Stakeholders internal and external to the process have recognized that the sustainability of CNFO will depend on the improved skills and capacities of executives and officials of its member organizations. Institutional sustainability can only result from an enhanced network structure, management and operations; and proper functioning of sound administrative and management systems. It is anticipated that political and social sustainability will be due, in part, to CNFO enhancing its credibility as the legitimate voice of fisherfolk organizations and fishers of the region, and by expanding its partnerships with CERMES, CANARI and other organizations. The creation and maintenance of an organizational environment conducive to responding to stakeholder needs as well as seeking public support and financial sustainability for member organizations will partly depend upon CNFO's capacity to undertake sustained advocacy and mobilize external resources.

For more

www.caricom-fisheries.com/cnfo/AboutCNFO/tabid/159/Default.aspx

Video on the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations

procs.gcfi.org/pdf/gcfi_62-29.pdf

Development of the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations