

Fishing Ground Management: The Malaysian Experience

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian Department of Fisheries (DOF) has lesson on ineffectiveness of the western type of fisheries management. The DOF pays attention on the success of the community-based fisheries management in Japan. The concept of co-management is placed emphasis where the government and the various stakeholders share the responsibility of managing the fisheries resources in particular locality. The Fisheries Act 1985 empowers the DOF, Malaysia as the only authority that is responsible in managing the fisheries resources, fishermen, fishing vessels and all fishing activities in the Malaysian Fisheries waters. However, the concept of co-management is practiced that the DOF consults fishermen and various stakeholders such as the politicians through dialogues, meetings and workshops, before new policy or regulations or laws are introduced. Recently, the concept of co-management is adopted into the 3rd National Agriculture Policy, (NAP3) as one of the strategies for the sustainable management of fisheries resources in the inshore areas. Fishermen are found to be more receptive to decisions when they are a party in the decision-making. The DOF established the Fishermen Economic Groups (FEGs) in localities that met with right criteria.

Keywords: community- based fisheries management, co-management, Fisheries Act 1985, NAP3, FEGs

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I. Introduction

1. Malaysia has always emphasized on good resource management as a strategy to ensure fishery resource remains sustainable even though it is exploited daily by the nation's about 80,000 fishermen. It is almost important to maintain the supply and availability of fish because a large number of the population consume fish for their daily protein need.
2. Since the coming of the British in the 18th Century, the western type of fisheries resource management had totally replaced the traditional way where each village head and the community was responsible for fishing activities. In those days for example, the fishermen from Pulau Perhentian in Trengganu, would guard the fishing grounds around the islands. It became an unwritten rule that they owned the area and fishermen from the surrounding areas recognized it. They would chase away outside fishermen who encroached into these areas.
3. However they lost their rights when the government then became the sole authority on all aspects of the fishing industries. It meant licenses were required both for boats and fishing gears. The number of boats and fishermen were controlled according to scientific information such as the status of fish stocks, the fishing effort and the mortality rate etc. Over the years the local fishermen slowly began to accept all the new rules and regulations imposed on them. Those who refused to comply were reprimanded.
4. Lately the failure of the western type of fisheries management especially in Canada, Europe and USA with the collapse of the cod, herring, lobster and salmon stocks affecting the livelihood of thousands of fishermen had triggered the search for alternative and new ways in fisheries management. The success of the community based fisheries management in Japan and other traditional ways of fisheries management in the Asian countries attracted many scientists to study and record them.
5. Since then a number of social scientists preached the concept of co-management where the government and the various stakeholders share the responsibility of managing the fisheries resources in a particular locality. Fishermen are found to be more receptive to decisions when they are a party in the decision-making.

II. Co-management at national level

6. Some degree of co-management has been practiced in Malaysia although the laws do not provide for it. Even though the Fisheries Act 1985 empowers the Department of Fisheries Malaysia as the only authority that is responsible in managing the fisheries resources, fishermen, fishing vessels and all fishing activities in the Malaysian Fisheries waters, however it has always been the practice, that the Department of Fisheries to consult the fishermen and the various stakeholders such as the politicians through dialogues, meetings and workshops, before any new policy or regulations or laws are introduced. Since the formulation is done at the national level and the policies/rules/regulations/laws are commonly applied throughout the country, sometimes they fail to serve their usefulness in certain areas and need to be modified with local inputs.
7. Recently the concept of co-management has been given further boost by the government when it was included in the 3rd National Agriculture Policy, (NAP 3) as one of the strategies for the sustainable management of fisheries resource in the inshore areas. The Department of Fisheries have been sending officers for observation visits, attending workshops/seminars/conference and various training courses in fisheries co-management. It is a paramount importance for the staff to understand the concept and believe it can work before they can disseminate and try to implement it to the various stakeholders in their localities.
8. Initially, one of the approaches used by the Department was to establish the Fishermen Economic

Groups (FEGs) in localities that met with the right criteria. Some of the general criteria that were considered include whether the fishermen were interested to form the group; the minimum number of fishermen should be about 30 and living in the same village or around the vicinity of the landing point; willing to co-operate and contribute money, time and energy to shore up all the activities of the group; and operating common type of fishing gear in the same fishing ground.

9. The proposal comes from the District Extension Officer. The State Extension Officer evaluated it before it will be sent to the Director of Extension and Training Division in Kuala Lumpur for approval. Then, the necessary financial support among others, to buy ice making machines, special tools to repair engines, materials for constructing Fish Aggregating Devices from the development allocation will be channeled to the FEGs, through the State Fisheries Office.

10. The members run the group on their own with the advice of the District Extension Officer. They have to appoint the leader, the secretary, the treasurer and a number of committee members. They establish their own group constitutions and should hold their meeting regularly. Everything is transparent, there is no politicking and the power is shared amongst them. They also determine the arrangement to catch the fish around the FADs and how much is the charge for using the FADs.

11. The Department provides many training programmes to the FEGs. The leaders are sent to the leadership and business courses while the members attend various technical skill enhancement courses such as boat repair, engine maintenance, fiberglass construction, FADs constructions etc. They are paid some allowance when they attend the courses to cover the loss of income, for food and lodging. Visits to successful FEGs are also conducted for the newer FEGs to let them see and learn for themselves how other fishermen run their groups including overseas visits.

12. Some of the projects conducted by the FEGs included the placement of newly designed FADs at their chosen fishing grounds, hiring their services to sport fishermen, running engine repair workshops; manufacturing fiberglass products; direct selling of their catch to the consumers, selling of ice, petrol, fishing nets and other products required by their members. These economic activities help in bringing fresh fund to the groups. The members benefit from the FEGs by getting cheaper supplies and can sell their catch at a better price. They too might get a share of the profits at the end of the year.

III. FEGs in Kuala Teriang, Pulau Langkawi

13. The Island of Langkawi is located in the northern State of Kedah bordering Thailand. Kuala Teriang is a small fishing village and the majority of population consists of fishermen who operate traditional fishing gears like gill nets; trammel nets, seine nets, hooks and lines and pots. There is no fishing port but fishermen land their catch at a private jetty. They sell their catch to the fish dealers or at times on their own. The average income is between RM 500-800 a month and this is above the national poverty line.

14. The FEG was established in 2001. It started with the placement of the 25 units of new FADs at their traditional site not far from the village. The fishermen not only catch fish for themselves but they also bring sport fishermen there. The species of fish that are found at the site include groupers, snappers, Spanish mackerels, mackerels and etc.

15. At the moment they continue to look after the FADs by adding newer materials to continue attracting fish. There is very little encroachment by other fishermen and if such thing happens, they can report to Department of Fisheries especially if they know the culprits. The Department will then call these people and action will be taken against them.



IV. Conclusion

16. Co-management is still a new concept and practice amongst the Malaysian Fishermen. It will take time for it to be fully implemented. However from the experience learned, it is proven to be acceptable and can complement the present fisheries management regime.