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Start-up Organisation for Fishers along the Coast of Kilwa, Lindi and Mtwara Districts in Southern Tanzania

IDENTIFICATION OF THE CASE

The paper describes the emergence of an interest organisation for fishers along the coast of Kilwa, Lindi and Mtwara Districts in Southern Tanzania.

The purpose of the organisation is to protect the marine environment and produce community-based alternatives to natural resources management. The organisation was formed as a result of an intermittent dialogue between different groups of villagers, government officers, politicians and development agencies in the period 1993 to 98. This dialogue was mediated and extended to policy makers and the public mainly through means of participatory video.

The process was supported in the course of participatory planning for a bilateral rural development programme, RIPS, funded by Finland. The author works as consultant advisor and took part in the process through facilitating village workshops and establishing the community media centre which provided the video services.

There are three towns and 55 villages along the 400 km long stretch of coast. An estimated 50 - 80,000 people rely partially on marine production. The coastal villages are geographically isolated with poor infrastructure, and the area as a whole is economically and politically peripheral in Tanzania. There are virtually no motor vessels, very limited supply of ice, and most of the fish is locally marketed. Exports include small quantities of seaweed, prawns, sea cucumbers, sharkfins. The southern part of the area is dominated by a distinct ethnic group, the coastal Makonde, while the people along the coast of Kilwa and Northern Lindi originate from many different groups. A relatively large group of full-time fishermen in Mtwara District practise a seasonal migration cycle, during which they fish either in the Kilwa-Mafia archipelago, or in Northern Mozambique for up to four months per year.

THE INITIAL SITUATION

The particular condition that triggered community initiatives was an alarming increase in fishing with dynamite. Villagers resenting the dynamite reckoned that politically influential people in Dar Es Salaam were financing and protecting dynamite fishing networks that indirectly employed opportunistic local youth pursuing a get-rich-quick strategy at the expense of the environment and the local economy. Dynamite was cheap, often sold under market price, and the initial returns were high, while the risk for getting caught by the police

and convicted in court was negligible, and the fines insignificant. Even police officers, it was said, were occasionally trading dynamite.

Villagers described the dynamiting problem as a vicious circle leading to destruction of both the ecosystem and the social fabric. Once dynamiting started in an area, the dynamiters would initially catch much more than any other fishers, while conventional fishing rapidly declined. The dynamiting youth were said not to care much about their future in the village, since they hope to move on to other areas and businesses after accumulating capital.

Local fisheries were threatened by other practices as well, such as beach seining, destruction of mangroves, prawn trawlers fishing too shallow waters, and overexploitation of specific species and resources. Furthermore, there was growing competition for the fish in the richest fishing waters in Kilwa and Mozambique where the migrant fishermen's rights was contested.

The government, fishers complained, had failed to address these problems for decades. They argued that the authorities did not understand the marine environment, and that they therefore did not care about the fishing in the same way as they cared about other natural resources which people from the mainland are familiar with. Radicals proposed that the government should let the fisherfolk themselves regulate the fishing, as was the case in Mozambique where armed villagers were said to shoot dynamite fishers on the spot. Also in Zanzibar there was no dynamite, because the villages' territorial rights to in-reef areas were recognised by authorities that were capable of enforcing the law with support from the communities. In Mtwara, Lindi and Kilwa, however, there were allegations that the police had set dynamite crews free after villagers had risked their lives to seize their boats and bring them to the police.

The open-access tenure regime of the fishing areas was recognized as a problem by the fishers. At the same time, they defend a customary right to exploit fishing areas far away from one's own village, without which it would be impossible to make a living from fishing. What was required was an agreement between the people along the entire coast on how they themselves could regulate fishing and control exploitation, e.g. through periodically closing certain reef areas for restocking, without therefore excluding artisanal fishers from other parts of the coast. Furthermore, the government had to be accountable to communities who tried to defend their environment and livelihoods, and give priority to the needs of artisanal fishers over investors'.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

In February 1994, 40 fishermen from 12 villages gathered on the beach in Sudi for a week-long meeting together with four District Fisheries Officers and two consultant facilitators from RIPS. The objective of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for people from different parts of the coast to discuss the state of the environment and the future of fishing, and to put these questions on the public agenda.

The meeting was structured by PRA exercises that were presented to a video camcorder. Participants formed groups which went away to prepare representations of issues, which they then explained or enacted in front of the camcorder and the other groups. The presentations became performances which lead to intense debates between participants from different areas, and between fishers and fisheries officers. There was no chairman during these presentations, but the microphone passed from person to person like a talking stick, followed

by the gaze of the passive camcorder, and tacit rules emerged for how to ask for the word. The tapes recorded during the day were played back on the beach in the evening. This show was public, and every evening almost the entire population of the host village gathered to review several hours of video. Though never recorded, this evening crowd is present in the material in a subtle way, because the remarks of consent or protest that were offered from the darkness made the participants wary of what they said in the day. The feedback from the village public provided legitimacy for the workshop participants to speak as representatives, even if they were not elected. The meeting resulted in a policy resolution and the establishment of the "Sudi-committee" of twelve men and women who were elected to work for its implementation. Guidelines were drawn up for pilot projects that addressed different aspects, such as improving the police patrols through collaboration with communities, studies of the environmental effects of various fishing methods, and provision of alternatives to destructive fishing methods through locally revolving funds supplying starting capital to youth for ecologically sound fishing.

A mechanism was envisaged for how to finance these new institutions through establishing fish markets where the local government could collect revenue. As villagers were to build and look after these fish markets, they demanded that fifty percent of the revenue should be set aside in a marine environment fund that was managed in the interest of the local fishers. Estimates of the potential revenue from three such fish markets indicated that it was realistic to finance e.g. expenses for police patrols and starting capital to revolving loans for youth in all villages from this fund. Kilwa Kivinje, one of the most important landing sites, was chosen for a pilot fish market. RIPS contributed the cement, the District Council lent a truck, and within a few months after the Sudi workshop the new fish market was built.

Due to the difficulties of communicating between villages, the Sudi committee could not play an active role in setting up the pilot projects. Instead it was the district fisheries officers who negotiated with other stakeholders and supplied inputs. One fisheries officer in each district was appointed "project manager" to monitor the pilot projects.

Meanwhile, a video programme was produced using material from the Sudi meeting and complementary shootings organised by Sudi committee members. This video was screened in most of the villages along the coast, and in official meetings in the District and Regional headquarters. Members of the Sudi committee took it to Dar Es Salaam where they showed it to a number of ministers, judges, and the highest police commander. After the show they recorded comments on video for playing back to the villagers back home.

The participants from Sudi met again for a workshop in Msimbati village in December 96, this time to evaluate the pilot projects and review the development. This meeting became bigger with some 80 participants staying in the village for a full week. Three members of parliament participated, as well as a number of District Councillors and senior officers from relevant government authorities such as the police. The controversial video had created expectations for change, and the Sudi committee was increasingly seen as representing a popular fisherfolks movement for environmental justice.

Neither of the pilot projects had performed as expected. The revenue from the fish market in Kilwa had not been controlled by villagers and not used as intended, but just disappeared into the District accounts. The loan schemes had missed the purpose of providing alternatives to jobless youth. The police patrols had been ineffective and expensive after a few successful months in the beginning. Dynamite fishing had decreased shortly after Sudi, in anticipation of

a serious campaign from the authorities, but was now more widespread and serious than ever before. One observer had counted over a hundred explosions in a single day.

The fishers' representatives put the blame for the shortcomings on the lack of accountability in the District administrations, police and courts. The politicians - eager to show commitment to a popular cause in front of the camcorders - strongly supported the fishers. They said that the Sudi committee had lacked teeth because it had no membership base, and suggested that the fishers now register an NGO with branches in the villages that can take over the responsibility for the projects from the District administrations, and begin to negotiate community-based management of the fisheries. A constitution was drafted and an interim board was elected.

The politicians also suggested that this board should go and see the prime minister. The video was shown to the environment committee in the parliament, and the board members travelled to Dodoma where they were received by the Prime Minister and the group of MPs from the South, including those representing inland constituencies. The prime minister promised to take action, and asked if the dynamite fishers and dealers of the area were known. A few weeks later he received a list with four hundred names, village by village. In a speech in a Lindi village he pulled out this list, read out the names of the local dynamiters, and ensured that the government was finally going to put an end to the practice once and for all. In Dar Es Salaam, all fish arriving in ice boxes to the major outlet for dynamited fish was inspected and boats and gear were confiscated. In Mtwara, a rumour circulated that the navy was going to be sent down for a campaign.

The registration of NGOs in Tanzania depends in practice on approval from the local authorities. Following the outspoken allegations of corruption, and the visit to the prime minister, which was regarded as a bit of overkill by the local authorities, the registration process became politicized. It took more than a year until the organisation got formally registered in January 1998.

THE OUTCOME

It is too early to know which impact the Shirikisho will have. With the exception of two politically active board members, those who volunteer work for establishing the organisation are all village folks with no previous experience from such work. They have, however, been remarkably consistent and determined during the four years since they first met in Sudi. Most fishers now know about the organisation, even if they have only heard about it, and many seem to be waiting for an opportunity to get involved.

As soon as the rainy season ends in April they will recruit members who open village branches. There is little doubt that they will succeed to open branches in all major fishing villages and to raise funds from donors for the establishment phase, the question is rather what these branches will be able to do for their members in the early stages. In a first phase, they will negotiate for control over the all but collapsed pilot projects. Participatory evaluations of these projects, with the different stakeholders' analysis and suggestions, have been documented on videos that are ready to be distributed in order to establish a shared understanding of the opportunities and difficulties. The next task will be to develop principles for management and regulation of fisheries that village groups can agree to across the three districts, and to apply these principles in management planning at the village level.

At the District level, a small office will be established to liaison with the district administrations. The Shirikisho will offer support for fisheries-related tasks that the natural resources offices and the police carry out today in return for shared control over how the tax revenue raised from fishing is used. This will demand a degree of transparency and accountability from the district administrations that they are not used to. On the other hand, the local government will in effect be dependent on the Shirikisho for raising any revenue at all from the fishing, since they can neither establish control of the marketing nor monitor the fishing without cooperation from the fishers.

The Shirikisho wants to become a national organisation. They have already been invited by the MPs of neighbouring Rufiji District to organise fishers there. In March they will meet with representatives from the remaining coast Districts and Zanzibar, where similar problems are being addressed by more costly conventional environment projects. The long term agenda remains to change national policy and legislation towards community-based management of coastal fisheries, allowing village fisher groups to e.g establish quota, check certain practices, or close areas for restocking, without abolishing the customary rights of migrant fishers. At the same time, new threats to the fisher livelihoods are emerging, such as large-scale industrial prawn farming and displacement for hotels.

THE LESSONS LEARNED

In comparison to other attempts at participatory planning carried out in the area at the same time, the Sudi workshop led much further. The difference can be attributed to the way in which participatory video was used to extend a learning process in two dimensions -

- Vertically, when the agency of a few committed individuals from the community was amplified by the video medium to establish a communication loop between national policy makers, the Tanzanian public, and the resource users themselves. Policy making was pulled down to the oral domain, in a reversal of conventional practice where policy makers commission research to provide processed information from the field.
- Horizontally, as tens of thousands of people in the coastal villages saw the video that was produced after the Sudi workshop in 1993. The principles and agendas expressed there became a shared platform. An identity was constructed around fisherfolk's issues across ethnic divisions and geographical distance. Several hundred local government officers and politicians, many of whom have never been on a small boat, came to learn about the fishers' realities.

The video offered authorship to people who otherwise rely on intermediaries to explain their cause. In the process, participants also learned how to use video for letting distant stakeholders witness conflicts. This gave people opportunity to enforce accountability e.g. in evaluations that were carried out with participatory video.

A striking feature of this case is the little overlap between expert knowledge and the knowledge of the fishers. The workshops revealed unexpected diversity and richness in the local knowledge about the sea and the fishing. In contrast, the fisheries experts who usually are trusted with management planning know little about artisanal fishing. None of the local fisheries officers come from a fishing culture. At no occasion in their training were they required to go fishing with artisanal fishermen. Marine biologists, on the other hand, know

lots about the biological environment that the fishers don't know, but have not studied the fishing.

Unlike expert knowledge expressed in designs and plans, local knowledge evolves in an adaptive, co-evolutionary interplay with the environment. While such knowledge production is critical for sustainable management practices, it is not easily accessible for outsider researchers or planners since it lives entirely in the oral domain, where it is unevenly distributed and embedded in practices, idioms, metaphores and local rules. Again, the introduction of an oral and visual medium facilitated mutual learning and crossing-over between local and expert knowledge. Sustainable community-based management requires that other than community-based stakeholders take part in the production of new local knowledge