

DEVELOPING COASTAL LIVELIHOODS FOR COASTAL BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION – LESSONS FROM THE SUSTAINABLE COASTAL COMMUNITIES AND ECOSYSTEMS PROJECT

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Livelihood initiatives are an important element of almost all Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) Programs implemented in developing countries. A growing body of empirical evidence demonstrate that successful livelihood strategies increase the probability of success within ICM programs (Pollnac, Crawford et al. 2001). More recent research has also demonstrated the link between tangible benefits and the sustainability of ICM programs (Christie, Lowry et al. 2005; Pomeroy, Oracion et al. 2005). Livelihood activities that generate increased income provide tangible benefits. The premise is that if people obtain such tangible benefits they will be more willing to be involved in and support ICM objectives. Indeed, ICM is often defined as improving quality of life of coastal residents while sustaining or improving the quality of the coastal environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that ICM programs consistently promote sustainable livelihood approaches.

This panel will reflect on the lessons learned from developing livelihood activities under the Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems project in Tanzania, Nicaragua, and Thailand. Three field-based presentations will show that, when planned right, livelihoods can play an important role in biodiversity conservation and post-disaster development, by promoting conservation-oriented enterprises as well as enterprises that reduce reliance on unsustainable livelihoods. To “plan right”, includes assessing the local livelihood endowments —local materials and resources, local skills and experience, and markets and distribution chains. What should not be done, but in many cases happens, is to force micro-enterprise initiatives inconsistent with local realities.

Second, the livelihood must match people’s **aspirations** – what people hope and want for themselves. Sometimes, rural communities have different business sensibility and logic than the Western perspective of production, sales, savings and profits. In Thailand some livelihood activities failed because rural, coastal fishing communities are dominated by fishers that are basically gamblers (not business entrepreneurs) by nature. Another lesson from post-disaster livelihood development in Thailand is that if the goal of livelihood development is successful income generation, then it is important to identify and work with those in the community who already have a strong ‘business mind’.

People often express interest in starting something new, especially if it costs only a small amount of their time and they stand to receive training and equipment. Later, many realize that the new activity is too risky or requires too much work to justify the benefit streams. Promoting paprika farming in Tanzania, we found it extremely difficult to sustain interest among group members. Why did they let the fields dry out? Why didn’t they transplant the seedlings on time? Part of the answer is our third conclusion that **groups don’t work**. We have seen over and over again that the most successful enterprises are those that are run by individuals or households. Many of our group-led

livelihood activities worked only with large extension support (basically doing the job for them). When left on their own, many groups fell apart. However, individual entrepreneurs have often successfully carried on with the livelihoods on their own, acting as early adopters for others to be inspired by.