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Policy Perspectives

Perspectives on resource management and environmental policy from the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados

A Regional Governance Framework for marine ecosystems of the Wider Caribbean Region

This *Policy Perspective* outlines the Regional Ocean Governance Framework developed for the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) in the CLME Project. For this work *"Governance is the whole of public as well as private interactions taken to solve societal problems and create societal opportunities. It includes the formulation and application of principles guiding those interactions and care for institutions that enable them."*[1]

Ocean governance is essential in the WCR

The WCR (fig 1) is highly dependent on marine ecosystems for goods and services that support fisheries and tourism. Without proper governance, these are at risk. These ideas are well developed in related documents and are considered to be accepted by all stakeholders. Marine ecosystems support diverse, mainly small-scale, fisheries in the region. Coral reef ecosystems are the basis for much of the region's tourism industry, providing beach sand, protecting beaches and offering recreation opportunities such as snorkeling and SCUBA diving. The sea is also an integral part of the recreation, culture and spirituality of Caribbean peoples.

Fig. 1 The Wider Caribbean Region

Marine ecosystems in the WCR are impacted by many marine and land-based activities. Over-fishing, pollution and coastal habitat destruction are prominent impacts. These also have transboundary aspects that require collaboration among countries. Climate change impacts will also be prominent in ocean and coastal areas. In the WCR, healthy coastal and marine systems will be important for climate change adaptation.

Marine ecosystems and their resources in the WCR are usually transboundary; so countries should collaborate to ensure their sustainability. The complexity of ocean management and the need for integration also demand regional collaboration as the WCR moves towards ecosystem based management[2, 3].

The CLME Project Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis found poor governance to be the main root cause of unsustainable use of marine ecosystems in the WCR[3, 4]

Challenges to ocean governance in the WCR

Regional ocean governance is difficult in the WCR due to its geopolitical complexity in terms of diversity of size, development, culture and capacity[5]. The many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the WCR present special challenges in terms of vulnerability and capacity.

Regional ocean governance arrangements in the WCR have been emerging over the past decades and are themselves diverse[6]. There are over 25 regional and subregional organisations with interest in governance of the ocean and its resources in the region. They include UN organisations and regional intergovernmental organisations. They may be oriented towards fisheries, pollution, biodiversity, tourism, shipping, etc. They cover most key areas of ocean governance but are geographically fragmented and may not interact much with each other leaving gaps, areas of low cooperation and duplication of effort.

Conventional approaches to regional ocean governance have usually been oriented towards establishing a single organisation, created by a binding treaty, with responsibility and authority to pursue transboundary ocean governance. This is not considered to be feasible in such a complex region in which a great deal has already been invested in many organisations.

Is the emerging ocean governance system appropriate?

Efforts to improve ocean governance in the WCR do not start with a 'clean slate', they must take account of what is already in place, and develop appropriate 'governance architecture' or institutional structure for the conditions in the WCR by building on strengths and addressing weaknesses in the current system.

Fortunately, there are new ideas about regional governance that take a holistic view of possibilities for regional governance systems[7, 8]. This thinking points to the potential for a network approach involving all organisations. With a network approach, organisations (most already existing) can focus on their geographical or subject area of responsibility. It also facilitates achieving subsidiarity (management responsibility at the scale level closest to the issue to be managed).

The network approach provides flexibility and resilience; but it must have structure. There are guidelines for what will make a functional and effective network. Until now the WCR network has been emerging on its own, unguided. It will be more effective if planned and coordinated. This requires understanding the emerging system and what is needed to improve it. It calls for assessment of gaps, overlaps and interactions among the organisations currently involved in regional ocean governance; and also their interactions with countries.

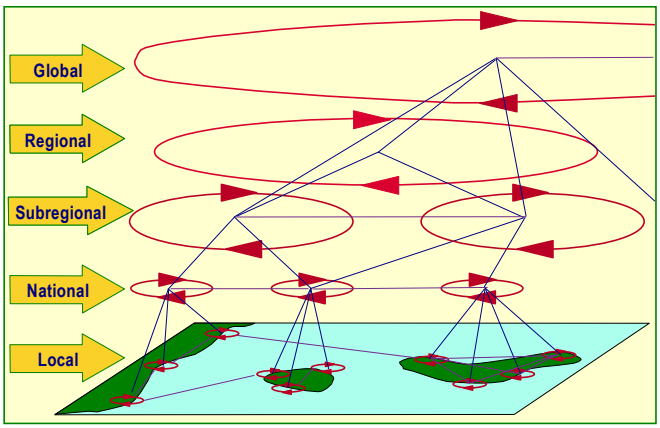

Fig. 2 Conceptual representation of the LME Governance Framework, comprising linked policy cycles at multiple scale levels

The CLME Project undertook to promote a structured coordinated approach by developing a Regional Ocean Governance Framework with initial focus on transboundary living marine resources. The development of the RGF is based on the conceptual development of the Large Marine Ecosystem Governance Framework in the first phase of the CLME Project[9, 10]. The framework, represented conceptually in fig 2, outlines the network approach and its advantages.

The task in the current phase of the CLME Project has been to apply this concept to the WCR situation. This brief describes the characteristics of the framework (Box 1) and its initial structure.

Box 1 - Characteristics of the Regional Governance Framework[11]

The Regional Governance Framework (RGF) is made up of linked 'governance arrangements'.

- There must be a clear arrangement for each actual or potential issue.
- To be effective each arrangement must have:
  - A complete policy process that can (1) take up data and information, (2) generate advice, (3) make decisions, (4) implement and (5) review and adapt
  - Capacity for (1) Policy advice and decision-making , (2) Management planning and decision-making, (3) Day-to-day action for implementation.
- Arrangements must be linked where necessary for the integration needed for efficiency and to achieve EBM.
- Similar issues may be covered by similar arrangements which can be overseen by a common organization for efficiency.
- The entire framework, may involve multiple organizations at several geographical and institutional scale levels.
- Several arrangements may share a common process at the level of policy development and decision making.

The development of the RGF is also based on a series of assessments of pilots, case studies and the whole system. The findings are summarized in Box 2.

The Regional Governance Framework (RGF)

The proposed RGF is the overall structure that is thought to be needed for effective governance of LMR in the WCR (fig 3). It provides a framework within which integrated regional ocean policy can be formulated and ecosystem based management can be pursued. This has the potential to be an exciting, innovative and effective new phase for the Wider Caribbean Region.

A considerable part of the proposed framework already exists. Many regional and subregional organisations are already fulfilling all or part of the roles intended for various parts of the framework.

In WCR fora where ocean governance is discussed, the absence of a region-wide body to perform this coordination function has often been noted by the countries and organisational partners.

"Increasingly, the debate turns toward what we describe as the overarching architecture of global environmental governance, that is, the entire interlocking web of widely shared principles, institutions, and practices that shape decisions by stakeholders at all levels."[12]

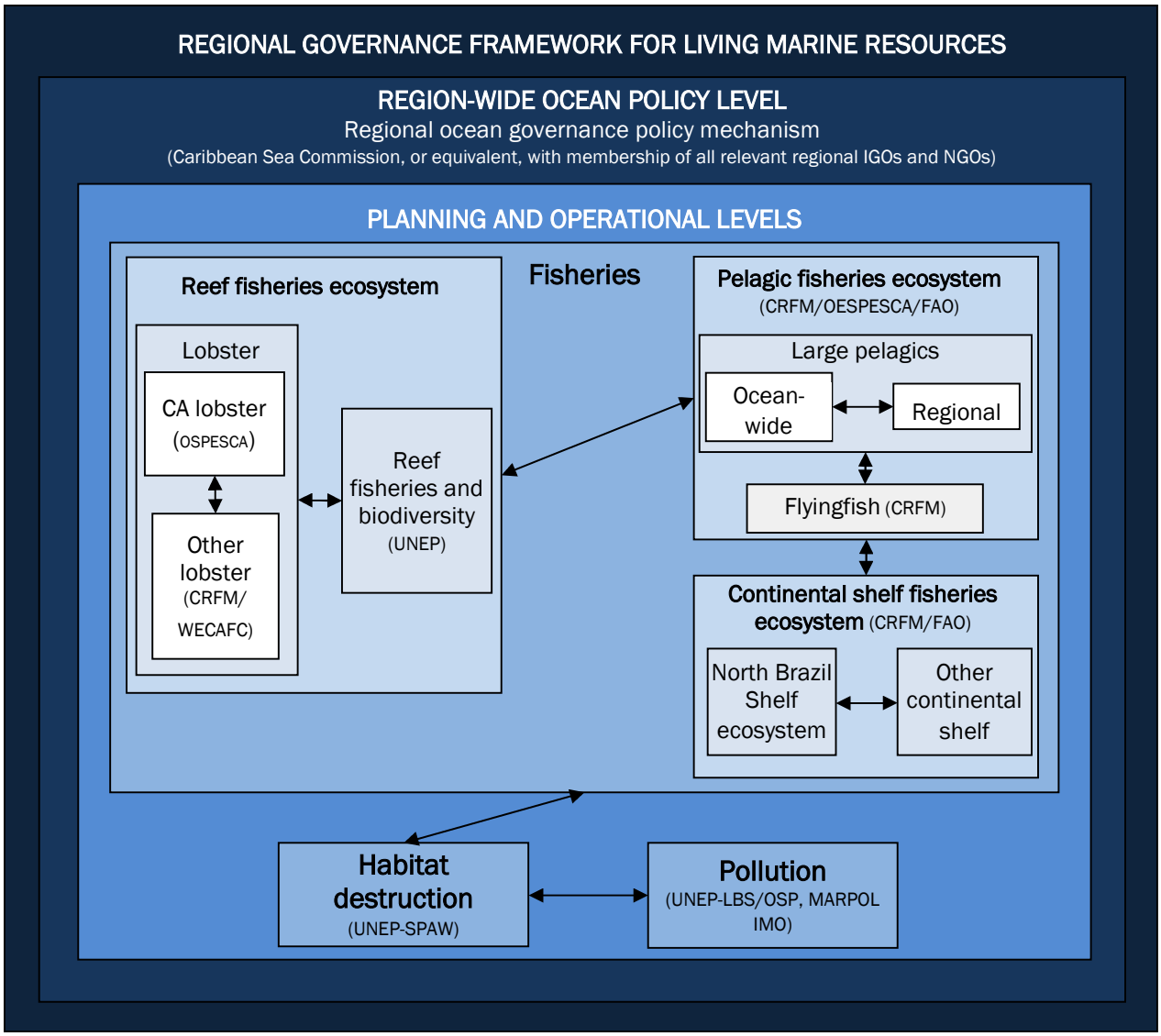

Fig. 3 A diagrammatic representation of the nested, multi-scale level nature of the proposed Regional Governance Framework for living marine resources in the WCR[13].

Interpretive notes:

- Likely lead organizations for arrangements are shown in parentheses;
- Nesting implies that there are vertical linkages with the overarching entity;
- Nesting implies integration and coordination but not necessarily control;
- Lower level entities are expected to engage in the work of higher level entities within which they are nested;
- The diagram is not comprehensive. Resources and sub-issues not included here must be added as the framework is developed;
- The final system may include too many arrangements to be diagrammed in two dimensions.

Key features of the RGF with regard to overarching arrangements are:

- Operationalisation of a regional ocean governance policy coordination mechanism that would coordinate the entire framework;
- Promotion of a regional sub-arrangement for addressing unsustainable use of fisheries resources led by WECAFC-FAO, in collaboration with sub-regional organisations such as CRFM and OSPESCA;
- Strengthening of a regional sub-arrangement for addressing marine pollution lead by the UNEP CEP, in collaboration with the IMO and other relevant organisations;
- Strengthening of a regional sub-arrangement for addressing coastal and marine habitat degradation led by the UNEP CEP;

The latter three are the main operational areas for living marine resources requiring regional coordination and in turn being coordinated by the overall mechanism. Within each of these areas are sub-issues that are defined both geographically and by topic and require separate arrangements. The fisheries area is best developed in fig 3. Details are available in the respective reports[13] .

The role of the regional ocean governance policy coordination mechanism is seen as:

- Developing a regional science policy interface for oceans governance with focus on living marine resources[14];
- Establishing a data and information capacity as described by the Expert Consultation[15] and initiated by the CLME Project;
- Promoting ocean governance in general and EAF/EBM in particular within the subregional IGOs - CARICOM (COTED and COFCOR), SICA and OECS;
- Developing a regional ocean governance policy for the WCR;
- Promoting the use of valuation information in regional decision-making and policy setting.

The role of the coordinating mechanism in each of the three operational areas is seen as:

- Developing regional approaches and plans of action;
- Institutionalizating of a policy process for developing these plans and tracking their implementation.

Further information on development of lower level processes can be found in the report on the RGF and supporting governance assessments.

What will it take to build the RGF?

The first step is for the countries and organizations of the WCR to accept and adopt the network approach to regional ocean governance. Acceptance and adoption should be a turning point in the regional conversation about ocean governance, from one that is sectoral and organisation focused to one that is holistic and focused on addressing issues with an ecosystem approach[13].

Once the framework is adopted, building and strengthening activities can be pursued. These will involve engaging these organisations to plan how they will proceed with:

- Maintaining current roles
- Expanding their mandate and activities to take up appropriate functions within the framework
- Developing the interactions and linkages that will be essential if the framework is to function as an effective regional ocean governance framework.

Box 2 - Governance assessment in the CLME[13]

- The CLME+ project assessed governance architecture in pilot systems using four steps: (1) Identify the system to be governed, (2) Identify the issues to be governed, (3) identify and evaluate the arrangements for each issue, (4) assess the extent of integration and linkage of arrangements.
- The degree of completeness for the six arrangements assessed in the WCR system ranges from 15% - 50% with an overall average of 43%. This indicates the need to focus on building and enhancing governance architecture.
- The degree of integration of arrangements within the six systems assessed ranged from zero in the case of the North Brazil Shelf LME to 100% in the case of large pelagic fisheries. This indicates that there is considerable scope for improvement in the integration of arrangements that is necessary for an effective ecosystem approach.
- The preliminary assessments of governance performance and principles in the CLME Project also suggest that there is considerable scope for interventions to improve the extent to which these principles are present in living marine resource governance processes in the WCR[6].
- The overall conclusion from the assessments of governance architecture is that there are many weaknesses in the governance arrangements that can be diagnosed using these assessment methods and addressed by specific interventions.

Final observations

As noted by Earth Systems Governance scholars, *"Among the many insights [...], one thread runs through all studies: there is hardly any coherent, systematic, structured system of global environmental governance. Instead, global environmental governance presents itself as a complex web of multiple and interacting actors, networks and institutions."*[11] This is equally true of regional governance and the development of the RGF is intended to be a start in bring some order to this complex web in the WCR.

As also noted, this situation is only likely to intensify as current stakeholders become better able to engage and new stakeholders enter the web. *"Given these developments, global environmental governance in itself has become more fragmented. Interactions horizontally (among international and trans-national institutions) and vertically (among international and national institutions) have gained in importance and at the same time in complexity."*[11] An RGF is needed that that can cope with, and take advantage of the opportunities offered by these changes.

The governance framework proposed here has the potential to address many of these issues and provide the flexibility needed for adaptation. It builds upon years of dedicated work by the many organisations in the region and also upon previous efforts at defining EBM in the WCR. It directly addresses the governance (lower left) quadrant of the strategic map developed by stakeholders in 2008 in support of the CLME Project as well as the direction provided by the many regional organisations that gathered to consider regional ocean governance in 2010[15].

The development, assessment and monitoring of the RGF will be an ongoing task.

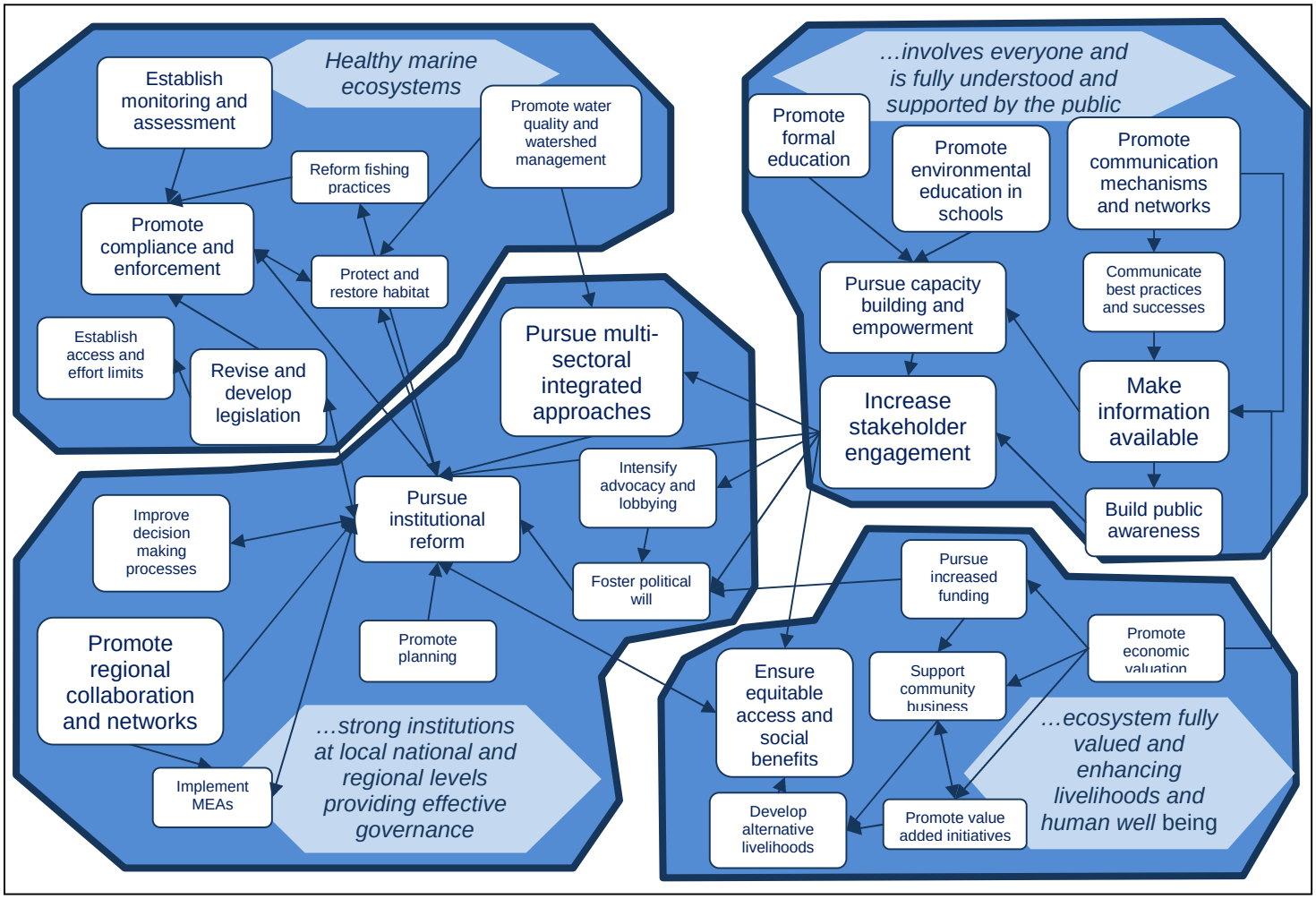

Fig. 4 The network of strategic directions that emerged as being needed to get from where we are towards the vision for marine EBM in the Wider Caribbean illustrates the diversity of activities required for sustainable use of marine resources. The bigger the font the more prominent the strategy in the discussions[2]

References and resources

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[9]Fanning, L., R. Mahon and P. McConney. 2009. Focusing on living marine resource governance: the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem and Adjacent Areas Project. Coastal Management 37: 219 – 234. (describes the development of the CLME Project and the governance framework that was developed for the WCR)

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[14]McConney, P., L. Fanning, R. Mahon and B. Simmons. 2012. Survey of the regional science-policy interface for ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean Region. Report prepared for the CLME Project by the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. CERMES Technical Report No. 51. 46pp. (http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/)

[15]ACS/CERMES-UWI. 2010. Report of the Expert Consultation on the Operationalisation of the Caribbean Sea Commission: building a science-policy interface for ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean. CERMES Technical Report No. 33 , 90 pp (http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/)

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACS - Association of Caribbean States

CARICOM - Caribbean Community and Common Market

CEP - Caribbean Environment Programme

CRFM – Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism

CSC - Caribbean Sea Commission

EBM - Ecosystem-based Management

FAO - Food and Agricultural Organization

IMO – International Maritime Organization

MARPOL – Marine Pollution

OECS - Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States

OSPESCA - Organización del Sector Pesquero y Acuícola del Istmo Centroamericano

TDA - Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis

UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme

WCR - Wider Caribbean Region

WECAFC - Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) has initiated this occasional outreach publication, ***Policy Perspectives***, to share some of the lessons learnt from ongoing research.

This ***Perspective*** is based on work done for the CLME Project and published in the report listed as reference 13 above).

The information in these policy briefs may be used by policy-makers and their advisers to strengthen the linkages between research outputs and policy-making in the Caribbean.

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