

POLICY BRIEF

CO-MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES: THE CASE OF BEACH MANAGEMENT UNITS (BMUS) IN EASTERN AFRICA

Summary

Beach Management Units (BMUs) are legally empowered communities that serve as the backbone of fisheries co-management of Eastern Africa, both on Lake Victoria and on the coast, led by the Fisheries Departments in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

- Established in mid-1990s, they bring together resource user groups at a given beach within communities and state actors to share responsibilities in resource management and conservation as an imperative to improve the livelihoods of people dependent on these resources.
- BMUs have delivered a considerable return in areas of raising awareness, training, lesson-learning (cross-border) and networking; jurisdiction, conflict resolution and democratic practices.
- The adequacy of resources, efficiency, enforcement, costs vs benefits, weak capacity and insecurity of land are most demanding; for many BMUs.
- There is opportunity to build capacity in various fields.

No management system is perfect and it takes a long time to bring about change. It is necessary to address the major challenges and confer fisher user rights through a co-management policy to BMUs. This would allow them to make valuable contribution to the sustainable management of the fisheries resources and improve the livelihoods of dependent populations. The BMUs are consistent with the The provisions of the Policy Framework and Reform strategy for fisheries and aquaculture in Africa which identified the improvement of fisheries governance through participatory management for inclusive decision-making process.

Background

Beach Management Units (BMUs) are the backbone of fisheries co-management in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, led by the respective Fisheries Departments in the Member States. The co-management approach was initiated around 1997 during the first phase of the Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project (LVEMP); at a time when donor driven projects were promoting the involvement of



local communities in fisheries management particularly in Africa. Local management bodies, known as local enforcement units, were initiated in the Mwanza Gulf, the United Republic of Tanzania.

The name was later changed to Beach Management Units (BMUs) and in the early 2000s, the Lake Victoria Fisheries Research Project introduced the BMU approach to fisheries management lake-wide and operational guidelines developed. These early initiatives were further consolidated under the Implementation of a Fisheries Management Plan (IFMP) Project from 2005 to 2008 through mentoring, training and networking processes.

Legal Framework: Governments in the three States have put in place the necessary legal framework for BMUs to operate both in the Lake and along the coast in the case of Kenya and Tanzania from 2006. The regulatory texts are the BMU Regulations 402 of the Fisheries Laws 2007 for Kenya; Statutory Instruments 2003 No. 35: The Fish (Beach Management) Rules 2003 for Uganda; and the Fisheries Act No. 22 of 2003 and the Principal Fisheries Regulation of 2009 of Tanzania. To date, over 1000 BMUs have been formed both inland and along the coast.

Definition of BMUs: Beach Management Units (BMUs), could be defined as, legally empowered communities that serve as the foundation of fisheries co-management system, in Eastern Africa. They bring together resource user groups (including boat owners, traders, processors, and boat builders and repairers as well as the traditionally marginalized communities within fishing communities which are namely women and boat crew) at a given beach within fishing communities and state actors to share responsibilities in resource management and conservation as an imperative to improve the livelihoods of people dependent on these resources.

Objectives of BMUs

The objectives of the BMUs are to:

1. strengthen the management of fish-landing stations, fisheries resources and the aquatic environment;

2. support the sustainable development of the fisheries sector;
3. help alleviate poverty and improve the health, welfare and livelihoods of the members through improved planning and resource management, good governance, democratic participation and self-reliance;
4. recognize the various roles played by different sections of the community, including women, in the fisheries sector;
5. ensure the achievement of high quality standards with regard to fish and fish products;
6. build capacity of the members for the effective management of fisheries in collaboration with other stakeholders
7. prevent or reduce conflicts in the fisheries sector

Mandates

A BMU's area of jurisdiction is the fish landing station, assigned for the exclusive purpose of landing and selling of fish and fishery products. The BMUs are technically responsible for ensuring that no fishing illegalities take place in their areas of jurisdiction and that breeding areas are protected.

More specifically their mandates are to:

- ensure the beach environment is kept clean;
- assist in the collection of data and document fisheries information;
- inspect and record visiting boats and ensure that newcomers report to relevant local authorities;
- mobilize and ensure financial sustainability
- propose fisheries by-laws for endorsement by district authorities, and enforce them;
- undertake monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) in collaboration with the relevant authorities.

Administrative structure:

The BMU administrative structure consists of an assembly (members), an executive committee and three sub-committees (fisheries management, financial management and environmental protection). The assembly includes all persons engaged in fisheries activities at beach level. The members include boat

owners, crew members, managers/supervisors, artisanal fish processors and traders, fishing gear and equipment dealers/repairers, boat makers and agents of industrial fish processors operating at the beach.

The Executive Committee consists of 9-15 elected officials who are responsible for the day to day running of the BMUs. The Executive Committee has a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, storekeeper and any other post as agreed by the BMU assembly. The Executive Committee oversees day to day operations of the BMU and is also responsible for ensuring that the roles and objectives of the BMU are met.

Overall Achievements and Performance

Lake-wide BMUs

Beach Management Units (BMUs) has delivered a considerable return in areas of raising awareness, training, lesson-learning (cross-border) and networking, as well as in repositioning and restructuring the role and scope of the various management institutions within the existing national and regional structures. However, in terms of comanagement, many challenges still exist as the priorities of the communities are to solve their day-to-day problems including poverty, livelihoods and health-related issues and not only to address top-down-decided control measures in the fishery that they do not necessarily believe in or agree with.

BMUs have formulated regulatory measures to manage the fishery but have been ineffective in implementing many of the measures. BMUs did not conduct regular meetings, collect data, initiate projects and patrol fishing grounds. They also had no poverty eradication schemes and lacked skills and expertise to tackle the challenges posed by poverty. There is persistent resistance among fishers to curb illegal activities resulting in the suspension/closure of some BMUs.

While the national or regional management institutions see the BMUs primarily as their new implementation tools for centrally decided harmonized regulations adopted away from the communities; the fishers see them as fora for solving local problems and conflicts,

and particularly as instruments for reducing theft and piracy (which is accelerating around the lake), for securing access to shared fishing grounds, for ensuring fair and transparent price and enumeration systems, for facilitating access to markets and government financing and lending schemes, and, not least, for curbing corruption.

Marine coastal area BMUs

Using Structured interviews (Likert six-point scale) and Focus Group Discussions accompanied by Standard evaluation criteria approaches of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and other factors such as governance, socioeconomic benefits, human resource development and sustainability, the European Union funded “Programme for the implementation of a Regional Fisheries Strategy for the Eastern and Southern Africa- Indian Ocean Region” also known as Smart Fish Project, has evaluated the performance of the coastal BMUs in Kenya and Tanzania.

The factors considered included organization performance, performance assessment, critical factors for success, authority, leadership, political vision and adequacy of resources, among others. BMU performance findings were grouped into four major categories namely; critical success conditions, organization profile/structure, organization performance, and individual BMU led achievements.

Critical factors of Success: Considering critical factors for BMU success, the performance was generally below average, though some factors were well addressed and others neglected.

Organizational Structure: BMU profile depended on a laid down structure outlined in the BMU regulations. Adherence to this structure was challenging, given the hindrances such as unclear registration procedures and unlimited membership. Nevertheless, despite adherence to the structures, not all were fully functional, implying that presence of a structural framework, though a good starting point, may not guarantee good results.

Factors affecting BMU performance were numerous, critical among them leadership, representativity, conflict resolution, inclusion, costs vs benefits, MCS, mutual trust and Jurisdiction. BMUs score for mutual trust and jurisdiction was satisfactory, but only moderately satisfactory for the other factors. In the midst of these factors were inadequate resources and infrastructure that further hindered the BMUs to achieve their objectives. Achievement of the objectives was well below expectations, except for few such as conflict resolution, collaborations and local networks. Stakeholder livelihood had not improved and poverty was still thriving. Consequently, as long as the BMUs remained relevant to the co-management concept of fisheries governance, the impending factors need to be addressed in order to enable them function fully.

BMUs as Fisheries Management tool: Since BMUs are a management tool, their achievements in fisheries management and improving resource-based issues directly affecting the stakeholders were minimal. For instance, the state of the stock had not improved, there was no increase in sizes and catches of fish associated with improvement in stocks and use of illegal and destructive gears was not eliminated. While such issues

cannot be blamed on the BMUs alone, there was a great potential for them to improve the state of the fisheries within their jurisdiction through various means. One of them not evidently used is creation of conservation areas. This role was left to other players while BMUs struggled to get on foot. It is however important to mention that there were relatively good examples of functional BMUs that utilized their little resources and managed to overcome most of the obstacles faced by majority of BMUS.

Major Weaknesses and Strengths: A SWOT analysis conducted by Smart Fish Project, exposed Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats faced by BMUs. A major strength was presence of legal frameworks directly and indirectly supporting establishment and implementation of BMUs. Major weaknesses included poor resource base (financial, physical, technical, information, etc.), mismanagement, poor leadership and poor commitment of members. A major threat was insecurity of land tenure. However, there lies numerous opportunities that if addressed would strengthen the BMUs further. Key among them includes provision of necessary resources, streamlining of both leadership and management and land security

SWOT Analysis of Coastal BMUs

Strengths	Weaknesses
enabling legal framework (Act, Regulations, by-laws) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to bring stakeholders together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor financial base • mismanagement of meagre resources • lack/inadequate infrastructure • poor leadership - low technical capacity • low empowerment of the members • poor commitment and motivation of members • poor cohesion - lack/poor sense of ownership • perceived lack of tangible benefits by stakeholders • poor selling and marketing structures
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financing of BMU activities and infrastructure • capacity building • trust building • cohesion building • establishment of BMU managed conservation areas • conferment of user rights • improvement of stakeholder income and livelihood • enhancing selling and marketing of fish and fishery products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land tenure insecurity • legitimacy-not always popular • political interference • unclear definition of user rights • lack of partnership arrangements with other stakeholders • high illiteracy levels within the community - deteriorating trust between BMU and Fisheries Department

Fisheries governance issues: The government implementer, the Fisheries Department provided sufficient authority, political vision, leadership and ensured stakeholder participation. Financial and institutional capacity shortfalls largely affected establishment and implementation process of BMUs. Nonetheless, the Fisheries Department played regulatory and facilitator roles in ensuring functioning of BMUs and can be viewed as the main driver of the fisheries co-management process.

Lessons Learned

The implementation of BMUs in both the lake and on the coast over the past two decades has provided a number of lessons which if addressed would strengthen BMUs as an effective tool in fisheries management:

- The presence of a structural framework, though a good starting point, may not guarantee good results.
- As long as the BMUs remained relevant to the co-management concept of fisheries governance, factors such as stakeholder participation, empowerment, institutional capacity building, implementation, fisheries management, and financial management need to be addressed in order to enable them function fully.
- BMUs should diversify their activities into such areas as the creation of conservation areas to improve the state of the fisheries within their jurisdiction.
- A major threat is the insecurity of land tenure. Public utility land between the beach and privately-owned beach plots or properties (beach buffer zone above the high-water mark) has either been illegally possessed or encroached on by private developers, denying public and more importantly BMU members access to the sea and beach to undertake their livelihood activities.
- Financial and institutional capacity shortfalls largely affected establishment and implementation process of BMUs.
- There is a need to lay emphasis on institutional capacity building and identify more sustainable financial mechanisms for BMUs.
- Strengthen existing interdepartmental and interagency partnerships in order to improve

crosscutting and emerging issues.

- Improvement of fisher skills to professionalize fishing and change attitude from 'last resort job' to a profitable business.
- Creation of a BMU special unit within the Fisheries Departments to improve service delivery.

What should Policy Makers do?

- Address the major challenges BMUs are facing.
- Confer fisher user rights through a co-management policy to BMUs.

Further Reading

1. **Kanyange, N., Rimani, P., Onyango, P., Sweenarain, S., and Yvergniaux, Y. 2014.** Performance assessment of Beach Management Units along the coastlines of Kenya and Tanzania. Programme for the implementation of a Regional Fisheries Strategy for the Eastern and Southern Africa- Indian Ocean Region Smart Fish
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3. **Luomba, J. O. 2015.** Fishers attitude towards performance of Beach Management Units (BMUs) in regulating fishery and reducing poverty: case study of two BMUs Lake Victoria, Tanzania, International Journal of Marine science, Vol. 5, No. 6, 1-7

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