CONTRIBUTION 8.1

Fisherfolk Organisations in Fisheries Governance and Policy

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Abstract

Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) has drawn attention to the important role resilient fisherfolk organisations need to play in fisheries governance and policy internationally, nationally, and locally. However, fisherfolk organisations are unlikely to be successful or sustainable unless the interactive relationships between them, ecological marine systems and political governing systems are well managed. Stewardship is a concept that has the potential to bridge these domains and provide practical guidance for all actors. Over the past two decades there has been increasing, even if only implicit, attention paid to stewardship in the CRFM region. Several policies, projects and other initiatives have tackled this matter. In this paper we examine some of these initiatives, their outputs, and outcomes. We suggest ways forward to build upon the foundation of progress and advance both the SSF Guidelines as well as the resilience of fisherfolk organisations in the CRFM region.

KEYWORDS: fisherfolk, organisations, governance, policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many of the challenging issues facing small-scale fisheries (SSF) within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have concerned governance and policy (Chakalall et al. 1998). Some issues such as formal regimes for transboundary fisheries management and access agreements have remained unresolved for decades (FAO 2020). Meanwhile, new issues, actors, networks, organisations, and institutions have emerged in the period to increase the complexity of some challenges as well as several possible solutions (Fanning et al. 2021; Mahon et al. 2014). Key among the changes, from collective action and stewardship perspectives (Jentoft et al. 2018), has been the evolution of national, sub-regional and regional fisherfolk organisations and their expanding roles in fisheries governance and policy in this millennium (Cumberbatch et al. 2023).

The fisherfolk organisations did not make the journey alone, however, and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) that is now celebrating its 20th anniversary played several pivotal roles along with a few of its regional partner organisations. These partners include the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) of the University of the West Indies, and the Subregional office of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. The fisherfolk organization that has developed with and through the partnership to become an important autonomous entity in regional fisheries governance and policy is the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO), which is the focus of this brief paper.

The CNFO rose to regional prominence particularly during the development of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and has strengthened its status and influence during SSF Guidelines implementation (McConney et al. 2017) and the creation of a protocol regional for that purpose (Compton et al. (2019). This Protocol on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries for Caribbean Community Fisherfolk and Societies (CRFM 2018) operationalises aspects of the CRFM (2014) Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP). While the evolution of the key actors, especially the CRFM (Haughton et al. 2004) and CNFO (McConney and Phillips 2011), has previously been separately well documented, less attention has been paid to setting out the several projects and events that aided in bringing them together and changing the regional fisheries narrative towards the more collective notion of stewardship. This article contributes to filling this gap. It is also a reminder of the significant Caribbean fisheries scholarship of global relevance produced from applied research within the CRFM region, and its focus on the engagement of fisherfolk organizations in stewardship.

Following the methods, the next section reviews a convenience sample of Caribbean fisheries literature and fisheries project profiles in which CERMES was engaged in partnership with the CRFM Secretariat, CANARI and CNFO in governance and policy. The discussion of the results focuses the main events and projects over the past 20 years, coinciding with the period that the CRFM has been in operation. Conclusions are then offered in the context of current and future directions for fisheries governance and policy that should engage both the fisheries organisations of the CNFO and member states of the CRFM in further collaboration with their partners for stewardship. We suggest how to build upon the foundation of stewardship and advance both the SSF Guidelines as well as the resilience of fisherfolk organizations.

2. METHODS

The publications and project documents upon which this article is based were selected from the personal collection of the lead author. Criteria for selection were determined by the guidelines provided for the CRFM 20th Anniversary Scientific Conference & Special Scientific Publication

as well as the aim to celebrate the partnerships and projects to which CERMES had contributed in the development of fisherfolk organizations and their engagement in fisheries governance and policy. Criteria, as applicable, included that the sources be previously published. Peer-reviewed journals and book chapters were preferred, but technical reports were acceptable. Caribbean authors were sought to the extent possible and drawn from project partnerships. Projects identified needed to have a substantial focus on governance and policy, with significant links to fisherfolk organizations.

As with any convenience sample, there was no attempt to be random or statistically representative. The biases are clearly set out in the selection criteria listed above. This article is not intended to be a research paper, but an evidence-based viewpoint, perspective or commentary as is common in journal publications. The results and literature cited sections set out the samples that were used. Over 20 publications met the criteria and over 10 very relevant projects were identified to construct the results timeline, table, and text. It is likely that a more extensive search of other collections and databases would have revealed more potential sources, but it is not likely that the main points of discussion would be different. There is no attempt to reveal linear or deterministic relationships between the events and projects and their outcomes related to fisheries governance and policy. As noted in outcome mapping (Jones 2006) it is difficult to untangle the internal and external influences on any one outcome. A more organic approach is taken in which the results form the foundation for a broader discussion. Consequently, this paper can be considered exploratory with a touch of advocacy as the authors openly argue for further strategic regional collaboration in fisheries governance and policy.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several of the publications reviewed contain detailed text and graphically illustrated timelines and descriptions of how the CRFM and CNFO have evolved, along with the projects and organizational partnerships that reflect collaboration. From these we have distilled only a small sample of the main points that serve to illustrate some of the interplay with fisheries governance and policy along the way towards SSF Guidelines implementation and stewardship. The timeline in Figure 1 shows some events and outputs in the pathway for engaging fisherfolk organization in fisheries governance and policy, and summaries of selected publications set out the background in the following paragraphs before focusing more on the projects that facilitated the progressive interactions.

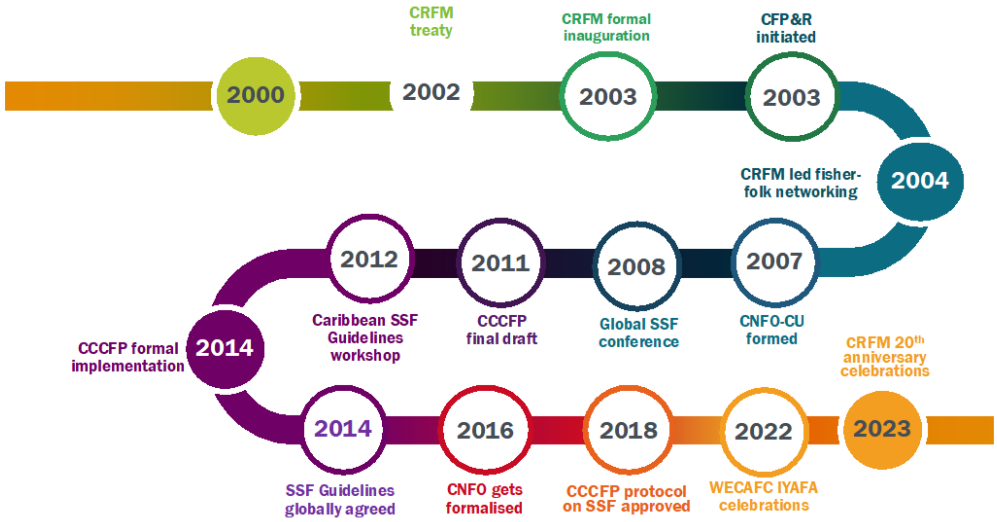

Figure 1. Timeline of some events and outputs in the process of fisherfolk organization engagement in regional fisheries governance and policy

Haughton et al. (2004) chronicle the establishment of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) from its project origin as an output of the CARICOM Fisheries Resource Assessment and Management Programme (CFRAMP). It took about seven years to design the CRFM through a regional participatory process and another year to get the new body operational. The authors note that, following conceptual consideration of options, around 1997 there were in-person interactions with fisheries stakeholders in CARICOM countries, including fisherfolk organizations. However, given the widely different interests and perspectives among and within countries, both state and non-state actors requested more substantial engagement in crafting the emerging organization for fisheries governance. "A total of five Regional Technical Workshops and six Ad hoc Working Group Meetings were held between June 1999 and January 2002 to review, elaborate and negotiate the detailed arrangements for the CRFM, ending with the preparation of the Inter-governmental Agreement" (Haughton et al. 2004:353).

This inter-governmental agreement that became the treaty which established the CRFM was signed during an Inter-sessional Meeting of the CARICOM Heads of Government which was held in Belize City from 4–5 February 2002. The CRFM structure was then staffed for it to be inaugurated on 26 March 2003 in Belize City, Belize, the headquarters of its secretariat. The acronym "CRFM" is often used as convenient but incorrect shorthand for the CRFM Secretariat as the governance structure also includes the Caribbean Fisheries Forum and the Ministerial Council. The instrument and the thinking that shaped the treaty was the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (FAO 1995). As a regional fisheries advisory body, not a fisheries management organization, the CRFM has a mission "to promote sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture resources in and among member states by the development, management and conservation of these resources in collaboration with stakeholders to benefit the people of the Caribbean region" (CARICOM Fisheries Unit 2002).

Key aspects of our storyline are that the treaty provided for fisherfolk organizations to be among the named stakeholders entitled to become observers of the Caribbean Fisheries Forum which provides policy advice to the Ministerial Council. In addition, "strengthening of fishers' organizations and improved community participation" was among the nine priority areas agreed by the countries (Haughton et al. 2004:355), apparently without as much contention as some other areas. It is possible to infer that fisherfolk and their organizations are implicitly included in several other priorities, but an absence of explicit wording could be construed to mean that the appropriate levels of fisherfolk involvement were thought to be national decisions. The Forum was intended to be, and still is, the main arena in the CRFM formal structure for exchange of information and discussion of regional fisheries policy. We will later discuss the critical roles of the Forum.

Compared to the CRFM, more publications examine the early evolution of the CNFO and its recent growing status in regional fisheries governance and policy (e.g., CANARI 2013; CANARI 2015a, 2015b; Compton et al. 2019; McConney and Phillips 2011; McConney et al. 2016; McConney et al. 2017; McIntosh et al. 2010). However, they do so by using different analytical frameworks, and while their storylines and findings overlap, they are not identical. McConney and Phillips (2011) research the CNFO as an output of collaborative planning and collective action within a complex adaptive small-scale fisheries social-ecological system. Fisherfolk organizations (primarily harvest sector cooperatives) were introduced to many places in the colonial English-speaking Caribbean during the 1960s and 1970s, but most remained weak or failed. Soon after inauguration the CRFM Secretariat staff thought that creative fisherfolk organization networking, resulting in greater adaptive capacity, could make a difference in regional fisheries governance and policy, especially within the concept of fishery co-management. The book chapter provides a timeline and description of the major planning components. In 2011 they write that until recently, despite the treaty provision allowing observer status at the Forum, fishing industry groups were unable to directly engage the CRFM's governance system. The organizations lacked capacity at local and national levels and

had not yet formed a regional level network organization. We look now at what changed the situation.

From September 2006 the CRFM Secretariat led a project on the Development of a Caribbean Network of Fisher Folk Organisations that was based on an earlier regional fisherfolk needs assessment (CRFM 2004) and subsequent regional meetings in 2004 and 2005 at which fisherfolk organization representatives recommended forming a regional network of national fisherfolk organizations. The aim was to have institutional capacities of fisherfolk organizations developed at the regional, national and community levels (CRFM 2007). This initiative was soon partnered by CERMES and CANARI, a CNFO Coordinating Unit was formed in 2007, and the partners contributed additional projects and resources resulting in a variety of capacity development outputs. The CNFO mission is "to improve the quality of life for fisherfolk and develop a sustainable and profitable industry through networking, representation and capacity building." The CNFO has participated as an observer at the Forum as well as attended other regional fisheries events as an independent entity with support from the project partners and external actors. This continues to the present but with far less input to CNFO from the original partners as CNFO capacity has developed and it became a formal organization under Belizean law in 2016.

Subsequent publications on the CNFO go beyond its formation to deal more specifically with fisheries governance and policy interactions within the CRFM region and globally. McConney et al. (2016) focus on the Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP). The CCCFP is a CARICOM treaty that was instigated by the Heads of Government in 2003 to establish a fisheries regime. Engaging principally fisheries, foreign service and legal officers, the CCCFP was approved by the Ministerial Council of the CRFM in 2011. It was determined in 2014 that as the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) had also approved it as authorized policy, it could be considered to have entered into force despite not being signed by the Member States. The paper examined the development of the CNFO from an institutional analysis perspective. It gave special attention to CNFO interaction, or lack of it, with the CRFM and CCCFP process in the context of good governance in the environment for fisheries policy.

The early years of the CCCFP process coincided with those of CNFO formation when network capacity was being built. By 2010, however, the CNFO had capacity for policy and governance due to assistance from several partners (McConney and Phillips 2011).). Stakeholders develop adaptive capacity and pursue good governance in part through their collaborative relationships. The CCCFP envisions, in Article 4 "Effective cooperation and collaboration among Participating Parties in the conservation, management and sustainable utilization of the fisheries resources and related ecosystems in the Caribbean region in order to secure the maximum benefits from those resources for the Caribbean peoples and for the Caribbean region as a whole". This implicitly includes the engagement of fisherfolk organizations.

McConney et al. (2016) detailed the engagement of the CNFO in regional fisheries activities and its interaction with the CRFM entities and the CCCFP process in particular. They suggest that from its initiation to its formalization the CNFO has been an actor in the arenas of policy and governance but not an instigator, agenda setter or leader. They claim that regional projects are consulting with and engaging the CNFO in the formulation and appraisal stages of the respective project cycles, rather than only in project implementation. They caution, however, that this trend does not indicate, on its own, the nature of the value placed upon CNFO participation. It could reflect genuine appreciation for the CNFO's capacity, but it could also be an expression of tokenism. Using the CNFO instrumentally to tick participation boxes in project requirements without meaningful engagement could simply be a means of attracting and mobilizing resources for projects with little reward for the CNFO except superficial recognition. The authors suggest that the CNFO needs to further build capacity and expand its human resources for engagement if it wishes to grasp the opportunities to participate in

governance. They add that taking advantage of even token opportunities, but then turning them to the organization's advantage, requires more strategy and skill than the CNFO accumulated, including decisions on what opportunities to pursue or not. They note that the CNFO seemed to be limiting it growth by relying mainly to its pioneer leaders, with whom it had become comfortable, rather than drawing on its widening pool of potential leaders by developing their knowledge and experience in policy influence as an ingredient in succession planning. The article speculates that CNFO leaders wish to avoid power challenges within CNFO and among its fisherfolk organizations.

This brings us to linked governance and policy initiatives that have served to unite the CNFO and its members while also forging closer relationships with the CRFM Secretariat, CERMES, CANARI, FAO and other partners. McConney et al. (2017), Compton et al. (2019) and Cumberbatch et al. (2023) are among the publications that examine the engagement of the CNFO with the SSF Guidelines and the protocol to the CCCFP that formally incorporated the SSF Guidelines into regional fisheries policy. McConney et al. (2017) set out timelines with sequences of project partnership activities leading up to the global adoption of the SSF Guidelines in 2014 and then their implementation in the CRFM region with a focus on the role of the CNFO. They remind that, while the CRFM Secretariat and partners were assisting the formation of the CNFO, fishing industry workers (fisherfolk) were minimally engaged in the formulation of the CCCFP at any level of governance, as noted in previous publications. In its latter stages the FAO's global civil society consultation and formal technical negotiation process that started in 2008 in Bangkok reached the CRFM countries in 2012 with a major multi-stakeholder workshop on the draft SSF Guidelines being held in Jamaica (FAO 2013).

Most of the CRFM national fisheries authorities did not actively take part in the SSF Guidelines process, but the interest of fisherfolk leaders in the SSF Guidelines provided a clear example of non-state actors attempting to influence regional fisheries policy. McConney et al. (2017) said that the CNFO interventions at the workshop and the status it was accorded by the CRFM countries signalled changes in the roles of fisherfolk in the policy environment, but they pondered how significant these changes were. In an institutional context the CNFO broke new ground, becoming through advocacy a prominent actor in the evolving policy domain of the CRFM. The 2012 workshop also marked the start of international governance networking in which the CNFO would become engaged to support the SSF Guidelines. CNFO engagement has, however, been guided or executed largely to fit the projects and programmes of its partners in promoting the SSF Guidelines. Recently, the CNFO and its members have been attempting to formulate their own activities, with assistance as needed, to pursue a more immediate and practical agenda of demonstrating how the SSF Guidelines can be applied to fisherfolk issues. The protocol that integrated the SSF Guidelines into the CCCFP can potentially assist with this.

Compton et al. (2019) and Cumberbatch et al. (2023) are the most recent publications to address the fisherfolk-policy- governance nexus. Both articles address the development of the Protocol on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries for Caribbean Community Fisherfolk and Societies (CRFM 2018). This process, supported by FAO, took place under a project comprising the usual partners of CERMES, CANARI, CRFM Secretariat and CNFO. Following consultations and advocacy, in April 2018 the Forum accepted a recommendation from its Executive Committee to accept the draft protocol and the final step was the Ministerial Council approval in May 2018 that brought the first protocol to the CCCFP immediately into force (Compton et al. 2019). Cumberbatch et al. (2023) in reviewing the process note that while the output of the protocol was achieved, the project partnership still exhibited weaknesses especially in being unable to fully capture the attention of CNFO fisherfolk leaders in the process, and this has resulted in the CCCFP and the SSF Guidelines remaining more separate and less institutionalized than desirable or expected for the effort invested.

This last section briefly looks at some of the multi-country fisheries governance and policy fisherfolk-oriented projects that comprise the effort invested over the same period from the start of the millennium to the present. It excludes some projects that were primarily state actor

oriented and those in which CERMES did not have a substantial role. Table 1 lists the project titles and implementation periods extracted from a CERMES database using these criteria. It was not feasible to consistently estimate the monetary value of the activities dedicated to governance and policy or to identify outputs that had no non-project contributions.

Table 1. Some projects associated with CERMES that contributed to the advancement of fisherfolk organization engagement in regional fisheries governance and policy

Project identification	Duration
Services contributing to the implementation of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022 in the WECAFC region	2022 – 2022
Developing Organizational Capacity for Ecosystem Stewardship and Livelihoods in Caribbean Small-Scale Fisheries (StewardFish)	2019 – 2021
Implementing gender aspects within SSF Guidelines and the protocol to the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP) for securing SSF	2019 - 2021
Providing a SSF Guidelines and gender mainstreaming protocol for the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy	2017 – 2018
Project on Activities to sustain dialogue, partnership and organizational strengthening among fisherfolk organizations	2015 – 2016
Project on Activities to initiate dialogue, partnership and organizational strengthening among fisherfolk organizations	2014 – 2015
Funds in support of organizing the Workshop on Strengthening organizations and collective action in fisheries: Towards the formulation of a capacity development programme to be held in Barbados	2013 – 2014
Sub-contract for Enhancing food security from the fisheries sector in the Caribbean: Building the capacity of regional and national fisherfolk organisation networks to participate in fisheries governance and management	2013 - 2016
Sustainable Aquatic Resources Management (SARM)	2008 – 2009
Marine Resource Governance in the Eastern Caribbean (MarGov)	2007 – 2011
Coastal Resources Co-management Project (CORECOMP)	2003 – 2007

Early CERMES fisheries governance and policy projects focused on co-management and marine resource governance with some involvement of national or local fisherfolk organizations but no regional thrust as the CNFO was not yet in existence. This changed as CERMES partnered with the other organizations previously discussed to strengthen formal and informal fisherfolk groups. The CCCFP was not associated with many projects, but the SSF Guidelines has been the focus of most since their global adoption. CERMES has attempted to engage the CNFO in most of these projects through sub-contracting, consulting, co-designing and co-implementing activities, serving as the focal point for communication with fisherfolk and so on. This has worked well to a point, especially with the CNFO board of directors who are the core leaders and actors. It has not worked as well when the CNFO was asked to reach out to the fishing industry organizations.

The most recent initiatives saw the CNFO playing leading roles crafting the protocol on the SSF Guidelines (previously described), promoting the mainstreaming of gender policy, in fisheries learning exchanges, forming a leadership institute, and more. The StewardFish project promoted stewardship by fisherfolk through policy engagement and influence. IYAFA 2022 celebrations saw fisherfolk paying more attention to SSF intersectoral interactions and coordination as they aimed for post-pandemic recovery and resilience. An obvious trend is that CNFO has transitioned from being a recipient of the capacity building efforts to being a net contributor in several instances such as the Leadership Institute. There is much less easily accessible and current information on the fortunes of national and local fisherfolk organizations in governance and policy across CRFM countries.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Considerable sums of money in project funding and associated in-kind contributions have been spent over the last 20 years on engaging Caribbean regional fisheries governance and policy by or with fisherfolk organizations in the CRFM region. The establishment of the CRFM and then the CNFO set the stage for the regional engagement of fisherfolk at multiple levels of governance. Partnership with CANARI broadened the civil society networking of both the CNFO and CRFM. Partnership with FAO led to links to the global SSF Guidelines

development and implementation processes, and to critical support from the FAO Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean especially for projects led by UWI-CERMES. It is the latter series of projects that provided much of the material for this article through project-related publications. The process of engagement has most recently focused on stewardship and blue economy, including blue and social justice.

The last-mentioned directions of engagement in governance and policy point to the need to better prepare fisherfolk organizations for roles in multi-level intersectoral governance (Compton et al. 2017; Oxenford and McConney 2020). This includes the science-policy interfaces at all levels of networked governance and an expanding into a wider set of policy domains such as for food security (McConney et al. 2020). To build resilience through adaptive capacity, it is now increasingly critical to strengthen the CNFO with more attention to national level ocean governance (McConney and Compton 2020) along with dimensions that have previously been neglected such as gender mainstreaming in fisherfolk organizations (CRFM 2020; Pena et al. 2020). The future of sustainable regional fisheries management and development through the collaboration of CRFM and CNFO with their partners will be challenged by changes in climate, disaster risks and other global environmental and economic shifts that impact small countries. However, by the end of the next 20 or 30 years we would expect to see the visions set out in the CCCFP and SSF Guidelines achieved and institutionalized in the CRFM region through our collective action.

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Table 1. Some projects associated with CERMES that contributed to the advancement of fisherfolk organization engagement in regional fisheries governance and policy

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Figure 1. Timeline of some events and outputs in the process of fisherfolk organization engagement in regional fisheries governance and policy