

## **TOWARDS LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN MANGROVE RESOURCE PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In order to ensure effective local community involvement in coastal resource management, certain factors are an imperative to include in any organizational planning. First, there must be a recognition of inherent differences in philosophy which often separate so-called 'modern' and 'traditional' approaches. Most 'modern' systems are more technically based, while the traditional systems often have both a social and a spiritual base. And, traditional systems have often evolved on the very lands being considered for sustainable management. These basic differences in philosophical approaches often cause well-intended modern programs to fall far short of their objectives, while frustrating all parties involved in the effort. Also, too often, traditional knowledge and expertise is undervalued, or misunderstood, by those governmental or non-governmental organizations attempting to implement sustainable resource management programs involving local communities. A more integrated approach would blend the 'traditional' and the 'modern', highlighting the merits of both. In fact, a recommended approach to local resource management is for governments to provide the legal and the administrative framework to support traditional management systems. Such provision engenders community support, trust, and involvement from the beginning. Built-in flexibility is an essential aspect of traditional resource management systems. The traditional system is not static, but is actually adaptable to changing conditions. Linking such adaptability with any synthesized modern approach is critical. As well, defining roles for traditional resource monitors is important. This will ensure that sustainable practices are in place, and that the local community members themselves safeguard against wasteful, or threatening, practices.

One serious problem affecting traditional communities is the loss of interest among the young people of the community in carrying on the traditions. Also, many are tempted by the popular glitter and frills that modern technology may offer. The promise of quick riches and elite standing in the community has tempted many community members wishing to advance their status, identifying, or rekindling, a faltering traditional leadership is often the initial challenge to any community organizing efforts. In order to catalyze interest in a sustainable management program, awareness raising and learning activities must be included from the beginning in such a program. Again, such educational outreach should include local community knowledge and participation. And, such programs could provide an invaluable opportunity to document the traditional wisdom that still survives.

True, traditional resource management systems have been weakened by modern developments. However, these traditional systems are still functional, and can be tied into a modern approach to help ensure the success of such programs. Governmental recognition, support, and protection of existing traditional systems is vital, however. In fact, without effective constraints—via legislation and enforcement—against such enterprises as the shrimp aquaculture and trawling industries, programs aimed at sustainable coastal resource management are undermined. Such efforts become themselves unsustainable—mere meaningless exercises in frustration. And, without effective protection of local community land-use rights in place, local interest in these kinds of programs will wane.