

What is adaptive fisheries governance?

What is governance?

Governance refers to the structures and systems involved in making decisions that affect how people access resources, who benefits and how resources are managed.

There can be many people, organisations and structures involved in governance.

Fisheries co-management is a form of governance.

Fisheries co-management in Uganda

Co-management in Uganda changed from Beach Management Units to Landing Site Management Committees in 2016. The 2022 Fisheries and Aquaculture Act commits the government to establishing fisheries co-management committees at all levels: landing sites, sub-county, district lake-wide, national and regional levels.

Challenges facing fisheries co-management in Uganda

Co-management faces many challenges, including:

- Being dormant since late 2015, when BMUs were suspended.
- The sector being under-resourced, meaning that government cannot adequately support communities.
- Lack of coordination between committees, parts of government and between government and communities.
- Pressure on fisheries for livelihoods, income and revenue.

These challenges are made worse by the impacts of climate change and by degraded environments, including fish breeding habitats and nearshore ecosystems.

What is adaptive governance?

Adaptive governance is an approach to governance that:

- Helps respond more quickly to change and uncertainty
- Is flexible and can make decisions fast – not too bureaucratic
- Generates, shares and uses information from different sources – collective learning informs decision-making
- Helps decision-making to respond to the impacts of climate change

Within fisheries, it is similar to adaptive management – the practical measures taken in response to new information and changed circumstances – and to the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries or Ecosystem-based Fisheries Management, which take into account the wider effects of fisheries activities on ecosystems.

Adaptive management can take place within adaptive governance, with adaptive governance providing a flexible and responsive system in which more effective management can take place.

Why adaptive governance?

Given the uncertainties brought by climate change and concerns about declining fish stocks and degraded ecosystems, adaptive governance should help those involved make more effective decisions.

Adaptive fisheries governance that is inclusive and effective

But, for adaptive fisheries to be developed and sustained, it needs to be inclusive of all stakeholder groups and needs to be well-resourced and supported. To assess what is needed to build fisheries adaptive

governance, the **capacity** for this governance approach can be assessed.

What is adaptive fisheries governance capacity?

Adaptive fisheries governance capacity means that the governance system has the resources, systems and processes in place that mean that new information can be generated and used to inform timely and effective decisions, in an inclusive, transparent and accountable way.

How can adaptive fisheries governance be assessed?

1. Who is involved in fisheries governance and how well do they work together?
How much trust is there and how inclusive is governance of women and youth?
2. What factors affect the capacity for fisheries governance? Funding, remit, staffing, policies, legislation, local rules and norms, leadership.
3. How do fisheries affect habitats and ecosystems, and what can be done to address negative impacts?
4. How are fisheries being affected by climate change and how can the sector respond more effectively?
5. What forms of knowledge are available?
How well is regular data collection and use going in fisheries?
6. How could fisheries governance be improved, whilst better protecting ecosystems and building climate resilience?

Examples of adaptive fisheries governance

Although adaptive governance, management and co-management have been discussed and promoted as approaches for decades, most examples provide some evidence of an adaptive approach rather than are fully adaptive.

Western Canadian Arctic

The Fisheries Joint Management Committee is the co-management board.

- Integrated fisheries plans with social and ecosystem objectives, driven by a multi-agency working group, assessing evidence, alternatives, solutions, etc.
- Adoption of the precautionary principle
- Numerous meetings and workshops, involving scientists and community members
- Meetings in communities
- Willingness to accept the ideas, beliefs and practices of others
- Regular monitoring and communication of results

Source: Ayles et al. (2007)

Solomon Islands, Pacific Ocean

Characteristics of an adaptive governance approach in fisheries management include:

- Recognition of customary management rights in law, which are backed up by government enforcement
- Localised decision-making
- Review and amendment of plans on an ongoing basis
- Involvement of communities in monitoring implementation of plans
- Bringing different types of knowledge together
- Diversifying enforcement mechanisms

Source: Datta et al. (2022)

Ayers, B.G., Bell, R. and Hoyt, A. (2007) Adaptive Fisheries Co-management in the Western Canadian Arctic, in Armitage, D., Berkes, F. and Doubleday, N. (eds.) *Adaptive Co-management: Collaboration, Learning, and Multi-level Governance*, Vancouver: UBC Press.

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Produced by: Building Adaptive Fisheries Governance Capacity research project, led by Professor Fiona Nunan, International Development Department, University of Birmingham, UK. Email: f.s.nunan@bham.ac.uk