

Segment 1- Demystifying the concept and understanding its implications

Implementing the ecosystem approach: the importance of analyzing stakeholders and their interests

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There is evidence that the status of resources and the biodiversity of the world's oceans and coastal areas continue to decline as a consequence of uncoordinated and unsustainable human action. By putting humans and their uses of space and resources at the heart of the decision-making process, the ecosystem approach recognizes humans' responsibility while at the same time providing them with the opportunity to find better management solutions. An ecosystem approach calls for a comprehensive look at all dimensions of the problem, and for finding sound solutions based on coordinated action of society, at different levels and scales; such solutions may imply trade-offs, but will benefit all in the longer term.

Especially exploitation of resources in marine areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction continues to increase, and the management of these resources is made more complicated by the lack of information on stakeholders, their actions and their interests, due to the out-of-reach nature of the area. Such a gap needs to be filled, if a meaningful debate on implementing the ecosystem approach to oceans is to take place and informed decisions are to be made.

Many different 'ecosystem approaches' exist. The *CBD ecosystem approach* (developed in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)), the *ecosystem approach to fisheries* (EAF) and *integrated marine and coastal area management* (IMCAM) (or alternatively, 'integrated coastal area management' or 'integrated coastal zone management' – terms that are relatively equivalent, differing in the amount of coastal or marine environment covered) represent three useful tools for making progress towards a more integrated and holistic management of ocean spaces and resources.

A basic premise of the ecosystem approach is that there is no 'correct' way to implement it, but that certain principles and guidance should apply. The goals pursued by different existing ecosystem approaches are consistent with each other, and the principles, guidelines and other guidance on implementing them complementary. However, we are now at a stage when the ecosystem approach needs to be brought beyond the general level of implementation allowed by its principles and guidance. To this end, concrete tools must be identified and applied so as to make the ecosystem approach a reality.

Valuable experience has been gained in implementing ecosystem approaches in the coastal waters of the world. Work aimed at identifying and analyzing stakeholders and their interests in these areas during the past decade and even in terrestrial areas since the 1970s has proven highly successful to mitigate and even anticipate conflicts over different uses of space and resources and thereby enhancing the actual operationalization of the ecosystem approach.

Most of the goals, principles and guidance within existing ecosystem approaches can be extended to open ocean and deep sea environments, as the ecosystem approach is not bound to jurisdictional limits, but rather informed by a mixture of ecological boundaries, spatial and temporal information on stakeholder uses, jurisdictional delimitations, and a range of special management measures. Moreover, within all the three above-mentioned ecosystem approaches, experiences have demonstrated that integration among sectoral policies can be complementary to the reinforcement of individual sectors.

However, the real challenge today lies not only in integrating the various management approaches into a comprehensive and cohesive plan with the ecosystem approach as its central framework; but, more urgently, in unveiling individuals, groups or organizations who are in one way or another interested, involved or affected (positively or negatively) by a particular project or action toward space and resource use. This is particularly true for open ocean and deep sea environments – areas which are increasingly recognized as important for the earth's economic and environmental balance and survival – and also for the oceans as whole.