



An alternative to alternative livelihoods

Improving alternative livelihoods so they are sustainably a long-term substitution to fishing households rather than an additional activity

Summary: Alternative livelihood projects (ALPs) are supposedly designed to minimize environmentally damaging behaviours such as overfishing, and promote more sustainable and conservation-based livelihood activities. Many approaches to date have been questioned and criticized for having minimal to even adverse effects on biodiversity conservation and exploitation of fish. Few projects monitor their outcomes and impacts, nor do they explicitly implement conditionalities and sanctions, which may lead to the alternatives offered becoming additional rather than substitutional activities.

False assumptions underlying ALPs:

- Providing alternatives will minimize people's need and desire to exploit fish
- If given the choice, it is assumed that individuals dependent on unsustainable fishing practices will decide partially or completely to substitute an environmentally damaging activity (e.g. fishing) for the more environmentally sustainable activity being offered
- Communities are homogenous (composed of households with common financial characteristics)
- Targeting interventions at individuals will scale up to population-level reductions in impact on fishing
- The individual will influence a shift away from fishing at the household level and shifts by individual households will then scale up to population-level change



Figure 1: Mariculture as an ALP in Komodo National Park, Indonesia

Why are these assumptions invalid?

- alternatives often become supplementary sources of income and exploitation of marine resources continues at similar levels
- additional income may even subsidize higher levels of exploitation of fish by enabling the purchase of more efficient equipment
- natural resource use differs according to the relative wealth of community members and that the poorest households in a community are often those most dependent on natural resources
- if one individual within the household is able to gain an income from an alternative activity, this may lead to a reallocation of labor and increased effort exploiting marine resources by another household member
- even if households do change their behavior, there are many exogenous factors that may undermine the conservation benefits of an intervention at the community and population levels



Figure 2: Mat weaving as an ALP in efforts to conserve Apo Island's fishes, in the Philippines



Figure 3: Blast fishing and illegal practices continue in Komodo National Park, Indonesia, despite previous attempts at establishing ALPs and other marine conservation regulations

“<ALPs are> initiatives that promote unsustainable solutions that are poorly adapted to people’s capacities, have limited market appeal and fail to reflect people’s aspirations for their future” (IMM [2008](#))

Evidence based on previous ALPs in Thailand, Nicaragua, and Tanzania have indicated that if households are used to getting a small daily income from fishing, they are unwilling to abandon this activity to focus on activities such as aquaculture or agriculture, that require significant investment and can take months to generate revenue



Figure 4: Seaweed harvesting as an ALP in Madagascar

Recommendations

- **Conservation performance (especially pertaining to fish and marine species) of alternative livelihood projects should be field-tested and adequately monitored**
 - While ecological monitoring will not be possible for all projects, comprehensive monitoring of socio-economic and ecological impacts in selected projects representing a range of alternative livelihood strategies, would provide essential information on the biodiversity gains that we might expect from such projects
 - Evaluating the socio-economic impacts of alternative livelihood projects need not be costly or complicated, and existing rapid-assessment toolkits could be easily adapted without the need for a large amount of additional funding
- **Alternatives should be locally relevant, and market analyses should be conducted for alternative income generating activities before any are officially put into place**
- **International donors can play a key role in ensuring that the alternative livelihood model is systematically tested, and that individual project managers have adequate capacity to adaptively manage their projects**
 - Project funding should be made contingent on a realistic plan for simple but well-designed project monitoring, and a specific section of the project budget should be set aside for outcome and, where feasible, impact monitoring
 - Donors need to allow for longer project timeframes to allow for such monitoring to take place
 - Donors should provide in-country training for project managers on existing participatory monitoring techniques and assist in tailoring these to fit the local context where needed
 - A standardised monitoring approach would provide donors with an evidence base on the impact of their funding, which could then be used to identify successful interventions and target future funding.

References:

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