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Perspective: In the Coral Triangle Initiative, Is Support Filtering Down to MPAs and Local Practitioners?

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In May 2009, the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste signed the Coral Triangle Initiative Declaration on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (CTI-CFF). CTI-CFF is a multilateral partnership that aims to safeguard the marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle region. Under the CTI-CFF, the six Coral Triangle countries collectively adopted a Regional Plan of Action, which was soon followed by each country's adoption of a CTI-CFF National Plan of Action that aligns with the goals of the regional plan. More than US \$100 million in multi-year grants has been committed by various international donor agencies to directly support implementation of the Coral Triangle Initiative.

The Regional Plan of Action is organized around five goals, each supported by a technical working group chaired by one of the six countries:

1. Priority seascapes designated and effectively managed (chair: Indonesia)
2. Ecosystem approach to management of fisheries and other marine resources fully applied (chair: Malaysia)
3. Marine protected areas established and effectively managed (chair: Philippines)
4. Climate change adaptation measures achieved (chairs: Indonesia and Solomon Islands)
5. Threatened species status improving (chair: Philippines)

The technical working groups include national representatives from each country and various partners that provide technical and financial assistance, including USAID, the government of Australia, the Global Environment Facility, and the Asian Development Bank. The Regional and National Plans of Action contain indicators and targets for each of the five goals at both the regional and national scales that are to be accomplished by 2020.

MPAs are clearly supported within the CTI: goal #3 includes a target to "establish and make fully functional by 2020 a Coral Triangle Marine Protected Area System (CTMPAS)." The MPA Technical Working Group on which I serve is designing the CTMPAS framework, where each country will contribute qualified MPAs to a region-wide system of MPAs. Criteria under consideration for determining qualified MPAs include meeting minimum standards for effective management, addressing core biodiversity issues, fulfilling fisheries and climate adaptation needs, and, where appropriate, providing key connectivity linkages within the larger MPA system. A projected benefit of the CTMPAS is that it provides an incentive for each country to elevate its standards for MPA design and management so that its MPAs will qualify for inclusion in the system.

But some might ask whether any of the CTI system or the CTMPAS provides support to local MPA and EBM practitioners, particularly in the form of funding. The answer to this comes down to the tradeoffs between national or regional programs versus focusing at the local level. In fact, the CTI does work at many levels. However, the reality is that it does not necessarily increase funding for all local areas.

Initially focused on sharing knowledge among nations

This is because CTI, at least initially, is not set up to increase funding for all local areas. In its development stage, the CTI is focused on linking the countries to share their lessons, expertise, approaches and limitations so that at the regional and national levels, there is more consistency and a more common understanding of the issues and their solutions. Plus, it is a young regional program and the overall coordination mechanism, the CTI Secretariat, is not yet fully ratified by the countries.

On the positive side of support to local practitioners and MPAs, funding is provided for particular "integration sites" in each country. At these sites, MPAs and networks of MPAs are being designed to address multiple objectives that include fisheries management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change concerns in a manner that builds resilience. These integration sites, mostly supported by the USAID-supported Coral Triangle Support Partnership, are building capacity within communities and local governments to implement large and small MPA networks. These networks will factor in social, economic, and governance aspects necessary for long-term sustainability. In addition, several new large projects are just beginning to support more field programs with funding from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank in addition to the ongoing programs under The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and Conservation International, among other NGOs working in the region.

Thus, while local project-support mechanisms exist, the Coral Triangle is a very large area and contains various levels of complexity to accomplish effective marine resources management and food security. It is a tall order to achieve the overall goals of the CTI in a few years and much of the success will rest on the ability, motivation, and political will of the national and local governments involved and their levels of capacity and funding from internal sources.

The original vision of large-scale financial support due to the creation of the CTI has not played out as some would like. But in the larger scheme of things, there is a tremendous amount of attention being given to marine conservation and coastal management in the region and CTI is pushing that along at a faster pace than otherwise would be expected. In fact, the CTI is quite a remarkable program whereby the six countries have banded together to protect and manage their incredible diversity of marine resources. These countries are committing their own resources to help accomplish this and it is no small undertaking. The CTI is moving and growing and, with time, intends to be a showcase for marine conservation.

For more information:

BOX: Other sources on Coral Triangle Initiative

Official website

www.coraltriangleinitiative.org

Coral Triangle Atlas, within ReefBase

<http://ctatlas.reefbase.org>

US Support to the Coral Triangle Initiative

www.uscti.org

Coral Triangle Support Partnership

www.usctsp.org

Reefs at Risk Revisited in the Coral Triangle (World Resources Institute, July 2012)

www.wri.org/publication/reefs-at-risk-revisited-coral-triangle

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