

Knowledge does not wear out

Knowledge might not wear out, but it can often be difficult to find and make good use of it. It is a sad fact that too much useful information is discarded or is 'lost' when people retire or move jobs. Many organisations try to keep copies of valuable papers and reports in their libraries but a lack of resources often means that they are unable to do this properly. The result is that organisational 'memory' is often short - just about as long as current staff have been employed. If new staff do not know that information exists how do they begin to find it and make use of it? If they do find it, how can they assemble it in some sensible order so that it becomes a useful tool and not just an administrative burden? Current trends towards more rapid changes in organisational structures and in staff turnover just exacerbate this situation. This does not bode well for those wishing to build on past knowledge and experience when making plans for the future.

IN THE CARIBBEAN

Communities in the Caribbean are seeking ways to make existing knowledge available and useful. Although just the mention of the Caribbean is enough to conjure up images of a tourist heaven of sun, sea and luxury, the view is very different for those people who must make their livelihoods there and seek new opportunities among the fragile natural resources of the coastal zone.

The first task was to bring together in a systematic way what was already known about the Caribbean coastal zone and its populace.



The next step was to see how this might benefit future planning by helping to identify constraints to developing new livelihood opportunities and areas where more research might be of benefit.

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A great deal has been written and published about the Caribbean coastal zone but it is scattered across the region. Searches were made of electronic databases both from the wider Caribbean and worldwide to try and locate as much relevant material as possible. The challenge was where to draw the line and yet be sure that all the important references had been located. In practice there was no simple answer to this. However, time limitations helped to draw the line, and it was reasoned that once the main database was set up there would always be the opportunity to add that important report which had been missed in the early searches.

LEVELS OF CAPITAL

To turn the data into useful information and then make it accessible needed a good classification system. An extension of DFID's



concept of 'levels of capital' was used for this purpose and a set of six strata was developed representing different levels of natural, human and social processes in the coastal zone. These strata were:

- **Natural resource base** – the natural resources available for harvesting or utilisation
- **Extracted resource** – sand may be seen as a potential resource, but only when it comes off the beach is it an extracted resource
- **Activities** – the extraction methods used
- **Nature of the individual** – the human resource
- **Informal or localised groupings of family or community** – e.g. NGOs, church groups
- **Formal institutional relationships** – Government and international groups

In addition to the six strata, 12 key questions were also developed to provide a means of further categorising the information. In this way it was possible, for example, to say that 500 references had been located dealing with natural resources, but only 25 were concerned with livelihood activities. The outcome might then be that more research work was needed on livelihood activities and less on natural resources. In practice, questions 1 and 2 relating to the natural resource base proved to be the area most researched, along with questions 10, 11 and 12 relating to social capital.

In all, more than 12,000 references were located and assembled into a searchable

database. 1,000 references with a strong relevance to livelihood strategies and natural resource management were then selected and a sample of 100 was reviewed in detail.

A series of regionally applicable indicators for particular facets of island or national livelihoods was also developed. Some of these were derived from information directly available from the databases and some were obtained by creating complex indices through mapping one against another. One of these, for example, characterised the potential pressure on the coastal resources by mapping the length of coastline per individual.

VALIDATING THE FINDINGS

Searching and finding a gap in the literature is one thing, but does it mean that more research is needed or simply that the topic is not important? To test this, views were sought both at a regional level and at a local grassroots level. To assess the regional picture a group of senior Caribbean representatives was brought together 'electronically' and asked to list major coastal issues and rank them according to regional, national and local importance. Grassroots opinion was sought from two communities based on islands where the project partners operated. One was a community in Portland Bight in southern Jamaica (a 'large' island) and the second was the entire community of Tobago, a much smaller island. A questionnaire was developed with the help of the project partners and 80 local community representatives were asked about their views on the future of the coastal zone and its resources. The results were validated at workshops attended by representatives of the communities. In broad terms they showed that the people of Portland Bight were not well off or very optimistic about their future. In contrast, those from Tobago had more assets

and, although they were concerned about uncontrolled development, they felt more empowered to influence local decisions.

A comparison between the regional views and those from the grassroots, perhaps not surprisingly, showed that the perceptions of need were not the same. Some issues of high local importance scarcely featured on national or regional rankings.

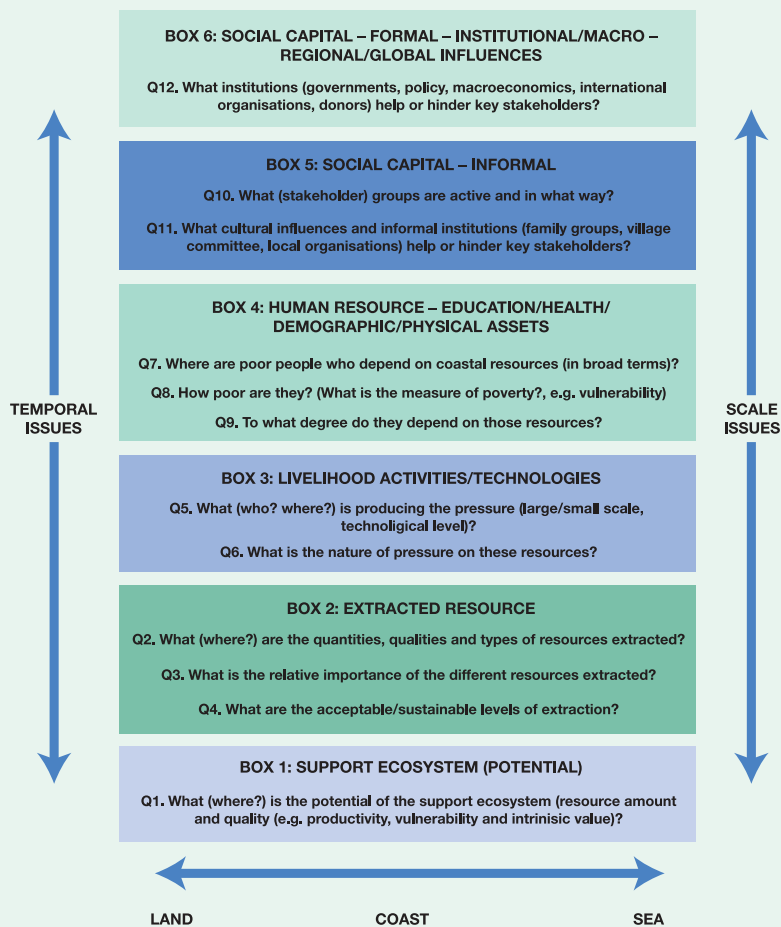
A 2-day regional workshop in Barbados was used as the vehicle to present findings from the data searches and the analysis of community responses and to suggest future researchable constraints to planners and to potential donors. The prototype database was well received, and several interested regional groups made suggestions for ensuring its sustainability.

The recommendations made for future research work in the natural resources area included:

- Consideration of a blend of regional, national and local projects
- More holistic approaches to research, and less concentration solely on natural resource issues
- More emphasis on the human resource base in relation to natural resources
- Carrying capacity studies on both systems and thematic issues
- Social and economic inclusion of coastal communities in research
- Development of more appropriate coastal poverty indicators
- Attention to scalability

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LEVELS OF CAPITAL, AND QUESTIONS USED TO DETERMINE PUBLICATION RELEVANCE



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