

Small states and the green and blue economy

The Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) is a biennial event held prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. CPF 2015 took place on 23-26 November 2015 and was jointly organised by the Government of Malta (host) and the Commonwealth Foundation. CPF 2015 critically explored policy based actions under the theme of "What Makes Resilient Societies?" It provided an innovative opportunity for civil society organisations to share knowledge and learn from each other as well as to interact with governance institutions on key policy issues. The CPF2015 series elaborates on the issues covered in the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience.

Resilience and the Green and Blue Economy

The green economy and the blue economy have both received significant attention in small states, particularly small islands developing states (SIDS), as alternative economic approaches to address growing financial uncertainty and vulnerability. Although there is still debate on what is meant by the green or blue economy, they have been promoted as offering a more resilient and sustainable economic path; one that re-balances the social, environmental and economic drivers.

The blue economy has its origins in the green economy concept. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines the green economy as one 'that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities'. Green economy strategies tend to focus on the sectors of energy, transport, sometimes agriculture and forestry, while the blue economy focuses on fisheries sectors and marine and coastal resources. Both incorporate strategies to address climate mitigation and adaptation.

The CPF 2015 session: *Small States, Colourful Economies* included a presentation and discussion around three case studies: Seaweed Farming in the Philippines; An investigation into the needs for a green economy transition in the Caribbean; and, a multi-stakeholder restoration and management initiative for inshore fisheries in Fiji.

“[UNEP defines the green economy as one] that results in improved human well being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks”

The session considered four interlinked questions: (i) What role can civil society play in advocating for, planning and delivering green or blue economy solutions? (ii) What kinds of governance structures and enabling environments facilitate the green economy vision? (iii) How can economic, social and environmental goals be met while providing significant benefit to people living in poverty? And (iv) What is the link between green economy approaches and resilient communities?

Key discussion points

Democratic institutions, people's participation and multi stakeholder approaches

Democratic institutions and people's participation are crucial ingredients in making resilient societies. The case studies demonstrated that multi-stakeholder and multi-level approaches with a strong emphasis on the people on the ground are key to building resilience and the foundation of a green or blue economy. Strong civil society networks help facilitate collaborative multi-stakeholder approaches and in preparing and responding to shocks. Local, community based facilitators are important to support a high level of communication and the sharing and negotiation of perspectives and interests amongst local communities and between communities and government at all levels.

Putting ecosystems, social equity, poverty reduction, and economic benefit at the forefront

The ecosystems of many small island states are under strain. The case from Fiji showed that if marine and terrestrial resources are viewed as a new development space for the blue and green economy, then natural resources must be carefully managed and restored.

“Local, community based facilitators are important to support a high level of communication.”

CPF Participant

Emphasis on social protection and participation in decision-making for livelihood dependent and poor communities will focus attention on social equity and economic benefit. Stable livelihoods and more equal patterns of income distribution are all positively related to improvements in social development and are a means to address risks, such as from natural disasters, which disproportionately affects poor communities.

Building Political Awareness

The case from the Philippines showed that a political awakening occurred when organised local communities engaged with decision-makers and were equipped with better informed decision-making skills. Direct involvement in negotiating for improved local government services, led to an important degree of empowerment, instilled a “political awareness” and fostered an active citizenship. Community leaders began to play a part in bringing about positive change in their wider community, thereby promoting their resilience.

Case Studies from the Caribbean, Philippines and the Pacific

From seaweed farming to political engagement, Philippines

A seaweed farming initiative in Polilio Island in the Philippines traced the opportunities and challenges local fishers faced in maintaining their livelihood. A sustained programme of fisher-led livelihood adaptations alongside capacity development over many years led fishers to recognise the links between local governance and its impact on their livelihood. This political awareness increased the participation of fishing communities in political and social change for their community.

Declining fish stocks due to overfishing provided the impetus for a CSO-led participatory programme to support fishers to run and manage seaweed farms. However, in 2000, some years after the establishment of the farms, a seaweed disease wiped out their crops, forcing a return to reliance on traditional fishing. Some of the fishers tried to revive the seaweed farms. In 2013 Farmer Fishing Schools (FFS) were established to provide hands on capacity support. Local facilitators helped guide fishers in the farming techniques and seaweed farmer associations were strengthened to demand improved support services from local government.

Networks and stronger associations encouraged greater engagement between fishers and local government and provided them with a broader

view of how government decision-making impacted on their activities. This constructive engagement with local decision-making encouraged fishers to take a more active role in their society leading to some becoming directly involved in politics to improve opportunities for their community.

An excerpt from the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience

50. Multi-stakeholder and multi-level approaches with the engagement of those working at grassroots level are key to build resilience societies. Successful networks and a strong civil society can bring about policy change required for strengthening resilience. Three case studies of blue and green development in Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, were presented. One case study highlighted a participatory programme in the Philippines, where fishers learnt how to run and manage seaweed farms. Other case studies presented were focusing on participatory governance where networks of governmental and non-governmental entities engage for the protection of natural resources, to scale up resilience.

51. Participatory Governance was presented as best practice. Empowering local communities to engage and participate in policy dialogue allowed for the increase of “political awareness” and greater ownership of the process. Governments that engage with communities can truly bring about positive change, thereby promoting societies’ resilience. All case studies underpinned the importance civil society networks play and their role in the transition towards achieving green and blue economies, which involves establishing agendas that give direction for action, implementation and performance.

Transitioning to a green economy, Caribbean¹

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) shared its experiences to catalyse and support new thinking and action for a green economy in the Caribbean. The project started with a multi-stakeholder visioning process involving government, private sector, academia and civil society to determine what a green economy means in a Caribbean context; its characteristics and principles.

“A green economy ... aims for ... equitable distribution of economic benefits and effective management of ecological resources; it is economically viable and resilient, self-directed, self-reliant and pro-poor.”

An Action Learning Group (ALG) was established – an independent group of around 20 development professionals from various sectors and academics across the region. The ALG identified and promoted ways in which a green economy can advance sustainable development, it collectively planned research and drew lessons from ongoing work. Research themes looked at: How to shift the economy to a green agenda? What are the benefits of a green economy? What leadership and institutions could lead the transition? Targets and indicators? How can energy strategies, social policy, local economies and trade be more sustainable and resilient?

A key feature of the CANARI project was action research and analysis on how to support small and micro enterprises (SMEs). SMEs are strongly linked to the community and are often beneficial to them, providing goods and services to local communities but also providing employment – an important source of livelihoods, especially for women and youth. SMEs can be resilient and have the capacity and flexibility to be adaptable. The project looked at a strategy for economic development strengthening the SME sector as its focal point².

¹ See <http://www.canari.org/towards-a-green-and-resilient-economy-for-the-caribbean-canari-policy-brief-no-13>

² See: <http://www.canari.org/supporting-smes-to-be-path->

Since its establishment, CANARI's project has helped influence regional initiatives such as the CARICOM green economy strategy and provide recommendations for renewable energy. It has also influenced national initiatives such as the Trinidad and Tobago Green Enterprise Policy.

Restoring inshore fisheries resources, Fiji³

In Fiji, a network of civil society and government entities have collaborated to restore the islands' inshore fisheries resource. The Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) is a network of civil society organisations, government departments, academic institutions and over 400 communities working together to promote the sustainable use of Fiji's marine resources.

FLMMA uses traditional fisheries management practices called 'tabu' – an area of reef where fishing is prohibited for 100 nights. Although this practice had died out, it was revived in the mid 1990s by one community with good success. Now, over 400 coastal communities have established one or more tabu - no take fishing zones, as part of the FLMMA network, established in 2001. 466 tabu, which encompass 135 traditional fishery areas, amounts to 79% of Fiji's inshore coastal area. This locally-led management has led to an increase in the abundance and size of fish and protects ecosystems as well as vulnerable species. FLMMA has provided people with greater access to communicate with government in negotiating and working alongside authorities in the management of ecosystems and resources important for livelihoods. FLMMA provides members with monitoring guidance, and operational structures which in turn supports community resilience. FLMMA is directly involved with the government's Green Growth framework.

Conclusion

The green and blue economy concepts have been promoted to challenge current economic systems that privilege economic growth at the expense of environmental sustainability and social and economic equity. Accompanying CPF sessions on Small States and Climate Resilience and Measuring Progress: GDP Alternatives show that current economic and governance systems contradict resilience and perpetuate vulnerability. New economic systems and measures of progress are needed that take account of people's agency and give back to nature and people.

The case studies presented showed that systems of local and national governance that promote participation of resource dependent people and communities in decision-making are more likely to support efforts to build resilient societies and form the foundation of a green or blue economy. Civil society networks and small and micro enterprises, when organized, can play a vital role in promoting such approaches and implementing economic development alternatives that allow for social and economic equity.

There is enormous scope for the Commonwealth to establish an agenda for a transition to a green economy and build on current work on the blue economy. Scaling up and sharing knowledge and experiences of blue and green economics approaches and efforts can support Commonwealth governments and civil society working locally, nationally and regionally. Civil society can continue to support resilience building by ensuring greater space for the voices and perspectives of local communities and those most vulnerable to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and help identify opportunities capable of scaling up and emulation across the Commonwealth. There are substantial untapped roles and opportunities for Commonwealth civil society, governments and the Commonwealth, to enhance and extend opportunities to build societal resilience through green and blue economy approaches in Commonwealth small states.

Developed by Cyrus Rustomjee, Chief Rapporteur,
Commonwealth People's Forum, May 2016

Edited by Gillian Cooper and Mithika D'Cruz

Presenters JD Faruggia (chair) Jose Deles, Anare Matakiviti,
Sarah McIntosh

Design by Leo Kiss

Disclaimer

The Commonwealth Foundation encourages the use, translation, adaptation and copying of this material for non-commercial use.

We ask that appropriate credit be given to the Commonwealth Foundation. The perspectives expressed are the views of the author while documenting the opinions expressed by delegates of CPF 2015 in their deliberations and do not reflect the views of the Commonwealth Foundation.