

Report of the Symposium

ITMEMS Secretariat

Introduction

The Third International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium (ITMEMS3) continued the process of sharing and learning the lessons of experience in managing coral reefs and related ecosystems. The proceedings of ITMEMS3 join those of the previous ITMEMS in providing a major source of information on the practical issues, problems and achievements of managers.

This report includes an account of the programme development and implementation that may be of assistance in appreciating the context and strength of the symposium conclusions and recommendations. It may also provide some assistance for those considering meetings with similar objectives.

Designing the Programme

As with earlier ITMEMS the core business of ITMEMS3 was conducted through small parallel workshops each of around 25 people designed to facilitate the substantial involvement of all participants. Also as previously, limited time was allocated for plenary presentations and, as far as possible, sessions were closed at the end of the afternoon to leave evenings free of formal side meetings so that participants were available for informal peer networking and mentoring that had been identified as a highly valuable activity in previous ITMEMS.

The first steps in the work of the Organising Committee were to identify the lessons learned from the experiences of participants from not only the first two symposia, but from other coral reef management meetings and workshops, to identify the relative importance of a range of themes that might be addressed through case studies and workshop discussion.

An on-line consultation process was conducted with the coral reef management community and partners, hosted on the ICRIForum. Drawing on the responses, the Program Committee developed initial discussion lists of themes and key management questions relating to each of the themes. A call for ITMEMS3 case studies was made, relevant to the proposed themes, and suggestions sought on other priorities and key management questions.

An organising group was formed for each one of the thirteen specific themes selected for discussion. Organising groups were asked to build and manage a program for the theme, identify relevant case studies from those offered in response to the call, and seek additional case studies where the offered range was limited. Where themes overlapped, organising groups prepared joint workshops to address cross-cutting issues.

The organising groups were also asked to develop an initial list of management questions to focus their workshops on discussion leading to outcomes, conclusions or recommendations. Based on the experiences of ITMEMS3, and to ensure comprehensive outcomes from each workshop, it was recommended that dialogue and experience sharing based on the topic under discussion should result in one action recommendation focused on improving and strengthening management capacity for immediate implementation. The outcomes of theme discussions are presented by organising groups through a series of reports and recommendations.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Organising a symposium such as ITMEMS presents interesting challenges. For most managers and management programmes the preparation of additional reports for a symposium or workshop is a major task, additional to already busy schedules. Attendance at conferences is not commonly incorporated in management programmes and budgets so finding the time and, in many cases, obtaining the funding and approval to participate can be a last minute decision.

For the organisers this means programme, total attendance and budget uncertainties until late in the process. This has been the case for all three ITMEMS. In the event for ITMEMS3 total registrations were 324 from 45 countries, 280 of these were received in the last month before the Symposium.

The nature of the programme with active small group parallel workshops requires multiple workshop rooms as well as a hall suitable for plenary meetings and presentations. The logistics of ITMEMS3 suggest that it would be difficult to manage a total enrolment of more than 400 without losing important aspects of effective peer group contact and networking.

The organisation of each ITMEMS has included innovation and the evolution of a model that addresses the operational contexts of management. For earlier ITMEMS these have included the development of the output focused workshop formats and regional caucuses. The size constraints of the ITMEMS model and the important peer group issues for regional managers suggests that future developments could involve a cycle of regional TMEMS with the quadrennial ITMEMS putting the regional management issues and priorities into a global context for reviewing and updating the ICRI Framework for Action to halt and reverse the decline in the world's coral reefs and related ecosystems.

For ITMEMS3 regional caucus arrangements were strengthened on the basis of experience from ITMEMS2. There were also 2 major program innovations - a Local Government Leaders Forum to address the roles and needs of local government in coral reef and coastal management and a Special Session on Peer-to-Peer Networking.

Regional Caucuses

Regional caucuses were an innovation at ITMEMS2, which were partially successful. The concept was developed further at ITMEMS3 and most regions had effective caucuses that agreed to follow up on the issues discussed, and to seek to organise and participate in regional meetings based around the ITMEMS concept. This important development supports an earlier decision of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) seeking to develop regional capacity, agendas and cooperative programs to implement the ICRI Call to Action to halt and reverse the decline of the world's coral reefs.

Local Government Leaders Forum

The Local Government Leaders Forum (LGLF) was a plenary workshop with a key group of participants that are generally not involved in discussions of the management, science and conservation communities. The LGLF, hosted by Mayor Ortega of the City of Cozumel, was designed to address the common situation that while most management of coral reefs and related ecosystems occurs at the local level most of the policy discussion and provision of information does not engage local communities or local government leadership.

The LGLF was held over three days, parallel to the main ITMEMS event. Local government leaders from a range of countries in tropical marine regions were invited to attend to discuss the role of local government in the management and sustainable use of tropical marine ecosystems. Discussions resulted in the development of an LGLF Statement outlining management priorities and key issues, which it is hoped will prove valuable in taking the issues of local government and marine management further in both communities.

The local government leaders welcomed the opportunity to interact with ITMEMS participants, and requested additional opportunities for participation in regional caucuses and workshops to enhance their own knowledge and learning, sharing lessons and experiences, and identifying new ways to address problems and issues in their home environment.

Speed Networking Session

The second program innovation was a structured networking session designed to encourage the active engagement of all participants during ITMEMS. It was held on day 3 to provide participants with an opportunity to make new and effective contacts for the exchange of lessons and knowledge.

This innovative session received widespread praise. Participants welcomed the opportunity to meet their peers from different regions, and to engage colleagues from different fields, as a means to strengthen their networks of contacts working on like issues and projects, and to identify areas for future collaboration and partnership.

The session was deemed particularly helpful for non- English speaking participants. Conducting the session at the opening of the symposium, as an icebreaker event, was encouraged for future symposia to facilitate networking.

Related Events

In keeping with the intention that evenings should primarily be available for informal peer-to-peer networking and mentoring a number of side events and meetings were scheduled before or after the main ITMEMS3 programme. Specialized workshops on Coral Disease, the Caribbean Bleaching Event (NOAA), Coral Reef Health (GEF IW: LEARN and the WorldFish Center), and Training of Trainers (Reef Check) took place before the formal start of ITMEMS3. An International Coral Reef Crime Scene Investigation workshop was conducted over 4 days following the end of Symposium. Social Monitoring Group and Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network management meetings took place during the week.

ITMEMS3 Fieldtrip

A field trip was co-organized by ICRAN and the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme (the GEF SGP), at the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve to provide an opportunity for participants to visit various SGP sponsored projects with a focus on community-led coastal and marine conservation.

Producing an Outcome

The Symposium produced tangible outputs in the form of an updated Action Statement, case studies, workshop reports, which are available online. (www.itmems.org).

Less immediately demonstrable, but as important, is the practical demand-led capacity building and review of program activities that arose through the networking and mentoring discussions within workshops and outside of the formal sessions of the symposium. This function and the opportunity to compare notes and ideas with other program managers and designers facing similar issues is particularly important because of the limited opportunities and time available for capacity building for many people who are involved in management that affects coral reefs and related ecosystems.

The most important dimension of an ITMEMS is that it is not just a one-off Symposium that occurs every four years. It is part of an iterative learning and experience sharing process that continues and evolves between meetings. We look forward to building further on the lessons of ITMEMS3 and to the development of supporting regional workshops so that these symposia become established as core events addressing the ICRI objectives of capacity building and review or evaluation of management of coral reefs and related ecosystems at the global and regional levels.

The ITMEMS3 Secretariat will continue communications with the ITMEMS community to track and provide feedback to participants on activities, and partnerships that have flowed from ITMEMS, to determine the impact and assist in forward planning for ITMEMS4.