

BOOK REVIEW

Communities and Coastal Management

Rajib Shaw and RR Krishnamurty (eds), Research Publishing Services, Singapore, 2010, 354 pp, index, list of contributors, hardback, ISBN: 978-981-08-2141-8.

An increasing percentage of the world's population live in areas not far from the sea. Anthropologists and geographers from both systematic and physical disciplines are acutely aware of the generally downward spiral of deleterious consequences for the ecology of coastal regions and particularly for the people who inhabit them. University libraries, government agencies and transnational institutions, including even the United Nations, are awash with alarming reports and studies of depleting fish stocks, of severe environmental degradation of coastal regions and the breakdown of social structures and thus migrations of poor dispossessed people into urban centres. Sometimes it takes a catastrophe of horrific proportions to shake governments and the international system out of a state of torpor and inaction about the generally depreciating situation.

The tsunami caused by the massive underwater earthquake off the western coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra on 26 December 2004 resulted in the loss of life of nearly 300,000 people and caused immeasurable devastation to property, businesses, families and the environment around the coastal periphery of the Indian Ocean. The humanitarian response from the international community in terms of relief and aid was unprecedented, generous and swift. What has necessarily taken some time to compile are lessons from the field, studies of reconstruction programs and an intensive review of the circumstances of the people of coastal communities. The collation of knowledge that focuses on the nature of coastal communities in the devastated areas and how they interact with their environment is well documented in this book. Sensible recommendations for policy-makers and government are to be found in the pages of this excellent collection of essays by knowledgeable officials, scholars and academics. However, the editors gently assert that the use of political and economic policies by central government needs to be tempered and applied judiciously and with finesse. Their somewhat surprising finding is that notwithstanding the many well intentioned interventions from powerful organisations, international agencies and NGOs to provide development assistance, positive outcomes for the benefit of the coastal zone in social

and ecological terms are more likely to be found in traditional community-based governance systems.

In compiling their argument the editors carefully build on the foundation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (which is a governance system widely practiced in developed countries from the 1970s), by using the case studies of communities in Tamil Nadu to illustrate the necessity of involving local people in the complexities of managing coastal estates. These chapters are thorough and highly technical case studies that underscore how local people exist and manage their livelihoods. The second half of the book details several topics concerned with fisheries, mangroves, effects of climate change *et al* from ten regional countries but again document how local communities are an integral part of coastal management regimes. In orchestrating their asseverations the editors cleverly fuse community based methodologies and systems of governance onto ICZM to produce practical recommendations and instruments as a means of improving the generally poor state of much of the coastal estate in India and Southeast Asia.

The content of the book is well endowed with clear diagrams, black and white photographs and tables of data. Some of the photographic illustrations do not convey much clarity of the target subject whereas others are somewhat cluttered with too much information. This is not a criticism but merely highlights the exhaustive attention to detail that each of the contributors has produced. Some chapters are a little hard to digest as English is not the first language of some authors. As an example, the word 'complexation' appears on page 84 to describe the complexities of metallic influences on organic and inorganic compounds in the ecosystem. Nonetheless it illustrates the significant depth of mental application the scholars have applied to get their message across. It is also a pleasure to read a mixture of both social and physical science being applied to resolve extremely difficult and complex problems. Each of the chapters includes a list of references that in themselves provide a rich source of further reading and knowledge – these references are drawn from all

over the world and emphasise that community-based coastal zone management is a subject that is transnational in character.

The topic of security in its hierarchical manifestations under the rubric of human security is addressed in Chapter 1 by the editors. The idea of 'self security' on page 5 is perhaps a new term for maritime strategists to add to their lexicons. It is defined in terms of where people and communities are engaged in self help and cooperation, therefore increasing their degree of freedom. However, it is clear that when any of the dimensions of security breaks down in these coastal communities there are deleterious implications for good order at sea and thus malevolent consequences for higher levels of government to grapple with.

This book is one that should be read and understood by maritime policy makers, coastguard and naval officers. More enterprise at sea is being applied to so-called constabulary duties sometimes to the

consternation of those demanding more aggressive means of applying political will. Nonetheless it is quite clear that unless coastal regions are carefully and intelligently managed, small infractions in these delicately balanced regions will escalate into bigger conflagrations. Community-based management systems applied in conjunction with those of the proven Integrated Coastal Zone Management techniques offer a way ahead to improve the security of people living in close proximity to the sea on the one hand and the prospects for the ecology and environment of coastal regions on the other. The editors and contributors to this extremely useful book deserve plaudits for their timely and highly useful endeavours.

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