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Coastal management policy: observations from an Indian case

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Abstract

This paper comments on the policy in India that relates to the management of resources on the coast. Almost all problems that are encountered in coastal policy fall into three major domains of coastal policy problems: (i) those that relate to resource use conflicts, (ii) those that relate to resource depletion and (iii) those that relate to pollution or resource degradation. Policies for developments that relate to the coast have to be sensitive to these three problems. Using this as an analytical lens, this paper examines Indian policy in relation to the developments in Goa, a coastal state of India, which is famous internationally for its coastal tourism. The paper argues that the absence of an integrated holistic approach to policy-making and a failure to link the process of policy-making with the substance of policy results in outcomes that are inferior viewed within a sustainability framework. This paper takes the view that in development that is closely connected with or has implications for ecosystems, and involves a resource that has multiple uses and users, as most coastal activities do, the effectiveness of policy might benefit from the notion that different kinds of coastal problems require different kinds of policy regimes.

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1. Introduction

Policies for resources development or management are assumed to follow a rational process, in the sense that decision-makers are assumed to have clear objectives and to develop tools to achieve these objectives [1,2]. The assessment of the effectiveness of policy generally refers to the capacity of policy to solve the problem that it is meant to solve. However, this paper takes the view that in

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development that is closely connected with or has implications for ecosystems, and involves a resource that has multiple uses, as most coastal activities do, that this may be a narrow way of assessing policy, as what may seem effective in solving the immediate problem may lead to a longer term problem that arises because of a neglect of a more holistic, stakeholder sensitive approach to policy-making and management. In this paper, this idea is examined with reference to policy in India and the developments in coastal tourism in Goa, a state of India.

In populated coastal areas, two sets of factors give rise to policy problems:¹ the conditions of uncertainty, complexity, and scale of ecosystems, on the one hand, and the social aspirations of the local population on the other. This is compounded in specific cases such as tourism because of the imperatives of government, both national and state, such as employment generation, earning foreign exchange, security concerns, economic growth and maintenance of environmental quality.

Almost all problems that are encountered in coastal policy fall into three major domains of coastal policy problems. For convenience, they are labelled here as:

- Those that relate to resource use conflicts (Type 1).
- Those that relate to resource depletion (Type 2).
- Those that relate to pollution or resource degradation (Type 3).

Type 1 problems refer to conflicts within the economy itself between users for the limited coastal ocean resources available within the same sector, as in the case of traditional and modern fishermen; small shack owners and large hoteliers as they vie for the tourist; and between sectors as in the case of allocating coastal land for power plant siting or reserving it for residential or tourist use. Types 2 and 3 problems involve conflicts between the natural and the socio-economic systems operating, or in other words between environment and human activity.

Coastal tourism provides a rich context for an understanding of these policy problems, as the nature of the activity, engenders conflict within the sector, with other uses, and with ecosystems. Coastal tourism can have a number of impacts on local ecosystems. These arise from the demands on water and land that are required to accommodate the needs of the tourist and the floating population that services tourism and which creates its own demands. The most direct impacts of coastal tourism on the environment may be felt on the following: coastal aquifers, both due to increased water withdrawals and due to potential risk of pollution due to increased sewage and other waste products of tourist activity that may find their way to the aquifer; land, as existing uses are converted or homogenised as more land is brought under tourist infrastructure; damage to sand dunes and to coastal vegetation and to coastal waters if untreated sewage and other waste products are discharged into the open waters. Coastal tourism thrives on the natural beauty of the coast. Its very logic lies in sustaining and maintaining the health of the ecosystems in terms of the goods and services that these contribute to the sector. However, in the absence of integration between the environmental and the tourist development

¹ A policy problem is defined as a gap between a set of values or goals and an undesirable situation that can be bridged by government action [3].

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