

FOREWORD

“We still like to go beachcombing, returning for the moment to primitive act and mood. When all the lands will be filled with people and machine, perhaps the last need and observance of man will be, as it was in the beginning, to come down and experience the sea.”

CARL SAUER (1962)

The *Atlas of Coasts and Oceans* is a very commendable portrayal of the global connections between the world's oceans and seas, their adjoining coasts and large scale, long-term atmospheric and climatic systems. The oceans and seas are immense, covering 70 percent of the planet. Most of the numerous atlases of the worlds' oceans and seas to date have consisted of global and hemispheric maps, intended to inform readers of various aspects of the marine world – such as the bathymetry, boundaries, resources, and currents. The *Atlas of Coasts and Oceans* complements, rather than replaces such publications. It is not another attempt to map the seas and their coastlines, but rather an attempt to map human impacts upon them. To explore their richness, both intrinsic and in terms of the value humanity accrues from them and to lay out recent management attempts that flow from our realization that the oceans are not a limitlessly renewable resource, but one in need of protection.

A key point that sounds throughout the Atlas is the management implementation gap. This is a universal phenomenon that cuts across all public policy areas. It is certainly not confined to Integrated Coastal and Ocean Management (ICOM). The gap is between completing a management plan/program and providing the powers, creating appropriate institutions, allocating the budget, and retaining competent staff to implement it. It appears that most – if not the great majority of ICOM efforts – have not been able to bridge that gap, particularly those efforts in developing nations and nations with a rapidly emerging economy. The root of problem is that there are very few rigorous and unbiased assessments of ICOM efforts to determine what has worked, what did not work, and why. For the most part ICOM is not learning from the experience of its 45 year history.

The Atlas cites the global databases of ICOM that I compiled between 2000 and 2002. Of the 166 different efforts in 145 coastal countries and semi-sovereign states that I cataloged, how many still exist? And of those, how many have resulted in significant on-the-ground achievements? The failures will largely be in developing nations where the international assistance community kept the effort alive during the plan preparation phase yet generally withdrew the funding required for the long-term process of implementation. Further, undermining the support required for effectiveness and undercutting funding, the international assistance community, by-and-large, no longer regards ICOM as an effective and efficient means to achieve sustainable development goals.

International ICOM efforts are very vulnerable to the implementation gap because participation is voluntary. The Atlas highlights two such efforts: UNEP's Regional Seas Program, and the Large Marine Ecosystems Program. Both have had far more failures than successes. If the international community cannot provide the resources to eradicate piracy in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the western Indian Ocean, what can be expected from them in respect of the international management of coastal and ocean resources and environments?

With few exceptions, ICOM has never been supported by a large and cohesive constituency which shares mutual goals. Shipping, offshore oil and gas production, and port development interests are not usually concerned about the declining harvest of capture fisheries and loss or degradation of productive coastal environments. The capture fisheries

constituency is weakened by conflict on the management of different stocks and the employment of different technologies. There are further conflicts between capture fisheries and mariculture farmers.

By showing the richness of the seas and their coastlines, and illustrating human interactions with these rich environments, the general reader gains a deeper understanding of just how important management efforts are, and how much we stand to lose if they don't succeed.

On our increasingly developed shores has beachcombing for many – if not most – people become more of a participation in a periodic litter picking event than an idle stroll and the opportunity to chance upon weathered treasures?

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