Multi-Actor Governance Approach for Sustainable Development Goal 17

Subjects: Others

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The seventeenth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations, Partnerships for the Goals, aims to strengthen the means of the implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. The successful implantation of the UN's seventeenth Sustainable Development Goal will aid the execution and achievement of the other sixteen goals.

Keywords: global alliances ; stakeholder management ; Sustainable Development Goals

1. Introduction

The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed at the United Nations (UN) Development Summit at Rio de Janeiro (RIO +20) held in 2012. The main objective of this summit was to create global goals that would resolve global environmental, social, and economic challenges. According to the UN, the definition of Sustainable Development is (to satisfy) the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. This definition of the term "Sustainable Development" is included in the Bruntland report from 1987 that was developed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), with the aim of developing long-term solutions related to sustainable development and to pursue these goals in the 21st century. Among the topics covered were the role of the international economy, population and human resources, food security, species ecosystems, energy, industry, and proposed legal principles for environmental protection [1].

The seventeen SDGs entail a set of global priorities that need to be endeavored via a multi-actor type of governance. Governance in this respect is defined as "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs [2]. Often, traditional governance was associated with one set of actors; however, the situation is changing through the increasing participation of a range of different stakeholders, and therefore no one domain of governance is the preserve of only one actor [3][4][5]. "Traditional modes of state-based regulation have come to be seen as limited in their reach, effectiveness, authority, or legitimacy such that tacking complex global environmental problems" [3] (page 366) such as those included amongst the SDGs. This change from government to governance has been demonstrated by a shift distribution of power and resources in the global political economy, with an increasing protagonist role for example for non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations, the civil society, local governments, and businesses. There are examples of multi-actor arrangements that range from non-state actor initiatives to certification projects (i.e., for timber, mining, or sustainable tourism, just to name a few examples). The seventeenth SDG (SDG 17), "Partnerships for the Goals," whose aim is to, "strengthen the means of the implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development" is an example of a multi-actor type of governance [6]. The idea is that, through the development and execution of the different targets comprised within this Goal, and the creation of alliances between different stakeholders, the rest of the SDGs will be achieved. Furthermore, SDG 17 "recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies, and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries" [6]. In 2019, the 2030 Agenda Accelerator was developed by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and The Partnering Initiative in collaboration with several other partners to significantly help accelerate effective partnerships in support of the Sustainable Development Goals [7]. A systemic perspective is therefore necessary when developing laws to implement sustainability policies in an effective way. However, not only the regulatory authorities are needed to implement change, but the global effort needed extends to everyone, and thus the need for SDG 17.

2. Multi-Actor Governance Approach

A pilot project in Calpe was thus led by the NGO Chelonia in collaboration with a variety of different stakeholders and aimed at reducing bycatch rates through the installation of TED in local fishing boats, as will be described later. The idea is, if the study is successful, to implement TEDs in all boats of the Valencian fishing fleet.

The Valencian marine turtle project is an excellent case study to work with to examine the challenges of working in a multi-actor governance context to achieve the project's mission, which is to reduce marine turtle bycatch rates. In this sense, the specific project's objective may be linked to Target 14.2 of SDG 14, which is linked to the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems.

In this respect, over the years, Chelonia has worked with several different stakeholders, with whom, over time, it has come to establish a trustworthy relationship. Most stakeholders according to stakeholder register (**Table 1**) and map were found to engage cooperatively throughout the project´s execution, besides sharing the same project objective, which is to reduce bycatch levels in the waters of the Levante Coast. There was, however, one stakeholder that was the most challenging to deal with, namely the fishermen themselves. However, with the help of the Valencian Government (i.e., Generalitat Valenciana), the fishermen have come over time to support the bycatch project (i.e., and the work of the scientists of both NGOs and universities).

Table 1. Power–Interest matrices of perspectives of different stakeholders.

Chelonia Members	University of Valencia Researchers	Regional Authority (Generalitat)
• Governmental authorities were considered to be rather powerful; however, the level of interest in the project varied. • The scientists had considerable interest in the project but medium power. • The funding bodies of the project were also found to be powerful but had medium interest. • The level of the civil society was found to have low power and variable interest. • The fishermen had varying levels of power and overall low interest levels. • NGOs were considered to have high interest levels but medium power levels. Chelonia members included themselves here as NGO members.	• The UV members saw themselves as having high interest but low levels of power in the project. • Chelonia was considered to have medium-high levels of both power and interest (with levels of over 3 out of 5 in both categories) • Then, NGOs were perceived as having considerable interest but as not being too powerful. • The perspectives regarding the fishermen varied considerably. One scientist considered that the fishermen had no power, while another said they had considerable power levels. • The power levels of the governmental authorities were considered to be elevated, while the interest levels were found to vary. • The positioning of the civil society members was also found to vary considerably with no general observable trend.	• The funders were found to be the most important stakeholders with high power and high interest. • The NGOs, universities, and Chelonia were positioned the same with high interest and low power. • The regional government rated itself as having high power and medium interest. • The fishermen had a more than average interest but little power. • The civil society was considered to have relatively high interest and no power.
Governmental Authority	**NGOs**	**Other Universities**

Chelonia Members	University of Valencia Researchers	Regional Authority (Generalitat)
• Chelonia and the universities were positioned the same. They were found to have great interest in the project and considerable power. • The other NGOs were also perceived to have high interest in the project but had medium power. • The civil society was found to have medium power and interest. • The fishermen (fishermen associations) were considered to have both high power and interest. • The project funders were perceived to have relatively high power and interest.	• The fishermen and fishing associations (Cofradía) had great interest in the project but no power. • The turtles and the fish had both relatively high interest and power. • The universities had considerable interest and little power. • Chelonia and the NGOs were positioned the same with medium interest and relatively high power.	• The other NGOs, although they were considered to have quite a lot of interest, were found to have limited power. • The interest of the project holding organization Chelonia was perceived to be high; however, the power varied to being low on one occasion and high in another. • The position of the fishermen also varied to one having no interest and relatively high power, to another having medium interest and very low power. • Only one university member commented on the position of the governmental figures, which were considered to be of medium power and relatively low interest. • The universities had high interest and medium power.

In the year 2020, the United Nations developed the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator, which is a collaborative approach associated with SDG 17 to “significantly help to accelerate and scale up effective partnerships in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [8]. This initiative highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and describes it as “An ongoing collaborative relationship among organisations from different stakeholder types aligning their interests around a common vision, combining their complementary resources and competencies and sharing risk, to maximise value creation towards the Sustainable Development Goals and deliver benefit to each of the partners” [8].

It is also important to note that nowadays a requirement to obtain research project funding is for the project to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach. Therefore, the execution of SDG 17 is often a prerequisite to fund marine conservation projects. “Challenges are that there are more and more people and maintaining a network of contacts is very important. Collaboration is very necessary as, for some project grant calls, NGOs may not apply without the support of other kinds of organizations and vice versa” (In a conversation with UV researcher, February 2019).

All of the members of the project holding organization Chelonia were found to be project supporters and their perspective was very much aligned with that of the members of the other NGOs supporting the project like Xaloc, and that of the scientific researchers from the University of Valencia (UV). With respect to the project objective, three problems were shared by these stakeholder groups; (i) the problem of getting onto the fishing vessels themselves, (ii) gaining the collaboration of the fishermen, and (iii) obtaining the necessary scientific data to be able to continue with their research. At the end of the day, this all boils down to the first point of getting the Chelonia and Xaloc members, as well as the scientists onboard the commercial fishing boats. One of the UV scientists noted in February 2019, “I think that the most important would be the fishing part. Everything that is related to fishing, really everything, depends on the fishermen, on whether they want or not to collaborate.” Without the fishermen, the scientists would not be able to get their data, nor complement the latter with qualitative data regarding the fishermen’s experience at sea.

The fishermen were probably the most challenging stakeholders to deal with, especially at the beginning of the project, both for the universities and the NGOs. The fishing sector, however, is a circle that is rather “closed” and difficult to deal with. From the scientific perspective, it is rather difficult and complex to develop a long-standing relationship with them and developing such a relationship takes considerable time. It must be noted that the fishermen were probably the most sensitive stakeholders with regards to the project’s execution. According to the fishermen, scientists were distanced from the reality of the fishermen working for a living and just came aboard to obtain their data. Furthermore, the fishermen are

also reticent about implementing changes in their way of working (i.e., that is to implement the TED on their boats). Part of the reason for the latter is that often the fishermen are blamed for many of the things that happen out at sea, such as marine conservation problems, the reduction of certain fishing target species, or the bycatching of marine turtles and other marine mammals.

Empathy was therefore necessary from the part of the scientists when dealing with the fishermen. They needed to understand that, if the fishermen decide to collaborate and participate in the project, the decision will probably affect the quantities of fish that they catch, and consequently affect their livelihood. Fishing is obviously a way of life for the fishermen (i.e., not a recreational activity), and the scientists needed to respect this. Therefore, empathy was the key to getting them on board with the project and the scientists presented to the fishermen the advantages and potential benefits that the project could bring to them. The scientists at Chelonia and the University of Valencia needed, therefore, to understand, show empathy, and respect the fishermen. Furthermore, the project is not just quantitative but also involves the obtention of qualitative data. This was a problem for the project biologists as they weren't used to analyzing this type of data and had to bring social scientists into the project team. The results obtained from the testing of the TEDs also needed to be communicated to the fishermen to discuss with them and obtain their input with regard to the evaluation of the best conditions to install the TEDs. Furthermore, the scientists needed to add value to the work of the fishermen and reinforce a positive message with regard to the potential result of the project, and how the latter would benefit the fishermen. Such careful actions by the scientists will contribute to ensuring the collaboration of the fishermen in pursuit of the project goals.

Over time, fishermen have come to feel that their position has never really been properly considered. For example, when drawing up the conservation regulations for the protection of the marine turtles at a national or European level, authorities have usually based their reasoning and decision making on rigid scientific experimentation and observation. One of the trusted information sources is the International Union for the Conservation of Nature that derives its knowledge from a compendium of scientific sources of experts that specialize in the observation and conservation of marine turtles. However, could the fishermen's own hands-on experience and knowledge be given more protagonism?

The president of the fishermen's association interviewed said that the fishermen really had no interest in catching sea turtles or in having dead turtles in their nets. They therefore did not want the problem to continue and did not want to get into any legal conflict with the Spanish authorities due to turtle bycatching. Apart from the legal problems, the fishermen did not want the bycatching of sea turtles to give them a bad image among the civil society. Therefore, one of the fishermen's main worries was the cleaning up of their image. "The positive aspect is sometimes cleaning up one's image. It goes beyond saving the lives of many turtles, cleaning up the image of the fishermen is important" (President of Gandía fishermen`s association).

It must also be noted that the Gandía Fishermen association has been involved in a few conservation initiatives, some of these aimed at giving a positive image to the fishermen. One of these actions is the recovery of bycaught turtles. When one is found, the fishermen call 112, which is the general number for the emergency services, which, when contacted, will come and take the turtles. In fact, it is the association that has recovered to date the greatest number of turtles. Furthermore, a yearly contest has been organized to motivate fishermen in recovering marine turtles and the winner is given a weekend in a five-star hotel. Finally, the Gandía association has also been involved in several European projects; some of them associated with the global marine plastics problem, which is nowadays so much in the media.

Over time, during the project and with the help of the Valencian Government (i.e., Generalitat Valenciana), the fishermen have come to support the bycatch project. The environmental representative from the Generalitat was key in promoting the collaboration between the NGO/Scientists and the fishermen. The environmental representative, through his charisma and empathy, has been able to get stakeholder collaboration from all parties. In the marine turtle project, he facilitated access for Chelonia and the scientists to the fishermen and fishermen`s associations. Over time, he was able to demonstrate to the fishermen that Chelonia was a trustworthy organization. At present, he is considered to be "a fellow fisherman" by the Levante Coast fishermen, and it is not strange to maybe see him in a bar in Gandía having a beer with them. "If they see you as a government representative, all they will convey to you are their complaints and they will tell you that the government is not helping them, and that the local government does not allow them to do this and that" (In a conversation with Generalitat environmental representative, February 2019). Juan's active participation with the fishermen over the past 26 years has brought the result of ensuring the fishermen's participation in the project, and has brought many parties together and over time created a strong multidisciplinary collaboration between the different project stakeholders; universities, NGOs, and local governments. He has played an especially important role in getting the fishermen on board with the different projects that work towards marine conservation.

Therefore, the scientists needed to understand that empathy and respect were needed when dealing with the fishermen. The scientists needed to understand that, if the fishermen decide to collaborate and participate in the project, that decision will probably affect the quantities of fish that they catch, and consequently affect their livelihoods. Moreover, it should also be taken into consideration that fishing is a socioeconomic activity that needs to exist and be sustained over time. There are several reasons for this; firstly, a large part of the society depends on seafood and fish as part of their diet, and, secondly, there are hundreds of thousands of fishermen and other stakeholders who depend on fish for their livelihoods.

Furthermore, the scientists were surprised that this would have unexpected advantages. Being usually guided by scientific rigor, the scientists found out that they could compile additional first-hand information (i.e., qualitative data) from the sea, such as additional elements to observe when a turtle is bycaught or other novel events of potential scientific interest that would have remained unknown to the scientists had they simply stayed in their labs or office, and thus they were able to obtain extra data. The results obtained from the testing of the TEDs will also be communicated to the fishermen to discuss with them and obtain their input with regard to the evaluation of the best conditions to install the TEDs (i.e., any modifications of the latter to be made throughout the experimentation period). This was a problem for the project biologists as they weren't used to analyzing this type of data and had to bring social scientists into the project team.

The scientists therefore needed to be more empathetic and develop a more cordial relationship if they wanted to get onboard the fishing boats and get their data. To do this, they learned through time that it is essential to provide the fishermen with their share of protagonism, such as mentioning them in newspaper articles when referring to the project and in the media whenever they were interviewed and asked about their research. The scientists therefore needed to recognize and acknowledge the importance of the fishermen's participation in the project in order to dissipate the high levels of distrust that the fishermen initially had of the scientists. Additionally, the scientists also needed to highlight the multiple benefits that the installation of TEDs on the fishing boats, which included the potential for catching fish of better quality thanks to the project (i.e., in the sense that the target species would not get squashed by the bycatching of marine turtles and large marine mammals). Such careful actions by the scientists will therefore contribute to ensuring the collaboration of the fishermen in pursuit of the project goals.

In this multi-actor governance context, it is interesting to note the role of the international and national authorities. In Spain, the panorama is different from that of other countries in Europe, in the sense that these measures at the state level need to be applied by the environmental ministry (i.e., presently called the Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica) and also at the autonomous community level. Spain is divided into autonomous communities ("comunidades autónomas"), which are in themselves composed of provinces. Overall, there are 17 autonomous communities in Spain and 52 provinces. A great risk to consider may be a change in political control, whether it is to the right or to the left wing, as this may affect the continuation of the funding of conservation projects and therefore the viability of the execution of the subsequent necessary conservation measures and their potential funding. This is very much applicable to the bycatch project, for example, as the project was partially funded by the Biodiversity Foundation (Fundación Biodiversidad), which comes under the Spanish environmental ministry.

A multi-actor governance perspective is necessary to be undertaken in order to ensure the proper execution of the marine turtle bycatch conservation project. This is especially so considering the actual nature of the project, which is not limited to the geographical boundaries of a country. Therefore, what happens in the Mediterranean Sea, may also affect what happens in the waters of the other side of the world in the Indian Ocean for examples. Furthermore, often, conservation project grant funding organizations such as the IUCN or the European Commission require, in their grant application for different organizational types (i.e., and often from different countries), to be represented. Often, if the latter requirement is not fulfilled, the grant will not be awarded to the organization.

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