

Chapter Six

A Typology of Community Participation

THIS CHAPTER ADDRESSES THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DISCOVERED categories and their properties, as described in chapter five. I found substantial differences among beneficiaries and functionaries in relation to their perception of what constitutes effective community participation in coastal development projects. Likewise, similarities among beneficiaries and functionaries of the development projects were evidenced. In undertaking a comparison of the differences and similarities between them, I explored conceptual categories that explain differences and similarities. The study utilized a grounded theory approach that sought to develop a theory of effective community participation from the perspectives of beneficiaries and functionaries working together at the grassroots level. Data collection methods used in the study included in-depth interviews, observations, and review of relevant documents.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section examines what these findings reveal about community participation as a social phenomenon shaped by social relations and the structures of communities (third research question). The second section describes the developed community participation model from results of the study. In the third section, findings and implications are related to community development practice in the social work profession, and section four identifies the study's limitations. Recommendations for further research are outlined in section five, followed by a conclusion.

SOCIAL RELATIONS AND STRUCTURES

The analysis of the findings prompt discussion in five areas: (1) discussion of the context of community participation; (2) the information, education, and planning (IEP) stage of participation; (3) the implementation, coordination, and monitoring (ICM) stage of participation; (4) establishing ownership in the project; and (5) participation in terms of evaluating the successes and failures of development projects for the purposes of feedback. All are summarized as follows.

Community Context of Participation

To examine levels of participation in a development project, one must understand the context in which it takes place. Population numbers and density, economic conditions, religious traditions, literacy, health status, nutritional benefits, political economy, land arrangements, government structures and effectiveness, levels of infrastructural development, educated unemployed youth, and other factors are relevant variables that differ from country to country (Lovell, 1992). Lovell also notes that development strategies appropriate in one country are not necessarily needed or appropriate in another because contextual constraints and possibilities differ widely; particular programs are not necessarily replicable country to country even where needs are similar.

The coastal regions of Bangladesh are characterized by extensive landlessness, extreme poverty, monopoly of land by a few landlords, frequent disasters, limited exposure to mass media, weak infrastructure, low literacy rates, rigid kith and kinship systems, and a strong sense of group lineage. It is evident from findings that only a few people in the region own most of the coastal lands and other properties. They are called *zaminder* (landlords); they manipulate the determinants of participation in development projects. Their influence in the region ranges from local to district to the capital city of Bangladesh. The majority of coastal people suffer from powerlessness and, therefore, dependence on the landlords. By virtue of their socioeconomic status, they often become elected representatives of government institutions. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in the region also treat them as gatekeepers to the community. Most of them either live in cities or their immediate relatives work in the cities, and they have, therefore, access to government and the NGOs head offices. By gaining recognition from both GOs and NGOs, the elite become more powerful in the region. Poorer people lobby the elite for relief materials, loans, and other benefits and facilities coming from these organizations.

Dube (1989) reports a similar experience of exploitative feudal relationships between the elite and poorer people of the community from his recent visit to the island of Negro's in the Philippines. I describe his experience:

For more than 100 years, the fertile land of Negro's has been planted with sugar cane. The land is divided into haciendas owned by large and powerful families, who have a feudal relationship with their workers, helping to house and feed as well as employing them. Most of the planters live in comfortable areas of Manila, leaving the operation of their haciendas to overseers that are rewarded for making the operation profitable.
(p. 23)

However, during the 1980s the world sugar cane price fell and planters abandoned their haciendas, withdrew food assistance to the workers, and failed to pay them even minimum wages. As a result, malnutrition, disease, infant mortality, and

starvation became serious concerns among the workers and their families. Under such a disastrous situation, the local Catholic Church and national Federation of Sugar Workers came forward to help the community. Dube (1989, p. 23) states, “A diversification of agricultural production into rice, maize, and mungo beans was started. The planters opposed these attempts at self reliance and a degree of independence by the people of Negro’s in a variety of ways including violence.”

In view of the situation, international aid agencies decided to respond by initiating a project to alleviate the sufferings of workers. However, the sugar planters, because of their strong connections in the country’s headquarters, came to know that foreign aid was on the way. They formed NGOs to receive it, thereby recovering the role of benevolent patrons they had abandoned (Dube, 1989).

This context of feudal relationships in rural areas of the majority world needs to be considered before assessing the extent of poorer people’s participation in the development projects. In reality, most development projects in Bangladesh are initiated by the elite class and they are the first to line their own pockets (Farazi, 1997). I did not report the distinction between and among governmental and nongovernmental organization’s development projects. However, the feudal relationships in Bangladesh coastal regions are so complex and extensive that the real meaning of participation in the development projects to the poor is quite obscure.

Information, Education, and Planning (IEP) Stage of Participation

Education has always played a crucial role in the society as it disseminates knowledge, provides necessary skills, and helps in forming attitudes (Rahman, 1994). It is evident that providing adequate and timely information, educating people about the development initiatives, and outlining a plan of action is critical in generating a process of participation. Differences and similarities between functionary and beneficiary perceptions of effective community participation resulted with a series of elements that need to be considered at this stage of participation. They are all related to the information, education, and planning stage of community participation. Some of the significant findings are summarized below.

Both functionaries and beneficiaries reflect similar views on the lack of transparency and invisibility of project-related documents and information provided to the local people. It was observed in this research project that most beneficiaries could not answer questions about the project budget, its funding sources, policy determination procedures, evaluation, and needs assessment procedures.

Adnan et al. (1992) mention that in assessing the quality of participation in development projects, a key question is, were project documents available to the local people? The authors also explain that people should be in a position to see and know what is happening, including how decisions are made at all stages of the project. Such information must also be available in a timely manner, so that people have a chance to be informed before decisions are made, and can try to influence them,

if necessary, to protect their own interest. However, they should have assistance to interpret documents to local people given that the vast majority of the coastal population is illiterate.

Another salient theme of this study was to consider participation of local people in development projects as a human right. It is evident that community participation in development projects is a human creation because the questions of who will participate, how they will participate, why they will participate, and what they will participate in, is determined by the project officials and the funding agencies. Under such a circumstance, importance was placed on outlining a legal framework that will protect the best interests of the poorer people and the physical environment of the community.

Superstitions, false beliefs, and religious misinterpretations regarding some of the development projects and their activities were critical in the regions. Some people thought planting eucalyptus around the houses prevents malaria because the scent of eucalyptus leaves is harmful to mosquitoes. When I contacted some of the project officials regarding this belief they indicated that there was no evidence that eucalyptus prevents malaria. However, both government and nongovernmental organizations realized the limitations of eucalyptus use for the regions and stopped its promotion for the future.

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, nightlong religious gatherings, called *waj mahfil*, are organized during wintertime. In most cases, they use a sound system to transmit religious messages to the surrounding areas. It was observed that some interest groups were taking advantage of this media to jeopardize NGO activities in the region. For example, a religious leader said that non-Muslim funds from Europe and North America were being utilized for the NGO-sponsored coastal forestry projects. His objective was to convince the local people that the involvement of non-Muslim funds for planting trees is *haram* (forbidden in Islam). This researcher contacted the concerned NGO and came to know that some of the organizers of that *waj mahfil* wanted to utilize some monetary privileges from the NGO, and when their illegal demands were refused by the project officer they became angry and began a propaganda campaign against the NGO.

Involvement of local people in all stages of development projects, such as needs assessment, decision making, implementation, and evaluation enhance effective participation and keep local people informed of what is happening within the project and in their community. A great deal of dependence of local people on feudal lords for their daily livelihood was also evident. Though the cyclone shelter houses were supposed to be shared among community members during the disaster equitably, in reality it was difficult for poorer people to establish their right of access to shelters.

Both functionaries and beneficiaries agreed on strengthening capabilities of coastal communities with regard to education, social awareness, economic conditions, infrastructure development, and improvement of transportation and commu-

nication systems. However, their responses varied with ways to enhance capabilities. Functionaries emphasized that training was the best way to enhance community capabilities, whereas beneficiaries saw community capacity building through income generation of the households. Several respondents from both groups believed that community capacity should be enhanced by creating awareness among coastal people, and by considering some kind of short-term economic benefits at the beginning of the project. According to these respondents, better economic, social, and psychological factors improve community participation in development projects. It was observed that some of the development organizations in the regions sensed this limitation for ensuring effective participation. In fact, one of the selected organizations for this study was providing short term benefits such as daily wages for planting trees, and distributing fruit plants to the local people free of charge.

I reported in 1995 that participation in development projects in the coastal areas were very much dependent on the education levels of the coastal people and their knowledge about the projects. Local people who were more informed and well-educated on the development projects took an active part in comparison to those individuals who were not as educated and informed about the projects.

Furthermore, consulting local people at the initial stage helps project officials by knowing local experiences with development projects. In the process, local people got a chance to cast their voices in the project, undertaken for their well-being.

It is also evident that coastal communities and their needs are different from the needs of communities attached to the mainland, and project officials never took this into consideration when designing projects for the region in the past. Functionaries of development projects, particularly those run by the government, have recently recognized these unique features of coastal habitats and are currently revisiting their programs based on the unique requirements of coastal communities. It was found in a study that coastal development projects were reluctant to involve local people in assessing the needs and issues of coastal communities in the past and were therefore, suffering from a lack of effective community participation (Mathbor, 1995).

Another surprising finding of the study is the recognition by beneficiary respondents of the role of women in development projects (i.e., local people), even though women hardly attend weekly and monthly meetings of the projects. Functionaries claimed that the traditional way of observing *purdha* limits women's participation.

A beneficiary remarked:

Development workers very often come to visit us and they strongly ask for inclusion of women in the project activities. I see the strong logic of involving half of our manpower (womenfolk) is essential for an overall development of the society but we need to obey our *samaj*. Allowing women members of our family such as my sister to take part in the meetings of the project with men will create problems for her marriage. As a brother, I don't want to see such a disastrous situation of my sister.

As indicated earlier, coastal areas, particularly the islands, are detached from the mainland. As a result, they are not exposed to mainstream culture and changes taking place at the mainland. Development workers working at the grassroots level need to understand and consider local desires, norms, and rules while planning and designing coastal development activities. It is evident from these findings that women's participation in coastal development projects is an issue that remains unexplored in the coastal communities of Bangladesh.

Implementation, Coordination, and Monitoring (ICM) Stage of Participation

Once local people are well informed about the development projects, they are in a better position to plan activities by themselves to implement a project (Mathbor, 1998). Close supervision of their work and having a monitoring system in place will enhance the effectiveness of a development project. This system takes place through identifying honest, sincere, dedicated leaders, involving them in all stages of the development project, and maintaining sustained interaction throughout the project period.

Several beneficiaries stated that the criteria set by the organizations for including local people as beneficiaries of the project failed to safeguard the interests of the poorer people. It is also evident that local people were only involved at the implementation level of the development project, and not the designing and planning stages.

Adnan et al. (1992) note that people must have a meaningful choice, rather than being constrained or compelled to accept options that have been determined by others. The authors also state that in particular, local people must have the right to say no to things that they feel are against their interests or ineffective, as well as to propose alternatives they believe are better. The interests of people should be considered at the planning stage of a project rather than including local people only at the implementation stage. Lack of an ongoing interaction between functionaries and beneficiaries created mistrust between the parties concerned. In fact, most beneficiaries said implementation is the subsequent stage of the Information, Education, and Planning (IEP) stage of participation.

A number of respondents also stated that:

Without a good design, one cannot start the construction of a house. If it happens, then it would not be a desired house that you planned to construct. Therefore, local people need to be involved at all levels of development project such as from conceptualization to evaluation stage. This way, the project will be able to produce desired results for the community people.

It has been observed during the field data collection that the nature of local people's involvement needs to be clarified. The clarification of local participation

should be mentioned in the project proposal at the very beginning and local people should be made aware of this necessity for clarity.

It is evident that effective coordination between and among governmental, nongovernmental, and community organizations, such as local self-government, is a requirement for successful implementation of the development projects. Buckland and Rahman (1999) report that the historic relationship developed between rural communities and government has generally assisted communities in mitigating the consequences of disaster.

Ownership and Control

Rahman (1993) states, "It is widely recognized that the development efforts of the last three decades have done little to improve rural poorer people's living conditions. But they had hardly shared in the benefits of development and have remained economically poor and underprivileged." As a result, they have had little participation in the development effort of their societies.

Coastal development projects in this study attempt to clarify ownership issues at the outset of projects. In some cases, these issues were outlined in project documents. Findings indicate, however, that a gulf exists between project documents and field reality. Eventually, the elite people of the locality gained exclusive control of development projects and resources. The criteria for selecting poorer people as project beneficiaries requires revision to safeguard people's interests in the development project.

As suggested by Adnan et al. (1992), a key notion advocated in this context was that the communities need to "feel a sense of ownership," or "gain a sense of commitment" to the project rather than being alienated and kept at a distance. Farazi (1997) reported that one of the main reasons for the failure of the World Bank-sponsored embankment project in Bangladesh was that almost none of the parties (contractors, engineers, officials, local people, and politicians) involved in the project, or affected by the project, took any responsibility for its effective implementation. He described his experience of interviewing some of these parties:

An engineer of the project said that it is not our money. The World Bank is too rich; why should we bother about how this money is spent? When the writer asked a villager in the affected area about the project, he said, you can see that the embankment is poorly constructed and it is also unfinished. I do not bother, because it is not my money.

A beneficiary suggested that local people should share the project costs; if not in money, at least in time and effort. This sharing of cost will give them a feeling of ownership and commit them to the project. Also, the legal framework set at the beginning for safeguarding the poorer people's interests and for protecting the local environment should be complied with, which will enhance poorer people's participation

by establishing rights of ownership in the project. It was also acknowledged that “such participation will not be easy to ensure” because more influential groups sometimes try to manipulate government programs to satisfy their own interests.

Feedback

This stage includes consultation with local people’s knowledge and experiences, to assess their needs and evaluate outcomes of development projects, and to hold local people accountable for successes and failures. It is evident from findings that local people were consulted only after the project was conceptualized, designed, and planned by project proponents and funding agencies. It has been widely observed and accepted that indigenous knowledge plays a significant role in sustainable resource utilization and conservation. Failures of the government reforestation project in this study speak to a lack of consultation with local people’s lived experiences and the project’s negative impacts on communities and families in the regions.

In an interview with the Gazette Newspaper of the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dr. Jon Lien reiterated the need for collaboration between fishermen and scientists in coastal zone management (Glover, 1998). Dr. Lien said that the time had come for scientists to get back in the fishing boats with fishermen, and for fishermen to sit at the table next to scientists. He further explained the widening gap between fishermen and scientists by saying:

Because I’m a scientist I talk to scientists and we talk the same jargon. The people in the fishing communities, they are experts at what they do and they talk the jargon, but we don’t understand each other; we’ve just moved apart. They have become more specialized and we have become more specialized, so I think it’s important and time to bring the culture of working together back for the greater interest of the community and its well-being.

Unfortunately, the culture of respecting traditional knowledge is decaying and being overpowered by the western culture’s use and throw models. Rahman (1994) suggested that since NGOs work in close contact with people at the grassroots level, they could tap these pools of indigenous knowledge and incorporate them into their program design and implementation strategies. I also note that these knowledge systems must be respected if one wants to implement development projects effectively and achieve success.

Recent proponents of community development advocate the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a key tool for collecting indigenous knowledge and promoting social change in the communities. Robinson, Hoare, and Levy (1993) defined PAR as an integrated approach involving the participation of community members in investigating social reality and building local skills and capacities for the purpose of increasing community autonomy through practices. In other words, Participatory Action Research is a process in which the community sets the re-

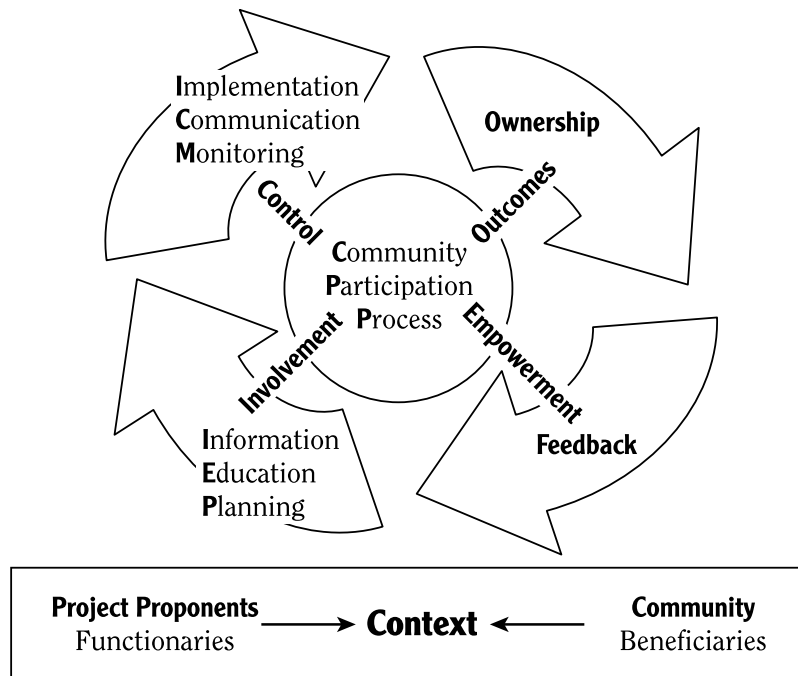
search agenda, determines whom it will work with, ensures that skills are acquired by community trainees, and that research results are put to work in the service of local people. It relies on the experiences of the people, its values and cultures, and it builds human capacity within the community. Practitioners identify the following as objectives characteristic in any PAR project:

1. Social investigation: to develop the critical consciousness of people
2. Education: to build people's capacity
3. Action: to change or eliminate structures of oppression (Robinson, Hoare, and Levy, 1993, p. 51)

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION MODEL

This model was developed based on the categories and themes that emerged from respondent's spoken and written words. These categories and themes were identified and correlated through a process of qualitative data analysis, as described earlier. The philosophy of this community participation model is grounded in a horizontal relationship between beneficiaries and functionaries of the coastal development projects (figure 6.1). Project proponents and the community begin their

Figure 6.1: An Effective Community Participation Model for Coastal Development Projects



dialogue at conceptualization and continue to work together until successes and failures of the project are fully evaluated and reintegrated into future planning. Community participation in coastal development projects is therefore hypothesized to be effective by involving local people in all four stages of the model (IEP stage, ICM stage, ownership stage, and feedback stages of participation). Each stage is the result of a set of elements that emerged from the views, opinions, and perspectives of the beneficiaries and the functionaries interviewed in this study. Although these elements are separated in terms of different stages, they are often interrelated and interwoven in practice. For example, consultation of local people is required both at IEP and Feedback stages or also may be required to identify a genuine resource person at the ICM stage. In essence, people are actively involved in the elements that flow out of the four identified stages of the model; they will have a chance for effective participation.

However, community context has to be considered before initiating the stages of community participation as evident from the findings. Community capabilities differ from community to community in terms of people's knowledge regarding development strategies, local infrastructures, mass communication systems, social structures, social interactions, group lineage, and levels of education of the people.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY PRACTICE

From an international perspective, Community Development (CD) has been one of the most significant social forces in the development decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when the United Nations and affiliated organizations (UNESCO, ILO, WHO, UNICEF) actively promoted the concept throughout the developing world as part of nation-building plans and efforts to raise living standards among the poor. The basic assumptions upon which these approaches to community development operated were soon challenged for their contradictory and culturally biased nature (Alldred, 1976).

The literature indicates that community development has evolved in three different ways. First, in Great Britain and the United States, where large-scale government support exists, the term community development was initially used to replace the concept of mass education and subsequently to evaluate technological progress (Lombard, 1992). Second, given the recurring themes of poverty and helplessness in third world countries, it is not surprising that the term community development in these countries has been related to improvement in socioeconomic conditions. Third, Jeppe in Robinson (1995) writes that colonialists in rural areas also used community development strategies.

Within the Social Work profession, community development strategies remain essentially ill defined, in comparison with casework and group work. It was not until 1939 that community organization practice was systematically studied by social

workers and not until 1947 that its theoretical and philosophical underpinnings were subjected to serious analysis and research (Rothman, 1970).

Campfens (1994) states that “my interest as a researcher in community development over the last few decades have made me aware of how little of the rich experiences in this field of practice are known to social workers in ways that have practical as well as educational value.” The author pointed out that:

Language and use of different terminology may be one barrier. Another limitation is that published case literature or concept papers rarely place the experience or ideas in a broader context of the particular community that makes it intelligible for international readers. (p. 3)

A community development approach in social work represents a strategy that believes in promoting more participatory modes of development. Also present is a belief that people in the community have ideas, management skills, and leadership qualities to contribute to the process of development. Community organizations are generally more responsive to the needs and problems of the local people. They are more likely than governments to have interests and skills necessary to adapt development projects and programs to local conditions. There may be some continuing assistance from the outside, but it should be given in ways and on terms that do not displace people’s own efforts to generate income, enhance the quality of life, or create infrastructures.

Community development is anchored in the belief of participation of people in shaping their own lives. It is premised on the assumption that people should have constant access to decision making and power. Community ownership and control are aspects of community participation. Participation, therefore, becomes an essential element in the process of empowerment. The notion of empowerment validates the view that there are powerless people in society and that most of them are poor. Participation in all spheres of life such as personal, social, economic, and political are viewed as very important in the empowering process. According to the UNDP Human Development Report (1993), participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural, and political processes that affect their lives. It enables them to gain access to a much broader range of opportunities so they may realize their full potential and contribute to the development of their community.

Freire (1985) correctly pointed out that a powerless individual assumes the role of object being acted upon by the environment, rather than that of a subject acting in and on his or her worlds. The powerless person alienates himself from participation within the social reality of his or her environment, resulting in a passive acceptance culturally given about his or her environment. Community participation implies that there should be an established and continuing means whereby communities can participate in the policy and management of the social welfare services they receive (Chappel, 1997, p. 109).

In reference to Rothman's framework, which is essentially a comprehensive ordering and classifying device that outlines locality development, social planning, and social action, Wharf suggests that there is no one conception of the community, nor of the community interest, and neither is there one approach to community work (Drzymala, 1983). One aspect that all approaches have in common, according to Wharf, is that they are all concerned with bringing about change: "On the basis of this assumption Wharf has developed a set of variables involved in the process of change. One of these variables is 'legitimacy.' The concept refers to the person or organization proposing change" (Drzymala, 1983, p. 11).

This study explored community participation factors from the perspectives of beneficiaries and functionaries and what both groups legitimize to make it more effective. The findings of the study suggest that effective community participation in development projects include a series of activities that takes place in four stages. It is also evident that effective community participation is a joint venture of the beneficiaries and the functionaries. This means that both the parties should work together in order to design, implement, and evaluate the end results of the project, which will help to upgrade the project in light of changing needs and desires of the community.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

As finances were limited, traveling to interview people in the more distant locations was not possible. Therefore, the study is limited to only one out of three coastal regions. In selecting the region, emphasis was placed on being able to access the community, and to the existence of active development projects. The low literacy rate and local transportation in the area were limitations; however, I am conversant in the regional dialect, having grown up in the study area. Coastal development projects considered in this study varied in terms of objectives, nature, scope of work, and network. Another limitation, therefore, is lack of ability to generalize information generated to all coastal development projects in Bangladesh. The time frame for the study was short. I worked very hard, as needed, to compensate for the limitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Research and evaluation of coastal community development from the social, economic, political, environmental, and psychological aspects are pivotal both for the organizations working in the areas and for the overall development of the coastal communities. An in-depth ethnographic study may be undertaken in order to interpret views of coastal people in terms of their desire for participation in coastal development projects. The effects of trauma on cyclone survivors could also be assessed.

There is a need for undertaking a comparative study in order to see the nature

and levels of participation in coastal development projects sponsored by governmental, nongovernmental, and international organizations. A cost-effectiveness study of coastal development projects needs to be undertaken in order to assess their usefulness to people and community in general. Employing women researchers could explore female desires, potentials, and obstacles to participation in coastal development projects. A qualitative approach will help significantly in uncovering subjective feelings of coastal women with regard to their desire for participation. There is also a need for research into direct and indirect relationships between beneficiaries and functionaries of a development project.

Diversification of the wood cutting occupation into other viable occupations could also be assessed to protect the coastal forest from everyday destruction by marginalized coastal people, and to provide a means of alternative livelihood. Population density is continuously increasing in the region. A survey could therefore be conducted to determine the types of development that will create employment opportunities for coastal people other than agriculture. A study assessing the utilization of indigenous knowledge to cope with natural disasters is also recommended.

