

Measuring good governance for complex ecosystems: Perceptions of coral reef-dependent communities in the Caribbean

R.A. Turner,^{a*}C. Fitzsimmons^b, J. Forster^b, R. Mahon^a, A.Peterson^a, S.M. Stead^b

^aCentre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, BB11000, Barbados

^bSchool of Marine Science and Technology, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK

Abstract

Good governance is widely seen as a prerequisite for effective natural resources management in the context of environmental decline and increasing anthropogenic pressures. Few studies quantitatively examine governance principles, or explore links between perceptions of community members and the governance that shapes their behaviour. Comparative work, spanning multiple sites and contexts, is rare. This paper measures community members' perceptions of governance in twelve coral reef-dependent communities across four countries in the Wider Caribbean Region. In relation to established principles of 'good governance', multiple correspondence analysis indicates that perceptions can be reliably described using two themes, institutional acceptance and engagement. These explain over 50% of variation in individual perceptions. These measurable themes provide an indication of the social fit of governance arrangements, and have implications for expected outcomes, including support for management and compliance with regulations. Cluster analysis provides unique empirical evidence linking structural characteristics of governance to community perceptions; four of five good governance indicators were present in communities with positive perceptions. Results suggest a combination of supportive structures and processes are necessary to achieve governance systems positively perceived by community members. Findings are relevant to those seeking to design management systems and governance structures that are appropriate to local circumstances and will engender stakeholder support.