

Preface

The coastal zone is a big place: some 40% of the world's population lives within 100 km of the sea and this zone is under increasing pressure. Sustainable development and management of coastal zone resources are vitally important to human well-being, to national economies and to the ecosystems on which we depend.

In simple spatial terms, the coastal zone is the interface between the land and the ocean. It comprises inshore waters below low-tide level, intertidal areas and tracts of land above high-tide level. It is an area of transition where terrestrial and marine environments interact, characterized by a complex web of interactions among people, resources and ecosystems. This is a functional aspect of the definition rather than a simple spatial relationship, which is critical to our understanding of how it should be managed.

The coastal zone environment that is of particular interest to us is represented by river deltas, mangrove swamps, salt marshes and estuaries where the land-water interface is gradual, extensive and seasonally varying. It has the following characteristics:

- The aquatic environment is subject to seasonally varying salinity.
- The terrestrial environment is vulnerable to both tidal and riverine flooding.
- The natural resource base supports aquaculture, agriculture and fisheries.

The off-shore limit may be arbitrarily defined according to legal and administrative considerations, but the inland boundary requires more careful consideration because of the hydrological linkage between the coastal zone and inland river basins. There are examples of many coastal zones being affected by a reduced flow of fresh water and sediment as a result of dams, barrages and water diversions (e.g. Indus, Nile, Volta) that occur very long distances upstream.

The focus of the book is around the challenges people face in managing crops, aquaculture, fisheries and related ecosystems in inland areas of coastal zones in the tropics. A priority issue that emerges from the case studies presented here is the impact of change on poor people whose livelihoods depend upon open-access resources. Any development decision that aims at enhancing production from aquaculture and/or agriculture is likely to adversely affect access to and the productivity of these resources. Conflicts arise between different stakeholders and in this book we discuss the nature of these conflicts and identify what is known and not known about how to manage them. The book will therefore help planners, resource managers and donors to make better-informed investment decisions in connection with development of the coastal zone.

The chapters in this book were selected from papers presented at the International Conference on Environment and Livelihoods in Coastal Zones: Managing Agriculture–Fishery–Aquaculture Conflicts, organized in Bac Lieu, Vietnam, on 1–3 March 2005. We would like to express our thanks to the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture, the Challenge Program on Water and Food, the WorldFish Center, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the many donors who support these institutes and programmes, the People’s Committee of Bac Lieu Province, Vietnam, and Can Tho University, Vietnam, for their assistance in sponsoring and organizing the conference. Grateful acknowledgement is extended also to the many anonymous reviewers who provided invaluable assistance in the process of editing the papers into the versions that appear in this book.

The Editors