

Dugongs without borders



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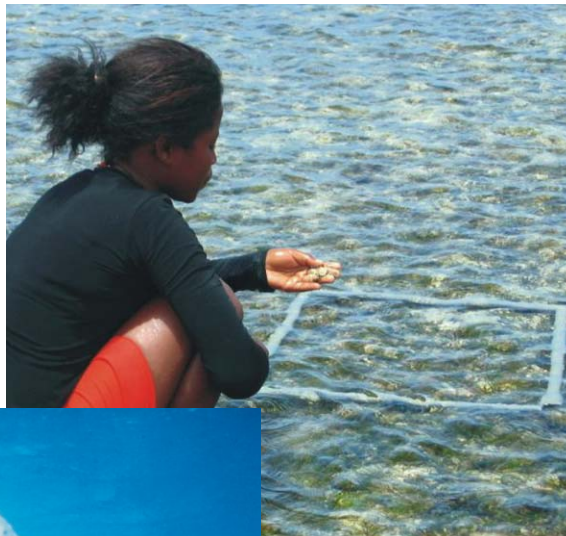
Photography Community Centred Conservation (C3)



Malagasy fishers preparing their nets

In recent years, dugong numbers have rapidly declined throughout the Western Indian Ocean region as a result of hunting, accidental capture in nets and habitat destruction. To address these issues, Community Centred Conservation (C3) and local partners initiated the project 'Dugongs without Borders' in Northern Madagascar in May 2009. The project aims to build national and regional capacity in Comoros and Madagascar for collaborative dugong research and conservation initiatives. One component of this project is the collation of information on seagrass habitat in the region, including baseline surveys and mapping, using the Seagrass-Watch protocol.

According to interview surveys that we conducted in July and August 2009 among fishers and retired dugong hunters in Northern Madagascar, it would appear that the region may still host a significant



dugong population and interviewees were even able to identify past and present dugong feeding sites. We are now concentrating our seagrass mapping work at these sites in order to assess dugong habitat and consider options for its protection.

Following a training session in Seagrass-Watch methods with our partner organisations, we conducted preliminary seagrass mapping at Ramena, Antaravy, and Nosy Hara Marine Park

(Ampasindava and Vohilava) from September to November 2009.

Our work has revealed the presence of 8 species including: *Thalassia hemprichii*, *Cymodocea rotundata*, *C. serrulata*, *Halodule uninervis*, *Halodule wrightii*, *Syringodium isoetifolium*, *Halophila ovalis* and *Zostera capensis*. There was good news for dugongs because seagrass meadows generally appeared healthy and extensive.

Working in this remote region has proven to be quite a challenge with many sites only accessible by boat and located in remote areas where freshwater is scarce; fortunately the incredible hospitality of local

communities has greatly aided our work. This is the first phase of a series of seagrass mapping work planned for the upcoming months. The information gathered on seagrass habitats in Northern Madagascar will provide us with a better idea of the importance of particular sites for dugongs and priorities for conservation with the help of local stakeholders.

For further information, please visit our website at www.c-3.org.uk



image courtesy GBRMPA

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