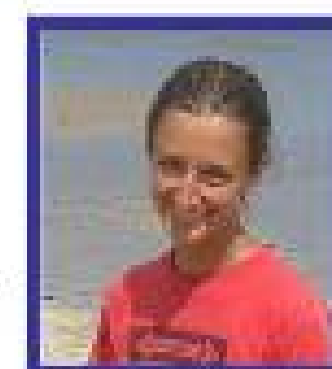


THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF MOHELI MARINE PARK, COMOROS



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ABSTRACT

The Union of the Comoros is situated at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel, equidistant (approximately 300km) from continental Africa and Madagascar. It comprises three volcanic islands; Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli. The Comoros are classed as a Least Developed Country with 88% of the population living on the coast and fisheries being of considerable economic importance (8% of GDP). Effective management of marine resources thus assumes a particular importance in the development of sustainable livelihoods and the reduction of poverty. In addition, the rich biodiversity of the Comoros provides immense potential for the development of marine eco-tourism.

Mohéli Marine Park was the first MPA to be established in the Comoros in 2001, based on its rich biological diversity and the presence of humpback whales, endangered dugong and the third most important nesting site for green sea turtles in the world. Partnerships between village associations, national government and NGOs are so far proving to be successful on Mohéli. Ten villages are involved in the management of the Park through village associations with 12 local 'ecoguards' in charge of day-to-day management and monitoring activities. Capacity-building is provided by a formal collaboration between an international NGO, Community Centred Conservation (C3) and the Park and income-generating projects are currently being initiated throughout the island.



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Local knowledge is a vital component of this programme and has proved particularly useful for studies of the dugong on Mohéli. Interviews with fishers and an incidental sighting programme have revealed that the dugongs may be more widespread than previously thought. C3-Comores hopes to follow this work up with aerial surveys in 2007.



Village consultation

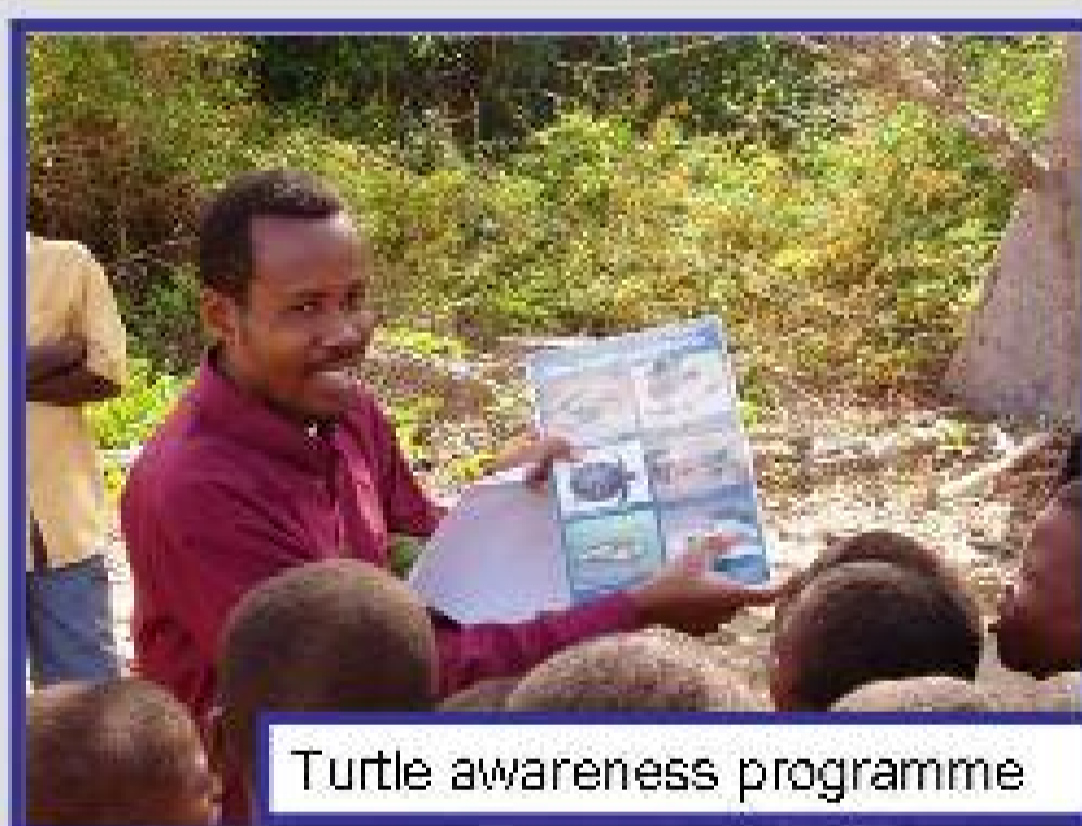
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH



Seagrass survey

The programme is currently studying the dugong and sea turtle populations of Mohéli and the seagrass habitat on which they depend. This work has included: mapping of populations and habitat, tagging nesting turtles, seagrass survey; dugong carcass recovery and basic necroscopy and storage and dispatch of tissue and stomach contents (for DNA and diet analysis). Local participants and ecoguards are trained and participate fully in all aspects of the work programme.

AWARENESS-RAISING



Turtle awareness programme

C3-Comores initiated 'Operation Mohéli' in June 2006, funded by the BP Conservation Programme, this project focuses on the dugong and sea turtles. By promoting these flagship species and their habitats, local communities have been encouraged to take responsibility for the conservation of their own marine resources. Much of C3-Comores fieldwork is carried out by local volunteers, ensuring that the skills and knowledge that they gain remain within the Comoros.

THE FUTURE

In the future, C3-Comores hopes to further increase the research capacity of Mohéli and replicate the success of the programme on the other islands of the Comoros. The greatest obstacle to date has been the lack of available infrastructure and sustainable funding, and this has to be carefully considered when planning conservation management programmes. In the past, many initiatives on the island have been overambitious for the available infrastructure and levels of training. However, community-centred co-management using simple, low-cost techniques is now creating long-lasting results for the Comoros.



Nesting green turtle

CAPACITY-BUILDING

The Comoros lack a marine research institution and there is a fundamental need to strengthen organizational capacity. The C3-Comores programme aims to enhance the marine management capacity of the islands through training of governmental, NGO and Marine Park staff. Inter-island exchanges have proved beneficial, and have enabled experiences to be shared. It is hoped that international exchanges will also be possible in the near future.



SCUBA training

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS



Turtle-watching at Itsamia

The Comoros, and in particular Mohéli, show great potential for the development of ecotourism. C3-Comores has carried out surveys of tourists and also investigated villagers perceptions and needs to promote ecotourism on Mohéli. The programme is also researching and providing start-up funds for other income-generating schemes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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