

MOHÉLI MARINE PARK, COMOROS – LESSONS LEARNED IN MPA CO-MANAGEMENT

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Please see C3 representative Bjorn Alfthan for further information on this poster

INTRODUCTION

The first Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Comoros, Mohéli Marine Park (*Parc Marin de Mohéli - PMM*), was established on 19th April 2001 (Figure 1) as a major component of the UNDP/GEF-funded Project Biodiversity. The establishment of PMM was based on its rich biological diversity and the presence of key coastal habitats and endangered marine species and the Management Plan for PMM anticipated full implication of local stakeholders through co-management.

Initially regarded as a model for co-management of marine resources, PMM is now operating at a vastly reduced capacity following the end of Project Biodiversity, and subsequent end in funding. Beaches are littered with poached turtle carcasses and fishers regularly use gillnets and other banned fishing methods. It is thus crucial that the impetus of Project Biodiversity is built upon immediately to ensure that local communities do not become disillusioned and demotivated. This study was recognized as essential to ensure integration of the perceptions of these stakeholders into current management decision-making and in the identification of future priorities.



Figure 1: The Union of the Comoros and Mohéli Marine Park



Fishers in Ndrondroni



Female focus group, Hamavouva

EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

Great disparity in knowledge and awareness of PMM was noted according to gender, with women showing much lower levels of awareness (Figure 2). The vast majority of women (in 70% of villages) felt that they had not played any role in the creation of PMM and four female focus groups also remarked that they remained uninformed and ignorant of park activities as well as conservation in general. In spite of this, the women who participated in the focus group interviews were motivated and inspired; they were eager for training in all conservation activities, including nightly surveillance of beaches for turtle poachers.

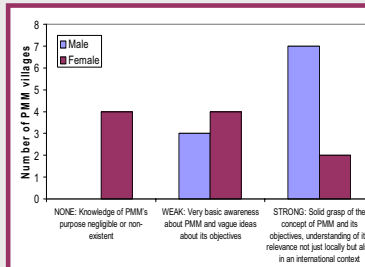


Figure 2: Stakeholder awareness of PMM in male and female focus groups

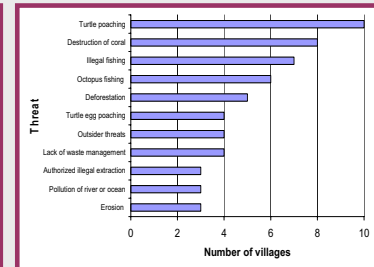


Figure 3: Threats identified during focus group interviews

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in each of the 10 villages of PMM based on six key parameters: (1) basic awareness, (2) value, (3) effectiveness, (4) environmental threats and solutions, (5) stakeholder roles and responsibilities and (6) future aspirations and expectations. The interview was designed to allow for open discussion in a focus group format and further relevant questions were posed during each interview according to participants' responses to the key questions.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF PMM

All focus groups interviewed believed that PMM was important, citing reasons which corresponded closely with the initial objectives of the MPA. However, PMM stakeholders reported a total of 18 negative aspects, illustrating that to date it has failed to some extent in successful implementation of these objectives in a co-management context.

LACK OF SUSTAINABILITY

Lack of sustainability was identified as the primary negative aspect of PMM, although there were originally plans to address this issue, it seems that none was fully realized. PMM's financial situation was thus uncertain following the end of Project Biodiversity in 2003. This was clear to local communities who remarked on the reductions in management effectiveness, activity and levels of enforcement after Project Biodiversity was over.

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS

Most focus groups (85%) believed that they had received no benefits or only one benefit from PMM. Thus, PMM has failed to provide adequate incentives to its stakeholders to ensure their continuing motivation for biodiversity conservation.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism was one of the key objectives of PMM and was recognized by communities as a positive aspect. However, tourist arrivals have declined since the creation of PMM and communities complained that they were inadequately trained to host tourists and provide guides, accommodation and other services.

Gear alternatives for fishers

Prohibitions on fishing gear (gillnetting, spearfishing, dynamiting and poisoning) were identified as a constraint by several communities. The main concern was the reduction in catch as a result of restrictions, particularly during rough weather. There was also no consensus among communities on the actual effects of these regulations on fisheries yields. Without demonstrated fisheries-enhancement effects, PMM will be unable to win over fishers who have lost income following gear prohibitions.

INEQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF BENEFITS

A lack of transparency in the management of PMM and inequitable distribution of its benefits were major concerns voiced by local communities. Stakeholders felt that benefits were being concentrated in Nioumachoua, the headquarters of PMM or villages such as Itsamia that host more conspicuous marine attractions such as turtles. These views regarding distribution of benefits were a root cause of the ubiquitous feelings of resentment towards PMM. This dissatisfaction and distrust have clearly contributed to stakeholders' non-compliance with PMM regulations and their unwillingness to actively participate in effective co-management.

MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT

Environmental threats identified by stakeholders are given in Figure 3. Lack of effective monitoring or enforcement ranked second for negative aspects of PMM. This issue was raised in eight villages, where respondents stated that the lack of permanent monitoring and enforcement was leading to a continuation of turtle poaching and destructive fishing practices. As a result, local communities have become demotivated. Resentment has arisen from the fact that those that do respect regulations gain no benefits, while those that do not respect regulations gain increased benefits. Lack of enforcement has also led to the perception that PMM no longer exists and thus people may carry out illegal activities with no fear of incrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Ensure sustainability through effective financial planning and promotion of low-cost, appropriate management techniques
- (2) Mobilize local communities to create a truly co-managed PMM
- (3) Ensure tangible benefits to local communities through realistic alternative livelihood options, particularly for fishers
- (4) Ensure equitable sharing of benefits and awareness of PMM
- (5) Involve women in the management of PMM, they are the primary local educators and motivators for future generations
- (6) Inform law enforcement officials and members of the justice system to ensure understanding, respect and enforcement of PMM regulations

'We want youth to be involved with PMM. We want them to become motivated and to forget about all the past negative aspects associated with PMM. We want them to be able to gain the benefits. Our generation has failed, but we should look to improve the situation for future generations.' – Man from Ndrondroni

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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