

# COMMUNITY-MANAGED MONITORING OF MARINE RESOURCES ON MOHÉLI, UNION OF THE COMOROS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Union of the Comoros is a cluster of volcanic islands situated at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel, equidistant from continental Africa and Madagascar. It comprises three islands; Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli. Mohéli Marine Park was the first Marine Protected Area to be established in the Comoros in 2001, based on its rich biological diversity and the presence of humpback whales, dugongs and the third most important nesting site for green turtles in the world. In August 2006, as part of 'Operation Mohéli', funded by the BP Conservation Programme, C3-Comores initiated an ecology training programme at the request of FADEVICHO, the village association of Hoani, in the north of Mohéli. Despite the presence of one of the five most important nesting sites for green turtles on the island, Hoani had not been included within the boundary of the Marine Park, and its community had a low level of awareness of the importance of the local marine environment.



Mohéli Island

## TRAINING PROGRAMME

C3 worked with the ecoguards (rangers) of Mohéli Marine Park and Zaharani Moindjie from the Comorian NGO, AIDE (Association of Intervention for Development and the Environment) to develop an ecology training course for the community members of Hoani.



Intertidal field trip



Hoani training programme participants



Ecology presentation

The three-day training course included lectures in marine and forest ecology and sea turtle and dugong conservation. There were also forest and beach field trips to provide practical understanding and experience.

This was followed by oral and written exams which required a minimum score to qualify as a community ecoguard or ecoguide.

Twenty community members participated in the course in Hoani and ten individuals decided to enter the final exam. Three community ecoguards and four community ecoguides were successful. Nema Madi obtained 95% in the final exam to become the first female ecoguard in the Comoros.

## CONSERVATION CENTRE

In addition, a Conservation Centre was constructed with funding from IOSEA Year of the Turtle 2006. This centre will provide information for tourists as well as acting as an ecoguard station and regional training centre. The Centre is located on a turtle nesting beach close to Hoani, and comprises two rooms.

The first room has been designed to accommodate anti-poaching teams for night patrols and for tourists who wish to view turtles nesting at night.

The second room has been designed to inform tourists and villagers about conservation issues on Mohéli. This room displays information posters and brochures on turtles, as well as information on the history of Hoani village and the surrounding region. There are also handicrafts, postcards and T-shirts on sale for tourists, revenue



Hoani Conservation Centre

from which will be channelled back into conservation initiatives in the village. Two murals have been painted on the centre by C3 with assistance from the local community. The specific designs for the paintings were chosen by the village association to portray the environment of Mohéli and the species that live within it.

## COMMUNITY MONITORING PROGRAMMES



Turtle survey team

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006, C3-Comores started a low-cost turtle monitoring programme on Mohéli. Teams of ecoguards now count turtle tracks and carcasses on the ten most significant nesting beaches every quarter, and on all beaches annually. These data will provide a clear picture of changes in poaching and numbers of nesting turtles and can be analysed by the ecoguards themselves to provide immediate feedback to their communities. Incidental sighting cards for dugongs have also been distributed among local fishers; these cards have already provided useful information on this illusive animal. A community seagrass monitoring programme is also in preparation.

## THE FUTURE

The positive results of the training were almost immediate; several turtle poachers were caught and convicted within two weeks. The village association received a percentage of the fine, thus enabling them to develop their conservation efforts. Two other villages in the region, Domoni and Hamba requested C3-Comores to carry out similar training courses which were received with equal enthusiasm.



A new generation of turtles for Hoani

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is being carried out as part of a programme undertaken on Mohéli by C3-Comores – a collaboration between Community Centred Conservation (C3) and Mohéli Marine Park. We are extremely grateful to the following donors for supporting this work:



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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