

MOHÉLI MARINE PARK, COMOROS – SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF THE CO-MANAGEMENT APPROACH

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Mohéli Marine Park (Parc Marin de Mohéli, PMM) was the first Marine Protected Area (MPA) to be established in the Comoros in 2001. Initially regarded as a model for co-management of marine resources, PMM is now operating at a vastly reduced capacity following an end to external funding sources. An assessment of current perceptions of local stakeholders of PMM was recognized as an essential first step in rebuilding its capacity and effectiveness as an MPA. This study aimed to ascertain stakeholders' current perceptions of PMM, using focus group interviews to evaluate 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. It was apparent that most local communities were aware of the importance of PMM, but felt that it had failed to include their needs or consider their input in its management. Concern was expressed for the lack of sustainability or alternative livelihoods; inequitable distribution of benefits; exclusion of women; continuing environmental threats and a concurrent lack of enforcement of regulations. The key recommendations to arise from this work were: (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.