

## Marine protected areas

# Making local communities visible

**There are issues surrounding marine protected areas and the livelihoods of coastal communities within them**

**M**arine protected areas (MPAs) or marine parks are increasingly being used as a way of protecting coastal and marine resources, based on scientific principles of safeguarding the ecological resource, in the context of widespread marine resource depletion. As such, they are a potentially positive intervention, as they seek to achieve the conservation of coastal resources as a whole for current and future generations of people. Claims are made about the benefits of MPAs for the environment and for local people, including that they can provide an increase in stocks in less restricted fishing areas adjacent to the protected areas, as well as indirect benefits through tourism. However, such benefits only occur if MPAs are properly managed—yet figures from the World Wide Fund for Nature—or, as it is known in North America, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)—estimate that 80 per cent of MPAs worldwide are protected in name only and are not being managed actively or effectively.

In some cases, protected areas in general (including land-based ones) have failed to sustain the wildlife populations they were designed to protect, while, at the same time, having a negative impact on the food security and livelihoods of local people. They have, in practice, been associated with forced displacement and loss of access to natural resources of those living in and around them, with inadequate or no compensation.

Numerous studies have found that it is often the poorest households that are most dependent on natural resources. Protected areas have, therefore, often led to further impoverishment of those living in poverty. This inattention paid to the livelihoods and socioeconomic situation

of local communities reflects a general trend in environmental conservation, despite a growing consensus that poverty and weak governance are two of the most significant underlying threats to conservation.

This article examines the issues around marine protected areas and livelihoods of coastal communities within MPAs, with reference to examples in South Africa. Findings were drawn from across the three coastal provinces of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, using a range of key informants and available literature.

International and national guidelines for the setting-up and management of MPAs include a strong emphasis on stakeholder involvement. However, in practice, provisions are weak, and local coastal communities are often effectively invisible in the MPA process, despite having traditionally fished in the protected areas for centuries or more, and despite the fact that many rely on fishing for their livelihoods and food security.

In the context of concerns over equity in marine resource allocation, the increased regulation of fishing that accompanies the creation of marine parks often disproportionately affects under-resourced local fishing communities, compared with other stakeholders.

**Local communities**

Furthermore, in South Africa, little effort has been made to find out the impact of MPAs on local communities. The lack of data on the impact on livelihoods is problematic, considering the obvious connection between the socioeconomic characteristics and attitudes of local communities, and the type of

management and enforcement of marine resources required within protected areas.

**T**hose living adjacent to MPAs in South Africa have been adversely affected in many cases by a rollover of spatial patterns resulting from land dispossession and the setting up of protected areas during the apartheid era. Local communities' access to coastal resources has been affected by removals as part of apartheid and colonial spatial legislation, and, more recently, by the growth of the tourism industry and the real estate/property boom. In many cases, MPAs have retained some protected area boundaries set up during apartheid, reinforcing discriminatory land ownership and access. Although this may be for sound environmental reasons, it has led to resentment in local communities, especially where there has been limited participation in decisionmaking.

Current management of MPAs, in general, is inadequate, both internationally and nationally. A joint WWF-Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) report found that only seven out of 19 MPAs in South Africa had formal management agreements in 2003—those without formal agreements appear to be faring worse. Many MPA authorities lack the capacity for effective enforcement and management funding for MPAs has not been a government priority and budgets have been cut. In many cases, staff

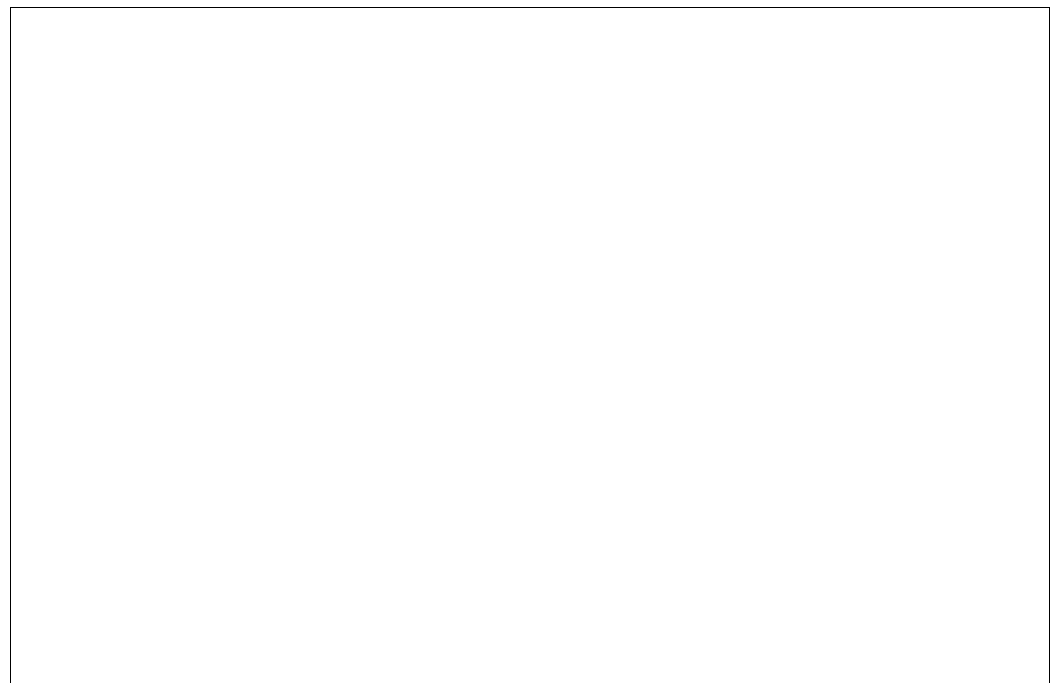
capacity is insufficient for effective management. Performance and monitoring requirements in the national legislation are also weak. Furthermore, existing management agreements between national parks/MPA authorities and MCM are predominantly concerned with enforcement against illegal fishing, not other aspects of management. Nevertheless, illegal fishing or poaching was stated to be a problem in all the MPAs investigated, in many cases jeopardizing the state of the resources. This included small-scale to large-scale poaching.

The evidence points to the fact that genuine increased community involvement has a beneficial effect on conservation aims in MPAs, with increased community buy-in and respect for regulations. National and international legislation now requires the consultation or public participation of stakeholders in the setting up and management of MPAs.

However, the mechanisms by which participation is to be carried out are not specified, and, therefore, real involvement has been limited, especially where the MPAs continue protection of an area that was set up when local participation was not required. This has caused conflict or protest action in many MPAs.

**Recent MPAs**

For some MPAs declared more recently, such as the Table Mountain National Park



(TMNP), the level of consultation has been higher. The TMNP has sought to impinge as little as possible on major fishing areas for permit holders, albeit imperfectly for small-scale fishers. In several other MPAs, multi-use zoning—which allows fishing in certain areas—has not been embraced, and buy-in to this principle from MCM has been inadequate.

**A**lthough the current discourse emphasizing involvement of local communities in the management of protected areas does bring benefits to those communities, in many cases, the limits placed on the level at which participation takes place means that it is unlikely to adequately compensate them for their exclusion from access to the natural resources in those protected areas. This includes the vast majority of government livelihoods and poverty alleviation initiatives, which lack sustainability.

In most cases, only brief consultation of specific stakeholders has been implemented rather than genuine local involvement in decisionmaking, with the result that such consultation can be used to legitimate top-down decisionmaking. This extends to what is termed 'co-management' of natural resources in South Africa—this has generally meant very little involvement in decisionmaking regarding resource utilization. For example, in

Dwesa-Cwebe MPA, where local people are supposedly co-managing marine resources, no fishing at all is permitted. Furthermore, where fishing is allowed in the protected areas, in most cases, the subsistence level and low-value resource use allowed by marine park authorities do not satisfy basic needs or livelihood requirements, including rent, school fees and basic services, where available. Even subsistence fishers operate in a monetized economy, and, therefore, if insufficient alternative livelihood opportunities are available, illegal fishing is likely to occur when subsistence fishing does not cover basic needs.

In practice, public participation can be fraught with problems, and requires a genuine, long-term commitment on the part of the relevant authorities. Capacity constraints and communication gaps have meant that communication among government departments and agencies, and between government and communities, has generally been inadequate, leading to the conflation of issues of land, marine resource and general service provision by communities, and a resulting lack of co-operation with government.

#### **Access denied**

In the context of a denial of access, people in local traditional fishing communities still have a very strong social and cultural connection with the sea and with fishing.

Changes that have been enforced relatively recently, and visibly extended within the last decade of democracy, have brought to the fore a fundamental clash of cultures—between predominantly ‘traditional’, communal ways of managing and harvesting natural resources, and ‘modern’ (industrial), individual, private property-based quotas. MPAs are one manifestation of the enforcement of the State as the effective owner of all natural resources, an idea that many people in local coastal communities would contest.

Furthermore, fishermen feel that their indigenous knowledge and traditional methods, including rotation of areas and resources, are not being recognized by scientific measures or government regulations.

Recreational fishers and industrial companies, with their better resources and greater political influence, can much better lobby government on access and policies than small-scale fishers and poverty-stricken communities, leading to greater resentment among the communities in the MPAs researched. Government authorities are reluctant to jeopardize access for recreational fishers since they are a major source of revenue in the form of tourism in MPAs. Furthermore, recreational fishers have escaped regulation and enforcement to a large extent in the past.

Levels of poverty in coastal areas in South Africa are significant in most areas where MPAs are situated—with the highest average levels in the Eastern Cape province (48 per cent), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (26) and the Western Cape (12), representing the percentage of people whose household expenditure was R800 (approx. US\$119) or less per month. The Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape has one of the highest levels of poverty in the country—between 60 per cent and 80 per cent.

However, such figures hide huge disparities between rich and poor—in most provinces, inequality is increasing, particularly in the Western Cape, where many people in coastal areas are unable to enjoy the benefits of the burgeoning, but highly capital-intensive, tourism

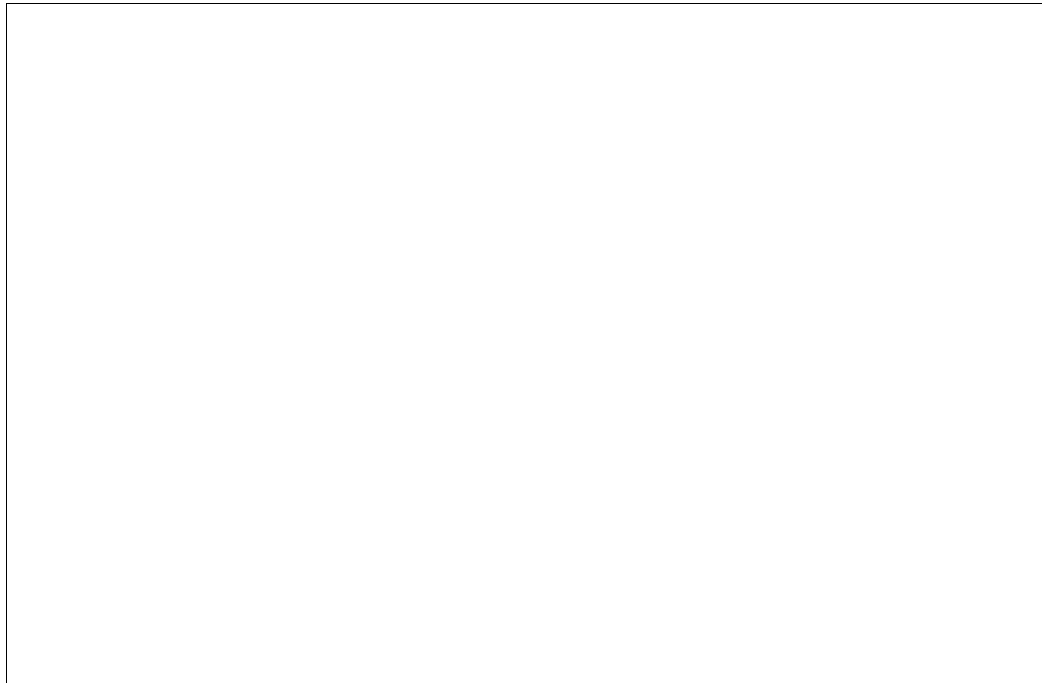
industry. In towns surrounding the West Coast National Park, over 40 per cent of people were recorded as having no income, according to the 2001 census. The Eastern Cape province, where five MPAs are situated, has suffered particularly from racially defined apartheid spatial policies, although other provinces have also been considerably affected. Severe lack of investment in certain areas, combined with restrictions on movement and land ownership elsewhere, meant that specific areas such as the Wild Coast became overcrowded and were systematically denied access to resources and services, resulting in high levels of poverty and reliance on marine resources. Therefore, the pressures of high population and poverty, as well as poor land and coastal management outside the reserves, are detrimental to the state of the natural resources, and has direct impacts on MPAs.

Without improved management of restricted areas, policy developments in South Africa are likely to further endanger the livelihoods of fishers living adjacent to marine parks, since the department responsible for fisheries has expressed its intention to substantially increase the no-take zones within marine park areas from 1 per cent to 20 per cent of protected areas.

The emphasis on environmental concerns in MPA management hides a predominance of considerations of growth and profit at the macroeconomic level (including foreign currency revenue for the State), over the socioeconomic concerns of livelihoods and poverty alleviation for local people.

#### **Legitimacy issue**

MPAs cannot be considered in isolation from the areas and communities surrounding them—the marginalization of local communities puts the legitimacy of MPAs at stake, and has serious consequences both for the management of protected areas and for the ecological resource itself due to increased incidences of poaching. Issues around management of MPAs, in general, exacerbate this problem. While MPAs have an important contribution to make, their strategy alone is unlikely to provide the solution to all management and resource access



problems MPAs are only one of a range of suitable management tools.

We, therefore, propose a more equitable sharing of the costs and benefits for stakeholders involved in MPAs, so that local communities and the socioeconomic impacts of MPAs are made visible, and local people are genuinely involved in management decisionmaking. If managed effectively to include local communities in genuine partnership with managing authorities—and if alternative livelihood opportunities are provided—MPAs could address both socioeconomic and environmental conservation concerns. 3

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