# BUILDING A NATIONAL NETWORK FOR SOCIOECONOMIC MONITORING OF MARINE RESOURCES IN THE COMOROS

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## ABSTRACT

The SocMon-WIO programme aims to establish a regional network of locally-based teams to conduct regular monitoring of socioeconomic indicators to provide data for management decision-making. Over 18 individual sites now employ SocMon in the region: in Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar Mozambique, South Africa, Rodrigues, Seychelles and Tanzania. In 2008, SocMon-WIO began to establish national-level networks in the Comoros, Tanzania and Kenya. The Comoros network is now well underway, with participation from government institutions, national NGOs, the University of the Comoros and local village associations. The Comoros are characterized by extreme anthropogenic pressure and high levels of biodiversity and this combination of attributes highlights the importance of assessing, understanding and monitoring socioeconomic elements to strengthen and develop appropriate participatory management and conservation strategies. Although progress has been slowed by political unrest between the islands, a SocMon training workshop was held for 15 participants in June 2008, secondary data have been collected and fieldwork was completed in 2009. Here we present preliminary findings of this work and options for their integration into national marine resource management policy.

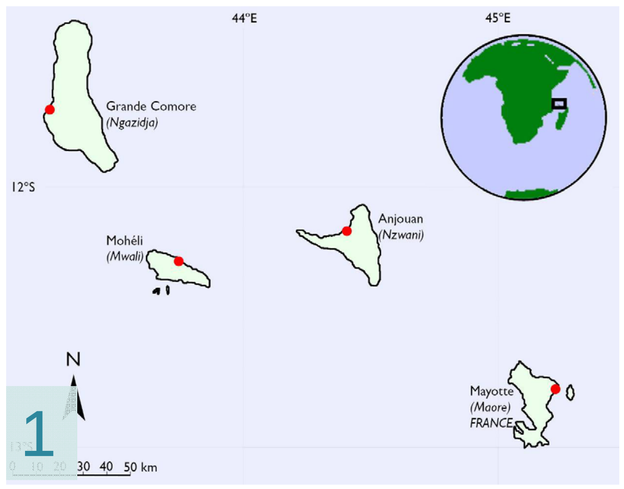
## WHAT IS SOCMON-WIO?

Coastal resources cannot be managed from a biophysical focus alone because local community attitudes towards and uses of coastal resources have serious implications for the health of coastal ecosystems. The management of coastal resources has equally serious implications for the socioeconomic health of the community. Socioeconomic Monitoring – Western Indian Ocean (SocMon-WIO) is part of the Global Socioeconomic Monitoring Initiative for Coastal Management, which aims to increase coastal managers' capacity to understand and incorporate the socio-economic context of the coastal resource user communities into coastal management programmes. This is done by providing clear and concise guidance on how to establish socioeconomic monitoring programmes at sites around the world. Over 18 individual sites now employ SocMon in the region: in Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar Mozambique, South Africa, Rodrigues, Seychelles and Tanzania. In 2008, SocMon-WIO began to establish national-level networks in the Comoros, Tanzania and Kenya.

## SOCMON-WIO IN THE COMOROS

The three islands of the Union of the Comoros: Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli **(1)** have been identified as one of the worlds 43 marine priority ecoregions and one of the worlds 'hottest hotspots' for global biodiversity. They host a wide range of endemic species and contain important marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds. This habitat diversity has resulted in a high level of biodiversity and endemism, including endangered species such as the hawksbill turtle *(Eretmochelys imbricata)* and the dugong *(Dugong dugon)*. Thus the Comoros are one of the world's critical sites for conservation investment and action as well as holding high potential for ecotourism.

In contrast to their biological wealth, the Union of the Comoros is considered to be one of the poorest countries in the world and a 'least developed country'. The political situation remains unstable since the Union's independence from France in 1975.




The current political system consists of an autonomous government for each island and a Union Government responsible for the islands as a whole. Further to this the Comoros are facing severe demographic pressure with their population estimated to double within the next 33 years.

As a direct result of the current demographic, economic and political situation of the country, the unique biodiversity and natural resources of the Comoros are under serious threat from over-exploitation due to population growth, paucity of knowledge, severe demographic pressure and lack of local conservation management capacity. The impacts of over-exploitation are most evident in coastal areas as a result of the economic importance of artisanal fishing and the consequently high levels of settlement in the coastal regions.

The Comoros' combined attributes of extreme anthropogenic pressures on natural resources and high biodiversity highlights the importance of assessing, understanding and monitoring socioeconomic elements to strengthen and develop appropriate participatory management and conservation strategies. This project aims to build on previous baseline work by C3-Comores and local partners to identify sites for community based coastal resource management and adaptive management processes using SocMon methodology.

## PROGRESS SO FAR

The Comoros network is now well underway, with participation from government institutions, national NGOs, the University of the Comoros and local village associations. A training workshop **(2,3)** was held for 15 participants in June 2008, secondary data have been collected and fieldwork **(4)** was completed at several sites on each island in June 2009. Community Centred Conservation (C3), a British NGO, in collaboration with local partners has been responsible for the implementation of the network which will initially provide recommendations for the establishment of a network of Marine Protected Areas throughout the Comoros.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Poonian CNS, Hauzer MD, Moussa Iboura C (in press) CHALLENGES FOR EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE CO-MANAGED MARINE PROTECTED AREAS: A CASE STUDY FROM THE COMOROS ISLANDS. Proceedings of the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, 7-11 July 2008

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**www.c-3.org.uk**
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