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INNOVATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE OCEAN

The Shimoni-Vanga Multi-Stakeholder's Forum—promoting social impact and sustainable management of the Shimoni Vanga Seascape

The Shimoni-Vanga Seascape, which is located in the southern coast of Kenya (Kwale County) and next to the Tanzanian border, is endowed with rich biodiversity. The seascape is teeming with a diverse array of fish species, and harbours important ecosystems such as mangrove forests, seagrass and corals. The Kisite-Mpunguti National Park and Reserve, famous for dolphin sightings and snorkeling, is located in the nearby waters.

However, challenges abound within the Shimoni-Vanga seascape. Fishermen are harvesting at a faster rate than the fish population can re-generate, leading to overfishing and dwindling catches. In addition, fishermen are using fishing methods and tools that are harmful to the environment and to fish stock. As the competition for fish increases, so do the conflicts. Moreover, when the number of tourists drop significantly due to external factors such as terrorism and climate change, the socio-economic status of the large number of people employed in this sector declines.

The resultant situation is one in which livelihoods are compromised; economic returns dwindle, school drop-out rate is high, drug use is on the rise and cultural values are under threat.



Plate 1. A fisher at Vanga. Fishing depends on the healthy mangroves

The county government of Kwale, together with development partners, private sector, academia and civil society organizations, are implementing a range of activities to promote the conservation and ecological integrity of the Shimoni-Vanga seascape as well as to optimize social and economic benefits to the local communities from the sustainable use of the coastal and marine resources. An additional element of vital importance undertaken by some organizations is the improvement of governance and management structures at various levels.

To support communities effectively play their role towards an improved, governed and managed seascape, the GEF Small Grants Programme of UNDP has awarded grants to 15 civil society organizations (CSOs). These organizations, in collaboration with their partners, are implementing activities that enhance conservation of the seascape's resources, and that enhance their livelihoods. Their activities vary and include the following: eco-tourism; rehabilitation of degraded corals and mangroves; monitoring, control and surveillance of Co-managed areas; reducing plastic pollution, and enterprise development.

COMRED was selected as a Strategic Partner for GEF-SGP in the Shimoni-Vanga Seascape, and has been instrumental in helping the CSOs to brainstorm their ideas and turning them into fundable proposals. In addition, COMRED has assisted them in starting off the projects, provided technical assistance, and is engaged in monitoring of the projects. This has greatly improved the capacity of community CSOs.

An overarching challenge in achieving sustainable use and management of coastal marine resources and other related natural resource systems has been the lack of a coordinated approach to harness the *connectedness* nature of the ecosystems. A segregated approach, in which different ecosystem components attract a wide pool of stakeholders with varying interests, could result in an intervention in one component being beneficial or detrimental to other components.

An additional activity supported by the GEF- Small Grants Programme is the establishment of a multi-stakeholders' forum.



Plate 2. Participants to the inaugural Multi-stakeholders' Forum meeting of Shimoni-Vanga Seascape

The main goal of the forum is to provide a platform for dialogue amongst Shimoni-Vanga Seascape stakeholders with the purpose of cultivating and nurturing a long-term working relationship for effective collective decision-making and alignment of the natural resources use in the seascape to management and conservation. The forum is open to statutory agencies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and the private sector that have a keen interest in the use and management of natural resources in the Seascape.

The main functions of the forum include:

- Promotion of collective decision-making and to provide the communities with a voice;
- Provision of a platform for dialogue amongst the stakeholders on the seascape emerging issues and the appropriate interventions and mitigation;
- Provision of a platform for aligning seascape initiatives and activities with the National and County governments agenda;
- Coordination of seascape activities through alignment of proposed, new initiatives with the existing initiatives; and
- Providing a platform for information assimilation and dissemination amongst stakeholders.

Management of the Forum is vested in members of the forum. While it is apparent that one of the challenges that has faced multi-stakeholders' forum is sustainability, GEF-SGP approach has vested responsibility to individual stakeholders to support the forum. It is therefore a responsibility of individual stakeholders to support their attendance and participation in the forum.

During the inaugural meeting held on 14th January, 2020, members of the forum endorsed the Deputy County Commissioner for Lunga Lunga Sub-county (from the Ministry of Interior and Coordination) to chair the forum and the Lunga Lunga Sub-county Administrator (from the Kwale County Government) to co-chair. The office of the Kwale County Director of Fisheries was mandated to be the Secretariat of the forum. This arrangement not only provides broader oversight and insight of activities in the seascape, but also forms the backbone of sustainability past the GEF-SGP project.

During the inaugural meeting, members agreed on the following measures to ensure sustainability:

- Meetings to be held quarterly or earlier if necessary;
- Meetings to be held within the seascape area;
- Financing model;
 - Members to support their own participation in forum activities
 - Cost-share with large projects by government and non-state actors
 - Draft joint funding proposals and implementation
 - Encourage members to include forum costs as part of their proposals

So far only two meetings have taken place; during the conceptualization phase and the inaugural members meeting. The second meeting had been scheduled at the end of March, 2020 but was postponed after the government restricted meetings due to COVID-19 pandemic. There are plans to hold another, when things normalize. However, communication is ongoing with members of the forum and further sharing of information through a newsletter is underway.

The multi-stakeholder approach and engagement towards management of ocean resources is worthy of emulation in other parts of the region and the world. It comes across as a key innovation in governance that is only being tested now, and comes at a good time as we celebrate the World Oceans Day.

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