

Assessment of Biodiversity, Socio-Economic Status and Conservation Options at the Kisite- Mpunguti Marine Park in South Coast, Kenya

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In order to address the challenges faced by the existing conventional MPAs and the less conventional community managed conservation areas that are increasingly coming up, it is important generate scientific data from both the biophysical and socioeconomic spheres to guide decision-making while at the same time taking cognizance of emerging socioeconomic issues such as oil and gas exploration that were not there when the first conventional MPAs were established. An assessment was conducted on the socio-ecological and economic issues that relate to the interaction and effectiveness of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity resources at Kisite- Mpunguti Marine Park in the Kenya South Coast. A combination of questionnaire, key informant interview and observation techniques were used to establish resource users' perceptions towards the status of local biodiversity. Results indicate that: overdependence on biodiversity resources for consumption; inequity in ownership and access to natural resources including benefits from use and conservation of biodiversity; inadequate knowledge and inefficient use of information; and legal and institutional systems that promote unsustainable exploitation, are the major conservation challenges faced by the respondents. 81% of interviewees said that there were heavily degraded local sites, and among these 93% were optimistic that these sites could still be rehabilitated while also suggesting possible methods of doing so. It is recommended that the social, cultural and economic context for conservation and sustainable use measures should involve community participation and use of local knowledge; and the curbing of destructive or unsustainable uses by those who are uninterested or uncaring. There is need to provide support for on-going community conservation initiatives (*tengefu*) and development of joint-management programs which "do not seek to replace traditional forest practices and fishing activities but augment them. Successful joint management requires a significant transfer of responsibility from state agencies to villagers.

Keywords: biodiversity; marine protected areas; conservation and management