Socio-Economic Value of Marine Megafauna in the Small-Scale Fisheries of the Western Indian Ocean

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Successful management of a fishery requires an understanding of both the biological and human elements. Whilst traditionally emphasis has been placed firmly on the biological elements, increasingly it is accepted that the social and economic context in which the users (fishers) exist is a vital component in the formulation of feasible and effective management strategies and viable management goals. The vast majority of studies have been undertaken in industrialised fisheries, mainly in developed regions. Yet, the small-scale fisheries, employing 95% of fishers at the global scale and providing 50% of fish landings, are often overlooked. These small-scale fisheries may act as economic buffers, where they provide an employment "safety net" for communities, and a form of pro-poor employment where long-term poverty can be tackled. Alternatively they may create poverty-traps, where fishers cannot generate enough capital to ever leave the fishery. What is agreed however, is that these fisheries and the survival of those dependant on them are highly sensitive (and therefore vulnerable) to external shocks such as management changes, overexploitation, environmental changes etc. The Western Indian Ocean is one such region where marine small-scale fisheries are vital to many rural communities. Increasingly fishers are targeting larger species to meet both internal an external market demands for marine produce. Of particular interest are those species most at risk to overexploitation, and already thought to be in severe decline (elasmobranchs, marine mammals, sea turtles), yet are often in high demand. Interview surveys with resource users were carried out in Northern Madagascar, Kenya and Zanzibar. Here both the dependence of fishers in the vulnerable small-scale fisheries on these at risk species groups and their social and economic value (monetary and non-monetary) is explored and the implications for the future of these communities and the management of these species are discussed.