A Study to evaluate the status, distribution and threats on dugongs in Kenya through local knowledge

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The dugong is a herbivorous marine mammal found in the coastal waters of Indo-West Pacific and the Indian Ocean and is vulnerable to the level of extinction. Studies have shown that the dugong population could have been affected by anthropogenic factors such as marine resource exploitation practices, and biophysical factors such as habitat loss, and climate change. The main objective of the study is to evaluate the status, distribution and threats on dugongs in Kenyan coastal waters and identify possible conservation management strategies to be used for their conservation. The study followed an exploratory cross sectional study approach. Data was collected from three spatial dimensional aspects; the fishing villages; current area anecdotal information and site specific scientific information on the availability of dugongs in specific locations. The data was collected through, questionnaire Survey; focus group discussions, aerial census and acoustic data loggers. 181 respondents spread across 8 villages were interviewed 92 % of who were small scale fishermen. Interviews were made regarding the socio-economic aspects of dugong including the people's perception on the mammals. 72% of the interviewed people had seen a dugong with 26% saying they saw it after it was accidentally caught in a net, 39 % saw it on their way fishing and 28 % saw it while fishing. In all the villages the respondents conceded that dugongs are not intentionally hunted. From recent aerial surveys, it confirmed that dugongs are there with one dugong sighting. The socio-economic study identified gillnets to be the second most common fishing method. This is a major threat to dugongs as gillnets have been known to have bycatch. The recent accidental capture and death of a dugong in south- coast is an indication that dugong are found in the Kenyan waters and among its threats is fishing nets.