The role of protected areas in biodiversity conservation and sustaining community livelihoods in Mafia Island Marine Park, Tanzania

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Achieving mutually beneficial outcomes between marine biodiversity conservation and community wellbeing can be a challenge. A “win-win” approach to conservation provides hope for poor regions of the world, because poverty can be reduced through exploitation of marine resources in a sustainable manner. The applications of the “win-win” approaches to conservation in most developing countries are less successful in attaining marine conservation and human wellbeing goals. Poverty is still high and
biodiversity loss continues. This study was conducted in Mafia Island Marine Park (MIMP) in Tanzania with the aim of assessing how the Park has achieved both marine biodiversity conservation and exploitation of marine resources. Purposive and stratified random samplings were employed to administer seventeen questionnaires to assess the role of the Park in marine biodiversity conservation. Data was compiled, descriptive analysis done in statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), and presented using graphs. The results indicate that, park has restored marine resources including fish, corals and mangroves that had been degraded prior to the Park establishment. The degradation occurred by 70% levels of illegal resource extraction. Illegal destructive fishing reduced through communities’ participation in park management and reduced pressure dependency on park resources through increased alternative income generating activities other than fishing. However residents’ response of 10% felt that, they had not benefited much from the Park as they restricted from their most important livelihood activity. This study therefore argues that Marine Protected Area (MPA) remain an important marine conservation tool for marine resources as well as achieving community livelihoods. Conservation efforts can be successful if resource users are given the opportunity to utilize the resources sustainably and participate in
the decision making of determining the level of resources to be extracted.

**Key words:**
Biodiversity, Conservation, Community and Livelihood