MIHARI, created in 2012, is Madagascar’s national network of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs). LMMAs are areas of coastal waters managed by local communities to help protect fisheries and safeguard marine biodiversity. The MIHARI network was set up to connect isolated coastal communities allowing community leaders to share ideas and effective management models through peer-to-peer learning. MIHARI now brings together over 200 local management associations supported by 23 partner institutions, and plays a key role representing the interests of small-scale fishers in national policy development.

The principles of local governance and sustainable management of marine and coastal resource have been institutionalised in Madagascar since the 1990s although there was no common reference or coordination of the available frameworks (community-based or co-managed MPA, management transfer from the Ministries in charge or marine and coastal resource, Dina). In addition, the tools were not always accessible to local communities and can be difficult to implement.

The first marine resource management initiative to be labelled an LMMA in Madagascar dates from 2005, following practitioner exchanges with the LMMA movement in Fiji. Thirteen years later, the concept has been applied to more than 80 locally and co-managed marine areas covering over 18% of Madagascar’s inshore seabed, established under a range of legal frameworks. There is great enthusiasm for the LMMA concept amongst a range of stakeholders in Madagascar, including governmental commitments to expand marine protection using this model. However, the lack of legal definition of what constitutes an LMMA hampers monitoring the status and number of LMMAs, as well as efforts to develop effective LMMA initiatives and secure favourable legal and political frameworks that allow the formal devolution of management rights to local users and communities.

While commitments to develop new legislation that recognises LMMAs have been made by Government ministries, progress has been slow due to changing roles and responsibilities for marine management. In the interim, the MIHARI network led a process to consult its members and determine the network’s favoured definition of an LMMA, developing a series of criteria in the form of a reference guide.

The development of the guide was done in three stages. First, the identification of the criteria
for the creation and the development of LMMAs in Madagascar, drawn from the legal frameworks and the experience of local communities and supporting NGOs in the local and sustainable management of marine and coastal resources. Then, those criteria were tested on sites, using qualitative methods. Leaders and members of local communities and local representatives from NGOs were interviewed to assess the validity of the criteria in practice. Data from 21 selected sites was used to evaluate each criterion. Results showed that the criteria fit with the legal framework and confirmed that the Dina (customary law) is the foundation of local governance in Madagascar. This led to a revision of the guide’s structure and content, to make it as relevant as a tool, and as precise as possible, and a validation through further consultation at national and regional levels.

This guide is designed to help LMMA practitioners and local communities define their progress towards the creation and development of LMMAs and choose the most appropriate management model to achieve this. It will then provide the basis on which a procedures manual will be developed, to detail the steps to follow to establish an LMMA under each legal framework applicable. It will also help build the MIHARI database of LMMAs in Madagascar, a tool for their monitoring and evaluation.

Keywords: LMMA, network, guide, governance, policy