Conservation Of Marine Areas For The SDG 14 Commitments Of Mauritius

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Background

The Republic of Mauritius comprise a vast Exclusive Economic Zone of about 2.3 million km2. In an effort to protect its coastal and marine zones, it has established several Marine Protected Areas (MPA) around its coast. However, a comparison of the extent of these MPAs to the size of the EEZ seems to result in a very low percentage of conservation. This study attempts to derive a computation of the actual percentage of coastal area under protection and devise an objective conservation strategy for all the coastal and marine areas based on the best available data and existing national legislation on the marine environment. It aims at enabling Mauritius to meet its targets under international conventions and development agenda, mainly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the whole of its maritime zones.

Method

In order to achieve target 14.5 for marine areas, different strategies have to be put into place to identify areas which could potentially have a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) status and thus be considered in the 'denominator' when using the recommended methodology to compute the indicator (IUCN 2016). These regions could also be used as a 'biodiversity pool' from which areas can be preferentially designated for conservation in the future. As per the metadata on SDG target 14.5, the indicator is computed by dividing the total number of KBAs which are wholly covered by protected areas by the total number of KBAs and multiplying by 100. The conservation strategy elaborated supports a conservative approach by firstly considering all the coastal marine areas of the islands and islets of the Republic of Mauritius as potential KBAs. These were then used as the denominator for computing the Indicator for Target 14.5 of the SDG for coastal regions. Secondly, for maritime zones beyond the coastal areas, all known oceanic ecoregions have been identified and delineated as potential KBAs. These include Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, Important Marine Mammal Areas, submerged marine features such as plateaus, banks and seamounts and Areas with Persistently High CHLA concentration.

Results

For the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues, the analysis shows that currently 18% and 30% of the coastal marine areas are under conservation respectively. Considering all the islands in the Republic of Mauritius, the overall percentage of coastal areas under protection amounts to about 15%. In this perspective, it can be reasonably stated that the SDG 14.5 target of 10% has already been achieved for coastal areas. However, at the scale of the whole EEZ, the percentage of marine areas under protection is still less that the SDG target. A conservation strategy has

been proposed by the Government of Mauritius to increase the overall percentage of conserved marine areas. This strategy includes the creation of a multi-purpose marine park in the Chagos Archipelago.

Conclusion

With the SDG 14.5 target achieved for coastal areas, the proposed creation of a multi-purpose marine park in the Chagos Archipelago would conserve an additional marine area of about 475,000 km2. That would include both coastal and non-coastal marine areas. Following the recommended methodology, the computed percentage of marine area conserved would then amount to about 16 %. In this context, the Republic of Mauritius will meet and even exceed its SDG 14 commitments. Designation of additional areas from the identified KBA pool could potentially increase the overall percentage to 20% and even beyond.