



Watamu Beach Turtle Watch Nest Protection Programme, Kenya

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Short title: Watamu Beach Turtle Watch Nest Protection Programme, Kenya

Key Message: Local communities preserve and monitor endangered turtle nests in Watamu Beach, Kenya.

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What is the problem?

Watamu Marine Park (Kenya) is a small but important nesting ground for various sea turtle species, including some that are endangered and critically endangered. Egg poaching activities, prevalent at Watamu nesting sites, threaten the reproductive capacity of the local turtle population. In response, the Kenyan government passed legislation for prohibiting the practice of poaching. The Kenyan Fish Industry Act of 1968 and the Wildlife (Management and Conservation) Act of 1976 helped to preserve the marine products. However, the laws have not had much success and poaching remains a persistent threat.

Which approach was taken?

The Nest Protection Programme in Watamu Beach was established in 1997 and engages local participation in turtle conservation. The process is monitored by the local community in conjunction with the Watamu Turtle Watch (WTW) (Barnes et al. n.d.) and local community members are paid approximately Ksh 500 (~\$6) for every nest found that is not spotted by Watamu Turtle Watch. The funding for the program is generated through voluntary donation schemes such as the 'Adopt a turtle' scheme. Since the program's inception, the payments made to the local community have been approximately \$5,000.

Although local communities are involved in the protection of the nests, the program is also supported by Local Ocean Trust (LOT). Fishing communities both facilitate the program and are provided with financial incentives (from the WTW) to compensate their contribution of time and effort. WTW records biometric data, collects DNA material, and tags each turtle before releasing it. Research focuses on evaluating local foraging population dynamics, growth rates, movements, ecology and frequency of capture.

What ecosystem services were considered and how?

The ecosystem services considered here is mainly biodiversity preservation through the conservation of endangered species of turtles.

¹ Verification of information by Nicky Parazzi, Trustee Coordinator, Local Ocean Trust : Watamu Turtle Watch

What input was required to do so?

Daily patrols check for nesting turtles and tracks in the sand which indicate new nests. Nesting turtles that are encountered are tagged and biometric data is collected. A fulltime coordinator runs the Watamu Turtle Watch program with two persons as beach monitors. The program runs twenty-four hours a day. WTW is the Local Ocean Trust's flagship program and is backed by a community education program aimed to spread awareness and raise interest within communities.

What was the policy uptake, and what were the conditions for this effort to actually influence public management?

Nest protection program: Thus far, approximately 421 nests (as of June 2010) have been protected and saved along the 5km long Watamu beach. The program has helped heighten awareness of other threats to the turtle population, thereby prompting additional protective measures.

By-catch and release program: WTW/LOT runs a sea turtle net release program. Sea turtles, caught in fisher's nets or lines, are released by the project. The project, in 10 years, has released 5,335 turtles which would otherwise have been killed (as of June 2010). In 2009 alone, 857 turtles were released. This program is the longest running sea turtle 'compensation-for-conservation' program worldwide. In effect, a single program has put over Ksh 2 ml (~\$ 25,600) back into the community. The approach has also influenced the general public through such things as financial incentives and education and awareness programs. The Local Ocean Trust runs education and awareness programs in villages, fish landing sites, schools and hotels within the Watamu area. Wildlife clubs also run marine conservation workshops in the schools. The relationship between biodiversity and healthy ecosystems is explained to people and competitions using drama, poetry and beach cleaning are further used to help spread awareness among children. Conservation awareness is also spread through the tourist industry.

The program has helped increase Watamu's sea turtle population and has proved that Watamu is an extremely important juvenile foraging area, as well as an important nesting site. An enormous increase to the human population around this marine protected area means that practices of unmanaged tourism and fishing threaten the protected area.

Reference:

www.watamuturtles.com

Barnes, Aimee; Ebright, Matthew; Gaskin, Emily and Strain, William. (n.d.). <http://www.translinks.org>. (United States Agency for International Development (USAID)) Retrieved July 15, 2010, from Translink: <http://www.translinks.org/CaseStudiesandAnalyses/tabid/2063/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

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