Social impacts of marine protected areas in South Africa on coastal fishing communities

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A B S T R A C T

In South Africa, marine protected areas (MPAs) continue to be a favoured tool for biodiversity conservation and fisheries management. Efforts to expand the network of MPAs are contested largely due to historical injustices associated with MPA establishment and the ongoing social impacts linked with their current management and governance. This paper presents findings of recent research on the social dimensions of MPAs in five MPAs in South Africa. Drawing on information gathered from 70 oral histories, over 250 key informant interviews and 28 focus groups, the paper examines key social impacts respondents attribute to MPAs and their establishment and ongoing management. Significant negative impacts reported include the weakening of local governance rights and processes, in particular the lack of effective mechanisms for local community participation in decision-making. The loss of tenure rights and access to resources amongst already marginalised communities has con-tributed to food insecurity, less exchange of food and less household income. The MPAs investigated have im-pacted on culture, way of life and sense of place. Yet, despite government commitments to several international policy instruments relevant to MPAs and national laws legislating redress, social issues associated with MPAs have been largely overlooked. Findings from this research demonstrate that the failure to address historical impacts, as well as social hardships and inequities still being experienced, undermine the legitimacy of MPAs and frustrate the achievement of objectives and plans to increase the marine space under protection. Ways of working towards more effective, legitimate and sustainable MPAs in South Africa are suggested.

1. Introduction

Globally, the declaration of marine protected areas (MPAs) as a tool for biodiversity conservation, habitat protection and more recently fisheries management has become increasingly popular in the con-servation community and amongst marine scientists (Agardy et al., 2011; Helvey, 2004; Jentoft et al., 2007). However, the effectiveness of MPAs as a tool for biodiversity conservation and fisheries management in particular is still a matter of considerable debate (Edwards et al., 2008; Halpern et al., 2004; Hilborn, 2017; Hilborn et al., 2004; Kolding, 2011). Despite these debates surrounding the value and benefits of MPAs, calls to expand protection of marine ecosystems and establish a representative network of MPAs have received support from govern-ments worldwide. However, increasing concern about the impacts of MPAs on the livelihoods and social wellbeing of coastal communities has been raised in the literature by social science researchers, local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and human rights activists (Christie et al., 2003; ICSF, 2008, 2010; Jones, 2009; Mascia and Claus, 2009; Sowman

et al., 2011; Sunde, 2014a; Sunde and Isaacs, 2008).

Forced removals and the displacement of local communities from traditional lands and waters, lost or restricted access rights, and impacts on food security, health and livelihoods, as well as impacts on social cohesion, culture, identity, sense of place, gender relations, customary practices and governance systems, are some of the social impacts that have been identified in the literature associated with protected areas (Brechin et al., 2003; Christie et al., 2003; Colchester, 2004; Fabricius and De Wet, 2002; ICSF, 2008, 2010; Mascia and Claus, 2009; Mascia et al., 2010; Walker, 2005; West et al., 2006; Sowman et al., 2011; Sunde and Isaacs, 2008). Thus efforts to expand MPAs are often met with resistance by local communities due to the many negative social impacts associated with protected areas (Blaustein, 2007; ICSF, 2010; Jentoft et al., 2012; Kepe, 2008; Rajagopalan, 2009).

Although considerable research has been conducted on the social and political dimensions of terrestrial protected areas, much less at-tention has been given to the social dimensions of MPAs in their design, establishment and management. Consequently many MPAs are not achieving their objectives or are not performing effectively (Charles and

Wilson, 2009; Christie, 2004; Christie et al., 2003; Chuenpagdee et al., 2013; Jameson et al., 2002; Jentoft et al., 2007). The literature highlights the fact that one of the main failures of MPAs in achieving their objectives is inadequate involvement of users and stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process, with concomitant unforeseen social consequences (Agardy et al., 2003, 2011; Jentoft et al., 2012; Sowman et al., 2011). In fact, two recent global studies on protected areas found that the involvement of local and indigenous communities in planning and decision-making processes enhanced management effectiveness and the achievement of socio-economic and conservation goals (IUCN-TILCEPA, 2010; Oldekop et al., 2016). Increasingly social scientists and some conservation agencies recognise that social factors, rather than physical or ecological factors, ultimately determine the success (or otherwise) of MPAs (Christie et al., 2003; Jentoft et al., 2011; Pomeroy et al., 2007; Ruddle and Hickey, 2008; Walton et al., 2013).

This paper focuses on the social issues and impacts associated with establishment and management of MPAs in South Africa. It draws on research undertaken in this arena over the past ten years but focuses in particular on research conducted in five MPAs in South Africa over the past five years. This latter research was part of a three-year project titled "Understanding and integrating human dimensions into MPA planning and management", which included empirical research in six MPAs in South Africa, including one coastal area that was being considered for MPA designation.[1]

Before outlining the specific context of the case studies examined, it is necessary to provide the political history of MPA establishment and management in South Africa from the mid-1960s to the present day. The majority of existing MPAs in South Africa were promulgated between 1964 and 1994, at the height of the apartheid regime. Many of them are associated with the forced removal of black[2] communities from their lands and their displacement from the waters they traditionally fished. Restricted access to coastal areas and marine waters had devastating consequences for households that relied on natural resources for food and livelihoods. Following the transition to democracy in 1994, and the promulgation of a Constitution and suite of environmental laws that required redress and equitable access to resources, as well as the participation of communities in management decisions, a new approach to MPA planning and management was advocated. While several agreements have been reached in which conservation land has been returned to local communities and co-management arrangements have been established, the restoration of land and resource rights to local and indigenous communities dispossessed during colonialism and apartheid has been slow and fraught with difficulties (Cundill et al., 2013; Fabricius, 2004; Kepe, 1999, 2008; Paterson, 2011).

The failure to recognise and address the historical injustices experienced by communities due to the establishment of MPAs, has led to growing discontent amongst coastal fishing communities. Consequently, several fishing communities have approached the Human Rights Commission, marched to Parliament and launched legal challenges against the state to demand their rights to resources (George and others v Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2004 (EC1/05); *State v D Gongqose*, 2013; Sunde, 2013a, 2014a, 2014b; Sunde and Isaacs, 2008). Clearly, 22 years after the transition to democracy, the negative social impacts experienced by local communities living in and adjacent to MPAs have persisted and in some cases their well-being is reported to have deteriorated (De Greef, 2013; Emdon, 2013; Faasen, 2006; Hauck, 2009; Mbatha, 2011; Paterson, 2011; Sowman et al., 2011, 2014a; Sunde, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b; Sunde and Isaacs, 2008; Williams, 2013). This paper explores the nature and extent of social impacts experienced by local communities living in and adjacent to five MPAs in South Africa.

2. Emerging realisation of the social imperative in conservation

While social science researchers have been exploring and debating social issues and impacts associated with the establishment and management of protected areas for decades (Brechin et al., 2003; Brockington et al., 2008; Brosius et al., 2005; West et al., 2006), consideration of the social dimensions of MPAs specifically is a relatively new area of concern. A rich literature exists on the socio-economic and political issues, including those of separation of people and culture, loss of tenure rights and impacts on ways of life and cultural identity, as well as impacts on livelihoods, food security, health and wellbeing (Brechin et al., 2003; Brockington and Wilkie, 2015; West and Brockington, 2006). However, few of these studies examine in detail the range of social impacts experienced by local people or their magnitude, severity and duration and how they impact different social groups over time (Geisler, 2003; West et al., 2006). Several scholars therefore claim that understanding of the social impacts of protected areas is limited, with a major weakness being the lack of longitudinal data to assess causal effects (Geisler, 2003; Gurney et al., 2014; West et al., 2006).

Calls for increased consideration of social issues in MPA planning and management have been bolstered by the commitment of governments and conservation agencies worldwide to a host of international bilateral agreements relevant to conservation management. In particular, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992) contains several articles that require attention to social dimensions. The Programme of Work on Protected Areas (POWPAs), launched in 2004 (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2004), is of particular relevance and requires that mechanisms for the equitable sharing of both costs and benefits arising from the establishment and management of protected areas be established, and that the involvement of indigenous and local communities, and relevant stakeholders be enhanced and secured (goal 2.2). The voice of civil society at various global gatherings has also contributed to enhancing the awareness of conservation agencies and governments that social dimensions can no longer be ignored if conservation goals are to be achieved (WFFP and ICSF, 2012).

In the early 2000s, as enthusiasm for MPAs as a tool for biodiversity conservation and fisheries management gained momentum, a number of scholars began cautioning against the widespread implementation of MPAs without due consideration of social[3] and/or human dimensions (Agardy et al., 2003, 2011; Christie, 2004; Christie et al., 2003; FAO, 2008; Pomeroy et al., 2006). In 2004, Pomeroy, Parks and Watson published their guidebook entitled "How is your MPA doing?" which provided guidance on socio-economic, governance and ecological indicators for evaluating MPA effectiveness (Pomeroy et al., 2004). This guideline gave a clear signal that international conservation agencies recognised that for MPAs to succeed, they needed to fulfil social, ecological and governance objectives. This work was followed by a number of guidelines and technical reports that provide advice on how to address socio-economic and ecological issues in MPA planning and management (FAO, 2003, 2011; Greiber et al., 2009; Schreckenberg et al., 2010; ICSF, 2010; IUCN et al., 1991; IUCN-TILCEPA, 2010) and how best to involve local communities and other stakeholders in these processes (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013; Hauck and Sowman, 2005; Voyer et al., 2012; Walton et al., 2013).

A review of the scholarly literature reveals that a number of studies

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[1] For further information on the project and the guidelines emanating from this research, see Sowman et al., 2014b.

[2] "Black" is a political term used in South Africa to designate persons of both African and coloured origin who were discriminated against through racial segregation legislation.

[3] Although the terms "human dimensions" and "social dimensions" are used interchangeably in much of the literature, we prefer the term "social dimensions", since "human" conveys a focus on the individual, while this research deals with social groups, in particular poor communities and their interactions with each other and their environment. In this paper, the term "social dimensions" refers to the socio-economic, cultural and governance dimensions of MPAs.