

MARINE TURTLE CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOODS OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES - TOWARD A CONCEPT AND INDICATORS TO UNDERSTAND AND ENHANCE OUR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT

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Coastal communities in developing countries are at the heart of many interventions toward marine turtle conservation. For five of the seven species of marine turtle, 78%-91% of countries where they occur have developing economies. Two thirds of countries with developing economies have marine turtles, one third have three or more species. Projects have focused traditionally on immediate mitigation of overexploitation. More recently, some projects seek to link marine turtle conservation with the generation of additional cash revenue to local communities. Improved livelihoods for the custodians and users of the natural resource at stake are accepted as necessary for the long-term sustainability of best practices. However, the impact of species conservation on local livelihoods is only partly understood, because various socio-economic dimensions have not been adequately monitored. We propose the adoption of an integral livelihood concept and corresponding indicators to design community-based marine turtle conservation projects. Marine turtle conservation can affect various socioeconomic variables, such as political power, social relationships, infrastructure, human resources, culture and economic income. Indicators for the impact of the project on such socio-economic aspects are typically absent, however. Despite cases where some effects may have been negative, anecdotal evidence suggests that marine turtle conservation has the potential to improve these community assets. This potential can only be fully unfolded, if projects include activities toward strategically enhancing these livelihood dimensions and measure their impact in relation to carefully chosen controls. This approach is necessary, if we are to understand the impact of marine turtle conservation on poverty alleviation.