

MPA NEWS



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Assessing the state of the art in training and certifying MPA professionals – Part II

The responsibilities of MPA managers are diverse and growing. While managing staff and communicating with stakeholders will always be key parts of the job, managers must also keep up with advances in MPA science, including on the impacts of climate change. In addition, managers are increasingly expected to support *people* as well as nature, such as by fostering sustainable development in local communities. And the technologies required to manage sites effectively — software programs, surveillance tools, even drones in some cases — add new layers of job complexity.

As a result, training of MPA managers across a broad set of disciplines is more important than ever. In our last issue, *MPA News* spoke with management trainers about what represents the state of the art in MPA training programs ([MPA News 16:6](#)). In this issue, we talk with the heads of regional programs to train MPA managers (in the Caribbean) and certify them (in the Western Indian Ocean) for their insights on where such training and certification is headed.

A) In the Caribbean, 16 years of regional MPA management training

The Caribbean MPA Management Network and Forum (CaMPAM; <http://campam.gcfi.org>) may be the oldest regional network of MPA managers in the world. Created in 1997 by the UNEP Caribbean Environment Program, CaMPAM helps managers share knowledge with their peers through multiple mechanisms. These include a longstanding email list and online forum; workshops; site exchanges; a regional MPA database; a mentorship initiative (profiled in [MPA News 16:3](#)); a small grants program; and CaMPAM's Training of Trainers program, which has been in operation since 1999.

The Training of Trainers program, or ToT, has conducted 11 training courses to date, alternating between English- and Spanish-speaking locations and one in French. The course offers lessons on MPA planning, management, stakeholder participation, research, monitoring, and regional policy, along with general skills in communication and teaching. Graduates of the course are required in turn to develop follow-up activities (supported by a small grant) within their home countries, sharing with their peers what they learned in the ToT course. This helps build local capacity while exercising the graduates' communication skills.

More than 170 individuals have taken the course since 1999, and an estimated 1500 MPA practitioners and stakeholders have experienced the follow-up trainings. Most countries and territories of the Wider Caribbean have now benefited from the courses via their practitioners.

Georgina Bustamante is the coordinator of CaMPAM and the ToT courses. Alessandra Vanzella-Khouri is coordinator of UNEP's Protocol for Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean (SPAW), which funds and directs CaMPAM and its ToT.

MPA News: In what ways have your ToT courses changed over time?

Georgina Bustamante: Every year there is a course assessment that collects feedback from course participants, and in 2007 from an external expert. The results are posted on the CaMPAM website and in each course report.

As a result of these assessments — and the evolution in the MPA community's institutional and human capacity needs in general — several changes have been made to our trainings:

- We have more interactive exercises and field trips to MPAs now, and less lecturing.
- Instructors are now asked to use the course manual more as a reference text rather than the sole basis for instruction. They are given more flexibility to integrate their personal experience in their teaching, as well as the most relevant and up-to-date information.
- More regional and local experts have been recruited as instructors, as many MPA managers in the region have grown to become experts and good lecturers.
- We have also involved other institutions (both national and international) in the organization and funding of the regional courses, in a different way each year. The 2011 course in Guadeloupe, for example, was funded by the IUCN European Overseas Territories office, which also provided a translation of the course manual into French. In 2015, IUCN's Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Programme (BIOPAMA) organized the course and covered much of the cost. (Meanwhile half of the participants in that course, from six eastern Caribbean islands, covered their costs with CaMPAM-ECMMAN Small Grants — <https://oct.to/ZkG>.)

Alessandra Vanzella-Khouri: In recent years we have also incorporated a "bonus" topic or lecture in the course to respond to emerging regional issues — such as coral bleaching, economic valuation, lionfish control, and so forth. It's not in-depth but it provides an introduction to the subject. Our intent overall is to keep the courses relevant, useful, and flexible, accommodating expectations and needs to the extent feasible.

MPA News: In light of your goal to keep the courses relevant, where do you see MPA management training headed in the future? For example, will courses be done virtually? Do you see the courses growing longer and more detailed as MPA management becomes more complex?

Bustamante: Virtual courses could be complementary but will never replace the "classroom" courses and the lessons provided by the visits to the venue MPA. The classroom setting — as well as the site visits and exercises with local stakeholders — allow participants and instructors to become acquainted and to network with one another. That is not as easy to do in an online course. Online courses on coral reef resilience and other specific MPA-related topics already exist [see box below, "A capacity-building program for reef management that partners with MPA training programs: The Reef Resilience Network"], and CaMPAM promotes them through to the network.

Content-wise, the ToT courses should evolve into something between a "learning exchange visit" (where a small group of managers has a 4- to 5-day guided and structured visit to an MPA) and a full, 12-day regional course. The latter is how the courses are currently done. Blending those two styles or combining them over the course of the year is more possible now that CaMPAM has a formal team of mentors — many of whom are ToT program alumni — who can organize such learning exchanges in their MPAs.

Even without such blending, a shorter version of the regional course (perhaps 8-9 days) that is focused on a few subjects of particular relevance to the region might be better. Subjects could include tourism and business planning, educational programs for different stakeholder groups (including kids), biophysical features and threats to ecological resilience (always important), the use of drones and community-based surveillance, the use of social networks and crowdsourced volunteers/fundraising, and ecosystem services valuation. In addition, as the science of connectivity continues to progress, teaching about large-scale ecosystem-based management approaches in the region would be invaluable.

Vanzella-Khouri: I agree with Georgina on the value of face-to-face learning. The exchanges among the participants are extremely enriching: they hang out together for two weeks and share personal and professional experiences of their MPAs while having a beer and meals. Additionally there is the opportunity to travel and experience another environment.

As time passes, we might do the courses every other year rather than annually. After all, the number of "functioning" MPAs in the Caribbean region is limited, and we are starting to see repeated MPAs benefiting from the courses. So we might be reaching some saturation there. Perhaps in the years in-between, online targeted thematic courses or webinars could be organized instead.

In my view, what is great and different about CaMPAM is that the ToT is just one of many ways in which knowledge is shared. Together, CaMPAM's programs allow us to keep a pulse on the region's MPA community. We know what managers' issues and needs are, and can respond through different mechanisms. Additionally the link to UNEP and SPAW gives us a good understanding of governments' priorities and expectations in the region. I might be biased but I think the CaMPAM structure is pretty close to ideal.

For more information:

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B) In the Western Indian Ocean, raising the practice of MPA management to a profession

In the Western Indian Ocean (which includes the nations of Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Mozambique, Comoros, Madagascar, and Seychelles), a program has been underway since 2008 to certify MPA managers.

The Western Indian Ocean Certification of Marine Protected Area Professional program (WIO-COMPAS) assesses candidates' knowledge and performance. Those candidates who complete the program and receive a passing grade are certified as MPA Professionals, or MPA PROs. So far the program has conducted 13 assessment events and certified 73 MPA PROs. It also offers advancement and recognition at multiple levels, from rangers or officers (Level 1) to supervisors (Level 2) to high-level policy developers (Level 3).

MPA PRO designation indicates the individual has proven he or she meets standards of education, knowledge, skills, experience, and on-the-job performance in six competency areas:

- Policy, legal and compliance frameworks;
- Approaches to MPA establishment and management arrangements;
- Communication and stakeholder engagement;
- Financing MPAs;
- MPA management operations; and
- Biophysical and social environment

The program was developed by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) in partnership with the Coastal Resources Center (CRC) at the University of Rhode Island in the US. Although WIOMSA also provides a separate training course for MPA managers, WIO-COMPAS is not a training program in itself. Rather it assesses and recognizes those professionals already performing at a minimum standard as established by MPA leaders in the region.

Julius Francis of WIOMSA and Glenn Ricci of CRC co-lead WIO-COMPAS.

MPA News: Your WIO-COMPAS program certifies MPA managers' knowledge as opposed to training them. However, due to the nature of your work, you are closely connected to the MPA training world: good training prepares managers to meet the standards your program has set. How do you view WIO-COMPAS's relationship to MPA management training?

Glenn Ricci: WIO-COMPAS takes a long-term view/approach to capacity building. We believe that while stand-alone, one-off training courses have contributed to building capacity, that approach alone is insufficient to build the breadth and depth of skills and knowledge on MPA management that is needed in the WIO region. Therefore WIO-COMPAS is aiming to raise the practice of MPA management to a profession. The program will do this by setting professional standards and requiring that these are met by those wishing to become certified — as is the case for other professionals (doctors, accountants, engineers) who are expected to meet standards recognized by their professional associations.

WIO-COMPAS does not replace the need for short-term training courses; rather we provide a framework from which training courses could be designed to help MPA professionals meet some of the requirements or prepare them for certification. In recent years, we have been encouraging organizers of national and regional MPA training courses to orient the focus and content of their courses to match the certification competences as much as possible.

MPA News: Based on your observations, where do you see MPA management training headed in the future?

Ricci: We must reframe the discussion from *training* (which is more about method) to *learning*, which is the desired outcome. Self-motivated employees who are actively learning on the job are more likely to be high-performing staff, helping contribute to their MPA's conservation goals. Professionals must take responsibility for their career development, since the majority of learning occurs outside of formal training/classroom environment.

To reduce the costs of developing staff capacity, learning needs to occur on the job through deliberate learning opportunities developed between the staff member and their supervisor. A side benefit of this approach is creating higher-quality supervisors who see their role as continually developing the capacity of their staff. When external training is required, there will be a stronger organizational system to absorb these competences and retain them over the long term. This is a weakness of the current external training approach that we've seen over the past few decades.

MPA News: In what ways has the WIO-COMPAS program changed over time?

Julius Francis: The core of the program (certification levels, competences, and assessment processes and instruments) has not changed much since the piloting phase of the program, between 2008 and 2010. However, the changes that have occurred have included, among others:

Institutionalizing WIO-COMPAS. In 2014, activities were initiated with CapeNature of South Africa and Kenya Wildlife Services to integrate competencies and certification into the human resources policies of these MPA management agencies' policies. This came about due to a realization by WIO-COMPAS that our certification program could not stand on its own. A rigorous competence and certification program needs to be integrated into human resource and management systems and institutional policies of management authorities, and linked to capacity-development initiatives that include training.

Offering professional advice to MPA PROs. Every WIO-COMPAS candidate receives professional development advice regardless of whether they have been certified or not. Through the 13 assessment events held so far, the WIO-COMPAS team of assessors has gained greater understanding of the work context of the MPA PROs and what is possible within each of their management agencies. Today the professional development guidance is tailored to fit the context and, where possible, involves supervisors in the MPA to ensure that candidates are taking on new responsibilities to improve their competence in certain areas.

MPA News: Do you think that MPA programs should ideally target certain personality types or backgrounds when recruiting new management personnel in general?

Francis: Individual personality plays an important part in delivering MPA outcomes. While identifying a specific personality type that works best for MPAs can be difficult, it is possible to identify common personality traits of managers who fit specific contexts. Arthur Tuda, who oversees five Kenyan MPAs with a combined staff of 350 and has been certified by WIO-COMPAS, gave us his insight on this:

'I would go for potential managers with a positive attitude and commitment — ones who can lead the organization through difficult times, communicate ably, and work well with a wide range of stakeholders. Effective communication is critical since MPA management often involves translating complicated ideas and instructions to teams of rangers and other stakeholders who may not see things your way. Willingness to learn new ideas is important because it takes a while for a manager to get the full grasp of MPA issues. An individual who is self-driven is suited for MPA work because in many cases the organization will not deliver required training and capacity development.

'A strong academic background is essential as it tends to help individuals grasp concepts quickly. A quick look at the certified MPA professionals in Kenya reveals that those with some academic background in conservation or ecology have often performed better in certification. This saves the organization time and money and improves efficiency. However, this should be matched with personality traits to get the right combination of a manager.'

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BOX: A capacity-building program for reef management that partners with MPA training programs: The Reef Resilience Network

The Reef Resilience Network (RR Network; www.reefresilience.org) is a global network for coral reef and MPA managers to share ideas, experiences, and expertise, and strengthen members' abilities to address impacts on reefs from climate change and other stressors.

Managed by The Nature Conservancy, the RR Network accomplishes these goals by hosting interactive webinars, a web-based discussion forum, online courses, in-person trainings, site exchanges, and an online toolkit. Over the last decade, the RR Network has trained more than 1600 individuals through the online course, and in-person trainings have been provided to practitioners from more than 60 countries.

A key strategy for building capacity is partnering and supporting local efforts whenever possible. When conducting trainings, the Network partners with existing capacity-building efforts. "If we have funding to work in a specific region and there is already a strong training and capacity-building program in place there, we approach that program about partnering," says Petra MacGowan, manager of the RR Network.

In 2013, the Network conducted a training for reef managers in the Western Indian Ocean, working with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association to recruit managers to participate. More recently, the Network partnered with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's MPA capacity building program [profiled in MPA News 16.6]; in this case, the Network contributed support for training costs and is supporting post-training Network activities to follow up with participants. In 2015, the Network partnered with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute on two events (one site exchange and one in-person training) where the Network led one and GCFI led one, and participants were identified and recruited from both networks.

"Although we remain distinct from these other programs, we work through regional networks whenever possible when developing in-person trainings or exchanges," says MacGowan. "We can bring additional resources to these regions through our trainings, and help those managers and existing networks to better connect with efforts outside their regions and experts around the world."

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BOX: IUCN releases framework for capacity development in protected areas

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas has released a framework to guide capacity development in protected areas (terrestrial and marine) over the next decade. The 24-page document describes the current status of protected area capacity building, identifies major issues that need to be addressed, and recommends pathways and goals for future action.

The "Strategic Framework for Capacity Development in Protected Areas and Other Conserved Territories 2015-2025" concludes that too much capacity development is short-term, donor-reliant, overly formal, and provided by "outside" entities, among other problems. These factors can all contribute to a lack of local ownership and a rapid decay of the benefits of capacity development investments. The framework recommends that capacity development programs use more proven approaches to adult learning, such as peer-to-peer learning, communities of practice, and methods that account for the full diversity of people now involved in protected area management (in terms of accessibility, language, and cultural approaches to teaching and learning). The framework is at http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/sfod_final_july_2015.pdf

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