

MPA NEWS



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Marine Protected Areas in Fisheries Management: A West African Perspective

In December 2011, fisheries managers and researchers from across West Africa gathered in Senegal to discuss the use of MPAs as fishery management tools. Convened by the Sub Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC), which coordinates the fishery policies of seven West African member states, the meeting featured a global review of the "[state of the art](#)" on MPAs in fishery management.* The event's goal was to find and promote ways that different forms of MPAs could contribute to sustainable development of fisheries in the region. (The SRFC member states are Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.)

The SRFC website, www.spcsrp.org, contains presentations from the December meeting, a summary of its recommendations, and a video documentary of the event. Below, MPA News speaks with Philippe Tous, coordinator of the SRFC project that hosted the meeting, and Hamady Diop, head of the SRFC's Department of Research and Information Systems, about the state of MPAs as fisheries management tools - in West Africa and around the world.

MPA News: Based on your global review, how would you describe the state of the art on MPAs as fisheries management tools?

Philippe Tous: As far as we know, our study on the role of MPAs in fisheries management, presented at the December meeting, was the first of its kind to be sponsored by a regional fisheries organization in a developing region. The main conclusions of the study included:

- Effective establishment of an MPA leads to increased biomass and fish size within its boundaries, especially for species that are exposed to high fishing pressure outside of the protected area. In contrast, the effects outside of the protected area (spillover) are difficult to measure and are confined to a limited distance from the MPAs.
- There is a general lack of baseline studies on protected areas in developing countries prior to establishment of MPAs. This is particularly acute in the area of socio-economics, in which the potential benefits of the MPAs can be offset by the negative effect of the closure to fishing.
- As in many fisheries where management plans are lacking or not enforced, many MPAs remain protected areas in name only - paper parks.

MPA News: What is the current status of MPAs in West Africa?

Hamady Diop: Fisheries are the main service provided by marine ecosystems to SRFC member states - generating around a million jobs, directly or indirectly. Despite this, the subregion's 30 or so MPAs are mostly managed by environment ministries, with the support of conservation NGOs. A major conclusion of the December meeting was that a strengthening of linkages between MPAs and fisheries in West Africa should include the increased involvement of fishing stakeholders in MPA management.

The subregion's ecosystem makes MPA planning and management complex. Because the main fish stocks are migratory small pelagics that follow upwelling intensities (accounting for about 75% of the 1.5-million metric ton annual harvest), spatial management of these areas is difficult to implement. As a result, only a few of the existing MPAs - relatively large sites with good governance mechanisms - can effectively contribute to the improvement of fishery management.

MPA News: What advice is the SRFC giving its member states on applying MPAs to fisheries management?

Tous: During the December workshop, the participants formulated many recommendations. These generally fell within three complementary categories - strengthening knowledge, MPA monitoring, and governance:

- Strengthening knowledge in all areas (ecology, socio-economics, governance) by combining scientific and empirical understanding is critical. This will improve coherence in studies of MPA networks and connectivity, mapping approaches, and rational zoning. All uses of resources (not only fisheries) should be encouraged and facilitated.
- It is necessary to move toward autonomous monitoring systems with the development of simple indicators, created in partnership with stakeholders. This allows easy ownership by resource users while providing valuable feedback to information users (researchers, managers).
- In terms of governance issues, effective cooperation mechanisms must be established between fisheries and environmental departments. The mechanisms should focus on harmonizing the various measures of access and fishing regulations throughout EEZs, not just inside the MPAs. Furthermore, a co-management approach must be favored and the formal signing of social contracts for sharing power among various stakeholders should be facilitated.

MPA News: The SRFC review also examined the impact of MPAs on other ocean uses, including ones related to alternative incomes to fishing. Can you describe those findings?

Diop: The study recognized that ecotourism can be valuable to MPAs in terms of revenue generation, although it is currently limited in scale in the sub-region. In general, it recommended that a cautious approach be observed with the development of all forms of alternative income-generating activities in association with MPAs. Such activities could adversely reallocate effort to other overexploited resources.

For more information:

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* **Footnote:** The study was conducted by Serge Garcia (IUCN/European Bureau for Conservation and Development), Didier Gascuel (Agro-Campus, Rennes, France), Jean Boncœur (University of Brest, France), and David De Monbrison (BRL Ingénierie, Nîmes, France). It was financed by the French Development Agency.

BOX: New guidebook on writing management plans for MPAs in West Africa

A guidebook for West African MPA managers on how to write a management plan is now available in English, translated from the original French. Published by the International Foundation for the Banc d'Arguin (FIBA), the guidebook walks readers through the stages of writing a management plan, from creating the writing team to evaluating the plan when done. It also provides an adaptable template for readers to use in developing their plans.

The guidebook was developed following a workshop on MPA management plans in West Africa, held in Senegal in 2008. In addition to supporting managers, the publication is intended to help harmonize management plans in the sub-region, particularly in the context of the regional network of West African MPAs, called RAMPAO (www.rampao.org). The *Methodological Guidebook for the Development of Management Plans for Marine Protected Areas in West Africa* is available at www.lafiba.org/index.php/fr/media/files/guide_des_amp_version_anglaise.

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