

MPA NEWS

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Perspective: When NGOs Invest Long-term in an MPA's Management

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By Anton Wijonarno

Indonesia has a system of marine protected areas that was designed in 1984, and mandated to be managed by the Ministry of Forestry and Nature Conservation. Challenged with limited resources to implement marine conservation, this ministry collaborates closely with several national and international conservation NGOs to build the capacity of its park staff and operations.

WWF and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) support the management of Indonesian national parks and other forms of MPAs. The support is provided in partnership with local governments and communities as an approach to share responsibilities and enable more effective management. One of the MPAs where these organizations have focused their efforts has been Wakatobi National Park (WNP).

Wakatobi National Park

WNP was designated as a national park in 1997 with the goal of habitat conservation. Located south of the island of Sulawesi and covering roughly 14000 km², the park includes coral reefs, mangroves, islands, and deeper waters. Upon designation, the main threats to the park were overfishing and destructive fishing practices, like fish bombing.

In 2002, the national park authority and local authorities decided that outside scientific and logistical support would be necessary to ensure WNP's conservation goals were achieved. This was a time of change for national parks throughout the country. A new national policy of governmental decentralization led to creation of new governance districts and new local management authorities for parks in general, including WNP. The move from top-down governance to greater reliance on bottom-up processes was a driver to review the management plans of the country's protected areas. In the case of WNP, the establishment of a collaborative management system, including local community forums, required involvement of various stakeholder groups not previously involved in the park's management, including fishers.

NGO support takes several forms

It was in this context that WWF and TNC began their support of Wakatobi National Park. The support came in several forms:

- Funding biological assessments and monitoring to underpin the design of management and zonation plans for WNP;
- Providing vessels, training and financing to support evaluation of management impacts; and
- Supporting outreach to and environmental education of the local community to help build a constituency of stakeholders. These stakeholders would assist with certain management responsibilities, including monitoring, and comply with the WNP management and zonation plans.

Substantial progress was made in the first three years of partnering. The sources of pressure and threats to the biodiversity and marine and coastal resources were identified, and management challenges and enabling conditions were discussed with the park authorities. The occurrence of destructive fishing practices, despite existing laws against such practices, was linked to low active presence of park managers in the field. Based on these findings, WWF and TNC provided financial support in years two and three for floating ranger stations and fast speed boats.

In year four, using the full range of collected monitoring data, authorities and their partners conducted a large workshop to kick off a stakeholder-informed process to redesign the park's management, including a revised zoning scheme. In addition, community and other stakeholder perceptions about the management of the park were assessed.

In 2007 the zoning revision process was completed, followed by the management plan in 2008. Funding support continued for monitoring of impacts of management, and outreach and engagement for compliance with villages. (In 2010 one local community forum of Wakatobi fishermen, Komunto, won the United Nations Development Program's Equator Prize for its work. Formerly fish bombers, the group now receives more attention and appreciation for its involvement in Wakatobi collaborative management.)

Conclusions

From 2002-2012, WWF and TNC have spent roughly US \$4 million in support of WNP. Over the same span, the park's annual operating budget has increased from \$300,000 in 2002 to \$1 million in 2012.

To achieve effective management of the park, WWF and TNC have needed to be flexible in their support. The period of decentralization - with new administrative authorities, collaborative frameworks, and a greater say for local communities in the use of resources - has required a broad array of services, from science to public education.

There is substantial work still to do. Implementation of the park's fisheries management component is still not complete. In 2009, WWF's fisheries transformation team developed a program in the park to respond to anxious fishers worried about the short-term loss of catches due to expanded no-take zones. Improving the quality of the catch and the way of fishing could be an answer to some of the coastal fishers' concerns. Ideally, WNP could serve as a prototype for integrating no-take zones with territorial use rights for catch and effort limitations.

The investment by WWF and TNC in Wakatobi National Park has been money well-spent. Illegal fishing practices in WNP have declined. The funding has also helped leverage additional direct funding for the park from the Indonesian government. In addition, the NGOs have helped promote and market WNP as a marine tourism destination and "brand", fostering a sense of ownership among Wakatobi residents and the Indonesian diving community, and serving to attract tourism investment.

Perhaps most importantly, during this period of somewhat ill-defined and contested national policy on collaborative management in Indonesian protected areas, the involvement of WWF and TNC has been a stabilizing influence. The investment in Wakatobi has helped support and facilitate discussions among various key sectors and stakeholder groups about power and revenue-sharing. This has proven to be a lengthy process, but one that is critical to the long-term success of the park.

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