

MPAH

case study series

MAPUTALAND–PONDOLAND–ALBANY HOTSPOT



Strengthening community conservation across landscapes

in the Maputaland–Pondoland–Albany Hotspot

The Maputaland–Pondoland–Albany Hotspot (MPAH) is an area of high biodiversity and endemism that follows the eastern coastline of southern Africa and extends inland to the escarpment. It includes portions of Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa. In 2010, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) initiated a 5-year investment in the hotspot region that would ‘support civil society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated protected areas, key biodiversity areas and priority corridors’. By focusing on key biodiversity areas and priority corridors, the investment offered opportunities to co-ordinate and strengthen the efforts of individual actors across broader regional landscapes, with valuable outcomes for both biodiversity and local communities. The successes resulting from strengthened community conservation across landscapes have been a noteworthy outcome of the CEPF investment.



Managing and reducing loss of biodiversity outside of protected areas often involves active engagement with communities to improve natural resource use and strengthen livelihood strategies. This may also include aspects of ecosystem rehabilitation to restore degraded habitats. A number of the Maputaland–Pondoland–Albany Hotspot (MPAH) projects have been working with communities to encourage sustainable natural resource use and/or conduct ecosystem restoration. These projects can have significant socio-economic benefits, while at the same time improving the protection of ecosystems in priority areas.

At the second MPAH Forum, held in 2014, a number of projects were invited to share their work and experiences. An emerging theme at the forum, and across the MPAH investment, is that projects able to conduct community conservation or threatened species awareness, particularly while co-ordinating efforts at a landscape scale, have seen greater success and improved project sustainability. The forum also served as a way of sharing some of the lessons learnt by the MPAH projects, and further reinforced benefits from co-ordinated community conservation across landscapes:

Consolidating conservation initiatives within a region makes resources and capacity go further

Regional partnerships are valuable for consolidating conservation initiatives and making resources and capacity go further. Instead of individual projects working in isolation, regional partnerships provide a platform for integrated, region-wide interventions. There are numerous benefits to such partnerships. At the most basic level, the benefits are intangible and include general support and encouragement. Partnerships can also be an effective way of sharing lessons, practical problem solving and exchange of information. This ensures that similar challenges that occur between projects can be solved faster and more effectively by learning from others. Partnerships allow each project or organisation to concentrate on its strengths, while aligning with other projects that will take on other roles. For example, one organisation may be a good project co-ordinator, whilst another has capacity to undertake work with rural communities and another provides environmental science expertise.

As partnerships become more formalised and well structured, they can even provide strategic project direction for future initiatives. In some cases, region-wide spatial mapping or management plans can form the framework for individual project interventions. The formalisation of a regional partnership can improve sustainability of individual projects by providing a platform for continued interventions. Co-funding amongst regional partners can provide for the strategic use of funds in the region.

Example: The Futi Corridor consortium

A number of organisations had been working independently in the Futi Corridor of Mozambique. By forming a consortium to work together, they were able to conduct more meaningful community engagement that drew on the strengths of each of the organisations:

- CESVI – capacity building and administrative co-ordination.
- LUPA – promoting dialogue within communities.
- ORAM – working with farmers on food security and land rights.
- KUWUKA JDA – training and environmental education.

Involving communities in the management of their natural resources remains an important goal

A large proportion of the population within the MPAH lives in rural communities, with a high dependence on natural resources. Thus, many of the projects in the MPAH had a focus on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). Many lessons were learnt, and continue to be learnt, during the process of implementing CBNRM. While there are some examples of success, many such initiatives are still working towards sustainable utilisation of natural resources, illustrating an overriding issue – the long-term nature of CBNRM activities to generate sustainable results.

There are a number of other lessons or emerging issues for CBNRM from MPAH projects. When working with a community on a CBNRM project it is important to be clear upfront about the possible benefits and the commitments required. Gaining sustained community involvement is a balance over the long term between inspiring interest and not overselling the possible outcomes. A large part of working with communities is based on developing trust, and continuing to deliver on expectations is therefore important.

Issues arising due to communal land tenure pose some of the bigger issues that CBNRM needs to address. Communal ownership, ownership by trusts and lack of knowledge about land rights make decisions about communal land management difficult to achieve. Addressing these issues is often time consuming and complicated, but a necessary step towards CBNRM. Legal tenure and the sense of responsibility it allows for the wise management of natural

resources is foundational in enabling communities to use their resources sustainably.

Possibly the most significant lesson that has been learnt is that meeting immediate needs of the community is often an important enabler in addressing conservation imperatives. The multiple challenges of food security, unemployment and poverty in rural areas mean that any conservation efforts necessarily involve consideration of these other priorities. In particular, finding innovative, diverse and sustainable alternative livelihoods is important. With alternative sources of income, there is less pressure on natural resources, and providing such benefits makes communities more open to the conservation message. A number of alternative livelihoods options can be explored, from the simple provision of alternate protein sources, to community owned eco-tourism initiatives.

Example: Participatory forest management in the Ntsubane Forests

Revitalising authentic participation in the legally required Participatory Forest Management Committees has encouraged a sense of 'ownership' of the forests by the communities of Ntsubane in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. This enhanced sense of responsibility has been important in deciding on zones for sustainable forest use and self-regulating illegal use of the forests. At the same time, providing employment for forest rangers and training for small business development has helped to address the dire need for livelihood options in the region.

Innovative funding is required to reduce reliance on donor funds

Reliance on donor funding is a limitation for many of the MPAH projects and civil society organisations. Although donor funding can be highly effective and catalytic, it is necessarily constrained by budget and timeframes. To continue initiatives past the initial donor funding stage often requires innovative funding mechanisms that allow for ongoing financing.

In many cases, this involves a broader scope than simply financing conservation. It is often about building an entire socio-economic structure that includes conservation or sustainable resource use, but which is self-sustaining in terms of financing. Clearly, there are many obstacles to this ideal. However, consciously initiating and running projects along business principles is a good start. Business planning for projects creates awareness of possible local assets and funding requirements. A business plan identifies the local market economies that may be harnessed as ongoing sources of funding. Business models also attract investors who would not be interested in short-term projects, but welcome long-term investment opportunities.

Another possible innovative funding mechanism is the concept of investing in ecological infrastructure. This encourages downstream users of ecosystem services to

invest in the maintenance of the ecosystems that provide these services. The concept has proven to be a popular way of funding ecosystem restoration projects. Investigation and practical implementation of these innovative funding mechanisms is necessary to test their efficacy over the long term. A range of other funding mechanisms are also available that need to be evaluated.

Example: Eco-business planning in the Lubombo region

The Lubombo Conservancy and its partners have been developing a model for innovative funding for community upliftment and natural resource management that is based on eco-business planning. An eco-business plan helps to define the area, its resources, assets and markets, promoting community conservation and ecotourism activities, and attracting investments in the area. Planning is done at two scales, at a local level with high community involvement and at a regional level to create broader partnerships and buy-in.

Education and awareness can encourage broader support of conservation initiatives

Education and awareness can be an effective tool for promoting conservation initiatives among different communities. Explaining why wise management of ecosystems is important is a necessary basis to encourage action and advocacy. Without education and awareness, conservation projects would struggle to gain the support of communities, landowners, local government and politicians.

There are a number of ways to increase awareness, especially given the growing range of media and interactive tools. Websites, blogs and social media are becoming increasingly important sources of information and outlets for conservation projects to present their work. Citizen science initiatives also give the public a chance to be involved in conservation science. A number of MPAH



initiatives have found that educating schoolchildren is an effective way to spread awareness, as schoolchildren go home and talk to family members about what they have learnt. In this way, they can encourage those within their sphere of influence to act responsibly. Schoolchildren will also be the future custodians of biodiversity.

While indicator or keystone species may be a contested concept in conservation science and biodiversity planning, flagship species can be very effective in awareness campaigns. Flagship species provide a rallying point for conservation initiatives, which can then spark broader ecosystem conservation. Flagship species also appeal to people on an emotional level. Such awareness campaigns aim to inspire, motivate and challenge the public to take part in conservation initiatives.

Example: Education and awareness in the Amathole

Two critically endangered species make their home in the forests and grasslands of the Amathole region: the Cape parrot and the Amathole toad. Projects run by the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Wild Bird Trust have successfully used social media, school education and community awareness programmes to encourage public support for the species. In doing so, they have also encouraged conservation action for the threatened ecosystems on which these species, and others, depend.

Benefits from co-ordinated community conservation across landscapes

The emerging lessons of regional co-operation, community involvement, raising awareness and sustainable financing are not mutually exclusive, and some of the most successful projects in the MPAH have combined them at a landscape level, resulting in multiple benefits. Those projects that have been able to link local scale community involvement with broader regional mobilisation of resources are more likely to have a lasting impact. By conducting community conservation across a landscape, projects are able to achieve multiple goals of community upliftment, sustainable natural resource management and conservation of important biodiversity.



Case studies

A set of four case studies has been developed from the presentations given at the second MPAH forum, which expand on the examples given above. These case studies highlight some of the projects that have been successful in co-ordinating community conservation across a landscape. The case studies include:

- Restoring Afromontane forests and grasslands in the Amathole region, Eastern Cape.
- Community-based natural resource management in the Futi Corridor, Mozambique.
- Eco-business planning in the Lubombo region, Swaziland.
- Restoration of indigenous forests in the Ntsubane forest complex, Eastern Cape.

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