

# Surveys find that despite economic challenges Malagasy fishers support fishing regulations

February 19 2014

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This shows Malagasy fishers working on the shores of Antongil Bay, Madagascar. According to a recently published study by the Wildlife Conservation Society, the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, and other groups, fishers in Madagascar's coastal villages are generally supportive of fishing regulations, an encouraging finding that bodes well for sustainable strategies needed to reduce poverty in the island nation. Credit: Ambroise Brenier/Wildlife Conservation Society

Scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society, the ARC Centre of

Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, and other groups have found that the fishing villages of Madagascar—a country with little history of natural resource regulation—are generally supportive of fishing regulations, an encouraging finding that bodes well for sustainable strategies needed to reduce poverty in the island nation.

Specifically, Malagasy fishers perceive restrictions on certain kinds of fishing gear as being beneficial for their livelihoods, according to the results of a survey conducted with fishers in 24 villages across the island. Conversely, fishers are less supportive of protected areas and restrictions on species; the results highlight both strengths as well as weaknesses to be addressed in future fisheries management plans.

The paper appears in the latest edition of *Ecology and Society*. The authors are: Tim McClanahan, Caroline Abunge, and Norbert Andrianarivelo of the Wildlife Conservation Society; Joshua Cinner of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies; Ando Rabearisoa of Conservation International; and Paubert Mahatante and Frederick Ramahatratra of the University of Toliara.

"The support for personal benefits and perceived sustainability from the island's fishing communities was significant and widespread, good news as management plans are implemented for Madagascar's fisheries," said Dr. Tim McClanahan, Senior Conservation Scientist for the Wildlife Conservation Society and lead author of the paper. "The survey results seem to run counter to assumptions that poor fishers with no history of government regulation would be resistant to most types of fisheries management."

The fishing villages of Madagascar have little input from the national government on the management of natural resources, a reality that make local-level governance and enforcement a critical part of a plan to implement a network of marine protected areas and multiple resource-

use restrictions. To better gauge the perceptions of local village fishers on what might work in the future based on their perceived benefits of restrictions to themselves, the research team conducted a survey of 24 Malagasy fishing villages—clustered in the Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest—between 2008 and 2010. A total of 519 individuals participated in the survey and expressed their views on management, with the smallest villages being surveyed completely.

While the communities surveyed were supportive of gear restrictions (such as the banning of fine-mesh nets) other restrictions such as fishing closures, temporary seasonal closures, and banning access to specific species enjoyed less support. In light of the survey results, the authors advocate an implementation approach that prioritizes support for the most widely accepted restrictions, while the less accepted restrictions would be applied first to the supportive locations.

Another finding was that people in the survey perceived more benefits of fishing restrictions to themselves rather than the Malagasy government, a situation that is frequently reversed in countries with stronger national management. The authors highlight the need to promote the recognition that entire communities share the benefits of restrictions and that the chances for successfully implementing restrictions will increase if this information and community meetings are held to promote their introduction.

"The study helps us identify critical pathways to improvement for Madagascar's marine environment," said Dr. Caleb McClennen, Director of WCS's Marine Program. "The information on the perceived benefits of fisheries regulations is critical to securing the future ecologically, socially and economically for community-based fisheries improvement projects in Madagascar. We plan to incorporate this information into community discussions and management plans in order to increase the rate of implementation and compliance with current and future fisheries

regulations."

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Surveys find that despite economic challenges Malagasy fishers support fishing regulations (2014, February 19) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-surveys-economic-malagasy-fishers-fishing.html>

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