

Can Marine Protected Areas Improve the Livelihoods of Local Communities: A Review and Analysis of the Current Literature

Micheal Verdone*

*International Organization for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Abstract

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are commonly used as a management tool to conserve marine resources. The conservation costs of MPAs are well known and often borne largely by local communities, while the benefits received by the communities are less known and more variable. Local communities become resistant to the idea of an MPA if they believe the conservation costs outweigh the expected benefits. Governments, NGOs, and fishery managers can gain the support of local communities by highlighting the community level benefits of MPAs. The existing evidence base makes it difficult to rigorously demonstrate the benefits to local communities because there are virtually no studies on the topic. One way of addressing the issue is through a comprehensive literature review. This approach is not without its limitations. MPAs are physically, institutionally, and geographically heterogeneous, making study results context dependent. This study addresses the question outlined above and makes several contributions to the literature. First, we synthesize the results of a literature survey in a methodological framework suggested by Pagiola (2004) that is consistent with valuing the effects of conservation and identifying the extent to which local communities benefit from MPAs. Second, we summarize the current state of knowledge on the topic and identify areas in need of further research if robust conclusions are to be drawn. Specifically, future research on the topic needs to rely on appropriate methodology in order to address the question posed in this paper and the results need to be presented in a policy-ready way.