Project Concept - GEF Enabling Activities in selected Indian Ocean countries (Madagascar: as demonstration country)

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The Indian Ocean – South-East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA)[i] is an intergovernmental agreement concluded in 2001 under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). The agreement now has 35 Signatory States around the Indian Ocean. Its secretariat is co-located with the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok, Thailand[ii].

This flagship agreement is primarily concerned with the conservation of the six species of marine turtles[iii] found in and around the Indian Ocean, as well as the nesting, foraging and developmental habitats that are critical for their survival. The species concerned are among the best-recognised megafauna of the marine environment, and they represent an important consumptive and non-consumptive resource for coastal communities.

IOSEA member states are guided by a comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, the implementation of which is reviewed at regular meetings of the Signatory States. Eligible countries have benefitted from a modest IOSEA Capacity-building and Technical Support Programme, which has supported the organisation of training workshops and provision of expert advice.

Many IOSEA countries have already developed, or are seeking to develop, national marine turtle conservation strategies or action plans with a view to fulfilling their commitments not only under the CMS/IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU, but also the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Among other things, the CBD *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets* call upon CBD Parties to revise and update their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and to monitor and review their implementation. The CBD Plan emphasises the generation and use of scientific information and methodologies to monitor biodiversity status and trends; as well as the need for capacity-building and effective sharing of knowledge. The Plan specifically requests the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to provide adequate, timely and predicable financial support to eligible countries to enable its implementation.

In its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2002), the Government of Madagascar acknowledges that the five species of marine turtles frequenting its shores or waters are traditionally exploited, notwithstanding certain customary restrictions on consumption. It also recognises that frequent bycatch of turtles in shrimp trawls threatens their survival. The document notes that biological data are required to develop an effective conservation plan; and it cites literature recommending the creation of sanctuaries, regulation of fishing seasons, and development of research activities and regional cooperation.

In 2011, IOSEA supported a national workshop in Antananarivo that brought together representatives of most of the key government agencies responsible for various aspects of marine turtle policy implementation, as well as NGOs working actively in parts of the country with important turtle populations. The meeting brought into focus a number of critical issues that need to be addressed in Madagascar.[iv] More recently, in November 2013, under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ecosystem Group of the National Committee on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (CNGIZC) organised a national workshop: (i) to reach a common understanding by the various concerned ministries of existing texts on the protection of marine turtles; (ii) to take stock of the current state of threats to marine turtles; and (iii) to develop urgent measures to eradicate the local sale of marine turtles throughout the entire Malagasy territory. Two further stakeholder workshops have been held in September and October 2014 (in the south and north of Madagascar, respectively) focusing on biology, ecology and social aspects of turtle conservation. Madagascar is currently entering a phase of creation of new marine parks in order to further boost the conservation of wildlife, including marine turtles.

Madagascar is among many countries seeking concrete support to build capacity in relation to marine turtle conservation and research, specifically targeting: (1) personnel involved in marine turtle conservation (Government, students, private sector); (2) local communities that are already engaged in turtle

conservation activities; and (3) government officials responsible for drafting and implementing conservation strategies. The country is also determined to develop a comprehensive ten-year national strategy for marine turtle conservation.

These aspirations are broadly aligned with current initiatives within the IOSEA Marine Turtle MoU to undertake sub-regional analyses aimed at identifying gaps in data needed for vital demographic studies; to identify and include additional sites into the recently established IOSEA Marine Turtle Site Network; and to promote the development of comprehensive national marine turtle conservation plans.

Past attempts to address aspects of this multi-dimensional conservation challenge in Madagascar through *ad hoc* workshops, invariably constrained by limited finance, have not produced the transformative changes that are needed if the country is to effectively manage this important resource. Therefore, it is worthwhile exploring whether an alternative vehicle under the Global Environment Facility, the so-called "GEF Enabling Activity", might be used to provide funding for a more holistic solution.

To get a better sense of the early thinking behind the GEF Enabling Activity, it may be instructive to quote from the 1996 GEF Operational Strategy, which defines enabling activities in biodiversity as:

'[Activities] that prepare the foundation to design and implement effective response measures to achieve Convention objectives. They will assist recipient countries to develop national strategies, plans or programs referred to in Article 6 of the CBD, and to identify components of biodiversity together with processes and activities likely to have significant adverse impacts on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity pursuant to Article 7 of the CBD. They will normally involve the review and assessment of information and will assist a recipient country to gain a better understanding of the nature and scope of its biodiversity assets and issues as well as a clearer sense of the options for the sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity. Enabling activities include supporting country-driven activities for taking stock of or inventorying biodiversity based on national programs and relying on studies, without new primary research; identifying options and establishing priorities to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity; preparing and developing biodiversity planning exercises, such as national strategies, action plans and sectoral plans; and disseminating of information through national communications to the CBD".

These days, GEF Enabling Activities are also defined more succinctly as "activities aimed at enabling countries to prepare national inventories, strategies and action plans to guide and encourage the integration of convention objectives into national development efforts and sectors". Additionally, the negotiation document on the sixth replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund (GEF/C.46/07/Rev.01, dated 22 May 2014) sheds more light on the potential use of funds in the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy (FAS). "The FAS will also complement biodiversity investments at the national level through participation in global, regional or multi-country projects that meet some or all of the following criteria:

(a) support priorities identified by the COP of the CBD and in particular the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Targets;
(b) relevant to the objectives and programs of the GEF-6 biodiversity strategy;
(c) high likelihood that the project will have a broad and positive impact on biodiversity;
(d) potential for replication;
(e) global demonstration value;
(f) potential to catalyze private sector investment in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; and
(g) contribute to global conservation knowledge through formal experimental or quasi-experimental designs that test and evaluate the hypotheses embedded in project interventions.

A three-pronged GEF Enabling Activity in support of IOSEA implementation would offer a holistic approach to simultaneously: (1) build capacity among government officials, practitioners and local communities that interact with marine turtles; (2) determine critical gaps in data, information, and institutional processes; and (3) engage stakeholders in an inclusive process to develop a national marine turtle conservation plan. The proposed project – addressing most, if not all, of the above-mentioned criteria – would be of approximately 2.5 years duration and would require a budget of less than USD 250,000 for a single country. The proposal

that follows would see the GEF Enabling Activity replicated in up to 5-6 Indian Ocean countries, with a total investment in the order of USD 1 million.

The necessary institutional support and expertise for such an initiative already exist in Madagascar through various government agencies responsible for marine turtle conservation, underpinned by an array of civil society organisations and research/academic institutions that have been working actively on community-based marine turtle conservation and research for many years.[v]

Among IOSEA Signatory States, Madagascar is perhaps the most advanced in terms of having articulated its pressing needs for assistance, but it is certainly not alone among countries in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) requiring this kind of support. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has expressed a similar request for assistance in developing a national marine turtle conservation strategy. Mozambique has sought and received support from IOSEA for a number of national training initiatives; and the country's NGO-led marine turtle conservation network, once very active, has been constrained only by insufficient resources. Both countries would benefit immeasurably from a comparable GEF Enabling Activity and, although they are perhaps not as well-endowed in terms of institutional engagement in marine turtle conservation, both countries have strong non-governmental resources that can be called upon. The IOSEA Western Indian Ocean – Marine Turtle Task Force (WIO-MTTF), a technical body set up to facilitate IOSEA implementation in the sub-region, could also play a role in the project execution and oversight.

If one were seeking to enlarge the project to take in other Western Indian Ocean countries, a case could also be made for Kenya, Seychelles and Mauritius – each of which brings unique attributes to marine turtle conservation.[vi] If interested, these three countries could readily be incorporated in the project framework. However, one could also identify countries in other IOSEA sub-regions that have needs comparable to Madagascar, Mozambique, and Tanzania; and would profit from the project to the same degree. Several countries in South-East Asia – among them Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines – would benefit from a nation-wide review of their marine turtle conservation policies and programmes. In the Northern Indian Ocean (NIO), compelling arguments can be presented for either Maldives or Sri Lanka. Although Oman would be a logical choice in the Northwest Indian Ocean, having already expressed a need for this kind of assistance, it appears not to be eligible for GEF support. In such case, either Pakistan (technically part of IOSEA's NIO sub-region) or perhaps Islamic Republic of Iran (if GEF-eligible) would be logical alternatives.

The following description of the Enabling Activity for Madagascar could also serve as a blueprint for each of the other 4-5 participating countries. It would have at its core an iterative process to develop a national strategy for marine turtle conservation through stakeholder consultation; a capacity-building component focussing on authorities, practitioners and local communities; and a technical gap analysis of data required to answer fundamental questions related to marine turtle demographics, in support of the broader national strategy[vii].

Benefitting from experience gained and lessons learned from Kenya, which has already produced a comprehensive national plan (2010-2014), development of Madagascar's national strategy will require the establishment of a dedicated inter-agency steering committee and a series of stakeholder consultations around the country that will produce successive iterations of a working draft, to be reviewed and finalised at final representative gathering.

An outline has already been developed for a training programme to be conducted in Madagascar as three separate, five-day workshops (courses) focussing, in Course 1, on field training/skills transfer for scientists; in Course 2, on engagement of local communities in monitoring, conservation activities and awareness-raising; and in Course 3, on improving the effectiveness and collaboration of government officials involved in policy formulation, implementation and enforcement. These workshops would be conducted towards the start of the Enabling Activity and, ideally, repeated towards the end to take advantage of feedback and lessons-learned.

The third component, which is to undertake an analysis of the current status of marine turtles in Madagascar, as well as a scientific gap analysis, will require the formation of a dedicated working group of experts, primarily within Madagascar, and bring in outside expertise as required. The output will be the

most complete assessment of marine turtle status and availability of demographic data ever undertaken in Madagascar, including a clear plan for addressing identified gaps. As such, it will serve as a mini-scientific strategy to be embedded in the broader plan.

By the end of the Enabling Activity, a comprehensive national marine turtle conservation strategy will have been published and actively promoted; an opportunity will have been provided for key stakeholders requiring specialised training to receive it; an up-to-date baseline will have been established for strategic data collection requirements; and the national knowledge base will have been considerably expanded.

Most of the elements of this project, as defined for Madagascar, are relevant to each of the other participating countries. The needs of each country may differ but the blueprint for Madagascar gives an idea of the range of activities that could be scaled up or down, as necessary, depending on the circumstances of the other countries.

This relatively modest investment in strategic planning, gap analysis and capacity-building – in the order of USD 1 million for 5-6 countries over 2.5 years – has clear potential for replication elsewhere and should produce substantial, long-term benefits for the conservation of some of the most iconic species of the Indian Ocean. It will serve as a demonstration project not only for other IOSEA Signatory States that require this kind of technical support, but also for other unrelated biodiversity instruments with a species/habitat focus elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, the Enabling Activity will compel participating countries to monitor implementation more assiduously, to develop human capacities on multiple levels, and to better appreciate the important contribution of scientific data in the formulation of national policy.

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[i] Full title: *Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia*.

[ii] The Secretariat manages a website where all relevant information can be consulted: www.ioseaturtles.org

[iii] Green (*Chelonia mydas)*, Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata)*, Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta)*, Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea)*, Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea)*, and Flatback (*Natator depressus)*.

[iv] The meeting identified the most important information gaps and issues facing marine turtle conservation and research in Madagascar, among them: (1) a lack of scientific and empirical knowledge about the marine turtles of Madagascar, and the absence of a centralised database to document previous work; (2) sub-optimal stakeholder understanding and acceptance of existence of laws, with insufficient consideration given to traditional and cultural turtle consumption; (3) the importance of involving local communities in conservation efforts, including the potential use of the *Dina* as a useful tool in future management efforts; (4) the need to draw upon existing local, national and regional expertise and frameworks though which all actors can communicate and share information; and (5) legislative shortcomings in need of clarification and long-term organizational stability.

[v] Relevant Government entities in Madagascar include:

DGP/MPRH (Direction Générale de la Pêche / Ministère de la Pêche et des Ressources Halieutiques)
CSP/MPRH (Centre de Surveillance des Pêches / Ministère de la Pêche et des Ressources Halieutiques)
DGM / MEEFM (Direction Générale de la Mer / Ministère de l'Environnement, de l'Ecologie et des Forêts)
DAMP / MEEFM (Direction des Aires Marines Protégées / Ministère de l'Environnement, de l'Ecologie et des Forêts
MESUPRES (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique)
DPRH (Direction régionale de la Pêche et des Ressources Halieutiques)
Ministère de l'Environnement et des Forets
Ministère de la Justice
CNGIZC (Comité National pour la Gestion Intégrée des Zones Côtières et Marines)
CRGIZC (Comité Régionale pour la Gestion Intégrée des Zones Côtières et Marines) / Atsimo Adnrefana et Diana
MNP (Madagascar National Parks)

Research/Academic institutions include:

CNRE (Centre National de Recherches sur l'Environnement) ; CNRO (Centre National de Recherches Océanographiques)
CEDP (Centre d'Etudes de Développement des Pêches) ; DBA (Dpt Biologie Animale), Université d'Antananarivo
IHSM (Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines)/Université Tolaria ; PBZT (Parc Botanique et Zoologique de Tsimbazaza)

Non-Governmental organisations/associations include:

Blue Ventures, C3 (Community Centred Conservation), Conservation International, ReefDoctor, WCI (Wildlife Conservation Society), WWF (World Wildlife Fund); GAPCM (Groupement des Aquaculteurs et Pêcheurs de Crevette Malgache)

[vi] Kenya led the way in 2009 with the development and production of a five-year (2010-2104) national sea turtle conservation and management strategy, through an extensive stakeholder consultation process. The strategy's main components include stakeholder engagement, advocacy, communication, education, public awareness, targeted research and monitoring, and threat mitigation. Kenya would certainly benefit from a review of the strategy's implementation after five years, as well as stakeholder consultations leading to any necessary revisions. Seychelles, another important Range State for marine turtles, is arguably one of the most advanced countries in the sub-region in terms of active marine turtle conservation and research, thanks in large measure to private sector and non-governmental initiatives. A National Strategy and Action Plan was developed and adopted in 2005 through a series of stakeholder workshops. Similar to Kenya, it would be timely to undertake a strategic review and revision process, perhaps with the support of an umbrella organisation that is attempting to foster greater collaboration among range of separate initiatives in the country. Lastly, Mauritius, which is less significant in terms of turtle nesting apart from some outlying islands, would still have much to gain by developing a national strategy to better protect and rehabilitate critical habitats, including nesting and foraging areas.

[vii] In keeping with the direction of the CBD Strategic Plan, calling on Parties to generate and effectively use scientific information, the gap analysis should examine the availability and use of information on: long-term monitoring at index beaches; genetic population structure; nesting parameters (e.g. inter-nesting interval, re-migration interval, clutch frequency, sex ratio, incubation period, hatching/ emergence success etc.); satellite tracking, traditional tagging, and stable isotope analysis (e.g. in relation to habitat use); as well as data from aerial surveys (e.g. in relation to at-sea abundance), strandings and bycatch etc. The analysis would include specific recommendations and setting of strategic priorities in relation to all of the above.