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Regional Project for the Development of a Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Protected Areas Network through the boosting of MPAs Creation and Management “MedMPAnet” Project

AT A GLANCE

The Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (MedPartnership) is a collective effort of leading environmental institutions and organizations together with countries sharing the Mediterranean Sea to address environmental challenges that Mediterranean marine and coastal ecosystems face. The project's 78 demonstration and the promotion and replication of good practices will maximize impact and ensure the sustainability of the project beyond its lifespan.

Total budget: 48 millions USD.
13 million USD: Global Environment Facility
35 million USD: Participating countries, executing agencies, and donors.

ABSTRACT

This activity aims mainly at assisting Mediterranean riparian countries in the setting up of an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the region. It has been addressed through the identification and characterisation of marine sites suitable to become MPAs, and also through demonstration projects for MPA creation and planning, including stakeholders' participation and financial sustainability mechanisms.

The project allowed the identification, listing and ecological characterisation of 24 priority areas of conservation interest in Croatia, Lebanon, Morocco and Montenegro. It provided support for the inception, ecological and socioeconomic characterization, zoning and management planning of four new MPAs in Albania (Porto Palermo), Algeria (Réghaia), Morocco (Cap des Trois Fourches) and Tunisia (Kuriat Islands). Business plans have been elaborated for the three demonstrations in Albania, Algeria and Morocco.

Furthermore, technical assistance and capacity building activities to improve MPA management have been provided through regional and national training workshops, on-the-job training, small-granted projects, and technical tools and teaching packages. The project's efforts led to the declaration or the launching of declaration processes of seven MPAs (totalling a surface of 98,411 ha of marine waters), which are: Porto Palermo (Albania), Réghaia (Algeria), Ras Chekaa, and Naqoura (Lebanon), Ain Al-Ghazala & Bomba Gulf (Libya), Cap des Trois Fourches (Morocco) and Kuriat Islands (Tunisia).

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Between 2010 and 2015, SPA/RAC provided its support to a number of Mediterranean countries in identifying and characterizing marine and coastal sites suitable to be declared as MPAs, but also for some demonstration cases, in preparing management and zoning plans in view of immediately declaring such areas and setting up suitable management efforts on the ground.

Such activities contribute to the global (Convention on Biological Diversity) and regional (Barcelona Convention and its Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity) objectives, stating that by 2020, at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas (Aichi Target 11).

THE EXPERIENCE

According to the 2012 MPA Status Report, elaborated by MedPAN and SPA/RAC, marine and coastal protected areas are very unevenly distributed across the Mediterranean's sub-regions and countries. The imbalance is particularly seen in the Northern basin region, which has 84 % of all the MPAs in the Mediterranean. The Southern region has thus the least MPAs (16 %).



Methodology

In order to address under-representation and enhance the coverage, quality and representativity of MPAs in the Mediterranean region, SPA/RAC joined efforts with Mediterranean countries from the South and the East in order to identify and establish new MPAs based on a sound knowledge of the prevailing ecological and socioeconomic contexts of the concerned areas.

In view of the identification and ecological characterisation of priority areas of conservation interest, technical assistance has been provided to Croatia, Lebanon, Morocco and Montenegro, through joint national/international expert teams, who were in charge of undertaking ecological studies, whose objective is to quantitatively survey marine areas that could be declared as MPAs.

Furthermore and in order to establish new MPAs in demonstration areas in Albania (Porto Palermo), Algeria (Réghaia), Morocco (Cap des Trois Fourches) and Tunisia (Kuriat Islands), SPA/RAC has first undertaken the needed enabling ecological, socio-economic, and fisheries studies as appropriate.

Based on the knowledge gained through these multidisciplinary diagnosis studies, draft management and zoning plans were elaborated in a participative and concerted manner with all the concerned stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, local community groups, (fishers, divers, boaters, business people, etc.), local communities, scientists and other resource management agencies.

Management plans were then produced and validated during local public workshops, taking into account both conservation objectives and the requirement that the MPA is integrated and compatible with its economic and social environments.

For the three demonstrations in Albania, Algeria and Morocco, financial sustainability was ensured through the establishment of business plans.

In order to respond to Mediterranean MPAs short staffing or staff lack of management, conservation or planning background, several efforts have addressed the need to build MPA management capacity: regional and national training workshops, on-the-job training, small-granted projects, and technical tools and teaching packages.

RESULTS

The project allowed the identification, listing and ecological characterisation of 24 priority areas of conservation interest in Croatia, Lebanon, Morocco and Montenegro, as well as the elaboration of a national strategy and the drafting of a law on protected areas in Libya. It provided support for the inception, ecological and socioeconomic characterization, zoning and management planning of four new MPAs in Albania (Porto Palermo), Algeria (Réghaia), Morocco (Cap des Trois Fourches) and Tunisia (Kuriat Islands).

A regional study on financial needs of Mediterranean MPAs was developed by MedPAN and SPA/RAC in collaboration with WWF-MedPO, and business plans have been elaborated for the three demonstrations in Albania, Algeria and Morocco.

Capacity building and training activities implemented within the project allowed enhancing the capacities of 600 MPA manager, practitioner or stakeholder from the participating Mediterranean countries.

These efforts led to the declaration or the launching of declaration processes of seven MPAs, which are: Porto Palermo (Albania), Réghaia (Algeria), Ras Chekaa, and Naqoura (Lebanon), Ain Al-Ghazala & Bomba Gulf (Libya), Cap des Trois Fourches (Morocco) and Kuriat Islands (Tunisia).

These newly declared or future MPAs protect a surface of 98,411 ha of marine waters.



LESSONS LEARNED

The identification and selection of marine sites suitable to be declared as MPAs by the Mediterranean countries are based most of the time on ecological criteria, whereas it is key to introduce social and economic criteria into MPA selection schemes.

Furthermore and in order to properly and timely meet Aichi Target 11 in the Mediterranean region, other effective area-based conservation measures should also be considered and taken into consideration with regard to marine and coastal areas conservation and the creation of MPA network/s in the region.

In order to achieve such shortages, gap analysis for ecological coherence and for considering socio-economic criteria and ecosystem services should be undertaken at national and regional levels.

Stakeholder engagement in MPAs can be described as a process of maturity from initial stages to more developed and self-sustaining stages. In the Mediterranean region, such processes are more and more recognized by governments as essential and unavoidable steps for establishing effective marine and coastal protected areas, especially with the developing and nascent democracies in the region, accompanied with a reinforced NGOs and civil society institutions.

As far as capacity building is concerned, the selection of course facilitators needs to strike a balance between professional trainers and experienced MPA practitioners in the topical areas covered by the training curriculum. In the way, a successful capacity building programme is dependent on the selection of programme participants who are willing and interested in making a professional investment in building their own capacity with the intent of implementing new skills and knowledge in the field. Moreover, post-training coaching and experience sharing proved being of significant value to continuing the learning process.

This set of lessons learnt gained through this five year-process will serve to sustain the project results and sustaining them in other locations in the Mediterranean region.

IMPACTS

The best illustration of the project's immediate impact on people's lives resides certainly in training. Capacity-building activities targeted stakeholders playing an important role in terms of marine life conservation in their countries, and were structured so that they meet stakeholders' specific needs and fill in their knowledge gaps.

If Montenegro for example doesn't yet have MPAs, men and women have been trained to prepare the ground, thanks to the project efforts.

In Lebanon, MPAs exist yet, but management resources and methods are lacking. Simple and inexpensive tools were taught to MPA practitioners, in order to set up efficient monitoring and management.

MPA establishment being painstaking and time-consuming processes, the project impacts are unlikely to be seen in such a short time (five years). What we can do is to first investing in people, so that declarations and resolutions on paper are implemented with conviction, for the sake of the planet and people.

Vesna Mačić: *"In my country, unfortunately, there are no MPAs, but there are several projects towards the creation of marine protected areas. So, to my institute and Montenegro, as a country, it is important to be prepared for activities we should perform. I am working at the Institute of Marine Biology, which is part of the University. So, we are a scientific institution, but we will be included in the management of marine protected areas. And we are now trying to pass on this knowledge, I get here, to other stakeholders in my country and to involve more people in this activity [of creating MPAs]."*

Ziad Samaha: *"The advantage of this course is actually it offers both the practical on side data collection and monitoring as well as analysis of data using an open source software, which makes it easy and makes it really good for a state owned enterprise and Government agencies so they don't have to buy the license. We use most of the time they suffer from lack of finance."*

For more information, click [here](#).



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REFERENCES

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Mediterranean, MPA creation, MPA management, MPA network.



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Executing partners: FAO, UNESCO/IHP, UNIDO, GWP-Med, MIO-ECSD, WWF MedPO, UNEP/MAP's MEDPOL programme and regional activity centres (SCP/RAC, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC).

Participating countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Montenegro, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

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