



## POLICY BRIEF //

### ESSENTIAL ROLE OF COMMUNITY VOICES IN BIODIVERSITY POLICYMAKING: EXAMPLES FROM MADAGASCAR

October 2023



# 01/ KEY MESSAGES

This policy brief aims to make the case for the imperative of empowering and involving communities as a central strategy for countries to achieve the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) through their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). The key messages are as follows:

- 1 NBSAP:** The NBSAP update emerges as a pivotal opportunity to ensure that community voices are heard and actively integrated into the policymaking process. To achieve this involves introducing communities to the significance of communication in shaping policy, empowering communication champions to create verified materials from community stories, and facilitating opportunities for champions to share these stories with policymakers on behalf of their communities.
- 2 CAPACITY BUILDING:** To promote greater community involvement in policymaking, it is essential to invest in capacity building for communities and community communication champions - enhancing their skills in advocacy, media use, and communication, while providing the necessary resources and support to overcome obstacles like language barriers and education disparities.
- 3 EFFECTIVE POLICIES:** Engaging communities in policymaking can lead to the development of effective and efficient solutions, strategies, and policies. It has significant benefits, including the emergence of diverse perspectives from a wide array of groups and the empowerment of confident communities eager to contribute to positive changes.

# 02/ INTRODUCTION

## 2.1. Background on the GBF

Urgent and transformative action is required to protect and conserve biodiversity [1], while enhancing the resilience of people. Countries around the world, including Madagascar, are working towards living in harmony with nature by 2050. They adopted the GBF at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), held in December 2022. The GBF sets the global direction of action and funding, with the aim of halting and reversing

biodiversity loss by 2030 and living in harmony with nature by 2050. It contains action-oriented targets for each country to reach that cover three main categories – (1) reducing threats to nature, (2) meeting people's needs while using nature sustainably and sharing its benefits, as well as (3) developing tools and solutions for doing so. One of the defining features of the GBF is its firm commitment to inclusive governance, recognizing the critical role that community participation plays in achieving its targets.

## 2.1. Background on NBSAPs

NBSAPs serve as the primary tool for countries to fulfil their obligations under the CBD. From now through to 2024, countries will update their NBSAPs to align with the GBF. These updated NBSAPs will be submitted for consideration at the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, scheduled for the second half of 2024. The NBSAP update emerges as a pivotal opportunity to ensure that community voices are heard and actively integrated into the policymaking process.

### BOX 1: How communities were involved in Madagascar's current NBSAP

Madagascar's current **NBSAP (2015-2025)** has been reported to respect and apply some of the good governance principles, including that of shared governance with stakeholders in decision-making processes. This includes consultative bodies at both national and local levels, ensuring the active and meaningful participation of stakeholders through all the steps. Public consultation has also played a crucial role in enhancing access to information.

Following a national-level consultation, the initial draft of the NBSAP was presented to local communities in smaller administrative subdivisions. Their feedback and input were gathered and incorporated into the final published version, making the plan more comprehensive and reflective of the diverse needs and perspectives of communities.

Despite the current NBSAP being established for 2015 to 2025, the adoption of the GBF requires an update of its content. This update is currently in the planning phase and anticipates the effective and early engagement of local communities in the process.

## 1.2. An overview of community participation in biodiversity policy making

Empowering communities to actively engage in policymaking is a recognition of their rights and an avenue for them to make their voices heard. It enables communities to shape the course of our **collective efforts**, ensuring that we, as a global community, move cohesively towards a common goal – from halting and reversing biodiversity loss to combatting climate change and reducing poverty [2].

The livelihoods of the most vulnerable people in rural areas are often dependent on ecosystems which means that biodiversity loss has major implications for them. Inclusivity in policymaking is, therefore, not only an aspiration but an ethical obligation needed to overcome threats to biodiversity while upholding the **rights** of these communities [2].

As communities become active contributors in policymaking, **insights** into **threats** and **opportunities** hidden within our ecosystems come to light. This wealth of indigenous wisdom, when shared and included, transforms policies into powerful tools for change. Local knowledge and community buy-in strengthen policy implementation, making it more impactful and sustainable [3].

However, the road to inclusivity can be challenging – from unwillingness to participate, deference to community leaders, inappropriate approaches, time demands, resource requirements and the need for capacity building and continuous commitment to participation. We must be mindful of these **challenges** as we move towards a more inclusive, equitable and biodiverse future through the NBSAPs revision process [3].

### DESIRED OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION



Preserved  
natural  
resources



Community  
rights upheld



Collective  
efforts



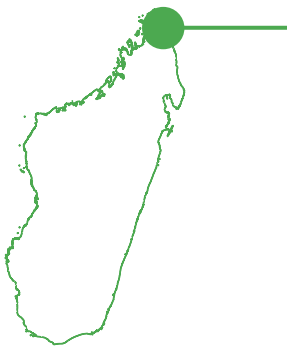
Effective  
policy



Community  
buy-in

### 3.1. Background

In Madagascar, local community representatives called communication champions who have directly benefited from nature restoration and protection were given an opportunity to share their experiences with policymakers. The process, which was facilitated by Conservation International (CI) Madagascar from October 2022 to September 2023, was financed by SwedBio. Community communication champions were from 14 villages of the 7 Bays Marine Corridor Protected Area.



7 Bays Marine  
Corridor  
Protected Area

#### 7 Bays Marine Corridor Protected Area //

Being part of Madagascar's Marine Protected Area network, it has mangroves of extraordinary ecological and socio-economic importance, as well as significant importance in terms of coastal protection and bio-nursery. However, these mangrove forests also have degraded plots caused by charcoal burning and cutting that took place before they were protected. These mangroves are not only essential to the local communities' daily lives but are also part of the proposed tourist routes. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain the integrity of these ecosystems to ensure that local communities' livelihoods are sustainable, and ecotourism continues.

The 7 Bays Marine Corridor Protected Area is also rich in coral reefs, a particularly biodiverse ecosystem where octopuses and other marine species find habitat. Octopus has become particularly essential for local people's livelihoods; hence the implementation of a sub-national octopus reserve. Despite the existence of regulations on fishery seasons, these ecosystems are continuously under pressure: apart from natural threats such as global warming and marine erosion due to sea level rise, anthropogenic threats are often observed, like overfishing and unregulated fishing gear and techniques.

### 3.2. The approach

Through comprehensive training and access to media resources, these communities were equipped with the necessary tools to effectively capture valuable insights derived from their efforts in ecosystem protection, sustainable management and restoration.

**Capacity building //** Workshops were held in five villages, where the communities of 15 of the 16 villages within the 7 Bays Marine Corridor Protected Area were gathered, represented by community groups such as fishers, women and youth associations, among others. In each workshop, CI provided a brief project overview, engaged in short but informative activities that included games and other participatory exercises highlighting the significance of effective communication in various formats and mediums.

CI introduced the concept of Nature-based Solutions and encouraged participants to share and describe the ones they practiced locally, identifying their main benefits and success stories. Participants were also asked what messages they would like to convey to the Malagasy government if given the opportunity to do so.



The voices, experiences, successes, challenges, and needs of the community were directly shared by the community representatives who attended. During the workshops, the ideal profile for a community communication champion was discussed and their roles and responsibilities were outlined.

At the end of the workshops, invitations were extended to the participants to become involved in the project through one of the following participation types: (1) becoming community communication champions, (2) contributing to the development of success stories, and/or (3) participating in validation workshops for the communication materials to be produced. The success stories and key messages were refined during a storytelling workshop that was organized with the community communication champions.

**Choice of communication medium //** The communities opted to convey their stories through short films, which would be shared via social media platforms such as Facebook. They chose Facebook due to its international reach and widespread usage in Madagascar, making it an effective means to reach a national audience, including government officials, policymakers, and the general public. These short films also showcased their culture through traditional songs and dances. Participants found short films to be easy to understand, yet they wanted to actively participate in telling their success stories to reflect their collective experiences and cultural identity.

### **3.3. Overcoming obstacles to meaningful participation**

**Language barrier //** While participants were enthusiastic during the sessions, a language barrier occasionally hindered full participation. The community groups and communication champions came from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, not all of whom understood the official Malagasy language. To address the language barrier,

local facilitators provided translations into the local language when facilitating workshops and helped during the activities. Training materials for communication champions were prepared and delivered in the local language by local trainers who attended the filming of the success stories videos. While effective for mutual understanding, this added some extra time, resulting in some meetings running later than planned.

**Educational barrier //** Educational disparities may have also impeded some participants, as some were literate while others were not. To mitigate differences in educational backgrounds, participants were divided into small groups with complementary members (for example, some could read instructions while others took notes as group members expressed their ideas). Activities primarily emphasized oral communication to ensure everyone could express their ideas more easily. Local facilitators and the CI team took notes during these activities.

### **3.4. Key successful community participation outcomes**

**A variety of perspectives emerged //** In total, **159** individuals were reached, with **81** expressing interest in participating in the project and **44** enrolling as communication champions. These participants represented a diverse range of groups, including fishermen, women, and youth associations. Emerging success stories authentically depict the realities within these communities, which can inform effective solutions, strategies, and policies.

**Communities were empowered to bring about positive change //** The capacity of communication champions was enhanced, equipping them with greater knowledge of Nature-based Solutions and skills for effective advocacy, media use, and communication. Communities themselves became empowered and gained confidence in their abilities to contribute to positive changes.

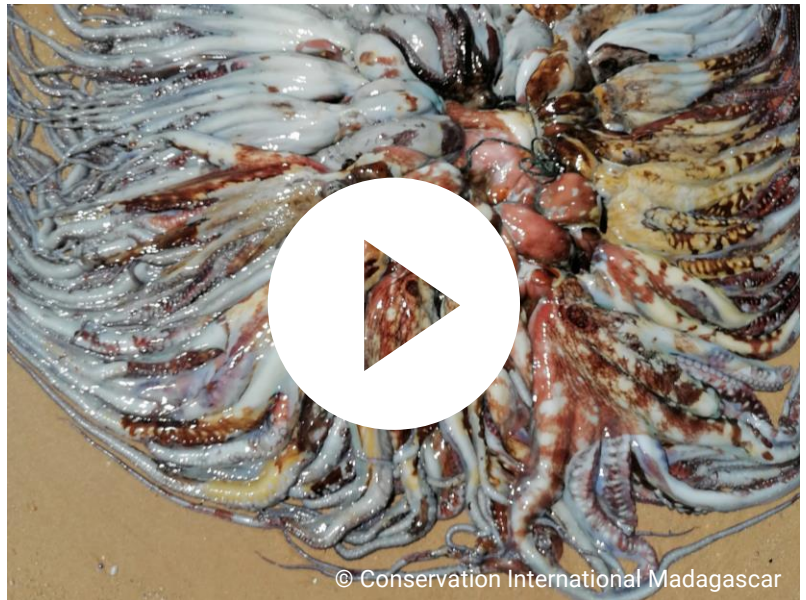


SHORT FILM

Mangroves: An ecosystem that keeps us alive

SHORT FILM

Sustainable fisheries: Think about the future, respect the closure of the octopus season



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The communication champions from the 7 Bays Marine Corridor Protected Area, who elaborated the success stories based on their collective experiences.





# 04/ CONCLUSION

Communities such as those in the 7 Bays Marine Corridor Protected Area aspire to ensure their voices are acknowledged. It is critical to empower them to actively engage in and contribute to policies, strategies, projects, and initiatives that are designed for or impact them, all while aligning with their unique needs.

As Madagascar begins the process of updating its NBSAP, policy makers can incorporate these three key lessons learned (listed on the right) on how to effectively engage communities for stronger, more inclusive policy outcomes. This would not only showcase the significance of effective communication in various formats and mediums, but would also ensure the effectiveness of communities' participation and inclusion in policy/decision making.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

### COMMUNICATION MEDIUMS:

Provide a variety of communication mediums to allow communities to showcase their experiences, knowledge, success, needs, insights, and culture (for example, through traditional songs and dances).

### LOCAL LANGUAGES:

Prepare materials in local languages and allow for verbal communication to bridge literacy gaps.

### INTERESTING EXERCISES:

Include creative and participatory exercises appropriate for local contexts when involving local communities, to trigger their interest and encourage meaningful participation.

## REFERENCES

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This policy brief has been developed by Conservation South Africa in partnership with Conservation International Madagascar, under the project "Government and communities share learnings on nature-based solutions for sustainable development, climate and biodiversity" (2021-2023), which is financed by SwedBio, a programme for biodiversity and equitable development at the Stockholm Resilience Centre.