



African small-scale fisheries perspective on marine conservation and food security

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At the United Nations Conference on Biodiversity, or COP-15, states adopted a target to declare 30% of the world's land and ocean as protected areas by 2030. This initiative is called 30 x 30.

CAOPA, which represents African small-scale fisheries organizations from 27 countries, recognizes that protected areas can be effective means of restoring and conserving biodiversity and supporting coastal communities that depend on fishing for their livelihoods and food security.

However, for us, the success of the 30 x 30 initiative will depend on participatory and transparent approaches to locating these zones and developing rules on the commercial activities that are allowed in them.

A hasty approach, without consultation and recognition of the conservation efforts made by communities and required of them, to designate large areas of the oceans as protected areas could be extremely detrimental to small-scale fishing.

Historically, through traditional systems, small-scale fisheries were the first to take measures to protect fragile coastal areas or fish breeding grounds. These spatial or temporal measures, such as prohibiting fishing in some areas, or during some seasons, were well respected by community members, and have proven to be successful in a traditional fishing setting.

Fishing communities therefore have a rich and varied experience of conserving nature and coastal eco-systems. This experience must be recognized and valued – small-scale fishing communities must be active partners in any conservation initiative, including protected marine areas.

The costs of protected marine areas to small-scale fishing communities must also be considered. For example, the establishment of protected marine area in a coastal zone that was previously dedicated to fishing will force fishermen to go further afield, outside the boundaries of the PMA, to fish. This has a cost in terms of, for example, fuel, and therefore has an impact on the income of fishermen and their families. If fishermen are involved in the management of the protected marine area, particularly in its surveillance, this also has a cost, both in financial terms and in terms of time spent by fishermen on this activity.



The social and economic costs of establishing a PMA on the surrounding small-scale fishing communities is something that needs to be seriously documented considered and compensated for if the initiative is to be successful.

We also want to emphasize that protecting 30% of the oceans by 2030 should not distract African governments from a more comprehensive focus on marine management. PMAs are not a miracle cure for overexploitation of resources, nor for the marine pollution, that is suffocating our ecosystems.

Simply declaring large parts of the oceans as protected areas does not guarantee the sustainable and equitable use of marine resources over an entire coastal zone, or over an entire EEZ. A coherent vision of sustainable and equitable management of marine resources is needed for the whole EEZ, with PMAs as mere tools for this management.

At the level of small-scale fisheries, we launched an appeal last year, during the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture, to this end.

For us, sustainable management of coastal areas implies that these areas are co-managed by the state and small-scale fishermen, and include appropriate ecosystem conservation tools, such as protected marine areas managed in consultation with fisheries-dependent communities.

However, it is important that states, in parallel with their efforts to establish PMAs, stop the growth of socially and environmentally destructive industries, such as industrial trawling in coastal areas, intensive fish farming dependent on small pelagic fish meal, and offshore oil and gas exploitation.

Public subsidies to these sectors should be phased out so that public money can be invested in sustainable fisheries management for the benefit of people and food security. Without this, the 30x30 target will be superficial and miss its goal.

Our concerns about the 30x30 target extend to proposals for its funding. It is argued that achieving the 30x30 target will require a huge increase in public spending. One idea that is becoming increasingly popular with states, including in Africa, is to raise this money through innovative financial instruments, such as debt-for-nature swaps, where part of a state's debt is exchanged for funding to implement conservation action, particularly PMAs.

These financial instruments are strongly supported by governments. These exchanges are most often led by large environmental NGOs, some of which



are present in our countries. However, the risks and pitfalls of turning to the financial markets to finance marine conservation are overlooked.

Our first concern is that debt-for-nature swaps are negotiated and finalized in secret. This model of debt swaps does not allow for the free, prior and informed consent of the citizens affected by these transactions.

There is also a lack of transparency in debt-for-nature swaps. Contracts that define the terms of financial transactions and retention commitments are treated as confidential documents. This lack of transparency prevents the public from understanding what has been achieved in these transactions and how much money is at stake. In our view, these debt-for-nature swaps to finance the creation of PMAs must be rejected.

We instead call on African governments to acknowledge the rights of the people, the need to obtain their free, prior and informed consent to any decision to deny them access to their historic fishing areas and to establish a marine nature conservation zone.