

MADAGASCAR ANNEX X. DLIST SUMMARY REPORT FOR AMBODILETRA

Ambodiletra is a small village at the southern tip of the Masoala peninsula in the north-eastern region of Madagascar. The biggest town in the area is Maroantsetra. The community in Ambodiletra is very isolated and it takes at least one day to travel to Maroantsetra. During the cyclone season it becomes impossible to travel by boat and for many months at a time, the community is rather isolated. This is one of the richest areas in the country in terms of irreplaceable biodiversity, and the largest remaining lowland rainforest is found here. Many local people live in poverty and few community members are aware of the universal value of the area where they live – in spite of the fact that UNESCO puts a high premium on community involvement in World Heritage Sites. The community of Ambodiletra are more or less self-sustained. They grow their own rice, cassava and other vegetables, they raise chickens, pigs and zebu, but their main source of protein is from the ocean – through fish and other sea food. Cash income is generally very small and comes mainly from small scale vanilla farming and dried octopus or shark-fin fishing.

Since the beginning of the current political crisis in Madagascar, Marojejy and Masoala National Parks have been particularly subjected to intense illegal ransacking and trafficking of precious woods, including rose wood. Many local people who are involved say that they would prefer to not participate in the destruction but at least can earn a little money through this activity. Many people say that poverty on the peninsula is worse than ever before. For sure, over the last two decades it has become much harder to walk into the lagoon and gather enough fish to feed a family. People in Ambodiletra know they cannot rely on aid coming from the outside; distances are too far and they are too small to warrant much attention.

1.1 Can the marine and coastal resources support the community?

The community is heavily dependent on fish and octopus as a regular source of protein (see Figure 25).



Figure 25: Drying octopus on the beach in Ambodiletra

They may eat chicken once or twice a month and most people only eat meat once or twice per year, for very special occasions. The majority of the community members say that the income received from fishing is not sufficient to support their families. This is because they are increasingly catching less fish and the rice is not enough to act as a substitute. Income generated from farming sugar cane and vanilla is very small and doesn't contribute much to support people.

The biggest and most acute threat to the environment around the Masoala peninsula is deforestation. Many of the old, large trees are being cut and sold and the community is concerned about this. The deforestation contributes to soil erosion and siltation of the sea, which affects corals in the area. In the recent years, the cyclones have been very strong and destroyed a lot of the corals in the lagoon, which was designated as a Marine Park in 1994. The poor state of the coral reef in and around the lagoon has resulted in the reduction in fish and this is something that many people in the community are worried about. People have also noticed a rise in temperature and less rain in the area in recent years.

International Knowledge Management (IKM)- an international NGO, together with Madagascar National Parks and Feon' ny Ala (a small local NGO based in Maroantsetra) have been active in Ambodiletra over a long period of time. One of the main achievements was a school built in the village. The construction

was funded by the Masoala National Park, while IKM paid for the teachers' salary with donations from a school in Connecticut, USA. IKM and Madagascar National Parks have also contributed to the general development and cleanliness of the village. The people feel that the marine park has helped to improve fish stocks and has overall really benefitted the village. The majority of the community feel that more conservation areas should be developed and people should not be allowed to fish in these areas. They would also like to see a tree plantation developed so that the natural forests can be protected. Other NGOs that have contributed to conservation efforts are WWF and WCS. But with the current political instability in Madagascar there are not many outside organisations that are active in the area any longer.

1.2 Alternative livelihoods options leading to poverty reduction

Box 1: At a glance - Ambodiletra

The demonstration site in Madagascar have been visited a total of four times with two initial trips in 2008, one trip at the end of 2009 and one in April 2010. The DLIST team has included marine biologists, LED specialists, stakeholder involvement specialists, history and heritage specialists as well as experts in community-based tourism. The LED planning process has been initiated and there have been at least one big community meeting arranged during each of the site visits. The community meetings have been complemented by a total of 48 individual socio-economic interviews to give input and background information to the LED planning process. The community in Ambodiletra is very small compared to most of the other DLIST demonstration sites and there is only one association within the community – the parents association which is responsible for the management of the village school. Another important stakeholder in this community is the marine park which has contributed greatly to the school development and conservation initiatives in the village. Much progress has been made in forging partnerships between the private sector, the Madagascar National parks, a school in the USA and the community itself, as well as linkages with national institutions and the University of Toamasina.

In a remote community such as Ambodiletra it is very difficult to find any alternative livelihoods options. People can potentially try to increase the intensity of vanilla and sugar cane farming for export to Maronatsetra, look for other alternatives such as rice and fruit. Chicken and pig production is also a good alternative, but it has limited opportunity to grow much. People also believe that the marine park has great potential and this can help support fishing also in the future. An example of sustainable fishing methods that are deployed inside the marine park is octopus fishing using clay pots as traps.

Tourism could potentially contribute to the development of the village. Due to the remote

location and limited resources available in Ambodiletra, it is not likely that tourism will ever grow to become a big industry, but if done right even one or two small groups of tourists per year would contribute significantly to the economy of the village. EcoAfrica have done "trial runs" for eco-tourism in the area in the past and some of the people in the village asked for this activity to be started up again. It would also add on to the opportunities for the women from the village to sell handicraft, vanilla and other products at a higher price than to local dealers.

1.3 Weaknesses and opportunities for sustainable community development



Figure 26: Commitments by different parties for future development with the school as focal point.

The Ambodiletra community find that one of the main weaknesses is that no one is available to buy their products. Even the local traders for dried fish and octopus come more rarely all the way to Ambodiletra for buying products and people want to have a better market.

There also seems to be conflict among people in the community. Many people that were interviewed reported that people in general take less responsibility for the development and well-being of the

community. Some people don't respect the rules of the marine park and that makes it worse for everyone else. Many people say that the marine park is the only thing positive in the area.

Many people are concerned that there are no hospital/dispensary facilities available in the village. If someone gets sick or has to deliver a baby they have to travel very far and it is very difficult in cases of emergency. The community still feel that natural environment in the area is still quite good from a health perspective as the air is clean to breath and most people are very healthy. The marine park staff stationed in the village reported that many children have been sick with a lung disease, which could easily be avoided if a vaccination programme was in place and enforced on regular basis.

People are very grateful for the new school as it has made a big difference for the children. It is however getting too crowded with more than 90 children registered at the school, which only has two teachers and two classrooms. All adults are pretty much illiterate and from the interviews it appears that no one has a tertiary education. The few people who have had some schooling have a T2 to T5 education with one person having a T9 education.



Figure 27: Representatives from other marine parks during the inauguration of the school.

The most important aspect to the school, in addition to providing essential basic education, is that it is evolving to become a type of multi-resource centre. During the first DLIST ASCLME-funded trip in 2008, before it was finally agreed that Ambodiletra will be the official demonstration site for Madagascar, significant planning meetings were conducted (see Figure 27 as an example). These were continued in 2009. During those meetings parties agreed to boost the school as a focal point for delivering programmes that will improve self-sustainability, develop alternative livelihoods that will, inter alia takes pressure off the marine park, and for environmental

education.

During those planning meetings the different partners in the project agreed to their respective contributions and long-term commitment. Significantly, when the school was inaugurated in 2009, several representatives from other marine parks in Madagascar as far north as Antsiranana attended the ceremony and partook in discussions. Undoubtedly the demonstration site can become a model in Madagascar of how to involve local communities that live in, or near marine protected areas.

1.4 Bottom-up and top-down communication

Communication to and from outside the village in Ambodilerta is mainly done through radios and word of mouth. People have mobile telephones, but the reception in the village is very limited and since there is no electricity people also struggle to re-charge the batteries. Most of the information comes from visitors and through the Madagascar National Parks. If someone wants to communicate a specific matter, they can contact the chief in the village and the message will be passed on to the appropriate authority. It appears that most decisions are handled by Madagascar National Parks. The community doesn't have much of a say in how the marine park is run although they are concerned about many issues. Recently a system was put in place where community members assist the marine park staff with patrols in the marine park. In exchange, the Madagascar National Parks pays a small contribution which partly goes to the volunteers who assists with patrolling and the other part goes towards covering the salary for the second school teachers. The intention is that the school will be equipped with solar power, a computer with internet and a phone charging station which would make a big difference for the

people in Ambodiletra. Communication with the outside communities would be improved and people could easily find a place to charge their telephones. The DLIST team has been in discussion with a school in Connecticut which is interested in adopting the Ambodiletra School as a sustainable energy model. Two film screening events have been organised in the village and it has been a very popular event both times. The first time was in 2008 and about 45 people attended, and the second event was in 2010 with more than 100 people attending. Film would be a very effective way to reach the community with awareness raising activities about marine conservation, illegal logging and alternative livelihoods activities.

