

SEYCHELLES ANNEX XIII. DLIST SUMMARY REPORT, CURIEUSE ISLAND

Curieuse is a marine park just off the north coast of the second biggest island in Seychelles, Praslin Island (see Figure 19). Curieuse falls in the Baie St Anne District, which covers the northern half of Praslin Island. Praslin Island has an estimated population of around 6,500 people. There is one family living permanently on Curieuse Island, and the Seychelles National Park Authority (SNPA) has a number of staff members that are based at the rangers' station on the island. The island and its surrounding waters obtained marine park status in 1979. The island is only 1 mile from Praslin Island and is small enough to be explored in a day, while at the same time ecologically and biologically very important. The island's ecosystem comprises of mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs, thick coastal forests, rough terrain, rocky outcrops and dry scrubland where endemic species of plants evolved for arid conditions predominate. Curieuse and Praslin are the only two islands where the famous coco-de-mer grows naturally. This tropical system plays crucial ecological and economic roles in the maintenance and successful management of this marine park, which is managed by the Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA).



Figure 19: The outline of the Curieuse Marine Park, the rangers' base on the island, the old doctor's house and also the large hotel development by Raffles Hotel on Praslin Island. The Côte d'Or beach is in the bottom right corner.

Its close proximity to Praslin makes it ideal for day trips for both local and foreign visitors of all age groups and natural interests. The local communities living near Curieuse earn their main income either through fishing or tourism activities. The tourism activities include taking clients on boat excursions to Curieuse and other smaller islands in the area for BBQ lunches

and snorkelling on the reefs. There are also two dive centres operating in the marine park and they have recruited some local staff employed. The professional yacht companies also employ some people from the local community, but a majority of the community members involved in tourism operate so called "boat taxi" services to and from the islands and run their businesses with very little investments. There are some professional fishers operating in the area (outside the MPA borders), and many people fish only for local consumption. Fishing as well as the tourism industry is very much dependant on the beautiful, clean, and healthy marine and coastal environment that has made this area a famous destination in the first place.

The main beach area, Côte d'Or, is very developed in terms of large hotel constructions along the beach and there are also some private housing developments on the slopes facing Curieuse Island. Recently, the construction of a new hotel (the Raffles development) resulted in soil and sediment run-off, which has had a negative impact on the marine and coastal environment (see Figure 20).

People complained a lot about this construction site and claim that when it rains the sea become completely red with soil from the slopes of Praslin. It will however be very difficult to estimate the damage caused by this sedimentation as no regular monitoring has been taking place before and after the construction of the hotel.

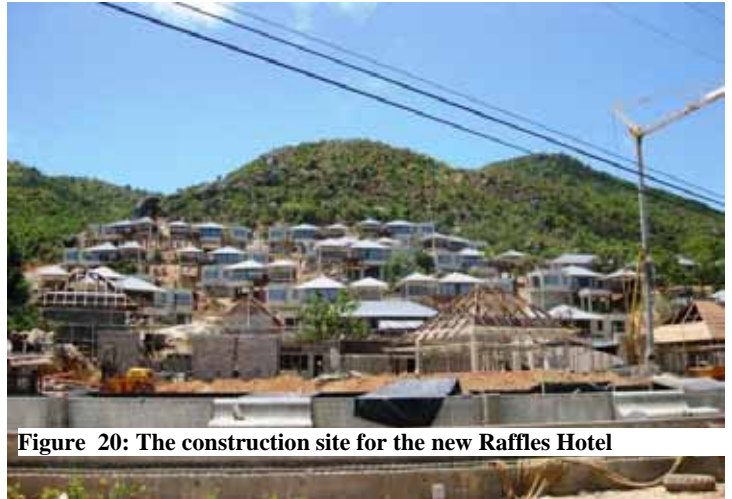


Figure 20: The construction site for the new Raffles Hotel

There are many stakeholders with an interest in the Curieuse marine park and how the resources are managed. These stakeholders include;

- i. Fishers – the Praslin Fishers' Association
- ii. Fish traders on the beach in Côte d'Or
- iii. Dive operators (there are two on Côte d'Or Beach – Octopus and White Tips)
- iv. Hoteliers
- v. Residents in the community
- vi. Curio and souvenir traders
- vii. Taxi boat operators
- viii. Tour operators
- ix. Yacht companies
- x. District youth groups
- xi. Green Island Foundation
- xii. Global Vision International (an NGO that has an MoU with the marine park)
- xiii. Seychelles Fishing Authority
- xiv. District Administration
- xv. Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA)
- xvi. Praslin Development Fund (PDF)

1.1 Can the marine and coastal resources support the community?

A lot of information exists on the marine and coastal resources near Curieuse Island. The island itself is a sanctuary for the Aldabra Giant Tortoise, a breeding ground for hawksbill and other marine turtles and a paradise for many marine birds including occasional visits by the Seychelles Black Parrot. The local population is highly dependent on ocean resources for their sustenance and livelihood (see Figure 21). Before the MPA was set up, the local residents used to fish in the sheltered area between the two islands during the south-east monsoon when the sea was rough as they could hardly catch any fish elsewhere. Since the designation of a no-take zone within the MPA, there have been numerous conflicts between the decision-makers and the fishing community around the marine national park on the inaccessibility of the site as fishing ground.

The community has expressed their wish to find a way where they will be allowed to fish in this area during a specific time of the year, even if it falls inside the MPA, at least for local/household



Figure 11: Emperor Snappers are commonly caught in the area around Curieuse Island

consumption. This could possibly be achieved if SNPA works closely with the community and develop a licensing and labelling system where each family had the right to fish with one fish trap a few days every week, and monitoring was carried out on a daily basis. Improved communication and community involvement are key factors to find a solution to this problem.

collaboration to find solutions to the fishing grounds issue. The fishermen living in close proximity with the marine park have shown keen interest in participating in all activities, from underwater rapid assessments to socio-economic surveys, to assist in settling the dispute. This approach seems plausible and can be of massive benefits for both the local community and the policy-makers. The local authority works in close collaboration with both local and international NGOs as well as funding bodies for the advancement of conservation management and education and awareness.

Recently, the SNPA established a new communication strategy to involve the local community in surveying the designated area and to work in close

collaboration to find solutions to the fishing grounds issue. The fishermen living in close proximity with the marine park have shown keen interest in participating in all activities, from underwater rapid assessments to socio-economic surveys, to assist in settling the dispute. This approach seems plausible and can be of massive benefits for both the local community and the policy-makers. The local authority works in close collaboration with both local and international NGOs as well as funding bodies for the advancement of conservation management and education and awareness.

People in the area are very well aware that there are illegal poaching activities taking place inside the MPA on regular basis. There are many reasons for this and lack of alternative livelihoods is one, limited law enforcement by the rangers on the island is another.

Some people around Curieuse have reported that they have seen changes in the environment. Coastal erosion and beach erosion is one problem, but the main worry is the sediment run-off caused by the large hotel constructions. Other environmental problems identified by the community include inadequate sewage treatment which causes pollution to the mangrove and swamp areas behind the beaches (see Figure 3). Many people also complain about the changes in the weather patterns where rainy seasons are shorter, causing a problem with lack of fresh water, and generally hotter climate which causes coral bleaching and other problems for the people living in the area.

People's attitude towards the marine park is in general positive and people say that they like the marine park, but they are a bit disappointed with how it is managed. The boat operators would like to see that they get better services out on the islands, since they pay an entrance fee (tax) for every tourist they take to the island. The dive operators and some others would like to see more active law enforcement



Figure 22: Polluted fresh water stream on Praslin with Curieuse Island in the background

from the rangers and for that to happen better patrolling equipment and regular maintenance is needed. Some community members also complain that they don't see enough benefits from the conservation efforts. It would be good if SNPA could increase their community outreach efforts and initiate an environmental education programme of the community members living near the MPA. This can be a good way to involve them more in the MPA and to increase people's awareness of the importance of conservation.

1.2 Alternative livelihoods options leading to poverty reduction

When meeting with the people in the area near Curieuse Island and in the meetings with Praslin Fishers' Association and other stakeholders they were asked about opportunities and alternative livelihoods options. A list of the opportunities identified through interviews and meetings is found below;

- i. Tourism is a great opportunity that can bring a lot of income to the community,
- ii. The Creole Festival is a very good initiative which could be expanded or marketed better to attract even more people,
- iii. People are generally well educated and speak many languages,
- iv. The people are friendly and helpful,
- v. There are many jobs available, mainly thanks to the tourism industry,
- vi. The marine park and the beautiful environment is a good opportunity as it brings tourist to the area,
- vii. There are rich marine resources that could be further developed to give more revenue to people,
- viii. Cooling, storing and processing facilities would give more revenue for the fishers,
- ix. People could be more encouraged to do small businesses such as local handicrafts, a small take-away restaurant with local food, fruits (see Figure 4) etc.,
- x. Farming could also be developed further to bring income to people,
- xi. A day-care centre would be a real asset for the community.

Curieuse demonstration site at a glance...

In November 2010 the DLIST team visited the site for the first time. Due to the situation in Seychelles it was decided to avoid calling for a public meeting and instead meet directly with the people living near the Curieuse Marine Park and conduct as many stakeholder interviews as possible. A total of 76 individual interviews were carried out, and 8 key informers interviews. A site visit to the marine park and a visit to the reefs have also been undertaken. Organisations involved include the Seychelles National Parks Authority (SNPA), Seychelles Fishing Authority, Praslin Fishers' Association, Praslin Development Fund, District Administration, and the Green Island Foundation. Private sector involvement included White Tip Divers and Octopus Divers, charter/yacht operators, the taxi boat owners, the hotels and the other tour operators.



Figure 23: Local entrepreneurs engaged in fishing, local art, and selling fresh fruit and juices on and near the Côte d’Or beach.



A draft vision of the community, based on the input given in the interviews is;

“We want a community that flourishes culturally, socially and economically. There should be more law enforcement to deal with the problems of drugs and theft. We want the community to be more actively involved in development processes and there should always be proper EIAs carried out to avoid costly mistakes. There should be less corruption in all sectors of society. We want an active youth centre, more sports facilities and cultural activities as well as a clean and nice looking beach front with a good road, street lights, a well equipped fish market/landing site and well maintained public toilets. The community should be more engaged in the tourism industry through local handicrafts, local restaurants, shops owned by people from the region etc. Any further hotel construction in the area must be done in close consultation with the community and in balance with the environment. The sewage treatment system should be more developed. The MPA should have better facilities such as mooring buoys, demarcation buoys and well trained staff.”

1.3 Weaknesses and opportunities for sustainable community development

Through the interviews and discussions with stakeholders in the community, a number of weaknesses/issues that hinder good development in the area have been identified. Below is a list of the issues raised by the community members during the DLIST interviews and meetings¹:

- i. There are lots of drugs in the community, particularly among the young generation. This is a big problem that leads to increased criminality and unemployment,
- ii. There are too many hotels and other development close to the beaches, which increase beach erosion and cut off people’s access to the beaches,

¹ All these issues are identified by members in the community and some points are more of personal opinion than real fact.

- iii. There is a general problem of corruption – which leads to poor EIA processes, lack of police interference in criminal activity and lack of enforcement in the MPA,
- iv. There is a lack of activities and sports facilities for youth in Côte d’Or and this increases the risk of people getting into drugs,
- v. The crime rate is increasing and tourists are being harassed on the beach, which makes the area less popular for tourists,
- vi. There is a general problem with lack of law enforcement – thefts and drugs on the beach as well as poaching in the MPA,
- vii. There is a problem with insufficient sewage and waste water treatment which leads to pollution of the mangroves and the beaches,
- viii. There is more and more solid waste and dirt on the beach,
- ix. Information is not treated confidential – if someone reports a problem it often comes back to them in terms of some kind of revenge,
- x. There is a lack of communication and consultation from the authorities to the local community,
- xi. Many people complained that they have to go very far to buy fuel, which makes it expensive,
- xii. The road through Côte d’Or is in bad shape – it should be renovated and street lights should be installed,
- xiii. The bus service should be expanded to facilitate transport to other areas,
- xiv. There are no public toilets on the beaches and not enough rubbish bins,
- xv. Some people complain that there is political oppression by people who are outspoken supporters of the opposition, which makes it very difficult to get permits and licences etc.,
- xvi. The village sometimes suffers from lack of water and power-cuts,
- xvii. The hospital often runs out of medicines and people have to wait very long to get help,
- xviii. There is a lack of good communication within families in the community and people don’t respect the traditions any longer,
- xix. There are too few mooring buoys in the MPA and the rangers don’t patrol the area enough. Other facilities in the MPA such as the visitors’ centre and the buildings should be upgraded since tourists pay so much to go there,
- xx. The cost of living is going up all the time, but the salaries remain the same, which makes it very hard for people to make a living,
- xxi. There is not enough land available for the local people if someone wanted to develop a business,
- xxii. There are environmental problems such as beach erosion, global warming, changing in the rainy season, and sedimentation from Raffles Hotel etc.

1.4 Bottom-up and top-down communication

Official communication on Praslin is done through the district administration. In other cases, people communicate important news through word of mouth or by posting announcements on signboards in the village. In general, people complain that communication is not always effective and more efficient and inclusive ways of communication should be sought, that does not leave some people out. Some community members were complaining that politicians only come to the community before election times to collect votes; they don’t see the reality of the people.

The DLIST team can work with the community to develop effective protocols by which two-way communication can be established and maintained. It is important that the people on the ground can formulate their agendas and clearly spell out problems, and that they then find ways of communicating it to the relevant authorities in government departments. It was also clear that there are divisions and groups within the community and that communication within the local community is also not always functioning very well.

One option that can contribute to improve the access to information and facilitate communication is to place a "DLIST node" in the area, preferably in Côte d'Or since that is where the highest population is found. A DLIST node can function as an information centre consisting of a few computers with internet connection placed at a strategic point in the Côte d'Or community to give as many people as possible access to this facility. Not only will they be able to access up to date information from the government, but they may also use it and learn more about the DLIST ASCLME Project and marine and coastal issues in general. Such a centre could be an attractive place for the youth in Côte d'Or and keep them away from the beach and hopefully motivate them to do well in school rather than going in to the destructive drug trade that is continuously growing in the area. This could be put into place during the ASCLME Project implementation.

The communities around Curieuse Island are very typical for smaller villages around Seychelles and if the Curieuse Marine Park through the DLIST intervention can improve the communication and relations with the local community, it will be something very valuable which can be replicated across Seychelles.