

Marine Conservation, Tourism and Fishing

A socio-economic analysis of resource use conflicts and livelihoods in Mabini and Tingloy, the Philippines



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Master's thesis submitted autumn 2004

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Abstract

Coral reefs are both among the richest and most threatened ecosystems in the world, and the degradation of these ecosystems has high costs for the populations that depend on them for their livelihoods, especially in developing countries. The conservation of reefs is difficult due to ecological complexity as well as the socio-economic complexity of coastal populations.

The aim of this study is to examine socio-economic issues in marine conservation in Mabini and Tingloy, the Philippines. The objectives are (1) to examine the perceived changes in the marine environment, (2) to examine local perceptions of tourism and conservation, including an examination of resource use conflicts and (3) to examine the potential of tourism in providing livelihood opportunities for the local population.

It was found that conservation in Mabini-Tingloy has been successful in improving the quality of the marine environment, initiating multi-stakeholder dialogue, establishing the collection of the diver fee and an effective enforcement body. However, large differences were found between groups of stakeholders in terms of the benefits and costs of conservation and tourism. These inequalities have led to conflicts in the area, and three main conflicts were identified in this study: conservation-fishing conflict, resort-fishing conflict and a conflict between local subsistence fishers and commercial fishers. Unequal power relationships mark all these conflicts, fishers being among the weakest stakeholders, and having the lowest rates of knowledge of and participation in conservation activities.

In order for the existing conservation programs to be effectively transitioned onto the social and legal fabric of Mabini-Tingloy, resource use and livelihood conflicts need immediate attention. As long as a large number of fishers perceive economic injuries due to conservation and tourism, effective stakeholder dialogue and cooperation, which is essential in community-based conservation, will not be possible. For continued success and sustainability, resource use conflicts and livelihood issues must be promptly be addressed.