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Gamba la Kasa: Using the Sea Turtle as a Flagship for Conservation through Storytelling and Children's Literature

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Gamba la Kasa: Using the Sea Turtle as a Flagship for
Conservation through Storytelling and Children's Literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this study has been to educate the children and adults of Uzi Island on the importance of sea turtle conservation through storytelling and collaborative children's literature. This study's culminating product is a handmade children's book, written in both English and Swahili, entitled Turtle's Shell/Gamba La Kasa. A story from an Uzi elder was integrated into the book, as were illustrations gathered from the children of Uzi. Sea turtle conservation efforts are occurring all over the world through many methods, but this study is different from others because it acknowledges and utilizes the local knowledge and folklore in the Uzi Village community, because it involves local people in the process of the project's end product, and because it targets the youth of the community so as to ensure that the coming generation is aware of the importance of sea turtle conservation. It is believed that by involving the children of the community in the process of making the book, they will feel a sense of ownership over it, and will be more invested in the topic of sea turtle conservation.

Introduction

In Zanzibar, Tanzania, the majority of inhabitants live within close proximity to the coastline and are therefore very much dependent upon the resources of the sea. Perhaps the most significant resource, fish, serves as both a means of livelihood and of nutrition for Zanzibari people. However, problems arise when the organisms caught by fishermen are endangered. One such organism is the sea turtle.

Although there were once many species of sea turtles, there are now only 7 total species, 5 of which can be found in the Western Indian Ocean region. The populations of these species have been decreasing over the recent decades as a result of "disturbance of nesting and foraging habitats, incidental net captures (gillnets and trawlers), poaching of meat and eggs, lack of adequate protection and enforcement, limited awareness and land-based development and pollution" (Muir, 2005). Sea turtles are an integral player in the ocean ecosystem. As one example, green turtles feed on sea grass, which in turn keeps the sea grass habitat a healthy living space for sea grass organisms. While there are hundreds of campaigns and projects being conducted throughout the world in support of sea turtle conservation, Zanzibar is still in the beginning stages of sea turtle conservation. In fact it is still very common for turtles to be eaten in Zanzibar, despite local laws prohibiting the fishing, selling, and consumption of sea turtles.

The local people of Zanzibar have been consuming turtle meat and using turtles for various uses for hundreds of years with little problem, until now. Yet now, because sea turtle meat is less expensive than other sources of protein such as beef or chicken, most people in Uzi eat turtle meat either by choice or due to socioeconomic limitations (Woodring, 2014). Although it is not the fault of the Zanzibaris that sea turtle species are endangered, it is vital that the

importance of sea turtle conservation is understood in Zanzibar.

The purpose of this study has been to educate children and adults in Uzi Island regarding the importance of sea turtle conservation using local knowledge and storytelling coupled with collaborative children's literature. While there is no one easy solution to sea turtle conservation, an important step that can be taken is to educate youth about the detriment that would be caused to the sea and to their communities by sea turtle extinction.

An effective method of educating youth is to involve them interactively in the learning process. For this study, children of Uzi Village were asked to help with the illustrations for the final product of the study. This measure was taken in hopes that the children would be more interested in the book upon its completion, and that they might feel connected to the book long after because they themselves were contributors to it.

Study Area

The interviews and meetings for this project were completed on Uzi Island, a small five by seven kilometer semi-island located off of southeastern Unguja, Zanzibar, Tanzania. Access to Uzi Island is limited; one must either come by dala dala in accordance with low tide along a fairly well maintained coral rag road, or arrive by boat (Figure 1). The current population of Uzi Island is in the range of 4,000 to 7,000 people, depending on the source of information (Kituo cha Afya, Uzi). In 2012, the population of Uzi Village, the larger of the two small villages on Uzi Island, was documented as 2,506.

**Figure 1. Map of
Zanzibar,**

**Unguja Island,
Highlighting Uzi Island**



Methodology

Three methods of data collection were used in this study. Within these categories, methodologies varied between observation, participation, and semi-structured interviews. Causal interviews were conducted in Uzi Village, an interactive event was held with children of the Uzi community, and research via secondary sources was conducted as well. All interviews were conducted in Swahili, with assistance from a local translator. A community meeting that was held to inform the people of Uzi about the risks of eating sea turtle and to brainstorm possible solutions for sea turtle conservation in Uzi was also attended.

Folklore Interviews

Community members were asked to recall local folklore regarding sea turtles. Interviewees were chosen by Aliy Aliy, a local man who knows of the storytellers in the village, and is a storyteller himself. Six community members were asked to recall stories.

To begin the interviews, introductions were exchanged, the project was explained, and interviewees were asked if their stories could be used for this study (Appendix 1). Each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes.

Interactive Event with Uzi Children

Children of the community were gathered by the two translators used for this study. In the afternoon of April 3rd, 2014, the participants gathered at the Uzi Nursery School to create illustrations for the end product of this study. Participants signed a sheet to document their presence and to ensure their acknowledgement in the book. Markers, paints, crayons, colored pencils, pencils, and paper were provided and funded by the Skidmore College Environmental

Studies Department. The aim of the project was explained to the children, and the children were asked if they were willing to help illustrate the book that would soon be theirs.

Book

The product of this study is a children's book. The book was created by hand using everyday arts and crafts materials, and was written using a story gathered from the community interviews and the authors own story.

Results

Interviews

Of the 6 community members asked to recall stories regarding sea turtles, two were either unavailable or unable to recall relevant stories. One community member who knew a turtle story was not interviewed because the story had already been documented from another interviewee. The remaining three community members were interviewed, and provided a total of 4 stories (Figure 2). For the sake of confidentiality, pseudonyms will hereafter be used to address interviewees. Timothy and James shared the same story, with very slight variations. Michael shared two sea turtle stories that were both different than the story shared by Michael and Timothy.

Figure 2: Folklore Interview Information

| Name | # of Stories | Language Used | Translator Used? |
|---------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| Michael | 2 | English | No |
| Timothy | 1 | Swahili | Yes |
| James | 1 | Swahili | Yes |

Interactive Event with Uzi Children

At the end of the meeting, the artwork of all of the children was collected. Some children completed more than one drawing, totaling 91 in all. 22 children documented their names, though many more children were present and participated. Those who did not write their names

were either not old enough to write their own names, or chose not to. However, verbal consent was collected from all of the children to use their artwork in the book resulting from this study. At the end of the meeting, each child was given a piece of candy as initial thanks for their participation.

Book

The end result of this study is a children's book entitled *Gamba La Kasa*, written by Eliza Hollister, Illustrated by Nelly Celine Chone and the children of Uzi, and translated by Shuwena Omar Mohd and Said Hamad Omar (Appendix 1). The book integrates the most well-known story of the community; the story told by Timothy and James and that was known by another interview candidate. This local story is integrated into a sea turtle conservation based story written by Eliza Hollister.

Discussion

There are many ways to teach a group of people about sea turtle conservation. Aside from writing children's books, other tactics have already been put into action in Uzi Village, Zanzibar. In the last few decades, a group of local people partnered with two tour companies to begin a sea turtle aquarium eco-tourism project on Uzi Island. Some sea turtles that have been caught either deliberately or accidentally are placed within the confines of an aquarium area in an intertidal lagoon of Uzi Island. There are currently six sea turtles living in the aquarium, who are tended to by residents of Uzi Village who are involved in the project.

Sadly, the funders of the Uzi Island sea turtle aquarium project have since backed out due to a lack of revenues from the project (<http://www.zanzibar-ecotourism.org/>). However, this project planted the seed for sea turtle conservation in the people of Uzi. Although there is still no perfect answer to sea turtle conservation for Uzi Island, this program was the beginning of sea turtle conservation for the people of Uzi. Even if many people may not be sure of how to help the problem, many are at least somewhat aware of sea turtle conservation as an environmental issue as a product of the Uzi Island sea turtle aquarium project. Because the Uzi Island sea turtle aquarium project is run entirely by the people of Uzi, it encourages the people to take the problem into their own hands, and to understand that this is something that they are able to work on without the supervision and dictation of a tour company or other such authority.

It is important that the people of Uzi are credited in their abilities to solve the problem of sea turtle endangerment within their community. Sometimes, the knowledge of local people is overlooked by conservationists, often being "disrespected, belittled and ignored" (Quansah, 2004). However, it is clear from the history of the Uzi Island sea turtle aquarium project that the

people of Uzi are both willing and able to take on the problem of sea turtle conservation in their community. The Uzi sea turtle project is still in its beginning stages and still needs much work to be wholly successful, but it is clear that the skill and knowledge is present in the community to move sea turtle conservation forward on Uzi Island.

Encouraging the involvement of local people and local knowledge for sea turtle conservation in Uzi will also have a positive lasting effect on how the people of Uzi see this issue in the future. "Targeting and harnessing local traditional knowledge as manifested in the uses of biodiversity will make people take up their responsibilities to help save biodiversity" (Quansah, 2004). If people are encouraged to use the knowledge they already have and are credited for it, it is much more likely that they will take up the responsibility to help save biodiversity, in this case sea turtles.

Similar to the Uzi Island aquarium project, this product of this study also aims to empower the people of Uzi directly, as is clear that they are the ones with the power to make direct change in this issue. The people of Uzi are knowledgeable about sea turtles, and have the power to make positive change.

At the end of the book that is the product of this study, readers are asked what kind of solutions they can think of that could be implemented to help positively impact sea turtle conservation in Uzi. The children came up with three answers; to build a sea turtle aquarium (this one may have had some prior influence), to create an office in the town to regulate sea turtle catching and releasing, and to make sea turtle t-shirts to raise awareness about the problem. These are all excellent ideas, and they came from the youngest members of the community. This is an excellent sign. Not only do these children have great ideas, they are also the coming

generation of people who will be able to implement these ideas in their community. These children will be the future fishermen, legislators, and perhaps even sea turtle office workers of Uzi Island.

Aside from the Uzi Island sea turtle aquarium project, another sea turtle conservation project that is currently happening in Zanzibar is the Mnarani Marine Turtle Conservation Pond in Nungwi, Unguja. Started in 1993, this project serves a similar purpose as the Uzi Island Sea Turtle Lagoon project. At Mnarani, sea turtles are kept in a small lagoon area where they can be viewed by tourists. The aim of the organization is “conserve the island's turtle population by promoting education amongst local fishermen against deliberate capture of turtles and encouraging their safe release when accidentally caught.” (<http://www.mnarani.com/>). The Uzi Island sea turtle lagoon aims to promote the aim of education and safe release as well, though due to the aforementioned lack of funding, they are currently less able to implement their goals.

This project is the first of its kind in Zanzibar. Although other children's books have been written in Zanzibar regarding sea turtle conservation, this is the first project to directly involve the children of the community in the actual creation of the book. It is the aim of this project to instill a sense of responsibility and ownership over the book within the children as a product of having taken part in the creation of the book. It is common knowledge that if a person puts effort into something, they will be far more connected to that thing. It is hoped that this will follow for the children of Uzi regarding the book and the concepts within.

This project uses storytelling as a method of sharing knowledge. Storytelling has been in the community for hundreds of years, and is a familiar way of sharing stories and lessons in the community. It is because of this that integrating storytelling into this project was used as a means

of communicating the goal of sea turtle conservation. It is hoped that because children are used to learning lessons through storytelling, they will be more influenced by this story because it may feel like a familiar mode of learning to them. It is also possible that by encouraging elderly storytellers in the community to share stories for this project, that they themselves may be reminded to tell more stories to the children and to pass on the knowledge and stories they have.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the goal of this study; educate the children and adults of Uzi Island on the importance of sea turtle conservation through storytelling and collaborative children's literature; has been completed. This project has been a success because it integrates local knowledge into the conservation of biodiversity, because it directly involves and encourages people in the Uzi Island community to be a part of sea turtle conservation, and because this project will be a lasting resource for the people of Uzi Island.

The story was well received by the children of Uzi Island, and they had positive suggestions for the future of sea turtle conservation in Uzi Village. Overall it may be concluded that this project has been a success.

Further Study

In the future it would be highly beneficial to reread the story that is the product of this study to the children of Uzi once again to re-instill the sea turtle conservation ideas in their minds and future thoughts. It is suggested that this happen every year at a yearly sea turtle celebration that could be held in Uzi. At this sea turtle conservation event, it would be beneficial for the future of sea turtle conservation in Uzi for an art project to be collaboratively made with the children of Uzi, possibly a mural depicting sea turtles. This could be a possible ISP project for a future SIT student.

The methods of this study could also be used in other areas for other conservation projects, such as education against poaching in Tanzania's national parks. Like sea turtles were used as a flagship species for this project, so could other animals be used as flagship species in similar studies in other areas.

This project could also be repeated with slight variation in any other village in Zanzibar, if the conductor of the study was interested in gathering appropriate community stories and integrating those stories into other conservation based children's literature.

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