



# Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project



## Key considerations for a regional SocMon strategy for the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem countries in South Asia

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# Key considerations for a Regional SocMon strategy for the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem countries in South Asia



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## Acronyms used

ANET	Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team
BOBLME	Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem
BOBP	Bay of Bengal Programme
CARESS	Centre for Action Research on Environment Science and Society
CDA	Chilika Development Authority
CORALI	Coral Reef Livelihoods Project
CORDIO	Coral Reef Degradation in the Indian Ocean project
DFID	Department for International Development
ECA	Ecologically Critical Area
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FAORAP	FAO (Regional office for Asia Pacific)
GCRMN	Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
ICRAN	International Coral Reef Action Network
IMM Ltd.	Integrated Marine Management Limited (of UK)
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LMRCC	Lakshadweep Marine Research Conservation Centre
MCRCF	Marine and Coastal Resources Conservation Foundation
MDS	Maliku Development Society
MLA	Marinelife Alliance
MRC	Marine Research Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PAD	People's Action in Development (Gulf of Mannar)
SA	South Asia
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SACEP	The South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme
SAP	Strategic Action Programme
SEA	South-East Asia
SEAMARC	Systems Engineering & Marine Consulting
SFFL	Small Fisher Federation of Sri Lanka
SLED	Sustainable Livelihoods Enhancement and Diversification
SocMon	Global Socio-economic Monitoring Initiative for Coastal Management
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

The world's tropical coasts are home to over two billion people, many of whom live in poverty and depend on coastal resources and ecosystems, such as fish, beaches, and mangrove forests, for their livelihood, sustenance and cultural traditions. In these coastal areas, development and poverty are often encountered side-by-side, and this combination places severe pressure on coastal ecosystems which frequently suffer from overexploitation, resource degradation and reduction in the services provided by ecosystems to people who depend on them.

Efforts to ensure that coastal development is sustainable and that the functions of coastal ecosystems are maintained have increasingly realised that understanding the people and communities that make use of coastal resources is as important as understanding the ecological processes that underpin coastal livelihoods. This situation is typified by the Bay of Bengal Region, where coastal areas are often particularly subject to multiple pressures from rising population density, high levels of poverty among coastal dwellers and increasing levels of industrial development. The complexity of social and economic conditions in coastal communities throughout the region makes socio-economic monitoring particularly important to allow communities, managers and decision-makers to understand how issues affecting coastal resources are evolving and to identify priority areas for intervention and management. Where conservation of critical habitats is being undertaken, socio-economic monitoring can serve to involve local communities in resource management decisions, provide adaptive management strategies to reflect local needs, and facilitate understanding of the importance of marine and coastal resources.

SocMon is an approach and set of tools that has evolved over the last decades to facilitate coastal planning, management and sustainable use. SocMon, which stands for the Global Socio-economic Monitoring Initiative for coastal management, has been working since 2001 through regional and local partners to facilitate community-based socio-economic monitoring in communities living in coastal regions of the world. Household and community level data are collected to inform planners and decision-makers about levels of dependence on coral reef resources, perceptions of resource conditions, threats to marine and coastal resources, and support for marine management strategies such as marine protected areas. To date, over 60 assessments have been completed in 30 countries. There are currently seven regions throughout the world that are successfully conducting socio-economic monitoring through the SocMon Initiative: Caribbean, Central America, Southeast Asia, Western Indian Ocean, Pacific Islands, South Asia and Brazil. SocMon fills a critical need by advancing a global and regional understanding of human interactions with and dependence on coastal resources. The United States (US) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) serves as the coordinating body for this global initiative. Within Asia, the socio-economic monitoring for Southeast Asia (SocMon SEA) and South Asia (SocMon SA) centres have been established with coordinating centres in the Philippines and India, respectively.

### **1.2. SocMon South Asia**

In 1997, a conference held in Chennai, India, was organized by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and the Bay of Bengal Programme of the FAO (BOBP) involving participants from all countries in the SAARC region. This played an important role in starting the process of building awareness of the need for monitoring of communities and their environment in coastal areas of the region. Shortly afterwards, the process of developing a SocMon network in South Asia was continued with the establishment of Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) South Asia office at the IUCN office in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1997 with support from DFID and IOC/UNESCO. Awareness of the importance of monitoring of both the bio-physical and socio-economic status of coral reef areas of the region was built through a series of capacity building activities and the



development of networks between concerned institutions. A first training event specifically dedicated to social and economic monitoring was held in Lakshadweep, India in 1998 and this was followed by a series of training activities involving staff from government agencies and NGOs working in coastal areas in India (Gulf of Mannar, Lakshadweep Islands, Andaman and Nicobar Islands), the Maldives (Vaavu Atoll) and Sri Lanka (Puttalam Lagoon and Bar Reef). These initiatives created the basis for a SocMon network in the region and GCRMN provided funding for periodic monitoring activities in areas where capacity had been developed for implementation.

Support for the GCRMN South Asia node ended in 2002, but the Coral Reef Degradation in the Indian Ocean (CORDIO) project, which also set up a regional office at SACEP in Colombo from 1998 to 2006, continued many of the activities initiated by GCRMN and played an important role in maintaining these networks and supporting on-going monitoring activities.

With the support of the European Union, UNEP, IUCN, ICRAN (International Coral Reef Action Network) and IMM Ltd., the CORALI initiative, implemented between 2007 and 2008, worked with a group of government and non-government organisations from India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia (Aceh Province) to develop a Sustainable Livelihoods Enhancement and Diversification Approach (SLED)<sup>1</sup> which, building on the methodologies already being used for SocMon in the region, aimed at improving work on livelihood diversification in coastal communities. Staff from organisations in Bangladesh and Pakistan was also involved in some of these training activities.

In 2010, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from the U.S.A. provided support to the documentation of SocMon approaches used in South Asia and their development into a set of SocMon South Asia guidelines, which were subsequently tested in 5 sites in India (Gulf of Mannar, the Lakshadweep Islands and the Andaman Islands), Sri Lanka (Bar Reef) and the Maldives (Baa Atoll). This activity was implemented by CARESS, a Chennai, India-based NGO, and IUCN. The SocMon network in South Asia currently consists of:

- the Centre for Action Research on Environment Science and Society (CARESS) acting as SocMon SA Regional Coordinator;
- the Andaman and Nicobar Environment Team (ANET), an NGO based in the Andaman Islands, India;
- People's Action for Development (PAD), an NGO based in Vembar in southern Tamil Nadu, India;
- the Lakshadweep Marine Research and Conservation Centre (LMRCC), an NGO based on Kavaratti Island, Union Territory of Lakshadweep, India;
- the Maliku Development Society (MDS), an NGO based in Minicoy Island, Union Territory of Lakshadweep, India
- Systems Engineering & Marine Consulting (SEAMARC), a private sector consulting group based in the Maldives;
- the Marine Research Centre (MRC), Maldives;
- the Marine and Coastal Resources Conservation Foundation (MCRCF), an NGO based in Sri Lanka.

In 2014, the SocMon South Asia node participated in a meeting of the Global SocMon Network in Washington D.C. at which strategies for disseminating and promoting the use of SocMon approaches were discussed. Among the outcomes of this meeting was a request for the regional SocMon nodes to develop regional SocMon strategies that could then feed into a more comprehensive and coordinated global strategy for the network. For the Global SocMon Strategy, it was specifically recommended that SocMon nodes should work with the Large Marine Ecosystem Projects in their region and incorporate capacity building in SocMon methodology into their work.

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<sup>1</sup> IMM, 2008. *Sustainable Livelihoods Enhancement and Diversification (SLED): A Manual for Practitioners*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Colombo, Sri Lanka; CORDIO, Kalmar, Sweden; and ICRAN, Cambridge, U.K.

### **1.3. SocMon and the BOBLME**

The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project (BOBLME) is an initiative funded primarily by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), with co-financing from Norway, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, FAO, participating Governments and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The project's first phase runs from 2009-2015 with the global objective of ensuring a healthy ecosystem and sustainability of living resources for the benefit of the coastal populations of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME). The development objectives of the project were to support a series of strategic interventions that would result in and provide critical inputs into the Strategic Action Programme (SAP), whose implementation will lead to enhanced food security and reduced poverty for coastal communities.

The BOBLME has been working with the South Asia SocMon network since 2011, with support to activities of the network contributing to BOBLME Component 2: Coastal/Marine Natural Resources Management and Sustainable Use. For BOBLME, SocMon provides an opportunity to build on a strong existing network of practitioners and experience in social and economic monitoring to enhance regional capacity in generating important information on the communities and resource-users living in coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal Region. In particular, the SocMon method adopted in South Asia has adapted approaches used more widely across the globe to a coastal environment where poverty remains a key issue which has an important influence on the dynamics of resource use in coastal areas. The agencies and individuals involved in SocMon in South Asia have extensive experience in working with the wide range of different communities found in coastal areas and accommodating the different approaches required in order to effectively interact with them and link monitoring activities to concrete initiatives to improve local social and economic conditions.

Particularly important had been the consistent involvement of both government agencies and NGOs in SocMon activities. This creates an opportunity for BOBLME to make use of the SocMon network to engage with key decision-makers involved in the management of coastal areas and so contribute to its global objective of improving the lives of the coastal populations through better regional management of the BOBLME.

With this in mind, the BOBLME has, since early 2014, supported activities to further strengthening coastal and marine management capacity in the region with a particular emphasis to extending SocMon capacities to new areas and new sets of collaborating institutions. A workshop held in Myanmar in January 2014 brought together both the SocMon South-East Asia and SocMon South Asia nodes to introduce the approach in that country and steps were subsequently taken to promote further collaboration between the two SocMon nodes on a further set of capacity strengthening activities in South Asia.

This developed into a programme for 3 training workshops held in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, on Chilika Lake in the State of Odisha, India and in Mannar district in the northern part of Sri Lanka. These workshops were held between October, 2014 and March, 2015.

### **1.4. A regional strategy for SocMon South Asia**

Building on the experience generated by this initiative in the region, and responding to the need to develop regional strategies for SocMon identified during the Global SocMon Network meeting in Washington D.C. in February, 2014, one of the intended outputs of these BOBLME-supported workshops was to develop the outline for a SocMon South Asia Regional Strategy.

This report aims to reflect on key factors that need to be taken into account by such a strategy and present some recommendations for consideration by both BOBLME and the Global SocMon Network.

## 2. Key considerations for a regional SocMon strategy for South Asia

The following points represent possible key elements for a regional SocMon strategy for South Asia. They have been developed based on discussions held with workshop participants during each of the three SocMon capacity strengthening workshops held in the region with BOBLME support and reflect inputs provided by participants, local partners and the facilitation team. Under each element outlined below, the relevant lessons learnt from the workshop process are also discussed.

### 2.1. Importance of local partnerships

In all three of the capacity-strengthening workshops, local partners played a key role in ensuring that the events were successful, that participants were made up of relevant local institutions and local stakeholders, and in ensuring that the potential for follow-up is high.

The term "local" in this context meant that partners were organisations with a sub-national focus, whose activities were specifically concentrated on the areas where the workshops were held.

Undoubtedly, some of the linkages that a higher-profile local partner, such as IUCN, would have been able to provide have been reduced as a result, but the experience of the workshops has shown that this can probably be well compensated for if there is adequate involvement and engagement with key government agencies during the preparation of capacity-strengthening events.

In India, the local partner was the Chilika Development Authority (CDA), an Odisha state government agency tasked with the responsibility of managing and ensuring sustainable use of one of the most important coastal wetland areas in Asia, Chilika Lake in Odisha. In many respects, the CDA represented an ideal partner as they have a specific focus on the management of a significant coastal resource; they are relatively well-resourced and are in the process of being established as a form of "one-stop shop" agency with wide-ranging decision-making powers over coastal management and development in their area. As a state-government agency, they are clearly closely integrated with government level decision-making as well as having a wide range of linkages with local stakeholders including civil society and community-based organisations in the area. SocMon represented a new approach to monitoring activities that they already carry out as part of their institutional mandate and was seen to be complementary, and potentially adding value, to work that they already carry out.

The Marinelife Alliance, who were the local partner in Bangladesh, are a non-governmental organisation (NGO) whose work focuses on marine and coastal issues in the Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh and, in particular, on St. Martin's Island, an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) and unique ecosystem for the country. While they are an NGO with a conservation focus, they work very closely and have long-established relations with local government actors and were able to mobilise a significant range of participation from other key players in the area.

In Sri Lanka, for the workshop held in Mannar district in the Northern Province, the Small Fisher Federation of Sri Lanka (SFFL) took on the role of organising the workshop. SFFL are an apex organisation of small-scale fisher associations throughout the country. While their area of interest is more national compared to the local partners involved in other countries, their local representatives proved to be well-connected with local-level groups in the area concerned and they proved to be particularly effective in mobilising interest among key government agencies working in the area including the local government planning, fisheries and coast conservation departments. This ensured that, while the SFFL's capacity to follow-up on the SocMon work is relatively limited, they were able to generate significant interest and immediate uptake of the SocMon approach by other on-going initiatives working in the area.

## 2.2. Partnerships that include both government and civil society

Another important feature of the partnerships formed to organise and implement the SocMon capacity strengthening activities was the engagement with organisations from both government and civil society. This approach is particularly important in terms of ensuring that the outputs of SocMon have the best possible opportunity of being mainstreamed into local decision-making and, eventually, policy formulation in a way that would be significantly less likely if, for example, only NGOs and civil society organisations were involved.

Where the local partner for the initiative was a non-governmental organisation, it was ensured that involvement of key government counterparts was included as part of their core responsibilities and involvement of government departments was good in all locations as a result.

## 2.3. Emphasis on adapting SocMon to local needs and priorities

During the three workshops held in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, considerable emphasis was placed, through the way in which SocMon was presented, on adapting the process to local needs and priorities. This was encouraged through a variety of approaches used by the workshop facilitation team, including: starting the workshop with a general discussion of livelihoods which encouraged participants to arrive at their own understanding of key issues and factors influencing coastal and marine resource use in their areas. The subsequent discussion of SocMon as an approach was then introduced as a means of helping to address these issues and not as an end in itself.

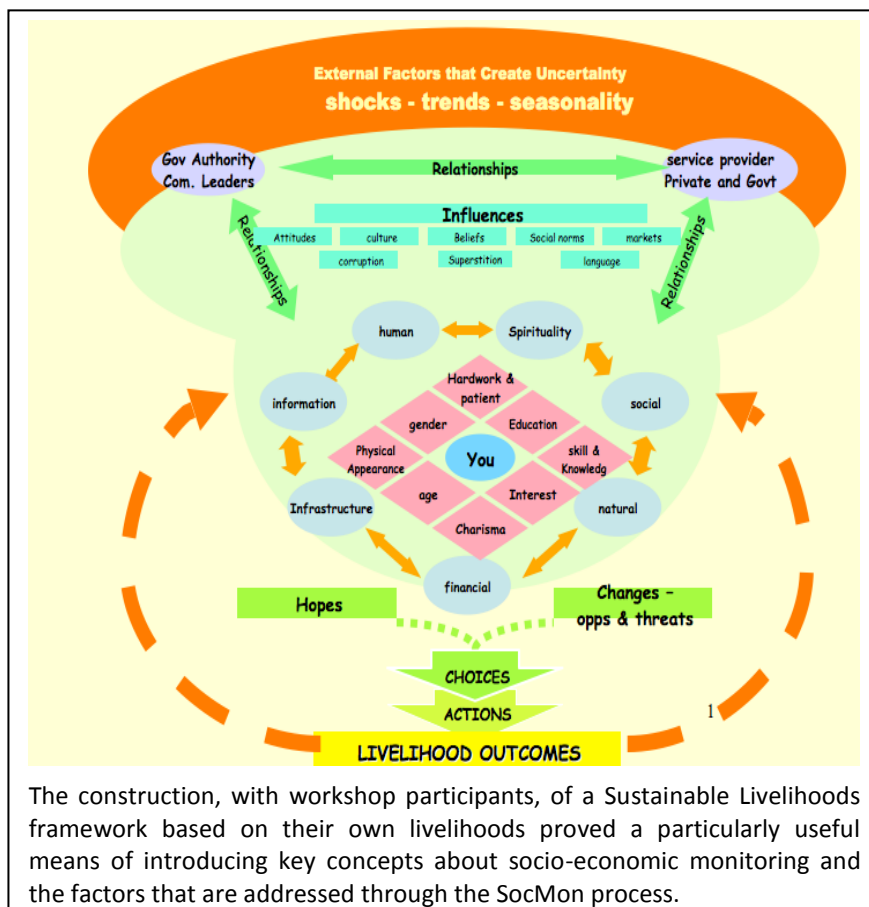


Figure 1 A Sustainable Livelihoods framework created by workshop participants in Sri Lanka

Particular attention was paid to contextualising SocMon approaches and discussing how it could fit in with, complement and add value to other approaches already being applied in monitoring and decision-making regarding coastal management. This approach proved particularly appropriate as SocMon was not perceived as a completely new, stand-alone approach but a complementary set of tools to be incorporated into on-going programmes of work.

Significantly, as part of this process, time was devoted during each workshop to developing a goal, purpose and set of outputs for SocMon that specifically related to the setting in which the workshop was taking place. This ensured that local partners and participants in the workshop took a significant degree of ownership of the approach and that they recognised fully that it is their responsibility to ensure that the use of SocMon satisfies their requirements and priorities. Particular care was taken to ensure that participants did not come away from the workshops feeling that they were being asked to implement a new approach simply because this was recommended by an outside agency.

The time spent in each workshop encouraging participants to think through what **they**, and the institutions they represented, wanted from SocMon was fruitful and enabled participants to achieve a far better and more practical perspective on SocMon by the end of each workshop.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Goal, purpose and outputs for SocMon on St. Martin's Island, Bangladesh</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Goal</b></p> <p>Management and conservation of the ecological resources of St. Martin's Island for a better life for the people of St Martin's Island.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Manage:</b> help determine how to manage the Island resources to achieve our goal.</li><li>• <b>Assess:</b> establish baseline data to use for monitoring changes in social and economic conditions, people's perceptions and involvement in decision making.</li><li>• <b>Inform:</b> Island community, managers and decision makers with the expectation of adaptive management and behavioral change</li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A livelihood and resource profile of the people (primary stakeholders) who live on St. Martin's Island developed.</li><li>• St. Martin's Islanders, managers and decision makers who are aware of and understand how livelihoods, resources and resource-use are changing in St Martin's Island.</li><li>• St. Martin's Islanders who are able to contribute to and engage in decision-making about resource management.</li><li>• A communication plan for informing an influencing stakeholders</li></ul>
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#### **2.4. Involvement of different levels of decision-making in SocMon capacity building activities**

All three workshops were characterised by the involvement of representatives from different levels of key institutions concerned with the coastal and marine environment. Senior decision-makers did not always participate right through workshops but they were aware of the events and generally participated in the opening and/or closing sessions.

The experience during the Sri Lanka workshop held in Mannar district illustrates the importance of this engagement with different levels of decision-making. Senior staff from the Coast Conservation Department who came to the closing session of the workshop and who were presented with the findings of the workshop participants from their 2 days of field work conducted as part of the workshop were sufficiently impressed by what they heard to be ready to immediately commit to further support of SocMon activities, not only to complete the field work in the one community covered during the workshop, but also to propose that it be extended to two other communities in the area with different ecological and socio-economic characteristics in order to have a more complete picture of resource use and management issues in the area.

During the workshop in Bangladesh, findings in the field highlighted a series of governance issues on the coastal environment and resource use on St. Martin's Island which relate to policy and decision-making at the central government level and the way in which decision-making is delegated. This further highlighted how involvement of senior decision-makers is of particular significance in order to build linkages between the local and policy levels and this should represent a key element in future SocMon dissemination activities.

## **2.5. SocMon as an approach for engaging with local stakeholders and interest groups**

SocMon as an approach can be used to address several different dimensions in the process of coastal area management. Often, considerable emphasis is given to SocMon as a means of collecting data on coastal communities and their use of coastal resources. This aspect of SocMon is clearly important; particularly where there is limited information available and the approach can provide an appropriate means of expanding the information base about coastal communities.

Another key dimension in SocMon relates to the process involved in generating a greater understanding of patterns of coastal resource use. The emphasis in SocMon methodologies on participatory process, with care given to the ways in which learning takes place in the field, the engagement of local people and the establishment of joint-learning procedures where both outside researchers and local people are involved proved particularly significant in all three workshops. Participants were encouraged to see how the "data collection process" can, in fact, become a key first step in establishing strong relations between local people, facilitating agencies, and decision and policy makers. The recognition of the importance of this process among participants in the workshops was particularly significant and it is important that this aspect is maintained in future SocMon activities.



Figure 2 Workshop participants and local people involved in field work exercises during the SocMon workshop in Odisha, India

## 2.6. Inter and intra-regional collaboration and experience sharing

For the first of the series of three workshops conducted under this initiative, inputs from the SocMon South-East Asia node were integrated and this represented an important added value for the entire process. There are significant differences in the way in which SocMon is conducted in South-East Asia compared to South Asia, but the comparison of these regional approaches and discussion of differences in the relative emphasis given to data collection and analysis on the one hand, and community engagement and participation on the other, proved extremely fruitful. Participants in the India workshop where the coordinator of the SocMon South East Asia node participated were able to benefit from the experience and examples of SocMon use presented and this helped to widen local perspectives on the approach as a whole.

The workshop held in Sri Lanka also greatly benefited from the involvement of a representative from a local organisation previously involved in SocMon work in Tamil Nadu, India. This participation was particularly significant in terms of support to the facilitation team regarding language (both the majority of participants in Sri Lanka and resource person from People's Action for Development (PAD) in Tamil Nadu were Tamil-speaking), and in terms of presenting concrete examples of how SocMon had contributed to work in an area with many environmental and cultural affinities to the area being covered in Sri Lanka.

This experience highlighted the importance of encouraging inter and intra-regional exchanges as part of the SocMon dissemination process and creating opportunities wherever possible for cross-visits between practitioners in different sites and regions.

## 2.7. Importance of language

Particularly where the focus of SocMon dissemination activities is on local organisations with a specific area focus, the importance of addressing potential language issues should not be underestimated. While the workshop facilitation team had foreseen this issue and attempted to incorporate means of ensuring that difficulties with language were addressed, the problems that some participants had with presentations and discussions in a language other than their own were still significant.

This has several important implications for future SocMon dissemination activities.

First of all, addressing potential language issues has an influence on the time required to cover the basic materials presenting SocMon during a workshop. Direct "translation" of everything being said in a workshop will rarely be an option and may not in any case be the most effective means of addressing the problem. However, there is a need for co-facilitation in the local language and regular opportunities for discussion among participants of key issues and concepts using their own language. All of this has implications in terms of time which need to be taken into account either by ensuring that sufficient time is available during the workshop to incorporate these additional sessions, or by limiting the amount of material presented and simplifying it as far as possible.

Other options might include investment in the translation of presentation materials into local languages, or undertaking additional workshops to build local capacity as SocMon trainers. During the workshop held in Mannar, Sri Lanka, the availability of a Tamil language version of the SocMon guidelines proved invaluable. The involvement of people with both SocMon experience and appropriate local language skills as resource persons is also an effective approach which was used in the Sri Lanka workshop with good effect.

## **2.8. Appropriate communications strategy**

As part of the SocMon workshops, time was devoted to encouraging participants to think through key elements in a local communications strategy for SocMon outputs aimed at informing and influencing key stakeholders and decision-makers regarding the findings of SocMon studies. The process involved in this work - identifying key stakeholders and decision-makers, defining their roles in relation to coastal management, discussing the objectives of the communication strategy in relation to those different stakeholders, and reflecting on what form of communication might best achieve those objectives - proved particularly fruitful and represented a new element for most participants.

The incorporation of this component into future SocMon dissemination activities is particularly relevant as it ensures that participants in capacity strengthening workshops do not come to regard SocMon as an "end in itself", or simply a process for collecting information, but that they are constantly bearing in mind how SocMon can actively contribute to bringing about positive change. It is important that SocMon practitioners recognise that the **outcomes** of a SocMon process should not be just the reports produced about SocMon activities, but the **actions taken** to improve coastal area management based on the information contained in those reports, or on other outputs that the SocMon process generates.

From this point of view, the experience during the India SocMon workshop on Chilika Lake was particularly fruitful as the local partner, the Chilika Development Authority (CDA), was already involved in a process of developing innovative communications materials aimed at influencing decision-makers and local stakeholders regarding the sustainable use of Chilika Lake. The presentation during the workshop on the Chilika Lake Ecosystem Health Report Card produced by the CDA, in collaboration with a range of partners including the BOBLME Project, and discussions of how this could be supported and supplemented by information generated by SocMon in the area, was particularly fruitful and led to a creative discussion of how different forms of communication could be used to target different stakeholder groups concerned with the area.



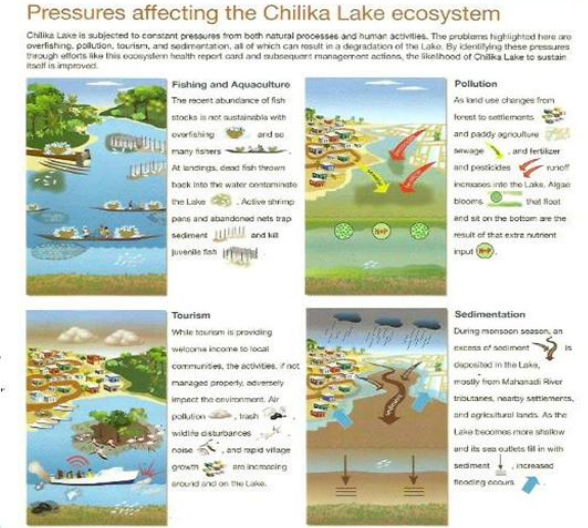
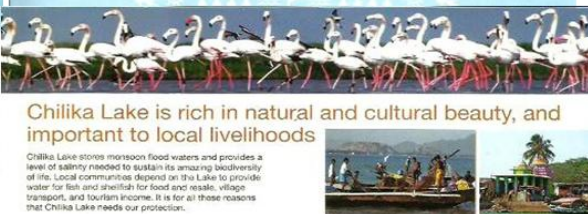
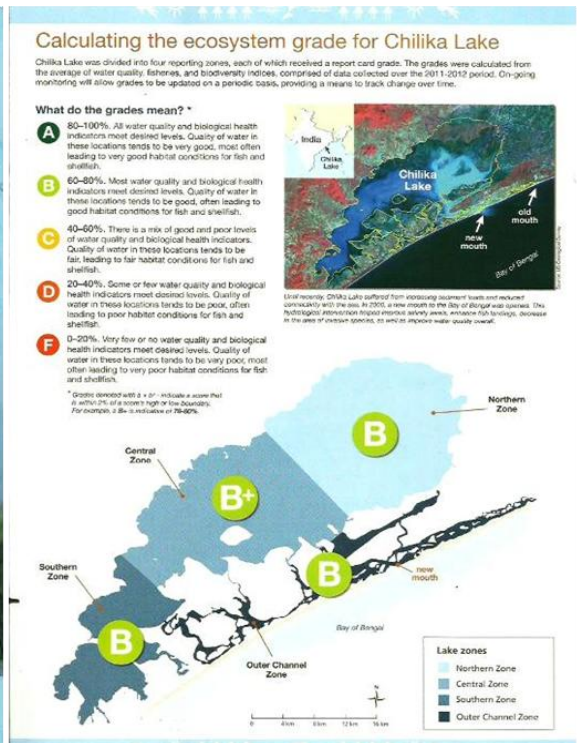


Figure 3 A selection from the Chilika Lake Ecosystem Health Report Card 2012

## **2.9. Important role for BOBLME to raise profile and link with international initiatives**

The involvement of the BOBLME in supporting this series of SocMon capacity strengthening activities proved to play an important role in terms of raising the profile of the event and people's awareness of regional linkages. Even among those participants not specifically aware of the BOBLME Project, the involvement of the FAO was key in encouraging local partners and participants to participate and recognize the significance of the activity.

The importance of support by an international organisation in this way needs to be recognised. In a development arena where new approaches, methodologies and toolkits are constantly being proposed, many local partners and participants in the workshops voiced their confusion over the way in which they are constantly being confronted with new terminology and new development approaches without having any ready means of evaluating relevance for their work.

From this point of view, the involvement of the FAO, and BOBLME, was widely recognised as providing a guarantee of relevance and a form of quality control on what was being discussed. Once again, this is relevant learning for future SocMon dissemination activities as working with a recognised institution provides a significant guarantee that SocMon will be taken seriously and that appropriate attention will be paid to mainstreaming its use in the future.

## **3. Key inputs for a regional SocMon strategy for South Asia**

Based on the considerations discussed above, the following recommendations are suggested for a future SocMon regional strategy for South Asia.

**When selecting national and local partners for SocMon in South Asia, priority is given to the level of commitment of different organisations to sustained engagement in coastal and marine issues in their particular area.**

The experience of the current capacity strengthening initiative suggests that the key criteria for selecting national and local partners should be their level of commitment to working on coastal and marine in a particular area, or with a particular target group, over the long term. This factor, rather than the overall profile or level of recognition of a particular organisation, is likely to be most important in ensuring follow-up.

**Capacity to engage with both government and non-governmental organisations is also a key criterion for local partners.**

In order to ensure that SocMon can be mainstreamed into planning and decision-making, whether at the national or local level, the capacity of local partners to engage with both government and non-governmental organisations is key and should represent a key criterion in selection of partners for future SocMon dissemination activities. Identifying this capacity is probably more important in selecting partners than whether the organisations are themselves governmental or non-governmental.

**Emphasis should be given to SocMon as a flexible approach that can be adapted to local needs and priorities.**

In presenting SocMon, the flexibility and adaptability of the approach should be emphasised, as this represents a key strength. The experience in South Asia has shown that it can be readily adapted to local priorities and the specific needs of different organisations and user groups.

**Dissemination and capacity strengthening activities should always include space for local participants to develop their own sets of goals, purpose and outputs for the SocMon process.**

Giving local participants the opportunity to think through for themselves what it is that they are trying to achieve by using SocMon is key to ensuring ownership and commitment to the approach. Presenting the approach as having a pre-conceived set of objectives should be avoided.

**Involve different levels of decision making directly in dissemination activities to ensure mainstreaming of SocMon outputs into decision-making processes.**

Wherever possible, key institutional stakeholders and actors who play a role in decision-making about coastal resource use at different levels should be directly involved in dissemination activities. While it may be unrealistic to expect such figures to participate full-time in multi-day workshops, their involvement in opening and closing sessions, if possible in more than a purely ceremonial role, but as "temporary" participants, should be encouraged. In particular, inviting them to closing sessions where participants can present their work and considerations based on the workshop to them is particularly effective.

**Emphasise SocMon as an approach that brings together the need for more comprehensive sets of information about coastal communities and resource use, and the development of mechanisms for greater stakeholder engagement in management processes.**

Particularly in the South Asian context, where working with coastal communities often means working with particularly poor and marginalised social groups, it is important to emphasise that SocMon is not **just** a different approach to collecting data about coastal communities and coastal resource use, but an approach that builds bridges and facilitates communication and participation by coastal resource users in decisions that affect their livelihoods.

**Inter and intra-regional exchanges should be an integral part of SocMon capacity strengthening.**

The involvement of partners from different areas, whether within a particular region or across regions, should be regarded as an integral part of the process of building capacity in SocMon approaches. First-hand accounts of how SocMon has been used by agencies and organisations similar to those involved in a SocMon event are a particularly powerful means of communication.

**Addressing language issues in SocMon dissemination activities should be given priority in organisation and planning.**

The importance of communication about SocMon taking place in accessible language, and wherever possible in the language most familiar to participants, should be given greater weight in planning and organising SocMon dissemination activities. This will inevitably involve the commitment of time and resources to addressing this issue but this is fully justified by the improved quality of the results achieved. Consideration might be given to the translation of key SocMon documentation into relevant local languages in the region (for example Tamil, Telugu, Bangla, Sinhala and Divehi (Maldivian)).

**The development of appropriate communications strategies should be regarded as an integral and key component of all SocMon dissemination activities.**

The process of developing locally relevant communications strategies for SocMon findings should be regarded as a key element in all dissemination activities. This will encourage greater awareness of how SocMon outputs can be used effectively to achieve desired outcomes and actually contribute to improved decision-making over coastal resource use and management.

**Association with key international and national agencies and/or programmes is important for SocMon to achieve wider acceptance.**

The SocMon network should seek to encourage linkages with recognised international and national agencies and/or programmes in the region, such as programmes undertaken by UN agencies or regional Large Marine Ecosystem projects (such as BOBLME) as this provides a significant guarantee of wider acceptance.







Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are working together through the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project to lay the foundations for a coordinated programme of action designed to better the lives of the coastal populations through improved regional management of the Bay of Bengal environment and its fisheries.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the implementing agency for the BOBLME Project.

The Project is funded principally by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Norway, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the FAO, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the USA.

For more information, please visit [www.boblme.org](http://www.boblme.org)



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