



POLICY BRIEF

SOUTH WEST INDIAN OCEAN
REGIONAL PROGRAMME • 2025



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RIGHTS AND BENEFITS IN MANGROVE MANAGEMENT IN MADAGASCAR

In 2024, the WWF South West Indian Ocean Regional Programme (WWF-SWIO) completed a review of policies to assess if and to what extent they make provision to support local community rights and benefits in Madagascar. The review, which consisted of a desktop policy analysis and stakeholder engagements, included recommendations to strengthen the rights and benefits of local communities participating in mangrove management. The recommendations have since been updated to reflect the policy landscape in 2025.

Local communities' right to participate in mangrove management can be traced to Madagascar's Constitution of 2010, the preamble of which emphasises sustainable and equitable management of natural resources for human wellbeing. It also provides for *fokonolona*: community-based social institutions that have the regulatory power to manage natural resources. The country's development plan, *Initiative Emergence Madagascar*, explicitly specifies the sustainable management of mangroves as one of the priority projects for sustainable natural resources management and restoring environmental balance. Local community rights and benefits are guided by a combination of policies on conservation, forestry, protected areas and local management of natural resources, and are carried through to Madagascar's National Strategy for the Integrated Management of Mangrove ecosystem (2022–2032).

Various stakeholders – government, civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – collaborate to enable the transfer of mangrove management to local communities for conservation, restoration and sustainable use. Stakeholder support focuses on convening communities and establishing institutions for mangrove management. It also includes technical and financial support throughout the entire management-transfer process up to the implementation of management plans.

The WWF policy review highlighted some key challenges to realising community rights, including tensions from multiple and duplicate policies in mangrove management; varied policy interpretations; limited institutional and financial capacities; and heavy dependence on CSOs and NGOs for mangrove management transfers and implementation of management plans. WWF recommends improving governance mechanism to better harmonise multiple, duplicate and contradicting policies; supporting community participation in policy processes; coordinating stakeholder support; and strengthening institutional and financial capacity for local community rights and benefits in mangrove management.

1 million

people in Madagascar could benefit from inclusive, participatory and sustainable management of

277 567 ha

of mangrove forests – the second largest extent of mangroves in the Western Indian Ocean region.¹

¹ Erfteimeijer P, de Boer M, Hilarides L. 2022. Status of Mangroves in the Western Indian Ocean Region. Wetlands International.



Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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POLICY PROVISIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY RIGHTS AND BENEFITS IN NATURAL RESOURCE AND MANGROVE MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL

“The rational and equitable administration of the **natural resources for the needs of the development of the human being** ... Decentralised Territorial Collectivities assure, with the state ... preservation of the environment.”

Madagascar’s Constitution of 2010

“Strengthen ... the governance of environmental protection and diversity with the **promotion of the involvement of government agencies and civil societies.**”

Initiative Emergence Madagascar (2019–2023)

“Strengthening the **benefits of biodiversity for all** and services provided by ecosystems under sustainable management of biodiversity ... and the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol to the **fair and equitable sharing of benefits** arising from the utilization of genetic resources.”

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2015–2025)

“The effective **participation of rural populations in the conservation of renewable natural resources** ... the management of which may be **entrusted to the grassroots community** ... conferring on the community ... **legal personality and functions** ... **the autonomous management of the resources.**”

Law on the Local Management of Renewable Natural Resources (2005)

“**Improve the forest landscape and the lives of local communities** through the promotion of sustainable management of natural resources ... and the protection of forests are transformed into **income-generating activities for local communities.**”

Plan National d’Adaptation au Changement Climatique (2015–2035)

GLOBAL

“The fundamental priority of safeguarding food security and ending hunger, and the particular vulnerabilities of food production systems to the adverse impacts of climate change ... **respect, promote and consider human rights, the right to health, the rights of ... local communities.**”

The Paris Agreement (2015)

“Strengthen and **support the full and effective participation and the collective actions of stakeholders, including ... local communities,** for the existence of sustainable, comprehensive and wise use of wetlands.”

Ramsar: Wetlands for the Future, Fourth Strategic Plan 2016–2024

“Nature can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while other global societal goals are simultaneously met through urgent and concerted efforts fostering transformative change.”

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022)

CURRENT POLICY CHALLENGES

MULTIPLE, DUPLICATE AND CONTRADICTIONARY POLICIES

Mangroves are governed as part of forests and particularly sensitive areas under the Forestry Law (1997). Its management transfer to local community organisations is made possible under the Law on the Local Management of Renewable Natural Resources (1996) (GELOSE), which most stakeholders use as a framework for work in mangrove management. Local community participation and access to natural resources management and use in protected areas is provided by the Law No. 2015-005 revising the Protected Areas Management Code (COAP). However, regional authorities often refer to a 2014 interministerial decree that prohibits the use of mangrove wood in its entirety, which is seen to take precedence over these laws. These various and contradicting policies contribute to a lack of clarity and cohesion between stakeholders that support community-based mangrove management.

Fisheries policies provide for additional management transfers of fishing areas to local communities, including those in mangrove forests. As such, overlapping and unclear mandates are seen to exist between the Ministries of Fisheries and the Ministry of Environment with regards to mangroves resources management, creating ambiguity and the potential for conflict at local community managers' level.

Madagascar's constitution recognises the right of all Malagasy citizens to access and utilise natural resources across the national territory. In practice, this principle sometimes leads to differing interpretations, particularly in areas where communities manage mangroves under management transfer agreements. These situations may occasionally create challenges in balancing the rights of local communities with the needs of citizens from other regions, highlighting the need for dialogue and collaboration to ensure equitable resource use in line with existing legal frameworks.

POTENTIAL FOR EXCLUSION

The review found that community members feel largely excluded from policy and decision-making processes – a sentiment corroborated by CSOs, who believe that communities lack the confidence and capacity to engage at the higher levels of these processes. As a solution, CSOs act as the “voice of communities”, but this does little to bolster grassroots leadership for independent and sustainable engagement. It also consumes CSOs' capacity to extend support to new community groups.

INSUFFICIENTLY COORDINATED SUPPORT

Multiple CSOs – with varied mandates, capacities and focus areas – support communities in managing mangroves. However, due to unclear roles of CSO in supporting the CBOs managing the natural resources and a lack in coordination between these organisations, some of them duplicate efforts and create inefficiencies in the deployment of resources.

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITIES

Madagascar's constitution establishes mangrove conservation as the responsibility of the state. Policy provisions are in place to facilitate the transfer of such management to local communities that potentially derive benefit. However, operationalising community natural resource management structures requires that communities – which are often already impoverished – pay fees to participate in these structures and access and use mangrove resources. Mandated agencies lack the capacity to support management transfers and renewals, limiting the expediency of these processes and making communities highly dependent on support from CSOs, NGOs and associated donor funding.

PROPOSED REMEDIAL ACTIONS

- Establish an inclusive governance mechanism to promote a common understanding, ensure the effective implementation of the existing laws and socialise the National Strategy for the Integrated Management of the Mangrove.
- Review fisheries policies for stronger coherence in mangrove management.
- Review natural resource management laws to provide for those outside of management areas.
- Secure and support community participation.
- Develop a legal framework for CSOs' roles in supporting community-based natural resource management.
- Increase institutional and financial capacities to support the establishment and implementation of community-based natural resources management.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ENSURE THAT THE NATIONAL MANGROVE STRATEGY IS CONSIDERED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OTHER NATIONAL STRATEGIES RELATING TO MARINE AND COASTAL AREAS AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The Malagasy National Strategy for the Integrated Management of the Mangrove ecosystem, finalised in August 2024, provides an opportunity to collaboratively update and strengthen the intentions, articulations and actions to ensure and secure local community rights and benefits. It can be used as a common reference point for socialising, among all stakeholders, the national goals for community-based mangrove management that delivers livelihood benefits. WWF further recommends integrating these national mangrove management goals more clearly in Madagascar's 2025 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for increased endorsement, commitment and accountability, and to similarly align them with the WIO Mangrove Regional Strategy and Action Plan that is currently in development. The updated 2025 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan should ideally take into account the inclusion of people living outside of mangrove conservation areas.

2. HARMONISE RELEVANT POLICIES

WWF recommends that the current revision of the 2014 ordinance/decree (prohibiting the use of mangrove wood) amend the policy to align with the GELOSE, the revised COAP and the National Strategy for Mangrove Management and to clearly specify the subsistent use of mangroves wood only within community-managed areas through traditional right use.

3. SUPPORT COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Various policy processes are proposed in Recommendations 1 and 2, including the implementation of the National Strategy for Mangrove Management; the 2025 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, especially to include people living outside of conservation management areas; the GELOSE and fisheries management transfer policies; and the 2014 ordinance/decree that prohibits use of mangrove resources. WWF urges the inclusion of CSOs and local community representatives in these review and implementation processes. Including community representatives would enable communities to represent themselves, reducing their dependence on CSOs and building the capacity of local leaders for longer-term, more sustainable engagement.

Community participation can be further strengthened by improving environmental education and awareness. This would entail designing targeted educational programmes for local schools, youth and adults to raise awareness of the environmental, social and economic benefits of mangrove conservation. Awareness-raising campaigns could also be launched to inform populations outside conservation areas about existing regulations and the benefits of sustainable and equitable mangrove management.

4. COORDINATE STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Support to the local communities could be better coordinated for greater efficiency and reach. WWF recommends reviewing the current support offered by CSOs to inform a collaboratively designed strategy that incrementally expands support to communities and community-based organisations.

5. ENGAGE THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector, particularly industries reliant on marine and coastal resources (such as fishing and tourism), should be encouraged to invest in mangrove conservation through public-private partnerships. Corporate social responsibility initiatives can also be established to provide financial and technical support to local communities in their mangrove management efforts.

6. STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITIES

WWF recommends increasing institutional and financial capacities for:

- **Research to support mangrove management**, specifically socioecological assessments that inform management transfers, plans, assessments and renewals, which will require unilateral stakeholder engagement.
- **The waiver of fees** for community participation in mangrove management and the use of mangrove resources.
- **The allocation of nominal fees** that enable the operations of community-based organisations.

WWF also recommends collaboration with the Western Indian Ocean Mangrove Network and for all organisations – state organisations, community-based organisations, CSOs and NGOs – to strengthen local community resource management structures. Doing so will require a strategic and coordinated approach that focuses on social learning processes and draws on case studies of building local community agency and capacity for natural resource management in the region.

For more information

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