Lamu Conservation:  
A Case Study Understanding Community Participation in Lamu Spatial Plan, Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

Lamu Old Town is one of the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlement in Lamu Archipelago. Located just off the coast of Kenya, it has retained its traditions and ways of life. The discovery of oil off the coast of Pate, a Lamu island, is expected to significantly impact this coastal area, especially in conjunction with associated large scale infrastructure development (as planned in the Lamu Port-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSSET) project).

The Lamu Spatial Plan aims to conserve the environmentally sensitive areas within Lamu County. The spatial plan aims to help guide future development, use, and conservation of land and resources in the county for 10 years.

RESULTS

1. Many community members had no knowledge or involvement on LSP and LAPSSSET but wished that they did.

Familiarity with LSP:
- Yes: 30%
- No: 70%
- Unsure: 10%

"Would have loved to be involved in the decision-making process." (LAPSSSET)

2. Lamu Community felt that LAPSSSET project posed a threat to the area and way of life.

Residents that wished LAPSSSET included more conservation:
- Yes: 70%
- No: 30%
- Unsure: 10%

"There needs to be compensation to those whose lands have been taken to pave way for LAPSSSET project."

3. Lamu Community felt they were not benefiting from LAPSSSET project.

Residents that knew anyone that was participating in LAPSSSET work:
- Yes: 40%
- No: 60%
- Unsure: 10%

"I know that LAPSSSET poses a big threat to Lamu Old Townes UNESCOs heritage title but I see no hope that the title will be able to withstand current developments."

Residents feel that the LAPSSSET port wasn’t for them and would not benefit them at all.

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"There is an issue of locals not being considered as first priority."

CONCLUSION

Community perceptions and participation are vital in large endeavors such as the LSP and the LAPSSSET plan, indeed imperative in the context of Lamu Old Town, which wants to uphold its UNESCO status. The LSP and the LAPSSSET plan will not only have major impacts on the conservation of natural resources but also on social and cultural heritage of the region. The people’s voices and involvement are vital to development processes that sustain the natural and cultural heritage that make Kenya unique in eastern Africa and the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

So far, WWF Kenya has done a good job of establishing a process of involving community members in its process. This process merely needs to expand and include more residents as well as disseminate information about the LSP. The LAPSSSET authority would benefit from the residents also being aware of what is happening in the region in relation to the project and provide community members with an opportunity to share their concerns.

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