

Socioeconomic Monitoring Initiative at Rivière Banane, Rodrigues

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In response to the recent decline in fish stocks in Rodrigues, 4 marine reserves were proclaimed in the northern lagoon in April 2007. Although biological monitoring has been on-going since 2002, there was an urgent need for socio-economic monitoring to be carried out to complement this research. The main objectives of this study were therefore to formalise and add to existing knowledge on fisheries and fishers attitudes and to establish baselines for future monitoring and evaluation. SocMon surveys were undertaken at the village of Rivière Banane, in the north-east of Rodrigues, during May – July 2006 and



Plate 1. A motorised fishing boat at Rivière Banane.



Plate 2. Preparing a corn harvest at Rivière Banane.

February 2007 using a combination of household surveys, key informant and focus group interviews.

The surveys indicate that fishing (Plate 1) and planting (Plate 2) are the most important occupations in Rivière Banane, undertaken by 22% and 28% of respondents, respectively, however the majority of the community are unemployed. The community is young, with 50% aged less than 30 years and the majority have received less than 9 years of schooling. The community is Catholic with the majority of respondents speaking only Creole. Households have an



Plate 3. SocMon feedback session at Rivière Banane.

average size of 4 persons and most respondents own their houses, have an average of 4 rooms and all have access to piped water and mains electricity. Fishing is the primary source of income for 30% of households, however only 13% of respondents own their own boats, and of these only 20% have an engine. (Plate 3) Coastal and marine activities carried out in the area are: fishing for octopus using harpoons, fishing for fish using basket traps and lines, planting fruit and vegetables, raising livestock and tourist snorkelling trips. Marine products have a low – medium value and all are sold locally, as well as being used for own consumption. Three formal community organisations

were highlighted, however the majority of respondents feel that they have no involvement in coastal management decisions. Respondents highlight illegal fishing, pollution, coastal flooding and soil erosion as threats to the health of coastal resources, with the solutions being better enforcement of fishing regulations and cleaning the beaches and rivers. Major problems facing the community are poor roads/lack of public transport, lack of water and invasive plants. Respondents understand the non-use value of the coastal resources, with the majority wanting future generations to enjoy coral reefs and agreeing that fishing should be restricted in certain areas.

The results therefore highlight that fishing is important to the Rivière Banane community and the development of a no-take marine reserve in the region will have an important financial impact on a number of households. The young community suggests that the development of an alternative livelihood and re-training programme may be more suitable than a Voluntary Retirement Scheme as a means of reducing fisher numbers. Illegal fishing is seen as the main threat to the coastal resources in Rivière Banane and this is particularly relevant to the development of the new marine reserve, with better enforcement needed. The study also highlights the need for greater involvement of the fishing community in future coastal management issues in order for the management plan to be successful.