

A Vision of Success

Perspectives from Sibylle Riedmiller, Chumbe Island Coral Park, Ltd.

Tanzania's most important tourism attractions are the world-famous terrestrial wildlife parks, and the government has decades of experiences in establishing and managing them, though with very limited community and private sector involvement. Just think of the world-famous Serengeti, Ngorongoro crater, Kilimanjaro parks among several more!¹

In contrast, marine conservation is a fairly recent addition to the development agenda here, and policies and the legal and institutional framework were only created from the mid nineties. The privately established Chumbe Reef Sanctuary was actually the first managed Marine park in Tanzania, and also officially recognised by the Zanzibar government in 1994 and the international conservation community (UNEP-WCMC, IUCN) from 1995.

Being a front-runner at local, national (and even international) levels has its costs. People don't understand what you are talking about, don't believe you, or suspect a hidden agenda. In the early nineties, few people in Tanzania knew anything about coral reefs, they are not taught about it in schools and the national language has no word for them (even fishers refer to them as rocks and stones). So officials wondered why this foreign investor cared so much about those underwater rocks. It took many years of awareness creation and actually proving on the ground that all the conservation and education work is real, until some of this was understood and acknowledged. International recognition is of utmost importance here as well, and we worked hard for that. The many prestigious international awards won by Chumbe, both for conservation and ecotourism, helped convince officials and the public that the Chumbe Project is indeed something Zanzibar can be proud about.

Also, where private land tenure is well accepted, as in many countries even in Africa, private reserves can be developed with relative ease by the owners. In contrast, water bodies, in particular the oceans, are commonly seen as public property or no-man's land, and badly suffer from the tragedy of the commons around the world because of that. It is the Wild West (or East) out there, where massive overexploitation and destruction of marine resources threaten the productivity of fishing grounds. In Tanzania, rampant dynamite fishing all along the coast is the biggest challenge.

Nevertheless, turning the whole of the uninhabited Chumbe Island and the adjacent reef into a park, was an accepted investment proposition in the early nineties, and we are grateful for that. As you can only lease land in Tanzania, the idea of leases and contracts for both the western reef of Chumbe and the virgin coral-reef forest on the island seemed fairly logical. The creation and official recognition of the Reef Sanctuary and Management Agreement with the Government of Zanzibar have worked well so far, together with the development of the Chumbe Forest Reserve. In fact, we run an island reserve, thus doing what is demanded in the conservation world today, that is integrated eco-system based management rather than protection of particular species only.

The downside is of course that leases and contracts have a limited duration and extension is not guaranteed, and may be subject to political pressures and thus insecurity. Ideally, nature conservation should be for perpetuity. Thus policies and instruments need to be developed that increase security of tenure for the conservation-minded investor. Investment into conservation is by definition long-term, foregoing short-term profits from resource exploitation, and there need to be incentives for that!

Altogether, the challenges have more to do with the fact that Chumbe is a privately established and managed park based on leases and contracts, and we share these challenges with other private nature reserves around the world.

For more information on the Chumbe Island Coral Park, see the Chumbe Case Study in the Africa Section of this document.

¹ Taken largely from an unpublished interview with Sibylle Riedmiller by a South African magazine, May 2008.