

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAs): A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO SHELLFISH CONSERVATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have emerged as a critical tool for the conservation of marine biodiversity and the sustainable management of shellfish resources. In Nigeria, shellfisheries contribute significantly to the livelihoods of coastal communities and play a vital role in local food security. However, overfishing, habitat degradation, and pollution have led to a decline in shellfish populations, threatening both the ecosystem and the economic well-being of these communities. This review explores the potential of MPAs as a sustainable approach to shellfish conservation in Nigeria. The implementation of MPAs can help mitigate the negative impacts of unsustainable shellfish harvesting practices by designating specific areas where fishing activities are restricted or regulated. This allows shellfish populations to recover, promotes biodiversity, and maintains the ecological balance of coastal ecosystems. Despite their potential, the establishment and management of MPAs in Nigeria face several challenges, including inadequate regulatory frameworks and limited stakeholder engagement. There is the need for collaborative management involving local communities, government agencies, and conservation organizations to address these issues. It is recommended that a community management strategy involving the government, local communities, and NGOs will ensure the sustainable use of Nigeria's marine resources. This approach which integrates local knowledge will promote sustainable practices through partnerships, resource sharing, and capacity-building initiatives. By adopting a holistic approach, MPAs can serve as an effective tool for the conservation of shellfish species, while ensuring the sustainability of coastal economies in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Marine Protected Areas, Shellfish conservation, Coastal communities*