

GRANT FACT SHEET



Sustainable management of MPAs in Bijagós Archipelago ('Blue Bijagós'), Guinea-Bissau



Project duration	June 2023 – May 2028
Country/ies	Guinea-Bissau
Lead organisation	Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone (PRCM)
Partners	Tiniguena, BioGuinea Foundation, GRID-Arendal, Organisation for the Defence and Development of Wetlands in Guinea-Bissau (ODZH), Palmeirinha
Total project costs	€ 6,370,989
Blue Action Fund grant	€ 4,754,808 (75%)
Match funding	€ 1,616,181 (25%)



The Bolama Bijagós Biosphere Reserve (or 'Bijagós') is an archipelago of 88 islands located off Guinea-Bissau's coast. It includes three marine protected areas (MPAs): Orango Islands National Park, João Vieira and Poilão Marine National Park, and Urok Community MPA. The Biosphere Reserve was recognised by UNESCO in 1996. The Institute of Biological Diversity and Protected Areas (IBAP) currently manages the reserve and included MPAs on behalf of the government. The reserve is a key Ecologically or Biologically Significant Area (EBSA) and Ramsar site and is known for its incredibly rich biodiversity, diversity of critical habitats and species and high biological productivity. It is the world's second most important site for Palearctic birds, and its intertidal mudflats are home to one of the world's largest populations of migratory shorebirds. The reserve also hosts Africa's largest colony of green turtles, as well as many endangered/critically endangered species such as manatees, dolphins and sawfish. Bijagós is an important feeding and breeding site for critically endangered sharks and rays. These play an important role in maintaining food-web balance for other endangered species that rely on these habitats, such as migratory shorebirds and marine turtles.

Bijagós is vital to both Guinea-Bissau's and the region's economies yet faces a number of challenges, such as overfishing and poverty, with the majority of people living below the poverty line. Bijagós has a farmer-gatherer economy based on cashew production, rice farming, subsistence fishing, shellfish

collection and non-timber forest products. A large proportion of its people (80%) live on the coast and are deeply bonded with their environment through their cultural heritage. Traditionally, their use of marine resources has followed strict rules supporting the sustainable use of natural resources. However, external influences from, for example, migrant fishers exploiting resources illegally without following traditional rules, have upset the balance in recent decades. Despite the ban on shark and ray fishing, these fish are still being caught in large numbers.

Led by PRCM and supported by a strong consortium of environmental and social partner organisations, the 'Blue Bijagós' project aims to integrate the protection of sharks and rays into fishery policies, fishing practices, and the zoning and management of the MPAs. It will also create two new MPAs, with one taking the form of a 'connectivity corridor' between the existing MPAs. MPA management will be enhanced by a 'blue planning' approach as well as reciprocal commitments with local communities, such as the enhanced monitoring and prosecution of illegal practices. A strong emphasis will be placed on youth and gender equity, including exchange visits between women from different islands and activities such as provision of training aimed at increasing female and youth representation in MPA management. Women will be supported to collect shellfish in a more profitable and sustainable way, and new income generating activities such as ecotourism and vegetable gardening will be developed.

KEY TARGETS

Newly created MPAs:
1,478 km²

Effectively managed MPAs:
2,668 km²

Number of beneficiaries:
6,840

KEY ACTIVITIES AND AREAS OF WORK



MPA GOVERNANCE

- ▶ Create two new MPAs (Unhocomo-Unhocomozinho and a 'connectivity corridor' between Urok, Orango and João Vieira Poilão MPAs)
- ▶ Support the application for the Bijagós to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage site
- ▶ Update and implement management and business plans for all MPAs and develop and operationalise realistic strategies for sustainable financing
- ▶ Provide leadership training for women and young people to encourage their participation in MPA management



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

- ▶ Diversify and strengthen coastal livelihoods by e.g. generating new employment opportunities in solar salt production, vegetable gardening and ecotourism
- ▶ Improve food security by e.g. developing and implementing rules for the temporary closure of shellfish collection areas in agreement with female shellfish collectors
- ▶ Enhance community awareness of the marine environment and resources, build community capacity for sustainable fishing methods, and ensure their compliance



SPECIES CONSERVATION/SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES

- ▶ Improve the monitoring and surveillance of e.g. colonial seabirds that provide a strong indicator of the quality of the environment
- ▶ Establish monitoring, control and enforcement techniques at community level to prevent illegal fishing/use of unsustainable practices through e.g. the provision of tools, equipment and training
- ▶ Implement cost-efficient data collection of relevant umbrella species by conducting research on the ecology of sharks and rays as well as collecting data on the abundance of fish-eating bird species, including Caspian terns



HABITAT CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

- ▶ Conduct education sessions in communities and schools to improve knowledge about e.g. climate change and the importance and rational use of mangrove ecosystems and their restoration in degraded areas
- ▶ Reduce the consumption of mangrove wood used for smoking shellfish and fish by offering improved ovens and providing training to fishers



Photo: Ariane van Marwijk



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