

To: Dr. Zakaria

From: Students of Boston College Schiller Institute's Working For and With Communities Course

Date: October 30, 2024

Re: Blue Economy Policy Recommendations

Statement of Issue:

Since the 1990s, tourism in the Tanzanian archipelago of Zanzibar has increased rapidly. The islands have seen massive growth in annual tourist arrivals due to hotel development, foreign investment, and added travel infrastructure. The surge in demand for Zanzibar's natural and economic resources raises many environmental and social concerns, creating the need for government coordination and planning provided by the Blue Economy Ministry (2020).

However, the rapid social, economic, and cultural changes prompted by foreign tourist investment generate significant local tensions that create challenges for the successful implementation of BEM's programs: regular conflicts and miscommunication between hotels and villagers utilizing the same beaches, tensions between mainlanders and natives now living as neighbors, and social friction as foreign tourists arrive without background on culturally-appropriate forms of behavior (Lange, 2015; Sumich, 2002; Winther, 2013) Further, while many local stakeholders have heard of the Blue Economy, many also express concern that they do not know how to ensure that their voices are heard by BEM regarding the rapid change and development that is affecting their lives and communities. Existing local governance structures have not been expanded/are not currently able to give stakeholders a platform to communicate and cooperatively address problems, which prevents Blue Economy Ministry policies from reaching their maximum potential.

Background and Key Data

Our fieldwork demonstrated a disconnect between the different stakeholder groups in the tourism industry, and a need for more cooperation between the locally appointed *Sheha*, the government, and the community.

- For example, while one local business owner thought expat investors and hotel owners were bribing the government with money, a later interview with an expat hotel owner revealed that they, in turn, felt immense financial pressure from the government and had to persevere to keep their business alive.
- A female seaweed farmer reported that in November of 2022, ice-ice, a climate change-related disease that kills seaweed (Hashim, 2016), forced the farmers to move their plots north. The hotel owners, who had been using the northern beachfront for kitesurfing, offered to pay the women to move their farms back south without understanding the issue of ice-ice, and therefore the women refused the money. The following morning, when the women went out to their farms they saw that they had been destroyed. They contacted the village chairmen who brought the issue to the government, but there was not enough evidence to discover the culprits. The villagers still believe that the hotel owners were responsible.
- During an interview with another female seaweed farmer, two tourists approached her farm wanting to take pictures. One was wearing a bikini, and the other was wearing swim trunks without a shirt. After sternly telling them not to take pictures and leave her be, the farmer explained that she usually welcomes tourists to visit her farm. She believes that any form of awareness for seaweed farming is beneficial, and she enjoys teaching others about her work. However, tourists need to be respectful of local customs and wear clothing that provides sufficient coverage. It is very disrespectful and makes the women uncomfortable when people approach in swimsuits, and it happens very often. From the tourist perspective, they likely have no idea why the seaweed farmers turn them away.
- A retired seaweed farmer explained that the changes in the community in Paje are because “people are not loving each other anymore.” As tourism and the foreign presence grew in Paje, she explained that there has been “moral decay.” Now, everyone has “bad habits” and communities are losing their collectivist values. She is especially concerned about the younger generation who are proliferating these bad habits, but she says that they try to “teach them [the tradition] but they do not hear and they do not understand.”
- A manager at a foreign-owned hotel stated that in their experience, the local government has been willing to listen to their concerns and help them operate their business because they approached with kindness and openness. They thought that if they started off being

upset or angry, the government would have been less willing to work with them, and most of the other foreigners do not know this.

- While observing activities on the beach in Paje, we noticed that local merchants and coastal workers tended to stay on the bottom half of the beach, closer to the water and facing towards the hotels, while tourists tended to stay on the top half of the beach facing the water. Each group occupied their own space on the beach, and there was very little interaction except when tourists left their hotels and local workers approached them. These limited exchanges caused both parties to categorize each other as “the other,” resulting in stereotyping and disconnection.

Policy Recommendation: We recommend the formation of regional Blue Economy Ministry councils consisting of representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups. This would build on the success of the current fisheries councils, while extending participation to all key stakeholders in coastal villages. Creating regional Blue Economy Ministry councils would create **a neutral and productive line of communication between the Ministry and all stakeholders.**

- **Opportunities:** Enables bottom-up communication of local-level questions and concerns to the Blue Economy Ministry as well as top-down communication from the Ministry directly to the local level. Raises awareness of Blue Economy policies and how they affect stakeholders. Formalizes a platform for discussion and increases communication between parties. Generates understanding between community members and disassembles silos. Lessens the government’s workload because councils can independently resolve many of their local-level issues.
- **Challenges:** Different educational backgrounds can result in power dynamics within the council that place certain stakeholder groups at a disadvantage. Capitalizing on meeting time for productivity (using time wisely, having a general agenda for specific meetings).

Key features that would ensure the success of the Blue Economy Ministry councils include:

- **A non-community member from the Blue Economy Ministry** who can serve as a neutral mediator to ensure equal representation of ideas, reinforce established communal values, and monitor meeting efficiency. This should be someone who is organized, is conscious of their preconceived biases, values perspective taking, and empowers

underrepresented groups. This person can regularly take meeting minutes in order to funnel information to the Blue Economy Ministry.

- **Opportunities:** This provides a way for the Blue Economy Ministry to “show face” in a local setting and build rapport with community members.
- **Challenges:** Choosing someone who is neutral and able to mediate. Determining the leadership structure, because this could be one person, or two or three.
- **Councils should be made up of competent representatives from relevant stakeholder groups.** These groups include but are not limited to fishermen, teachers, workers in tourism, hotel owners, seaweed farmers, and general female and youth community members. Representation of Zanzibari, Tanzanian Mainlander, and foreign identities should be encouraged. Representatives should be trusted by the respective stakeholder groups, possess strong communication skills, and be able to sway within their perspective groups while being committed to the general community.
 - **Opportunities:** Helps to unify all stakeholders to work towards a common vision of progress and prosperity in Zanzibar by collaboratively overcoming differences and settling disagreements.
 - **Challenges:** The lack of unification among certain represented groups (other than collectives like Furahia) may make electing representatives difficult. Ensuring the construction of a shared vision to work towards together. Creating space for all represented groups to voice their concerns.
- **Councils should set their own goals and activities beyond the main function of conflict resolution.** This could be creating a structure for community members to openly voice their suggestions, designing an educational poster to put on the beach to inform tourists of cultural etiquette, developing materials for hotels to educate tourists about the cultural context, empowering diverse voices and encouraging the inclusion of local forms of knowledge in program creation, running classes where locals teach tourists Swahili or hair braiding or even how to harvest seaweed, or other initiatives to integrate tourists and encourage meaningful connection.
 - **Opportunities:** Having this mechanism for communication across stakeholders would also allow for the co-creation and dissemination of educational modules that can address pressing community challenges and needs.

- **Challenges:** Organizational challenges arise in terms of delegating tasks and creating a hierarchy of topics to address. Beyond the main function of conflict resolution, it may be difficult for councils to divide time and resources to accomplish other necessary activities.

Intended Outcomes

- *Intercultural communication/bridging*, providing pathways for stakeholders to connect across cultural and economic divides and help diminish inter-cultural tensions
- *Resolving conflicts at a local level*, empowering community members to address issues that arise without need for external government intervention
- *Strengthening community capacity* to collaboratively develop local structures and programs to meet community-identified needs
- *Raising local understanding of Blue Economy Ministry policies and perspectives* while allowing greater communication from the community back to the Ministry
- *Intergenerational communication and understanding*, given the prevalent disconnect between older and younger generations regarding the value and opportunities represented by the tourism industry

Appendix

This data was collected by a group of seven students, one staff member, and one professor, all from Boston College. After a semester of study and preparation, our group spent three weeks in Zanzibar conducting ethnographic research to gather information on how economic and environmental change has impacted the coastal livelihoods in Zanzibar. Our research allowed us to form connections with stakeholders around the island including government officials and agencies, business owners, employees, investors, native-born community members, and immigrants who have moved to Zanzibar to pursue opportunities in the tourism sector commonly referred to as foreigners. While our perspective and inherent biases as foreigners lends an incomplete picture of Zanzibar's complexities, we intend for our research to draw on our outside lens to help construct an objective understanding of the changes occurring in Zanzibar.

Sources

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