

## Chapter 7

### Socioeconomic study of Ponérihouen, Poindimié and Touho communes regarding issues associated with the lagoon and reef environments

*Antoine WICKEL*

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#### SUMMARY

- The socioeconomic study involved a field survey where 88 interviews (individual or collective) were conducted. A questionnaire on seafood consumption was given to primary schools. The approach of the target groups was adapted to the local social structure.
- The study area has about 10,000 inhabitants, of whom 80% are of Melanesian origin and of customary law status. The population is very young, and for the most part lives on the coast. The unemployment rate is high but informal subsistence activities are widespread.
- The marine environment supports many uses, primarily various types of fishing, which are characterized but remain difficult to quantify. Dependency on fisheries resource for food is very strong.
- The main anthropogenic pressures are terrigenous runoffs related to land erosion and domestic pollution.
- The public expresses strong support for environmental management but the organization of a participatory management project requires taking into account local socio-cultural realities.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The study area spans across three communes, consisting of 44 “official” tribes. The maritime area is composed of a large lagoon, where the population carries out many activities, mainly fishing. The employment sectors are quite restricted and therefore the subsistence activities (farming and fishing) represent important issues for the local population, from which it derives much of its food. Other users also use the lagoon, including the communes’ population, which engages in recreational fishing. The overall fishing pressure remains relatively low, as well as other environmental threats associated with human activities. However, in view of demographic trends and issues related to the marine environment for the population, the conservation of the lagoon and reef environment appears as a necessity.

Any management project (implementation of managed areas or regulations) requires the support of local people to guarantee acceptance and success. Currently, the lagoon adjoining the study area is part of the zones recently listed as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO.

This step provides a real opportunity to launch a management process, as preferred, on participatory bases. This process has begun already with the establishment of a management committee for the areas of Poindimié and Touho. This approach seems well adapted to the local context but requires taking into account territorial issues (e.g. socioeconomic, cultural etc). In the local context, this means taking into account the social and contemporary customary realities and adapting them to the participatory management methods to optimize the acceptance of projects and the involvement of the population.

This study aims to provide a general description of the socio-economic, customary and territory structure of the Ponérihouen, Poindimié, and Touho area in relation to management