

## **Scholar**

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Title of LIA Project:	Coastal and Marine Conservation in Zanzibar

## **Reflective Review: Coastal Conservation Project in Zanzibar**

### **Introduction**

The opportunity to engage in the Coastal Conservation project in Zanzibar was a significant chapter in my journey of personal and professional growth. As a participant in the Leadership in Action (LIA) program, I was thrilled by the prospect of contributing to environmental sustainability in a region known for its natural beauty and ecological significance. My motivation stemmed from a deep-rooted passion for environmental conservation and a desire to immerse myself in a culturally rich and diverse community that is heavily reliant on its coastal resources.

From the outset, my expectations were high. I envisioned gaining practical experience in conservation, developing leadership skills, and understanding the complex interplay between environmental preservation and community livelihoods. I anticipated challenges, especially given that I would be working in an unfamiliar environment, but I was determined to embrace every aspect of the experience. As the project unfolded, it became clear that my initial goals were not only achievable but would also be surpassed in ways I hadn't imagined.

### **Project Description**

The Coastal Conservation project in Zanzibar focused on addressing the environmental challenges facing the island's coastal and marine ecosystems. These ecosystems are vital to the local economy, particularly for fishing and tourism, but they are under threat from various human activities, including overfishing, pollution, and unsustainable tourism practices. The project aimed to mitigate these threats by promoting sustainable practices, raising awareness among local communities, and implementing conservation initiatives such as the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs).

Stakeholders in the project included a broad spectrum of local and international entities. Key partners were local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that had been working in the region for years and had established trust within the community. Their knowledge of local customs, language, and social dynamics was invaluable in guiding our efforts. We also worked closely with trying to change government policies, particularly those responsible for environmental regulation and resource management.

The local communities were central to the project. Fishermen, tourism operators, and other community members were directly impacted by the conservation efforts, and their active participation was essential. Engaging these stakeholders required a delicate balance of respect for local traditions and the introduction of new, sustainable practices. Lastly, international organizations provided technical expertise and funding, enabling us to implement large-scale projects such as the MPAs.

Throughout the project, I was actively involved in a variety of tasks, each of which contributed to the overarching goals of the initiative. My responsibilities ranged from conducting environmental impact assessments to organizing and leading community workshops. The assessments were particularly eye-opening, as they revealed the extent of environmental degradation in certain areas, especially those heavily trafficked by tourists or subjected to intensive fishing practices.

One of the key initiatives was the creation of an MPA, a task that required extensive coordination with local authorities, NGOs, and community leaders. The establishment of the MPA was a complex process that involved not only identifying and designating the protected areas but also ensuring that the local population understood and supported the initiative. This required extensive community outreach and education, which I was heavily involved in. We organized workshops and meetings where we discussed the importance of the MPA, not just for environmental protection but also for the long-term sustainability of the local economy.



Another critical component of the project was the implementation of sustainable tourism practices. Zanzibar's tourism industry is a double-edged sword; while it brings in much-needed revenue, it also poses significant environmental risks. We worked with local tourism operators to develop and promote practices that would minimize the environmental footprint of their operations. This included everything from reducing plastic waste to encouraging eco-friendly excursions that respect the natural habitats of marine and coastal species.

## Impact of the Project

The Coastal Conservation project had a profound impact on the local community, the environment, and myself. The initiatives we implemented led to tangible improvements in environmental awareness and practices among the local population. For example, reporting the number of fish populations, water quality and mangrove planting was key. These outcomes are vital for the long-term sustainability of the local fishing industry, which many families in Zanzibar rely on for their livelihoods.



The project's success in promoting sustainable tourism was also significant. By working closely with tourism operators and locals, we were able to introduce eco-friendly practices that not only reduced environmental impact but also enhanced the overall tourist experience. This, in turn, has the potential to attract more environmentally conscious travellers to Zanzibar, further boosting the local economy in a sustainable manner. Projects such as Chako and OZTI were model examples of NGOs who were providing jobs for the community and women, as well as recycling used material to benefit the environment.

For me personally, the impact of the project was transformative. One of the most rewarding aspects was the achievement of the SMART goals I had set at the beginning of the project. My primary goal was to lead a successful community workshop on sustainable recycling practices and understanding the effect on marine wildlife, and I am proud to say that this goal was not only met but exceeded. The workshop, which was attended by a wide cross-section of the community, received positive feedback, and resulted in the adoption of several sustainable practices by local fishermen, and families. This experience was a significant milestone in my leadership journey, reinforcing my belief in the power of community-driven solutions to environmental challenges.



Another SMART goal was to develop and implement a public awareness campaign about the environmental issues facing Zanzibar. This goal was achieved through the creation of educational materials, such as posters and brochures, which were distributed in schools across the island. The campaign was well-received, and I was particularly pleased to see the enthusiasm of young people who showed a keen interest in learning about and protecting their environment.

The LIA project also had a lasting impact on my personal and professional development. It challenged me to step out of my comfort zone, adapt to new and sometimes challenging environments, and take on leadership roles that I had not previously considered. The experience taught me the importance of flexibility, empathy, and perseverance, all of which are essential qualities for effective leadership.

### **Leadership Learnings**

The Coastal Conservation project provided a fertile ground for developing and demonstrating a range of leadership skills. One of the most significant skills I honed was the ability to lead by example. In an environment where actions often speak louder than words, it was crucial to actively participate in every aspect of the project. Whether it was joining community members in beach clean-ups or leading discussions during workshops, I made it a point to be fully engaged and visible in all activities. This approach not only helped build trust with the local community but also inspired others to take ownership of the conservation efforts.



Another key leadership attribute I developed was effective communication. Working in a multicultural and multilingual environment presented unique challenges in conveying our

messages clearly and persuasively. I quickly learned that effective communication goes beyond language; it involves understanding the cultural context, listening actively, and being open to feedback. By adapting my communication style to suit the audience, whether it was a group of local fishermen or a panel of government officials, I was able to foster a collaborative atmosphere that was critical to the success of the project.

Problem-solving was another leadership skill that was put to the test during the project. Environmental conservation is fraught with challenges, from logistical issues to resistance from stakeholders. One challenge we faced was the initial resistance from some community members to the establishment of the MPA. This resistance stemmed from fears that the protected areas would restrict their access to vital fishing grounds. To address these concerns, I worked closely with local leaders to organize a series of meetings where we could openly discuss the benefits of the MPA and address any misconceptions. Through these discussions, we were able to find a compromise that satisfied both the conservation goals and the needs of the community.



Leadership in this context also required a high degree of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Zanzibar's culture is deeply rooted in community and tradition, and any leadership approach that did not take this into account would have likely failed. I learned the importance of respecting local customs and traditions, and of leading in a way that was inclusive and empowering. By involving community members in decision-making processes and respecting their knowledge and expertise, I was able to build a sense of shared ownership of the project's goals.

Additionally, I gained insights into the importance of sustainability in leadership. Leading a project that aimed to achieve long-term environmental and social outcomes required me to think beyond immediate results and consider the broader impact of our actions. This experience has shaped my understanding of leadership as a long-term commitment to creating positive, sustainable change.

## **Cultural Experiences**

Living and working in Zanzibar was an incredibly enriching cultural experience that offered me a new perspective on the world and my place in it. Being immersed in such a diverse cultural environment was both fascinating and challenging, as it required me to navigate a complex web of cultural norms and expectations.



One of the most profound cultural lessons I learned was the importance of community in Zanzibari society. Unlike in many Western cultures, where individualism is often emphasized, the people of Zanzibar place a strong emphasis on communal values and collective well-being. This was evident in the way community decisions were made, with extensive consultation and consensus-building being the norm. I learned to appreciate the value of this approach, which fosters a strong sense of solidarity and mutual support.



Another cultural experience that left a lasting impression on me was the Zanzibari people's relationship with their environment. In many ways, their connection to the land and sea is spiritual, with a deep respect for nature that is woven into their daily lives. This respect is evident in their traditional practices, such as sustainable fishing techniques that have been passed down through generations. Witnessing this relationship firsthand reinforced my belief in the importance of integrating cultural values into conservation efforts. It also challenged me to think more critically about how Western conservation models, which often prioritize scientific and economic considerations, can be adapted to better align with local cultural contexts.

### **Dissemination Activities**

To ensure the wider dissemination of our project's findings and impact, I engaged in several activities. I attended local and regional conferences where I presented our work on marine protected areas and the role of community engagement in conservation. Additionally, I contributed to the creation of informational posters that were distributed in local schools, aiming to educate younger generations about the importance of marine conservation.

I also played a role in promoting the project through social media, sharing our achievements and challenges with a broader audience. This helped raise awareness of the environmental issues facing Zanzibar and highlighted the positive steps being taken to address them.

### **Future Plans**

The experience in Zanzibar has profoundly shaped my future career and educational aspirations. Initially, I was focused on pursuing a career in environmental policy, but my time in Zanzibar has sparked a deeper interest in community-based conservation and sustainable development. I now plan to further my studies in environmental management with a focus on community engagement and participatory approaches to conservation.

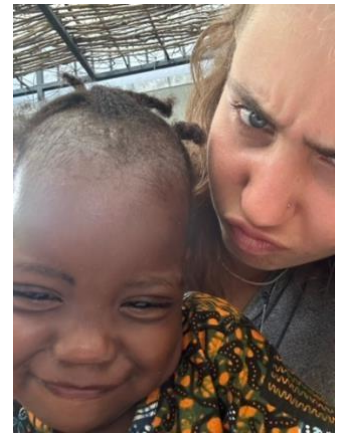
To ensure the wider dissemination of the project's findings and impact, I hope to engage in several activities, such as attend local and regional conferences where I can further develop my knowledge on marine protected areas and the role of community engagement in conservation. Additionally, I hope to create more informational posters that can be distributed in local schools, aiming to educate younger generations about the importance of marine conservation and share these posters abroad to widen the audience reached. I also played a role in promoting the project through social media, sharing our achievements and challenges with a broader audience. This helped raise awareness of the environmental issues facing Zanzibar and highlighted the positive steps being taken to address them.

Additionally, the leadership skills I developed during the LIA program have encouraged me to take on more leadership roles in my academic and professional life. I am now more confident in my ability to lead diverse teams and navigate the complexities of cross-cultural collaboration.

## Conclusion



My experience with the Coastal Conservation project in Zanzibar was a pivotal moment in my personal and professional development. It provided me with invaluable insights into the challenges of environmental conservation in a developing context and the importance of community involvement in achieving sustainable outcomes. The lessons I learned about leadership, cultural diversity, and the interconnectedness of people and nature will undoubtedly guide me in my future endeavours. This experience has not only enhanced my understanding of the world but has also solidified my commitment to making a positive impact on the environment and the communities that depend on it.



11/06/24 – 24/07/24

## Project Leader

Please comment on your scholar's LIA period, what you consider to be your scholar's strengths and which leadership attributes (please refer to the leadership attributes below) you feel your scholar has demonstrated and is particularly skilled in. You could also identify areas which the scholar can develop further.

To whom it may concern; Please kindly consider the recommendations for our Volunteer Soluna Stojanovska at the time of her Laidlaw Programme Leadership in Action (LIA) at Mother nature conservation Camp at Matemwe, Zanzibar. Among many leadership attributes the Volunteer demonstrated at the time she was doing her program, the project Leader would like to recommend the followings:

- Able to lead without authority
- Cultural intelligence and capacity for empathy
- Able to listen and understanding
- Makes effective decisions in complex environments
- Strong intellectual ability
- Turns ideas into action
- Builds relationship and networks
- Able to navigate new and foreign situations
- Has energy and impact
- Makes things happen
- Able to work and think independently
- Priorities activities and manages own time

Signature of Scholar

S.S Date: 16/0/24

Signature of Project Leader

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Date: 13 / 9 / 2024

