

# Community-Based Management Approach at Work in the Muan Wetland Protection Area: Changing Perception, Changing Practice and Changing Policy

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The Marine Protected Area (MPA) policy of the Republic of Korea has rapidly evolved since 1999, when was enacted the Wetland Protection Law, the first MPA supporting legal arrangement. The first coastal Wetland Protection Area (WPA) then was established in 2001 along the tidal-flat of Muan. Although the designation process was taken under the consent of local stakeholders, the management of the area has received little attention of local communities and governments until recently. Like all other later-designated MPAs, the area faced challenges such as a low policy priority by local government (thus, insufficient budget and political support), lack of stakeholders' understanding of MPA, and lack of managers which resulted in poor management status even after the designation as a protected area.

Amid the raising dissatisfaction of local communities against the government and their enervated expectations on having an MPA in their own villages, a community-based approach was introduced as a remediation. This approach aimed at two purposes: first, for empowering and benefiting local communities in the MPA management regime and second, for demonstrating the community-based management approach as an effective and successful way for managing protected areas in the national context.

The activities so far focused on changing local communities' attitudes towards nature and MPA policy. Instead of formal biodiversity education programs, a cultural approach that local people make their own lives at the tidal-flat as a folk play was adopted. Their work was presented at a number of art festivals, and eventually not only the site won a nation-wide recognition but also the local participants' pride and valuation of the nature and their living as fishermen were



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elevated. Successively, the foundation of a village cooperative enabled collective actions and active participation of local communities to various management issues. Other multiple activities such as meetings, seminars and surveys were carried simultaneously with local participation and contributed for disabusing people of misunderstanding about conservation and MPA.

All these activities for three years made a prominent progress not only for changing people's conception, but are evaluated to affect their behaviors too, which could be seen from the emergence of local people's voluntary actions of patrolling, biodiversity status reporting, and suggestions of management ideas to governments. Meanwhile, these changes at a corner of the MPA affected the local governments' attitudes and behavior as well that the management of Muan tidal-flat has now higher policy priority and is given better institutional and political support.

In the Republic of Korea, where the community-based management approach has not been properly understood as a form of policy, the success case of Muan tidal-flat opens a new way for the improvement of MPA policy. It demonstrates that the local participation should be guaranteed for sustainable MPA management and that a targeted community-unit approach could be effective although those covering larger areas and larger number of people seem more relevant in general. Also the political willingness of local governments, who hold legal MPA management duties, could be gained from bottom, and eventually contribute to the better management of MPA.