

Pressure Point



The Indian Ocean island of Madagascar, described as the 'hottest of the hot' global biodiversity hotspots, exhibits exceptional concentrations of species of unique plants and animals. This "island continent" also has one of the world's fastest growing populations, with an average fertility rate of over 5 births per woman and nearly half of the country's population currently under fifteen years of age. Only one in five women has access to contraception despite government programmes to promote family planning and the population of the country is projected to double within 20 years. Population growth inevitably exerts enormous pressures on Madagascar's natural resources, and is leading to devastating loss of natural habitats, threatening the survival of the Island's unique wildlife.

“*The UN predicts the present global population of 6.7 billion will increase to 9.2 billion by 2050. Most of this growth will be experienced in developing countries.*”

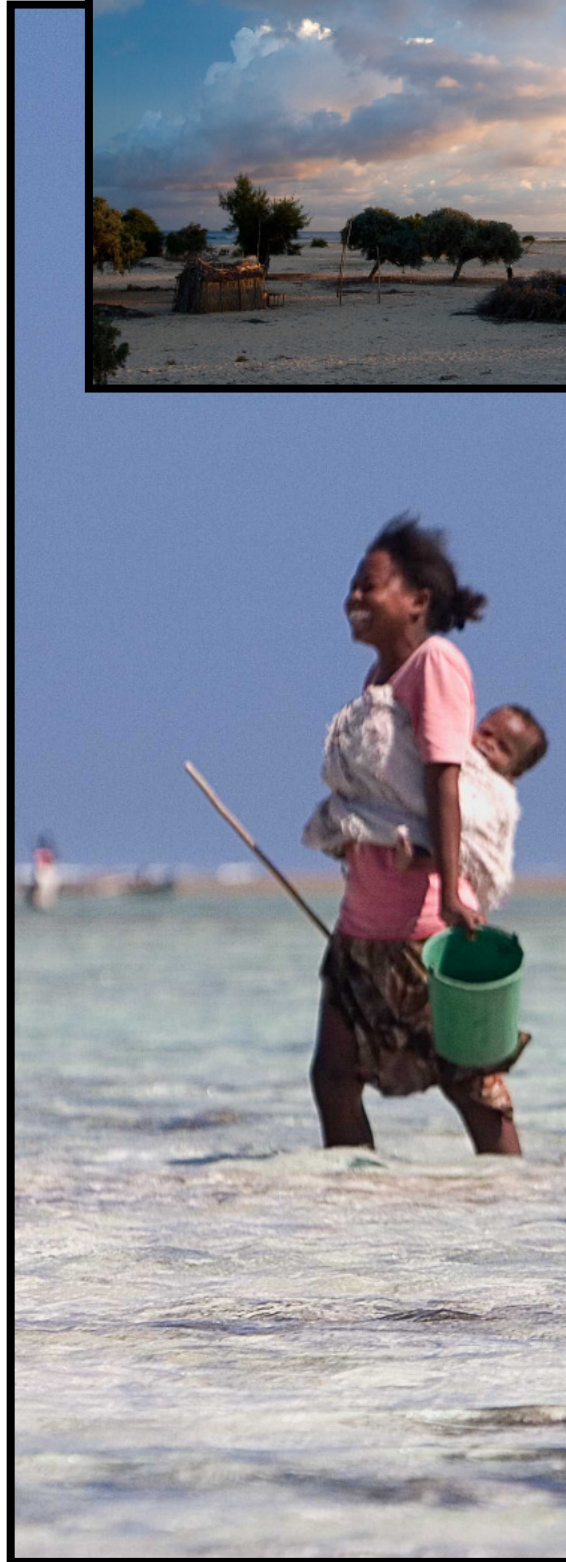


Pressure Point

Rapid growth of coastal populations of the remote and isolated southwest poses a severe threat to the future sustainability of the country's extensive coral reefs and other marine habitats, upon which the livelihoods, culture and future economic wellbeing of these coastal communities depend.

Blue Ventures, a British-based conservation charity, is directly addressing the environmental challenges of population pressures and unsustainable resource use through an integrated Population, Health and Environment (PHE) initiative with these coastal communities.

Working in partnership with coastal communities, Blue Ventures has established the largest community managed marine protected area (MPA) in the Western Indian Ocean, as well as enabling the community to develop the alternative livelihoods of aquaculture and ecotourism. This conservation work has been complemented by the integration of a sexual and reproductive health service into the portfolio of projects. This service, which has been developed in partnership with the community and key stakeholders, aims to meet the community's need for family planning, serving to reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies, enable couples to



I think your project is just wonderful: it's straightforward and hugely effective. You have a chance to change the fate of those suffering from these diseases in Madagascar.

Joanna Lumley



plan their family size and to space their children (as well as protecting themselves against HIV).

To help raise awareness and change behaviour, the project also runs a programme of social marketing and community education, including the use of theatre, sporting and cultural events, and peer-led education. These have proven highly effective at raising awareness of the importance of family planning and facilitating the adoption of safer sexual practices.

This pioneering, integrated approach to conservation, health and family planning offers opportunities for these different interventions to work synergistically, enabling far more effective achievement of the projects' objectives than could be achieved if these projects were carried out in isolation.

First launched in 2007 and now active in 26 villages along the southwest coast of Madagascar, Blue Ventures' sexual and reproductive health project has had a huge impact on these communities. As a result of this grass roots initiative, for the first time couples from one of Africa's poorest regions have been given the chance to have some control over their fertility, plan for their family's future, and avert the feared epidemic of HIV.

www.blueventures.org

