

New research: A broad human rights-based approach is vital for removing barriers to community engagement in conservation

Press briefing

- Marine conservation organisation Blue Ventures has been implementing a [health-environment programme](#) at its conservation site in coastal southwest Madagascar since 2007: integrating family planning and other health services with livelihood diversification and local marine management initiatives
- Blue Ventures' latest research published today in [Global Environmental Change](#) shows that this rights-based approach is highly valued by communities (with positive feedback and strong uptake of health services) and can help address barriers to their engagement in conservation
- Family planning users reported experiencing better physical and mental health, being able to work and earn more, provide better for their children and focus on longer-term priorities such as better housing, savings and the future of fish stocks
- Yet the research also challenged some established thinking about how health-environment programmes support conservation outcomes:
 - It found that family planning use alone may not empower individual women to engage more in local management efforts – highlighting the need for complementary gender equality initiatives
 - It found that family planning use may not reduce demand for natural resources – in fact it may enable increased resource extraction (at least in the short-term) as people gain more time which they may use to go fishing – highlighting the need for complementary livelihood diversification initiatives
 - *Note that these findings are specific to communities in the Velondriake Locally Managed Marine Area and may / may not be generalisable elsewhere*
- Overall the study affirmed Blue Ventures' rights-based commitment to this holistic approach: improving access to family planning and other health services while [advancing other rights](#) – e.g. those to equal opportunities, food, decent work, education, property tenure, etc. – is vital for communities to be able to manage their fisheries sustainably

More details about the research:

- The mixed methods study was conducted in 2016 with a survey taking in some 20% of households and 10% of adults in the Velondriake locally managed marine area
- The integrated social survey – encompassing a variety of health, environment and livelihood indicators – allowed the research team to analyse not only the outcomes of Blue Ventures' different programmes but also the interactions between these outcomes
- The survey also included open-ended 'most significant change' questions which provided in-depth insights to complement the statistics