

Measuring the impact of conservation campaigns: The case of sea turtle consumption in São Tomé

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In conservation we are faced with a whole host of pressing issues that human actions cause, but we are short on time and money. Whether climate change, the wildlife trade or any number of other conservation challenges, we need to figure out the most effective ways of changing human behaviours that harm the environment. Evaluating our projects is really important if we want to learn from them and improve future interventions. Unfortunately, this can be difficult. Our research explores better ways to evaluate conservation projects that work to change human behaviour.

We evaluated a campaign that tried to persuade people in São Tomé and Príncipe to stop eating sea turtle meat and eggs. This campaign involved a variety of activities, including television advertisements and even a cooking contest. Unusually, we measured both behavioural outcomes like attitudes or consumption, and conservation impacts, like sea turtle poaching. We found a decrease in self-reported sea turtle egg consumption and a decrease in the poaching of adult sea turtles. However, multiple challenges arose in the evaluation. The special questioning techniques we used to measure consumption complicated the analysis, and simultaneous law enforcement could also have affected poaching rates. In the article we explore how these factors alter our confidence in the role of the campaign. Our recommendations for future projects include combining different outcome measures to triangulate hard-to-measure behaviours and using theory-based evaluation methods.



Sea turtle in São Tomé; © José Carlos Bernardo Costa.



Mem Di Omali activities; © Victor Jimenez.

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MEM DI OMALI "MOTHER OF THE SEA"



MASS MEDIA CAMPAIGN



Campaign included:

- Billboards
- Radio anthem
- Awareness spots on TV and radio with Santomean personalities

3 villages



NGO never worked here before

Baseline levels of sea



45%



4%

FULL SOCIAL MARKETING INTERVENTION



Campaign included all mass media components plus:

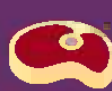
- Cooking contest
- Children's book on sea turtle life cycle and threats
- Awareness talks in churches
- Local theatre
- Futsal championship

5 villages



Long history of community involvement by NGO

turtle consumption



10%



40%

Study design for "Mem Di Omali", a conservation intervention to reduce sea turtle consumption in São Tomé.