



Case Study: Maharees Conservation Association CLG (Ireland)



The Maharees Environment and Community

The Maharees partnership is as an excellent example of what a locally-led and community based partnership can do and how even small initiatives can have a wider impact on progressing adaptation. Read on to find out how the initiative was formed and why locally-led action is at the heart of its approach.



Maharees Conservation Association
Protecting | Enhancing | Preserving

Background

The Maharees is a 5km long natural tombolo located in a rural area on the west coast of Ireland. Home to diverse habitats and wildlife the Maharees sand dune system is designated as a special area of conservation and is protected under the EU habitats directive. The coastline of the region is under constant threat from the impacts of climate change, specifically coastal erosion, which was further exacerbated by human behaviour and the lack of coastal management.



The Maharees Tombolo and Islands

Facing a crisis, the Maharees community formed the Maharees Conservation Association CLG in 2016. This partnership brings together a diverse range of community

members, representing hospitality, tourism, farming, retirees, educators and other professionals living in the area, who work alongside local councils, national

agencies and regional universities to address the climate impacts and implement practical solutions.



Spotlight on Influence

Following the winter storms of 2015-2016 and the subsequent impacts on the local infrastructure, where roads had become impassable, a community meeting was held and the community of the Maharees took the decision to form an association to help highlight and address the issues raised. A strong committee who could focus the work of the Maharees partnership on raising awareness, implementing practical measures and putting in place a comprehensive management plan to ensure the future of the coastline, was elected. A major part of the implementation was the installation of chestnut fencing along the base of the sand dunes to lessen erosion from human impacts and to help preserve

them. An initial two sections of fencing was funded by Kerry County Council and the remaining sections self funded (€7000) by the Maharees partnership. The clear improvements that have been seen has helped influence an increased interest in this adaptation measure and the recent decision of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to provide chestnut fencing for the partnership to continue their work in an area that is protecting critical infrastructure from being impacted. The success of the Maharees has also allowed them to share knowledge and insights with other coastal communities influencing wider change at a regional level. The research carried out with other coastal communities across Ireland as well as universities have been used to highlight the need for a discussion on the impacts of

climate change at a national level in the Climate Conversations event and at a regional level with state

agencies like NPWS and the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO).



Sand covering vital infrastructure in the Maharees



Spotlight on Communicating and understanding evidence

In order to help local community stakeholders and visitors to the area understand the impacts of climate change the Maharees partnership has focused on a number of outreach activities for a wide range of audiences. In the past few years, the Maharees partnership has developed shared content, run biodiversity experiences that highlight the SAC and SPA designations of the Maharees and developed the Maharees Heritage trail that

outlines the natural and cultural heritage. During summer months there are two events run each week, one on natural heritage and one on cultural heritage. The partnership have created a series of information sheets and signage, a number of other bespoke materials detailing the unique biodiversity and cultural heritage of the area and has worked with the local schools to involve primary and secondary school children in their outreach efforts and adaptation activities. They have also invited Dr. Eugene Farrell of the National University

of Ireland in Galway (NUIG) to give presentations raising awareness of the benefits of nature-based solutions. The Maharees Conservation Group are active on a number of social media platforms, have secured coverage in a multitude of national and local traditional and new media (e.g., RTE's Prime Time, Six-One News and Eco Eye) and have a website so that they can communicate the work they are doing to a diverse audience. To increase understanding of the climate impacts the Maharees partnership has worked closely with a number of universities since its inception. The National University of Ireland in Galway (NUIG), University of Limerick (UL), Munster Technological University (MTU), University of Glasgow (UofG), Sacred Heart University (SHU) and University

College Cork (UCC) students have used the Maharees area for fieldtrips and research, including Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mapping. This has been supported by drone surveys on the human impacts affecting the dune carried out by the Maharees community, both of which have contributed to expanding the evidence base for how adaptation measures are working.



Impacts of Dune Restoration Measures implemented between 2016 and 2017



Vincent Hyland working on the Maharees Heritage Trail App



Spotlight on Collaboration

The formation of the Maharees Conservation Association CLG began with a community meeting in 2016 where Dr. Eugene Farrell urged the community to form a group and begin engaging with state agencies in order to address the impacts of climate change that they were facing. This initial meeting was extended to the whole of the Maharees community and set the principle that not only those who lived in the area, but ‘anyone who cared about the Maharees’ could be a member of the conservation group. This meant that a diverse range of stakeholders were included in the Maharees partnership from the beginning. The Maharees committee is made up of 15 members who work with various stakeholders in the community to build trust and facilitate discussions ensuring the



Locals and Visitors planting Marram Grass



Kerry Education & Training board Life Guarding and Surf Instructor Course Students recovering a research buoy

interests of the whole community are represented and to coordinate collaborative adaptation initiatives. Following its establishment, the Maharees conservation group has also collaborated closely with a number of external organisations including Kerry County Council, NUIG, MTU, An Garda Síochána, Clean Coasts, the Dingle Hub, CARO ASBN and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). These collaborations have helped build the evidence base and provide resource for furthering adaptation action in the Maharees, something which is now feeding back into other areas.



Community Members erecting fencing



Spotlight on People

The major strength of the Maharees partnership is the strong involvement from local stakeholders and the community led aspect of the adaptation work. Much of the initial work carried out in the area was funded by the Maharees

either through local fund-raising efforts or through the provision of time and assets to carry out adaptation work. The strong sense of community within this partnership is reinforced by having local champions that work to ensure all of the community are involved in partnership projects. The social aspect of the Maharees

partnership has helped create strong relationships between members and build a sense of trust in the work they are doing. Projects such as fencing and marram grass planting have allowed team bonding between a diverse range of stakeholders (retirees, surfers, landowners, hospitality workers, etc.) who might not necessarily otherwise interact. To maintain this local involvement the Maharees partnership has co-designed a community education course with Kerry Education and Training Board that has allowed members of the Maharees community to learn more about the sand dune habitats and how to manage them. The need to represent the best interests of the local people is a major aspect of the partnership and one of the reasons that the elected committee works to be fully

transparent in their operations. and that all members have the right to vote on any proposals.



Chestnut Fencing being erected by the local community

Find Out More

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**Maharees Heritage
and Conservation**



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