



**Marine Conservation Governance in St Helena  
as a UK Overseas Territory**

**By**

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# **KING'S COLLEGE LONDON**


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## **MASTERS DISSERTATION**

I, Daniel Spurr hereby declare (a) that this dissertation is my own original work and that all source material used is acknowledged therein; (b) that it has been specially prepared for a degree of King's College London; and (c) that it does not contain any material that has been or will be submitted to the Examiners of this or any other university, or any material that has been or will be submitted for any other examination.

This Dissertation is 9850 words.

Signed: 

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the implementation of the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme in St Helena, focusing on stakeholder dynamics, power relations, and governance structures. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores how the programme navigates the complex interplay between local autonomy and external support in marine conservation efforts within UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs).

Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including Blue Belt Programme officials and marine conservation experts, were conducted and analysed alongside grey literature such as policy documents. The study reveals a gradual shift towards greater local autonomy in St Helena's marine conservation governance, challenged by resource constraints necessitating UK support. Strategies to balance conservation with local economic needs, such as sustainable use Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and alternative livelihood development, show mixed effectiveness among stakeholder groups.

Key challenges identified include limited local capacity, difficulties integrating local and scientific knowledge, and uncertainty in long-term funding. The Blue Belt Programme's responses include capacity building initiatives, exploration of sustainable financing mechanisms, and development of adaptive management approaches.

The findings highlight the need for flexible, context-specific governance models in implementing large-scale marine conservation initiatives in small island territories, contributing to broader discussions on effective approaches to marine conservation in remote regions, emphasising the importance of genuine stakeholder engagement, innovative financing models, and governance structures that balance local autonomy with necessary external support.

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# 1. Introduction

Marine conservation has emerged as a critical global priority in recent decade, with the establishment of large-scale Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) becoming a key strategy in safeguarding ocean ecosystems (Edgar et al., 2014). Within this context, the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, launched in 2016, stands as one of the most ambitious marine conservation initiatives globally. This programme aims to protect over four million square kilometres of ocean around the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), linking biodiversity protection with sustainable resource management (CEFAS, 2021).

The UK Overseas Territories are a unique geopolitical entity, distinct from both fully independent nations and integrated parts of the United Kingdom. These territories, scattered across the globe from the Caribbean to the South Atlantic, retain varying degrees of self-governance while remaining under the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the United Kingdom (FCO, 2012). These Overseas Territories also lack representation in parliament, creating a complex governance landscape, particularly in environmental management, where local autonomy intersects with UK oversight and support.

Within this framework, St Helena, a small island in the South Atlantic with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spanning over 440,000 square kilometres, serves as a compelling case study. As an Overseas Territory, St Helena operates under a distinct governance structure, balancing local decision-making with support from the UK mainland. This unique relationship has significant implications for the implementation of marine conservation initiatives, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities of large-scale conservation efforts in remote and economically vulnerable regions.

Research has identified several factors critical to MPA success, including no-take zones, strong enforcement, longevity, large size, and isolation (Edgar et al., 2014). Additionally, effective stakeholder engagement has been recognised as crucial for successful marine conservation efforts (Mizrahi et al., 2019). However, the governance dynamics between the UK and its Overseas Territories add further complexity to the implementation of large-scale MPAs, with some scholars critiquing the establishment of very large MPAs (VLMPAs) as

often being driven by international conservation targets rather than local needs (Jones and De Santo, 2016).

## **1.1 Research Gap & Rationale**

Despite the growing body of research on MPAs and marine conservation, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how large-scale conservation initiatives like the Blue Belt Programme are implemented in the unique context of the Overseas Territories. The complex interplay between stakeholder engagement, governance dynamics, and local context in these remote territories has been largely unexplored. Additionally, the specific challenges and opportunities presented by St Helena's unique situation as an Overseas Territory have not been thoroughly examined in the context of the Blue Belt Programme.

## **1.2 Research Aims and Objectives**

This dissertation aims to address this gap by exploring how the Blue Belt Programme navigates the complex interplay of stakeholder engagement, governance dynamics, and local context in implementing marine conservation initiatives in St Helena. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does St Helena's status as an UK Overseas Territory influence power relations between local stakeholders, the St Helena government, and the UK government within the Blue Belt Programme, and what are the implications of these dynamics for marine conservation outcomes?
2. What specific strategies does the Blue Belt Programme employ to balance marine conservation objectives with local economic needs in St Helena, and how effective are these strategies from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups?
3. What are the primary implementation challenges faced by the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena and how effective have the Programme's responses been in addressing them?
4. Based on the experiences of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena, what specific policy and practice recommendations can be made for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of marine conservation efforts in small island UKOTs?

### **1.3 Methodology**

To address these questions, this study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including Blue Belt Programme officials, marine conservation researchers, and experts with experience in isolated coastal communities. These insights are analysed against existing literature on MPA governance, stakeholder engagement, and the socio-economic impacts of marine conservation initiatives. Additionally, a thorough review of grey literature, including Blue Belt Programme reports and policy documents, provides context and supports the interview findings.

The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives, experiences, and interactions of various stakeholders, which are critical to understanding the complex and nuanced nature of stakeholder engagement in marine conservation efforts. This methodology is particularly suited to capturing the depth of stakeholder experiences and the nuances of power dynamics, which may not be readily apparent through quantitative methods (Cloke and Paul, 2004).

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study have potential implications not only for the ongoing development of the Blue Belt Programme but also for broader discussions about effective approaches to marine conservation in small island territories and other remote regions. By focusing on the unique case of St Helena, this research aims to highlight the complexities involved in balancing global conservation goals with local realities and needs. The insights gained from this study could inform more effective and equitable approaches to marine conservation in UKOTs and similar contexts, contributing to both the academic discourse and practical implementation of large-scale marine conservation initiatives.



## 1.5 Key Terms

To ensure clarity throughout this dissertation, it is important to define several key terms:

**Blue Belt Programme** – A UK government initiative launched in 2016 to enhance marine protection across more than four million square kilometres of ocean around the UK Overseas Territories (CEFAS, 2021).

**UK Overseas Territory (UKOT)** – A territory under the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the United Kingdom, but not part of the UK itself. These territories have varying degrees of self-governance and autonomy (FCO, 2012).

**Marine Protected Area (MPA)** – A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (IUCN, 2008).

**Governance Dynamics** – The complex interactions and processes through which decisions are made and implemented, involving various actors and institutions at different levels (Kooiman, 2003).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Representation in UKOTs

The governance structures of UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) like St Helena represent a complex balance of local autonomy and UK oversight, a relationship that has been the subject of ongoing debate and scrutiny, with some scholars and policymakers arguing that it's time to rethink the Overseas Territories relationship with Parliament and government (Clegg and Gold, 2011; House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2019).

A key issue in this debate is the lack of direct representation for UKOTs in the UK Parliament. As Clegg (2009) points out, this absence of formal representation creates a democratic deficit, potentially undermining the legitimacy of UK decisions affecting the territories. This view is echoed by some UKOT residents, as evidenced by Benjamin Roberts from Turks and Caicos, who stated, "in this 21st century, a territory such as [TCI] and all its citizenry have no representation in their so called 'Mother of Parliaments'" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2019, p. 16).

The lack of MPs representing UKOT interests in Westminster stands in stark contrast to the practices of some other countries with overseas territories. In a comparative analysis, Clegg et al. (2022) examine the parliamentary representation of overseas territories in Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, and the United States. They highlight a variety of representation, from full integration into the national parliament to more limited forms of participation. For example, Clegg et al. (2022) note that France has integrated its overseas territories into its parliament, with representatives in both the upper and lower houses. Similarly, Denmark's parliament includes members from Greenland and the Faroe Islands. These examples offer alternative, more inclusive models for representing overseas territories, contrasting sharply with the UK's approach to its own.

However, Corbin (2009) argues that direct parliamentary representation may not be suitable or desired by all UKOTs, given their diverse populations and unique local context. This perspective is supported by evidence from the UK's Foreign Affairs Committee (2019), where Ian Lavarello, the Chief Islander of Tristan da Cunha, expressed that the island did not seek representation in the UK Parliament, preferring instead for multiple MPs to take an interest in the Territory. Councillor Derek Thomas from St Helena shared a similar perspective,

suggesting a committee constituted of existing MPs to represent the OTs as a possible way forward.

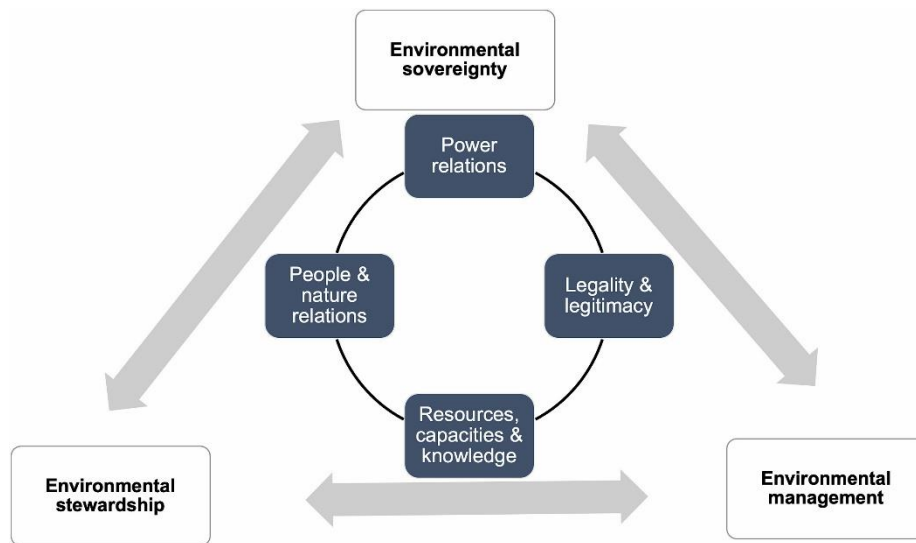
While the UK government provides significant support, the lack of direct representation in Parliament may impact how initiatives such as the Blue Belt are perceived and implemented locally. Clegg and Pantojas-García (2009) argue that reforming UKOT representation in UK governance structures could have significant implications for various policy areas affecting these territories, including environmental management. However, they also caution that any reforms must carefully balance the diverse needs and preferences of different UKOTs.

The governance dynamics and debates about representation in UKOTs provide important context for understanding the implementation of initiatives like the Blue Belt Programme. These complex power relations between different stakeholders can significantly influence the success of conservation efforts in UKOTs and it's important to consider these when analysing marine conservation initiatives in territories such as St. Helena.

## **2.2 Environmental Governance in the United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOT's)**

Montana (2022) explores environmental governance in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), focusing on the power dynamics that influence conservation efforts. By examining the interactions between various stakeholders, Montana highlights the ongoing tension between the environmental priorities of the UK and the specific needs of the UKOTs. The framework presented by Montana offers a lens through which to analyse these dynamics, particularly in relation to power relations, legality, resources, and people-nature interactions, all of which shape environmental sovereignty, stewardship, and management in the UKOTs

(see Figure 1). This approach is particularly relevant to understanding the implementation of initiatives such as the Blue Belt Programme in these territories.



*Figure 1 - The three narratives of responsibility identified for biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories (outer triangle), and the focal areas of enabling and resisting conditions that mediate them (inner circle) (Montana, 2022).*

The first focal area in Montana's framework is power relations, which played a significant role in shaping environmental governance across the UKOTs. Despite the formal devolution of environmental responsibilities to these territories, many interviewees highlighted the variability in the balance of power between the UK and the UKOTs, depending on the local context (Montana, 2022). A recurring concern among interviewees was the extent to which UK priorities, values, and needs dominated discussions about biodiversity conservation, often at the expense of local perspectives. Although the rhetoric around the UKOTs emphasises their right to self-determination, disparities in access to resources, capacity, and knowledge continue to constrain the autonomy of many territories. For example, UKOTs that are more financially independent from the UK are often seen as the most autonomous, while others remain reliant on external support, limiting their ability to fully control their own environmental futures (Montana, 2022).

This struggle for autonomy is also reflected in environmental management, where different government departments often have uneven capacities to fulfil their responsibilities. For example, in some Caribbean UKOTs, planning departments wield far more influence over coastal development than environmental departments. Montana (2022) also notes UK priorities can sometimes overshadow local needs and perspectives in conservation planning,

highlighting how these power imbalances can have significant implications for both governance and conservation outcomes.

### **2.3 St. Helena's Status as an Overseas Territory**

St Helena's status as part of the UK Overseas Territory of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha creates a complex and unique governance context that significantly impacts marine conservation efforts like the Blue Belt Programme. This territory, consisting of three islands in the South Atlantic, presents distinct challenges for governance and environmental management. As Clegg and Gold (2011) explain, UK Overseas Territories are internally self-governing, but the UK retains responsibility for defence and international relations. In the case of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, this creates a multi-layered system of governance. Each island has its own local government structure, but they share a single constitution and are represented by a single Governor appointed by the British monarch (Hendry and Dickson, 2018).

St Helena specifically has a locally elected Legislative Council and Chief Minister, alongside the Governor who retains special responsibilities, including for external affairs. This can create tension when it comes to international conservation initiatives like the Blue Belt Programme, as local autonomy intersects with UK oversight and support. The governance situation is further complicated by the vast distances between the three islands. As Royle (2002) notes, Ascension is over 1,300 km northwest of St Helena, while Tristan da Cunha is some 2,400 km to the south. This geographical spread creates unique challenges for implementing cohesive policies across the territory, including marine conservation efforts.

As Churchyard et al. (2016) observe, while UKOTs are theoretically autonomous in environmental decision-making, they often rely heavily on UK expertise and resources for conservation initiatives. This reliance is particularly significant in St Helena due to its small population and limited economic resources. Montana (2022) argues that this creates a power imbalance where UK priorities can sometimes overshadow local needs and perspectives in conservation planning.

However, Benzaken and Renard (2011) contend that the UKOT status also provides unique opportunities for conservation, allowing small islands to access resources and expertise they

might otherwise struggle to obtain as fully independent nations. In the context of the Blue Belt Programme, this has enabled St Helena to participate in large-scale marine protection efforts that might be beyond its individual capacity.

Understanding these unique governance dynamics is crucial for analysing the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena. This context significantly shapes stakeholder engagement processes, resource allocation, and the overall approach to marine conservation in St Helena and across the broader territory of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

## **2.4 Stakeholder Engagement in Marine Conservation**

Effective stakeholder engagement has been recognised as crucial for successful marine conservation efforts (Mizrahi et al., 2019). However, the nature and impact of stakeholder engagement in marine conservation remain subjects of debate. While Mizrahi et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of stakeholder engagement for MPA success, Jones and De Santo (2016) argue that in large-scale MPAs, local stakeholder input is sometimes sought mainly to gain support for pre-determined plans rather than to genuinely shape conservation strategies, resulting in a disconnect between conservation goals and local needs.

Bennett and Dearden (2014) found that in some MPAs, local communities felt their views were not adequately considered in management decisions, leading to reduced support for conservation efforts. This tension between the ideal and reality of stakeholder engagement is particularly relevant in the context of UK Overseas Territories like St Helena, where power imbalances between local and UK authorities may complicate genuine local participation.

Artis et al. (2020) highlight the complexity of stakeholder dynamics in large-scale MPAs, noting that the success of these conservation efforts hinges on understanding and addressing the diverse perspectives and concerns of all involved parties. They argue for a move beyond mere consultation to meaningful participation in decision-making processes. However, achieving this ideal can be challenging, particularly in remote and economically vulnerable regions like St Helena.

In the context of St Helena, stakeholder engagement must navigate the complex relationship between local communities, the St Helena government, and UK authorities. The island's

small population of 3,979 (as of the end of July 2024) and limited economic diversification make it particularly important to ensure that conservation efforts align with local needs and capacities (St Helena Government, 2024). The Blue Belt Programme's approach to stakeholder engagement in St Helena thus provides a unique case study for understanding how global conservation initiatives can be implemented in small island contexts.

Hogg et al. (2017) explore these challenges through a case study of the Cabo de Palos-Islas Hormigas MPA in Spain, highlighting that conflicts often arise between different stakeholder groups when their interests and goals diverge. These conflicts can significantly undermine the effectiveness of MPAs and lead to resistance from local communities. Their findings suggest that despite high support for stakeholder participation in theory, in practice, the extent and quality of participation in MPA management can be limited by various barriers, including administrative will, funding, and power dynamics between stakeholders. This is particularly relevant to my dissertation, as it reflects the complexities of power dynamics in UKOTs, where the interplay between local governance and external decision-makers often limits genuine stakeholder engagement.

## **2.5 Power Dynamics in Marine Protected Area Management**

The distribution of power among stakeholders significantly influences whose interests are prioritised, whose knowledge is validated, and ultimately, how policies are implemented and enforced in MPA management. Whomersley et al. (2022) highlight that within initiatives like the Blue Belt Programme, despite efforts to include stakeholder voices, the reality often reflects a top-down approach. Decisions are predominantly driven by government agencies and international organisations, which can overshadow the knowledge and needs of local stakeholders, particularly in small, isolated territories like St Helena.

Jones (2014) discusses the risks associated with such power imbalances, noting that when governance is dominated by external actors, it can undermine local stewardship. This exclusion of local stakeholders not only hampers the legitimacy of MPAs but also challenges their long-term sustainability. The imposition of externally driven conservation strategies without adequate local involvement can also lead to resistance, reducing the overall effectiveness of MPAs. Churchyard et al. (2016) note, while UKOTs are theoretically

autonomous in environmental decision-making, they often rely heavily on UK expertise and resources for conservation initiatives.

A key debate in marine conservation literature centres on the effectiveness of large-scale MPAs (LSMPAs). While proponents argue that LSMPAs are necessary to protect highly mobile species and ecosystem processes (Toonen et al., 2013), critics like Jones and De Santo (2016) contend that they often fail to address local conservation needs and can exacerbate social inequities. This debate is particularly relevant to St Helena, where the Blue Belt Programme has established a large-scale MPA in a small island context.

The case of the Chagos Archipelago in the British Indian Ocean Territory provides a stark example of the potential negative consequences of top-down MPA implementation. As highlighted by De Santo et al. (2011), the designation of the Chagos MPA as the world's largest no-take zone has been criticised for its exclusionary practices and the political motives behind its creation. This case highlights the importance of considering local rights and needs in MPA design and implementation, a lesson that is highly relevant to the Blue Belt Programme's work in St Helena.

## **2.6 Gaps in the Literature**

While there is a growing body of literature on marine conservation governance in small island developing states (Gruby and Basurto, 2013; Abecasis et al., 2013), there is a lack of research on marine conservation in UK Overseas Territories. The unique governance arrangements of UKOTs, which combine elements of local autonomy with ongoing ties to the UK, create a distinct context for marine conservation that is not well understood. This study aims to address this gap by examining the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena.

Furthermore, while the literature provides insights into stakeholder engagement and power dynamics in MPAs generally, there is limited research on how these dynamics play out in the specific context of UKOTs. The complex relationship between the UK government and UKOT local authorities in marine conservation governance remains unexplored.

Additionally, there is a need for more research on the long-term socio-economic impacts of large-scale MPAs in small island contexts. While studies have examined the immediate



effects of MPA establishment, less is known about how these impacts evolve over time and how communities adapt to new conservation regimes. St Helena's experience with the Blue Belt Programme could provide valuable insights in this area.

The tensions between local autonomy and external support, between conservation goals and economic needs, and between different stakeholder interests create a challenging environment for initiatives like the Blue Belt Programme. The case of St Helena offers a unique opportunity to examine how these dynamics play out in a small island context. By exploring how the Blue Belt Programme navigates the complexities of stakeholder engagement, governance, and socio-economic impacts in St Helena, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of marine conservation governance in UKOTs and provide insights that can inform more effective and equitable conservation practices.

The theoretical frameworks of social-ecological systems and adaptive co-management provide a solid foundation for analysing these complex interactions. However, their application to the specific context of UKOTs like St Helena remains an area for further research. This study seeks to contribute to this while also providing practical insights that can inform the ongoing implementation and evolution of the Blue Belt Programme.

## **3. Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to address the research questions of this study, which aims to understand how the Blue Belt Programme navigates the complex interplay of stakeholder engagement, governance dynamics, and local context in implementing marine conservation initiatives in St Helena.

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is particularly suited to exploring the complex social, political, and economic dynamics involved in implementing the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena. As argued by Davies et al. (2014), qualitative methods are effective in capturing the depth of stakeholder experiences and the subtleties of power dynamics in complex social settings. This aligns with the study's aim to understand the nuanced processes of stakeholder engagement and power relations in the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams software due to the remote location of St Helena. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. The interview guide (see Appendix 2) was developed based on the research questions and key themes identified in the literature review. It included open-ended questions on topics such as stakeholder engagement practices, governance challenges, and perceptions of the Blue Belt Programme's effectiveness.

## **Sampling**

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select interview participants. This approach was chosen to ensure that key stakeholder groups were represented, including the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) (oversees the Blue Belt), fishery representatives, conservation NGOs, and community leaders. Snowball sampling was also employed where initial participants were asked to identify additional individuals who might provide relevant insights, facilitating access to hard-to-reach stakeholders (Naderifar et al., 2017).

The criteria for selection included:

- Direct involvement in marine conservation efforts in St Helena
- At least two years of experience with the Blue Belt Programme

While this sampling strategy aimed to capture a range of perspectives, the small sample size means that some important stakeholder groups may be underrepresented or absent from the study.

This study initially aimed to conduct 15 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in marine conservation in St Helena. However, due to difficulty accessing participants and time constraints, only 5 interviews were conducted. Although Guest (2006) writes data saturation can often be achieved with as few as 6 interviews, this limited sample size is a limitation of the study, impacting the breadth and depth of perspectives captured and limiting the generalisability of findings. To mitigate this limitation, the study incorporated additional data sources, including grey literature such as policy documents and reports, to triangulate findings from the interviews.

## **3.3 Grey Literature Analysis**

To complement the interview data, a comprehensive review of policy documents and reports related to the Blue Belt Programme was conducted. Documents analysed included:

- Blue Belt Programme annual reports (2016-2023)
- St Helena Government policy documents related to marine conservation
- UK Government policy documents related to the Blue Belt

- NGO reports on marine conservation in St Helena
- Press releases and media coverage of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena

This documentary analysis provided crucial context and supported the interview findings, facilitating a thorough understanding of the initiative's stakeholder dynamics and implementation processes over time.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts and documents were analysed using thematic analysis. This involved not only identifying patterns in the data but also exploring the power structures and governance dynamics driving those patterns (Aitken and Valentine, 2006).

The analysis process followed these steps:

1. Familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and documents
2. Generation of initial codes using NVivo software
3. Searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes
4. Reviewing themes to ensure they work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report, selecting compelling extract examples and relating the analysis back to the research questions and literature

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

This research received ethical approval from the King's College Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1) Key ethical considerations included:

- Informed consent: All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet and signed consent forms before participating in interviews.
- Confidentiality and anonymity: All identifying information was pseudonymised in the final report to protect participants' privacy.
- Data protection: All data was securely stored in accordance with King's College London data protection policies.

### **3.6 Limitations**

While this methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena, it is important to acknowledge its limitations:

- Small sample size: The limited number of interviews restricts the range of perspectives captured and the generalisability of findings.
- Remote data collection: Due to the geographical isolation of St Helena and carbon intensive flight, all interviews were conducted remotely, potentially limiting the non-verbal cues that could be captured in face-to-face interviews such as in Shove (2015).
- Potential bias: The purposive sampling method, while appropriate for this study, may have introduced some bias in participant selection. The reliance on a small number of interviewees increases the risk that the views expressed may not be representative of all stakeholders.
- Limited local perspective: Due to challenges in accessing local participants, the study may not fully capture the scope of local perspectives on the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena.
- Time constraints: The limited timeframe for data collection and analysis may have restricted the depth of exploration possible for each theme identified.

Despite these limitations, this methodology, employing qualitative methods and combining in-depth interviews with grey literature analysis, provides a framework for exploring the complex dynamics of implementing the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena. By triangulating data from multiple sources, this approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both the observable events and the underlying causal mechanisms at play in marine conservation governance in this unique context.

## **4. Data Analysis and Discussion**

This section presents an integrated analysis of key findings from both grey literature sources and qualitative interviews, exploring the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena. By synthesising insights from official reports, critical academic perspectives, and expert interviews, this analysis aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in marine conservation governance in UK Overseas Territories.

The primary grey literature sources examined include Blue Belt Programme reports from 2016 to 2023, offering official narratives on the programme's progress and challenges. These are critically examined alongside perspectives from 'ECOS 43 (3.2.1) - The UK Overseas Territories: Moving Away from Colonialism in the Environment?' by Pienkowski et al. (2023), which provides a counter-narrative to official accounts.

Complementing this documentary analysis, insights from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders are integrated throughout. These interviews, conducted with a local fishers, marine conservation researcher experienced in European MPAs, a Blue Belt Programme official, and a researcher specialising in MPAs in isolated coastal communities, offer valuable on-the-ground perspectives and expert opinions.

By combining these diverse sources, this analysis explores the evolution of stakeholder engagement, power dynamics between local and UK authorities, strategies for balancing conservation with economic needs, and the programme's implementation challenges. This integrated approach allows for a more holistic approach to the research questions, highlighting areas of consensus and contradiction between official narratives and lived experiences.

The structure of this analysis follows the main research question and sub-questions, providing a systematic exploration of the Blue Belt Programme's navigation of marine conservation governance complexities in St Helena. Through this lens, this dissertation aims to offer nuanced insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by large-scale marine conservation initiatives in the unique context of UK Overseas Territories.

#### **4.1 Governance Structures and Power Dynamics**

**RQ1: How do the governance structures of St Helena, as a UK Overseas Territory, influence power relations between local stakeholders, the St Helena government, and the UK government within the Blue Belt Programme, and what are the implications of these dynamics for marine conservation outcomes?**

This section examines how St Helena's status as a UK Overseas Territory (UKOT) shapes the governance structures and power relations within the Blue Belt Programme, and the implications of these dynamics for marine conservation outcomes.

##### **Formal Governance Structures and Constitutional Relationships**

As highlighted by Clegg and Gold (2011), UKOTs are internally self-governing, but the UK retains responsibility for defence and international relations, creating a complex dynamic where local autonomy intersects with UK oversight and support.

The Blue Belt Programme official interviewed for this study emphasised this point:

"The UK overseas territories are constitutionally responsible for their environments... They're responsible for setting the laws, they're responsible for implementing the policies and the management measures."

This statement highlights the formal autonomy of St Helena in environmental decision-making. However, Pienkowski et al. (2023) provide a more critical perspective on this formal autonomy. They argue that "the UK Government's approach has become more colonial in nature, not less" (p. 23), suggesting that despite the constitutional arrangements, there's a growing trend towards centralised control from the UK. This tension between formal autonomy and practical UK influence is a crucial factor in understanding the governance dynamics of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena.

## Resource Constraints and De Facto Power Dynamics

Despite the constitutional autonomy of St Helena, the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme reveals a more nuanced picture of power relations. The same Blue Belt official noted significant resource constraints:

"The territories are supposed to provide the roles themselves, but obviously the limited budget, limited people and everything else constrain this."

This highlights a tension between formal autonomy and practical dependencies. St Helena's limited resources create a de facto reliance on UK support, complicating efforts to achieve genuine local empowerment in marine conservation governance. This dynamic mirrors what Churchyard et al. (2016) observed across UKOTs, where territories often rely heavily on UK expertise and resources for conservation initiatives despite their theoretical autonomy in environmental decision-making.

This dynamic is also highlighted by Pienkowski et al. (2023), who note that "Properly staffed would be over-stating it a little much in most cases. Some of the smallest territories have significantly less than one full-time equivalent staff member" (p. 10). This stark assessment of human resource constraints in UKOTs like St Helena highlights the practical limitations in marine conservation governance in small island states and overseas territories such as St. Helena.

The complexity of governance structures in St Helena reflects broader debates about the nature of sovereignty and self-determination in small island territories. As Baldacchino (2010) argues, the concept of sovereignty in such contexts is often "layered", with multiple, overlapping spheres of authority. This is evident in the case of St Helena, where local autonomy in environmental decision-making intersects with UK oversight and support.

This layered sovereignty has significant implications for marine conservation governance. On one hand, it allows St Helena to access resources and expertise that might be beyond its independent capacity. As one Blue Belt official noted, "We provide like a central surveillance offer where we use satellite surveillance to monitor the marine protected areas." This UK-supported surveillance capacity is crucial for enforcing marine protection in St Helena's vast ocean territory.

However, this support also creates dependencies that can complicate efforts to achieve truly locally-led conservation. As Fisher A expressed, "Sometimes it feels like decisions are made



far away in London without understanding of our life here." This sentiment reflects the ongoing challenge of balancing external support with local autonomy in UKOT governance.

### **Evolving Stakeholder Engagement Processes**

The Blue Belt Programme's approach to stakeholder engagement in St Helena has shown a gradual shift towards more collaborative methods over time. The 2021/22 Blue Belt report marks a significant evolution, stating that the "St Helena Government is now writing regulations to manage tourism and development activities in the MPA" (Blue Belt Programme, 2022, p.12). This suggests a transfer of decision-making power to local authorities, further reinforced in the 2022/23 report which notes that "St Helena Government has worked with the Blue Belt Programme to review and publish an updated Marine Management Plan" (Blue Belt Programme, 2023, p.15).

However, interview data reveals ongoing challenges in achieving a truly collaborative process such as Fisher A who noted it felt decisions were made in London, not St. Helena. This perspective highlights a gap between the programme's intentions and local perceptions of its implementation, suggesting that the unique governance structure and lack of representation of the UKOT's in parliament as mentioned in the literature, can affect how the Blue Belt is perceived in the UKOT's (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2019).

The gap between intentions and local perceptions is further highlighted by Pienkowski et al. (2023), who observe that "decision-making in UK Government bodies about funding and priorities for UKOT conservation has drifted away from involvement of NGOs and others familiar with these issues in the UKOTs" (p. 10). This suggests that despite efforts to increase local engagement, there's been a centralisation of key decision-making processes in the UK, potentially undermining genuine local participation.

### **Knowledge Integration and Decision-Making**

The integration of local and scientific knowledge within the Blue Belt Programme provides another lens through which to examine power dynamics. The Blue Belt official described their approach to engaging with local stakeholders:

"We've helped them develop a marine tourism policy and an accreditation scheme for the marine tourism operators, and in doing that we went and spoke to each of the marine tour

operators to find out what they did and what they thought of the existing scheme and whether training would help."

This statement suggests efforts to incorporate local knowledge into policy development. The official further elaborated on their engagement with other sectors:

"There's only two aggregate extractors who have a really low scale operation on the island, and again myself and [a colleague] at the time went and spoke to both operators to say, just tell us a bit about what you do and where you extract from. Do you plan to expand?"

These examples highlight attempts to gather local insights and integrate them into the programme's decision-making processes. However, the effectiveness of this integration remains questionable, as evidenced by Fisher B's comment:

"Sometimes it feels like they're just talking to us for the sake of it, rather than really listening."

An MPA researcher further emphasised the value of local ecological knowledge:

"In many cases, fishers are going to know a lot more about the marine protected area... They have a better sense of, you know, which quotas need to be respected. And that's thing is fishers actually care about, you know, they care about the ocean, they care about nature. They're not, they're not destroying the environment to destroy it."

This discrepancy reveals ongoing challenges in knowledge co-production and integration, reflecting broader issues in marine conservation governance (Di Franco et al., 2020). It also suggests that despite efforts to engage local stakeholders, UK-based scientific knowledge may still dominate decision-making processes.

Additionally, Pienkowski et al. (2023) raise concerns about the broader context of knowledge integration in UKOTs, noting that "resources to draft and implement legislation in some territories have been lacking" (p. 10). This suggests that even when local knowledge is gathered, there may be structural barriers to translating this knowledge into effective policy and management practices. The authors further highlight that "Even in some of the territories in which UK government controlled the finances or, temporarily, the whole government, priority in legal drafting has often not included environmental matters" (p. 10). This indicates that environmental conservation may not always be prioritised in the governance structures between the United Kingdom and its Overseas Territories.

## **Implications for Marine Conservation Outcomes**

The governance structures and power dynamics observed in St Helena have significant implications for the effectiveness and sustainability of marine conservation efforts under the Blue Belt Programme. While the programme has made strides towards more collaborative approaches, the persistent resource dependencies and power imbalances pose challenges to achieving genuinely locally-led conservation.

On one hand, the UK government's support through the Blue Belt Programme has enabled the establishment of a large-scale Marine Protected Area that might have been beyond St Helena's independent capacity. As Benzaken and Renard (2011) argue, UKOT status can provide unique opportunities for conservation, allowing small islands to access resources and expertise they might otherwise struggle to obtain.

However, the power dynamics inherent in this relationship also risk undermining local ownership and long-term sustainability of conservation efforts. The criticism from Pienkowski et al. (2023) that "the UK Government's approach has become more colonial in nature, not less" (p. 23) suggests that despite increased local authority on paper, the UK government still exerts significant control through funding and priority-setting mechanisms.

This dynamic could potentially lead to conservation measures that are not fully aligned with local needs and realities, as suggested by the scepticism expressed by local fishers. Moreover, the reliance on UK funding and expertise raises questions about the long-term sustainability of conservation efforts if UK support were to diminish.

## 4.2 Balancing Conservation and Economic Needs

### **RQ2: What strategies has the Blue Belt Programme employed to balance marine conservation objectives with local economic needs in St Helena?**

The implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena presents a complex challenge of reconciling marine conservation objectives with local economic realities. This section examines the strategies employed to achieve this balance and the perspectives of various stakeholders on their effectiveness.

#### **Sustainable Use Approach**

A key strategy employed by the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena is the adoption of a sustainable use approach to marine protection. As the Blue Belt Programme official explained in the interview:

"The MPA that's set up is a sustainable use MPA, so the local fishermen are still able to fish there."

This approach aligns with the Blue Belt Programme's broader strategy of supporting sustainable marine management in UKOTs. The 2019/20 Blue Belt report mentions the development of "new policies for marine tourism and marine development activities within St Helena's MPA" (Blue Belt Programme, 2020, p.8), indicating efforts to balance conservation with economic activities.

However, the implementation of this approach is not without challenges. A local fisher (Fisher A) expressed mixed feelings:

"The regulations might be confusing and feel restrictive. I don't know how these are helping the fish stocks."

This perspective highlights the ongoing challenge of translating the sustainable use concept into practice in a way that is both effective for conservation and comprehensible to local stakeholders.

## **Alternative Livelihoods and Economic Opportunities**

The Blue Belt Programme reports indicate efforts to develop alternative livelihoods as part of the conservation strategy in St Helena. The 2021/22 report notes efforts to develop "sustainable financing mechanisms" for the MPA (Blue Belt Programme, 2022, p.16), suggesting attempts to create long-term economic sustainability for conservation efforts.

However, the grey literature analysis reveals potential limitations to this approach. Pienkowski et al. (2023) highlight that "UKOTs are not eligible for [National Lottery funding], despite over 20 years of lobbying by UKOTCF, RSPB, other NGOs and even FCO" (p. 14). This indicates significant structural barriers to sustainable financing for conservation in UKOTs that may impact the Blue Belt Programme, as well as the livelihoods of those on St. Helena.

The perspective of local stakeholders further highlights the challenges in this area. Fisher B expressed scepticism about alternative livelihood initiatives:

"We hear abot eco-tourism, but not everyone wants to become a tour guide."

This comment suggests that current alternative livelihood strategies may not be perceived as sufficiently inclusive or diverse to meet the needs of the entire community.

## **Integration with Other Economic Sectors**

The Blue Belt reports suggest efforts to integrate marine conservation with other economic sectors, particularly tourism. The 2022/23 report again discusses "exploring and testing appropriate sustainable financing mechanisms with UKOTs" (Blue Belt Programme, 2023, p.20), which could include local employment opportunities.

However, Pienkowski et al. (2023) provide a more nuanced view, noting that in some UKOTs, "priority in the deployment of legal draughtspersons has gone to the drafting of agreements with overseas developers which territory governments may hope to generate high short-term financial income" (p. 10). This suggests potential conflicts between conservation goals and other economic priorities that may not be fully captured in the Blue Belt reports.

## Discussion

The efforts to balance conservation and economic needs in St Helena through the Blue Belt Programme reflect broader trends in marine conservation towards more integrated approaches to conservation and development (Bennett et al., 2017). The sustainable use MPA model and efforts to develop alternative livelihoods demonstrate an attempt to align conservation goals with local economic realities.

However, the findings reveal significant challenges in implementing these approaches effectively. The confusion expressed by local fisher about regulations and their impact suggests a potential gap in communication and education efforts. This aligns with findings from other studies on the socio-economic impacts of MPAs, which highlight the importance of clear, transparent communication about conservation measures and their expected benefits (Mizrahi et al., 2019).

The structural barriers to sustainable financing highlighted in the grey literature raise questions about the long-term viability of current approaches. The exclusion of UKOTs from certain funding sources, as noted by Pienkowski et al. (2023), suggests a need for more innovative and diverse financing mechanisms to support marine conservation efforts in these territories.

Additionally, the scepticism expressed by local stakeholders about alternative livelihood initiatives highlights the challenge of developing economic opportunities that are perceived as genuinely inclusive and beneficial to the whole community. This reflects broader debates in the literature about the effectiveness of alternative livelihood projects in conservation contexts (Wright et al., 2016).

The potential conflicts between conservation goals and other economic priorities, as suggested by the grey literature, highlights the complex trade-offs involved in marine conservation governance in small island contexts. These findings align with research highlighting the need for more holistic, integrated approaches to marine spatial planning that can effectively balance diverse economic and ecological objectives (Agardy et al., 2011).

In conclusion, while the Blue Belt Programme has made efforts to balance conservation and economic needs in St Helena, significant challenges remain. The findings suggest a need for more nuanced, context-specific approaches that can effectively address the unique economic constraints and opportunities in small island UKOTs. Future efforts may need to focus on developing more diverse and locally-appropriate economic opportunities, improving communication about conservation measures, and exploring innovative financing mechanisms that can provide long-term support for marine conservation efforts.

### **4.3 Implementation Challenges and Adaptations**

**RQ3: What implementation challenges, particularly regarding long-term funding and sustainability, has the Blue Belt Programme faced in St Helena, and how have these been addressed?**

The implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena has faced various challenges and necessitated adaptations. This section examines these challenges and the Programme's responses, drawing on both interview data and grey literature analysis.

#### **Capacity Building and Local Empowerment**

A recurring theme in both the interviews and grey literature is the importance of building local capacity for marine management. The Blue Belt Programme official emphasised this point:

"Over the years, what we have done as an organisation is we have then been there to offer support through capacity building training, for example and giving them the processes to be able to work too."

This focus on capacity building aligns with the literature on the importance of governance capacity in effective MPA implementation (Van der Molen, 2018). However, the grey literature reveals ongoing challenges in this area. Pienkowski et al. (2023) note that "Properly staffed would be over-stating it a little much in most cases. Some of the smallest territories have significantly less than one full-time equivalent staff member" (p. 10). This suggests significant human resource challenges in implementing and sustaining conservation efforts, aligning with the Blue Belt officials' earlier insights.

"The territories are supposed to provide the roles themselves, but obviously the limited budget, limited people and everything else constrain this." – Blue Belt programme official

The Blue Belt Programme has attempted to address these challenges through various initiatives. The 2021/22 report mentions efforts to develop "sustainable financing mechanisms" for the MPA (Blue Belt Programme, 2022, p.16), which could potentially support long-term capacity building. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms remains unclear which are talked about in the next section.

### **Funding Cycles and Sustainability**

The interviews highlighted challenges related to the UK government's funding cycles and their impact on long-term planning and implementation. The Blue Belt Programme official when asked about the future of the Blue Belt explained:

"We might not be able to support it because we've actually just been given our budget for this financial year and we can't then as a government organisation commit them to doing something that we don't have a secure budget for the following year."

This highlights the tension between short-term funding cycles and the need for long-term, sustained conservation efforts. The grey literature analysis supports this finding, with Pienkowski et al. (2023) noting that "Much of the income of UKOT conservation bodies depends directly or indirectly on revenue from tourists, effectively stopped for several years during the Covid-19 pandemic" (p. 13). This highlights the vulnerability of current funding models to external shocks and the need for more sustainable financing mechanism for conservation efforts as expressed by the Blue Belt official in the interview.

### **Policy and Legislative Challenges**

The Blue Belt reports generally focus on policy development as a positive step, with the 2022/23 report noting that "St Helena Government has worked with the Blue Belt Programme



to review and publish an updated Marine Management Plan" (Blue Belt Programme, 2023, p.15).

However, Pienkowski et al. (2023) highlight broader challenges in this area, noting that "resources to draft and implement legislation in some territories have been lacking" (p. 10). They further state that "Even in some of the territories in which UK government controlled the finances or, temporarily, the whole government, priority in legal drafting has often not included environmental matters" (p. 10).

### **Adapting to Local Context**

The interviews revealed efforts to adapt the Blue Belt Programme's approach to the specific context of St Helena. The programme official emphasised the importance of flexibility:

"We go out to our contacts in the territories, in the government to say what is it you need, where do you need support, where do you need assistance?"

This adaptive approach aligns with recent literature emphasising the importance of context-specific solutions in marine conservation. However, the grey literature suggests that challenges remain in fully realising this adaptive approach. Pienkowski et al. (2023) argue that "the UK Government's approach has become more colonial in nature, not less" (p. 23), suggesting tensions between local adaptation and broader programme objectives.

### **Discussion**

The implementation challenges faced by the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena reflect broader issues in marine conservation governance in small island territories. The focus on capacity building aligns with best practices in conservation that emphasise the importance of local leadership and capacity for long-term success (Brooks et al., 2013). However, the persistent human resource challenges highlighted in the grey literature suggest that current efforts may be insufficient to overcome structural limitations.

The funding challenges reveal a fundamental tension between the long-term nature of ecological processes and the short-term cycles of government funding. This mismatch is a common issue in conservation governance (Balmford et al., 2004), but it appears particularly pronounced in the context of UKOTs due to their unique governance arrangements and economic reliance on the UK.

The policy and legislative challenges highlight the complex interplay between local autonomy and external support in UKOT governance. While the Blue Belt Programme has supported policy development, the grey literature suggests that environmental matters may not always be prioritised in legislative processes, reflecting broader debates about the balance between local self-determination and external support in small island governance (Baldacchino, 2010).

The efforts to adapt to local context demonstrate an awareness of the importance of place-based approaches in conservation (Stewart et al., 2013). However, the tension between this local adaptation and broader programme objectives, as suggested by Pienkowski et al. (2023), highlights the challenges of implementing large-scale conservation initiatives across diverse island contexts such as the UKOT's.

In conclusion, while the Blue Belt Programme has made efforts to address implementation challenges in St Helena, significant obstacles remain. The findings suggest a need for more robust, long-term approach to capacity building, innovative solutions to funding challenges, and more effective mechanisms for balancing local adaptation with broader programme objectives. Future efforts may need to focus on developing more sustainable and locally appropriate governance models that can better withstand external shocks and support long-term conservation goals.

#### **4.4 Critical Analysis**

This analysis synthesises the key findings from our examination of stakeholder engagement, balancing conservation with economic needs, and implementation challenges in the Blue Belt Programme's work in St Helena. By integrating insights from both interviews and grey literature, we can evaluate the Programme's approach in the context of broader marine conservation governance in small island settings.

Our analysis reveals a complex picture of the Blue Belt Programme's implementation in St Helena, characterised by both progress and persistent challenges. The Programme has made strides in moving towards more collaborative planning approaches and attempts to integrate local knowledge into conservation strategies. This is evidenced by the Blue Belt official's statement about consulting local contacts and the Programme's efforts to work with local fishers in mapping important areas.

However, the grey literature, particularly Pienkowski et al. (2023), suggests that these efforts may not be as comprehensive or effective as they appear. The exclusion of NGOs and local experts from decision-making processes, as noted by Pienkowski et al., raises questions about the depth and breadth of stakeholder engagement. This contradiction between the Programme's stated intentions and its practical implementation echoes findings from other studies on large-scale marine conservation initiatives (Jones and De Santo, 2016).

## **4.5 Key Themes and Contradictions**

### **Local Autonomy vs. Resource Dependency**

A central tension emerges between the formal autonomy of UKOTs in environmental decision-making and their practical dependence on UK resources and expertise. This dynamic, highlighted in both interviews and grey literature, complicates efforts to achieve genuine local empowerment in marine conservation governance. It reflects broader issues in UKOT governance identified by scholars like Clegg and Gold (2011), who note the complex balance between self-governance and external support in these territories.

### **Knowledge Integration**

While the Blue Belt Programme claims to integrate local ecological knowledge, perspectives from local fisher suggest this integration may be superficial. This gap between rhetoric and reality in knowledge co-production is a common challenge in marine conservation, as noted by Di Franco et al., (2020).

## **Sustainable Financing**

The Programme's efforts to develop sustainable financing mechanisms contrast with the structural barriers to funding highlighted in the grey literature. This contradiction highlights the challenges of achieving long-term financial sustainability for conservation efforts in UKOTs, reflecting broader issues in conservation finance for small island states (Silver and Campbell, 2018).

## **Adaptive Management vs. Colonial Dynamics**

The Blue Belt Programme's claims of adaptive, context-specific management are challenged by Pienkowski et al.'s (2023) assertion that UK government approaches have become "more colonial in nature, not less." This tension highlights the complexities of implementing large-scale conservation initiatives across diverse island contexts.

## **Evaluation of the Blue Belt Programme's Approach**

The Blue Belt Programme's approach in St Helena reflects broader trends in marine conservation governance towards more participatory, integrated strategies (Bennett et al., 2017). However, our analysis suggests that translating these principles into practice remains challenging.

The Programme's efforts to balance conservation with local economic needs through sustainable use approaches and alternative livelihood development align with current best practices in marine conservation (Christie et al., 2017). However, the scepticism expressed by local stakeholders and the structural barriers identified in the grey literature suggest that these efforts may not be fully effective or sustainable.

The challenges in capacity building and long-term funding highlighted in our analysis reflect common issues in small island conservation governance (Polido et al., 2014). The Blue Belt Programme's struggles in these areas highlight the need for more innovative, context-specific

approaches to building local capacity and ensuring sustainable financing for conservation efforts.

In the context of broader literature on marine conservation governance in small island settings, the Blue Belt Programme's experience in St Helena highlights several key issues:

1. The importance of genuine, deep stakeholder engagement that goes beyond consultation to meaningful co-production of knowledge and decision-making (Gruby et al., 2017).
2. The need for flexible, adaptive governance models that can effectively balance local autonomy with necessary external support.
3. The challenges of implementing large-scale conservation initiatives in diverse island contexts, and the importance of truly context-specific approaches (Jupiter et al., 2014).
4. The persistent influence of historical, colonial relationships on contemporary conservation governance in UKOTs, and the need to actively work to decolonise conservation practices.

## 5. Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena, focusing on the complex interplay between stakeholder engagement, governance dynamics, and local context in marine conservation efforts. Through analysis of grey literature and qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, this study has provided insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by large-scale marine conservation initiatives in UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs).

The findings reveal a nuanced picture of the Blue Belt Programme's implementation in St Helena, characterised by both progress and persistent challenges. The Programme has made significant strides towards more collaborative planning approaches and attempts to integrate local knowledge into conservation strategies. However, structural barriers and power imbalances continue to complicate efforts to achieve genuinely locally-led conservation.

Addressing the research questions, the governance structures of St Helena as a UKOT create a complex set of power relations that significantly influence the implementation of the Blue Belt Programme. While formal structures grant autonomy to St Helena in environmental decision-making, practical realities of resource constraints create dependencies that shape actual power dynamics. This has led to a situation where marine conservation efforts benefit from UK resources and expertise, but also face challenges in achieving genuine local ownership and long-term sustainability.

The Blue Belt Programme has employed several strategies to balance marine conservation with local economic needs in St Helena, including implementing a sustainable use MPA model, developing sustainable financing mechanisms, and supporting marine tourism policies. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies among stakeholder groups, with some viewing the approach positively while others express concerns about long-term impacts on livelihoods. This aligns with findings from other studies on the socio-economic impacts of MPAs, which highlight the importance of clear, transparent communication about conservation measures and their expected benefits (Mizrahi et al., 2019).

Key implementation challenges identified include limited local capacity and expertise, difficulties integrating local and scientific knowledge, logistical issues related to St Helena's geographical isolation, and uncertainty in long-term funding. These challenges reflect broader issues in marine conservation governance in small island territories, as noted by Polido et al. (2014). In response, the Programme has initiated capacity building initiatives, explored sustainable financing mechanisms, and begun developing more adaptive management approaches. However, the long-term effectiveness of these responses remains to be seen.

The experiences of the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena offer valuable lessons for enhancing marine conservation efforts in small island UKOTs. Key recommendations include investing in long-term local capacity building, implementing flexible, adaptive governance structures, strengthening ongoing stakeholder engagement mechanisms, developing frameworks to integrate diverse knowledge systems, and exploring innovative, sustainable financing models. These recommendations align with current best practices in marine conservation governance, which emphasise the importance of adaptive, context-specific approaches (Bennett et al., 2017).

This study contributes to broader discussions on effective approaches to marine conservation in remote regions and small island territories. It highlights the need for conservation

initiatives to navigate complex governance dynamics, balance global conservation goals with local realities, and develop truly context-specific approaches. As Jupiter et al. (2014) argue, successful marine conservation in small island contexts requires approaches that are deeply rooted in local social, cultural, and economic realities.

The findings of this study have implications not only for the ongoing development of the Blue Belt Programme but also for broader marine conservation policy and practice. They highlight the importance of developing governance models that can effectively balance local autonomy with necessary external support, a challenge that is particularly pronounced in the context of UKOTs (Clegg and Gold, 2011). Additionally, this study highlights the need for more innovative, diverse financing mechanisms to support long-term marine conservation efforts in these territories, addressing the structural barriers to sustainable financing noted in the grey literature and in the interviews (Pienkowski et al., 2023).

## **Future Research**

This study has highlighted several areas that warrant further investigation to deepen our understanding of marine conservation governance in UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and similar contexts. Firstly, a comparative analysis of the Blue Belt Programme's implementation across different UKOTs could provide valuable insights into how local contexts shape conservation outcomes. Such research could explore how factors like population size, economic diversity, and historical relationships with the UK influence the effectiveness of marine conservation initiatives. This comparative approach could help identify best practices and context-specific challenges, informing more tailored and effective conservation strategies (Gruby et al., 2017).

Further research is also needed on innovative financing mechanisms for marine conservation in UKOTs. Given the challenges of sustainable funding highlighted in this study, exploring diverse funding models - including public-private partnerships, conservation trust funds, and blue bonds - could provide valuable insights for ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of conservation efforts (Silver and Campbell, 2018).

Additionally, more in-depth research on power dynamics and decision-making processes in UKOT marine governance is warranted. This could involve a closer examination of how

different stakeholders' knowledge and perspectives are integrated into policy-making, and how power imbalances between local and UK authorities are negotiated in practice (Montana, 2022).

Finally, there is a need for research on the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives in UKOTs. Future studies could assess the impact of training programs and knowledge transfer initiatives on local governance capacity, examining how these efforts contribute to more locally-led and sustainable conservation outcomes.

In conclusion, while the Blue Belt Programme in St Helena has made significant strides in marine conservation governance, continued adaptation and responsiveness to local needs and conditions will be crucial for its long-term success and sustainability. By addressing power imbalances, strengthening local capacity, and developing truly context-specific approaches, the Programme has the potential to achieve more equitable and sustainable marine conservation outcomes in St Helena and serve as a model for similar initiatives in other small island territories.

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# 7. Appendix

## 7.1 Appendix 1 – Copy of Ethics Approval Letter

Research Ethics Office

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
5-11 Lavington Street  
London SE1 0NZ  
rec@kcl.ac.uk



27/07/2024

Daniel Spurr

Dear Daniel

Dissertation - Implementation of the Blue Belt in St. Helena

Thank you for submitting your Minimal Risk Self-Registration Form. This letter acknowledges confirmation of your registration; your registration confirmation reference number is MRSU-23/24-45165

### Ethical Clearance

**Ethical clearance for this project is granted. However, the clearance outlined in the attached letter is contingent on your adherence to the latest College measures when conducting your research.** Please do not commence data collection until you have carefully reviewed the update and made any necessary project changes.

Ethical clearance is granted for a period of **one year** from today's date and you may now commence data collection. However, it is important that you have read through the information provided below before commencing data collection:

**As the Minimal Risk Registration Process is based on self-registration, your form has not been reviewed by the College Research Ethics Committee. It is therefore your responsibility to ensure that your project adheres to the [Minimal Risk Guiding Principles](#) and the agreed protocol does not fall outside of the criteria for Minimal Risk Registration. Your project may be subject to audit by the College Research Ethics Committee and any instances in which the registration process is deemed to have been used inappropriately will be handled as a breach of good practice and investigated accordingly.**

### **Record Keeping:**

Please be sure to keep a record of your registration number and include it in any materials associated with this research. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that any other permissions or approvals (i.e. R&D, gatekeepers, etc.) relevant to their research are in place, prior to conducting the research.

In addition, you are expected to keep records of your process of informed consent and the dates and relevant details of research covered by this application. For example, depending on the type of research that you are doing, you might keep:

- A record record of all data collected and all mechanisms of disseminated results.
- Documentation of your informed consent process. This may include written information sheets or in cases where it is not appropriate to provide written information, the verbal script, or introductory material provided at the start of an online survey.  
**Please note: For projects involving the use of an Information Sheet and Consent Form for recruitment purposes, please ensure that you use the KCL GDPR compliant [Information Sheet & Consent Form Templates](#)**
- Where appropriate, records of consent, e.g. copies of signed consent forms or emails where participants agree to be interviewed.

### **Audit:**

You may be selected for an audit, to see how researchers are implementing this process. If audited, you and your Supervisor will be asked to attend a short meeting where you will be expected to explain how your research meets the eligibility criteria of the minimal risk process and how the project abides by the general principles of ethical research. In particular, you will be expected to provide a general summary of your review of the possible risks involved in your research, as well as to provide basic research records (as above in Record Keeping) and to describe the process by which participants agreed to participate in your research.

Remember that if you at any point have any questions about the ethical conduct of your research, or believe you may have gained the incorrect level of ethical clearance, please contact your supervisor or the Research Ethics Office.

### Data Protection Registration

If you indicated in your minimal risk registration form that personal data would be processed as part of this research project, this letter also confirms that you have also met your requirements for registering this processing activity with King's College London in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

More information about how the UK GDPR affects researchers can be found [here](#).

Please note that any changes to the storage, management, or type of personal data being collected should also be included in a modification request.

We wish you every success with your project moving forward.

With best wishes,

The Research Ethics Office

On behalf of the College Research Ethics Committee

## **7.2 Appendix 2 – Interview guide for Blue Belt official**

### **Interview Questions for Blue Belt Official**

#### **Background Questions**

Can you tell me a bit about yourself and how you are connected to the Blue Belt Initiative?

How long have you been involved with the initiative?

#### **Stakeholder Engagement**

How well do you think different groups, like local people, government, and environmental groups, are working together on the Blue Belt initiative?

How has the Blue Belt Initiative engaged local stakeholders in St. Helena?

What were the key challenges in ensuring local community participation?

Do you think stakeholders felt heard in the decision-making process?

How would you describe the power balance between the UK government and local stakeholders?

Were there any resistance or conflicts in decision-making? How were these addressed?

Have there been any key successes in engaging the local community or any lessons learned?

#### **Challenges and Benefits**

What difficulties did you face while working on the initiative?

What good things have come from the initiative?

How has this initiative affected your community or your work?

#### **Community Involvement and Awareness**

How have local people been involved in the initiative?

What has been done to make people aware of the importance of marine conservation?

#### **Future Improvements**

What changes or improvements would you suggest for the Blue Belt Initiative?

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

### 7.3 Appendix 3

#### Participant Information Sheet

This sheet was sent to all participants.

**Participant Information Sheet - MRSU-23/24-45165 / 28/07/**

#### **Title of Study:**

How Stakeholder Dynamics, Power Relations, and the Inclusion or Exclusion of Key Groups Have Influenced the Implementation and Impact of the Blue Belt Initiative in St. Helena

**Department:** Geography Department

**Researcher Contact Information:** Daniel Spurr, [daniel.spurr@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:daniel.spurr@kcl.ac.uk)

**Dissertation Supervisor:** Dr Maud Borie

#### **Invitation to Participate**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If anything is unclear or you would like more information, please feel free to ask. Thank you for considering participating.

#### **What is the Purpose of the Study?**

The study aims to explore how stakeholder dynamics, power relations, and the inclusion or exclusion of key groups have influenced the implementation and impact of the Blue Belt Initiative in St. Helena. This research will contribute to understanding the effectiveness of marine conservation efforts and how they can be improved.

#### **Who is Eligible?**

I'm interested in insights from individuals of all levels of expertise, including but not limited to community leaders, residents, business owners/employees, scientists and marine professionals. The only condition is that you must have been involved in researching or implementing marine protected areas OR have been or are currently a resident of St. Helena.

#### **Do I Have to Take Part?**



Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw, you can request that your data be excluded from the study.

### **What Will Happen if I Take Part?**

If you decide to participate, you will be involved in a one-time interview ranging anywhere from 15 minutes to as long as you're happy to spend. The interview will be conducted via Microsoft Teams and may be audio/video recorded to ensure accuracy. The recording will then be transcribed for analysis.

### **Will I Be Recorded?**

The interview will be audio/video recorded on Microsoft Teams for the purpose of ensuring accurate transcription and analysis. These recordings will be kept confidential and will not be shared outside the researcher. No other use will be made of these recordings without your permission, and no one outside the project will have access to the original recordings.

### **What Are the Possible Benefits of Taking Part?**

While there may not be immediate personal benefits to participating, your insights will contribute to improving marine conservation practices and policies, particularly in how initiatives like the Blue Belt are implemented and managed.

### **What if Something Goes Wrong?**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or your participation, please contact Daniel Spurr.

### **Will My Participation Be Kept Confidential?**

Yes, all the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any reports or publications resulting from this research.

### **Who Is Organising and Funding the Research?**

This research is being conducted by Daniel Spurr as part of an MSc final dissertation at King's College London.

Thank you for your interest in my research!

## 7.4 Appendix 4

### Interview Transcript Excerpt with Blue Belt Official

Daniel Spurr: Do you think like over the years, so now it's been, I don't know like say like 8 years, do you think you're slowly building up the overseas territories' capacity to deal with it themselves? I know obviously there'll always be the need for the MMO to oversee it and sort of check everything, but...

Interviewee: Well, there won't be though. That's kind of the point I'm trying to make 'cause that isn't our role. So if the programme funding finishes, we can't be involved anymore.

Daniel Spurr: Oh.

Interviewee: That's not one of our core roles. So yeah, what we've done over the years... And it's not MMO that funds the role, it is the Foreign Office directly. So for certain territories they have, the Foreign Office has provided funding for new roles in the local governments, but not all of them. Only where there's seen to be a real capacity gap they've put like, like I said, the same kind in the enforcement officers, for example. And Liz, Liz as the programme coordinator there, they provided funding for those roles that provided funding for like an MPA officer in Pitcairn.

Interviewee: And yeah, so they've provided money for some roles, but the territories are supposed to provide the roles themselves, but obviously the limited budget, limited people and everything else.

Daniel Spurr: Yeah.

Interviewee: And then over the years, what we have done as an organisation is we have then been there to offer support through capacity building training, for example and giving them the processes to be able to work too. So for example like in Saint Helena, I think it was the Environment Protection Ordinance.

Interviewee: Didn't actually have any teeth. There wasn't any way for the Environmental Protection officers to actually enforce that legislation. So we've then helped them to sort of put the processes and the systems in place underneath that so that they are then enabled to do their roles or, for example, we've provided training in Intel collection, for example, for the

fisheries officers. You know, if you board a boat, what is it you're looking for and what is it? What should you record so that you've got enough evidence to make a prosecution say, for example?

Interviewee: So we have been upskilling them, upskilling and increasing that capacity as we've gone on. But then when if and when the UK Government funding say it stops, MMO can't continue that role because we're not, we're not set up in a way that we can do that.

Daniel Spurr: Yeah.

Interviewee: So that's why I'm saying there really needs to be more thought given to this longer term sustainable funding.

Daniel Spurr: Yeah, OK. Yeah. 'cause, it's just because, yeah, so that your connection to them is just so you know I hope. And then when the funding stops, you'll be your capacity sort of stops that. Yeah. OK. Yeah. Yeah, I think that's a really important point. I know. Yeah, because it's like a good point. I can sort of, you know, mention I can be like, you know, it's not so much of A. It's not a political thing. It's just that, you know, more of a financial.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Daniel Spurr: Thank you so much, I really appreciate you taking your time. I know you're really busy and we've taken, like, an hour. It's more than... Yeah, like, almost double that anyone else has spent with me.

