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25
YEARS

COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION OF CORAL REEF — ECOSYSTEMS —

and Sustainable Ecotourism Development



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COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION OF CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEMS

AND SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Project number:

VNM/SGP/OP5/Y4/START/2015/03

Duration: 2015 – 2017

Location:

Nhon Hai commune, Quy Nhon city, Binh Dinh province

Implementing agency:

Binh Dinh Fisheries Association

Beneficiaries:

Local people of Nhon Hai commune

Project budget:

UNDP/GEF SGP funding:

1.046.400.000 VND (US\$ 47,978)

Counterpart funding from the provincial

People's Committee:

337.840.000 VND (US\$ 15,490)



Coral reef ecosystems are described as an underwater forest, a habitat for marine species, which help keep marine ecosystems in balance. A substantial decrease in the number of coral reefs will result in severe loss of fish, due to a lack of habitats in which to reproduce. If coral reefs fade away, the food sources of fish will be severely degraded, potentially leading to the extinction of some species which have no place to live and reproduce.

Nhon Hai is a peninsula commune in Quy Nhon city, Binh Dinh province that is

blessed with many coral reefs and seaweed and seagrass carpets. The waters around the commune provide habitat for specific and high-value species, creating a precious source of biodiversity and a valuable landscape to develop tourism. However, an increase in fishing activities near the reef, along with a spontaneous tourism industry that has increased the number of tourists diving to see corals (and at the same time damaging the reefs by dropping anchor and stepping on corals, as well as breaking corals for souvenirs) has resulted in the near-extinction of some of the reefs.



To develop sustainable ecotourism and to continue to enjoy long-term benefits from the coral reefs, the local people must be well aware of, and involved in, conservation efforts. The project "Management and conservation of coral reefs ecosystems associated with ecotourism development in Nhon Hai commune, Quy Nhon city, Binh Dinh province" was introduced by the Binh Dinh Fisheries Association in order to meet these demands.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

- Nhon Hai is a commune located on the Phuong Mai Peninsula in Quy Nhon city, Binh Dinh province, Vietnam. The commune's natural area is 1,200 ha, of which 91.46% are arid hills, craggy cliffs and valleys. To the east, west and south, the commune is bordered by the sea with a total coastline of around 15 km.



- The waters of Nhon Hai commune area diverse ecosystem of coral reefs, which are home to valuable species of fish, coral, seaweed, lobsters, sea urchins, starfish, etc. The diversity of coral reef ecosystems in these waters is also manifested by the presence of marine turtles, which feed and spawn in the waters. (Marine turtles are listed as rare animals in the Red Book of Vietnam).
- From Hòn Khô Lớn to Hạng Yên, coral reefs cover about 36 ha with various species, including hard corals and soft corals, which are morphologically diverse, creating a magnificent aquatic landscape. Since 2012, this area has attracted thousands of visitors who come here for sea tourism and diving to observe thereof. However, as the number of tourists has increased, the coral reef ecosystem has been severely affected. Many areas of corals are broken because of diving activities. Fisheries products in the reefs are exhausted due to excessive exploitation for tourists' consumption. In the near future, coral reefs may be damaged beyond recovery unless there is a management and conservation measure from the government with the participation of local people. Achieving a balance between preserving coral reef ecosystems and developing tourism is an important goal of the locality.
- In 2015, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, Global Environment Facility - Small Grants Programme, the People's Committee of Binh Dinh province agreed with the proposal from the Fisheries Association and the People's Committee of Nhon Hai commune on the implementation of the project "Management and conservation of coral reef ecosystems associated with the development of community-based ecotourism in Nhon Hai commune, Quy Nhon city, Binh Dinh province" from September 2015 to December 2017.



Vietnamese seawaters are home to about 340 species of coral among 800 species in the world, widely distributed from the north to the south. Coral reefs in the seawaters of Vietnam play a very important role, from regulating the marine environment to providing nutrients in the sea through biochemical processes. At the same time, the reefs provide habitats for breeding and nursing of larvae of many aquatic species, including many species of seafood, both on the coast and seasonally from offshore.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES



Raise awareness and capacity of local authorities and people on management, conservation and sustainable exploitation of coastal reefs in Nhon Hai commune (Quy Nhon city, Binh Dinh province) through communication solutions integrated with the activities of the local association.



Develop a pilot model of community participation in management, monitoring and conservation of coral reefs in Hon Khoi area, Nhon Hai commune.



Set up pilot models of cooperatives for public-utility services in tourism and aquaculture business activities on the principle of providing environmental protection services and natural landscapes of coral reefs for the development of ecotourism, promoting employment and gender equality.

HIGHLIGHT INITIATIVES

COMMUNITY MODEL OF PARTICIPATING IN CORAL REEF PROTECTION COMBINED WITH TOURISM

1. Assess the status:

- Monitoring workshop
- VHD expert and 10 fishermen

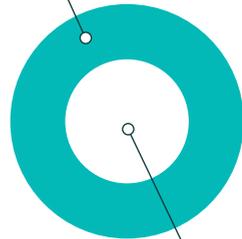
2. Elaborate the zoning plan:

- PA expert (fishermen and CQ consultants)
- Two community and authority level workshops

3. Conduct the zoning for protection:

- Put the float on the signboard
- The Commune People's Committee announced the zoning and set up a security group of 8 people
- On-duty security associated with tourism business

Floating boats



REEF

Using floating boats for on-duty security and tourism is an initiative of the Youth Union of Hải Bắc village.

COMMUNITY MODEL OF ECOTOURISM COOPERATIVE

- Collecting public services as the focus for creating cooperative prestige
- Commune members contribute capital to build the commune's first tourism pier
- Improve waste collection services to protect the environment
- Establish green tourism image for Nhon Hai commune



RESULTS

1

Local authorities and people are well aware of the importance of coral reef ecosystems to their aquatic resources and livelihood; they are equipped with basic knowledge and skills to carry out management, conservation and sustainable exploitation of coral reefs in Nhon Hai commune.

2

A pilot model of community participation in zoning, monitoring and protection of coral reefs has been established and is operating well.

3

Nhon Hai Fisheries Tourism Cooperative is the first cooperative established in Binh Dinh Province. Its mission is to provide public services for environmental protection and natural landscapes for community ecological tourism development. After nearly two years of operation, the cooperative has well performed in garbage collection services, cleaning the environment, investing in the construction of wharves, protecting coral reefs and guiding visitors, etc. and help achieving the standards of “new rural areas”. The demonstration is also supported by the local government and is being replicated by neighboring communes.

□

PROJECT'S IMPACTS

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS

- The activities of the coral reef conservation community cooperative have had great impacts on the community's awareness. The number of violations such as anchoring and breaking corals have been reduced. The coral reef area is well protected. Local people comply with regulations and guidelines from the coral conservation cooperative.
- The results of coral reef survey in Nhon Hai in 2017 show that the coral coverage in the protection zone has significantly increased, ensuring shelters for aquatic species to breed and develop, contributing to raised value of marine ecosystems benefits, including increasing aquatic resources and keeping ecological landscapes for tourism development.





Binh Dinh - Viet Nam

Photo : Thu Huyen

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

- The tourism and fisheries cooperative has created favorable conditions for small-scale tourism households to cooperate in business in the form of collective economy, effectively supporting the Commune People's Committee to implement public services such as garbage collection, wharf services, station services and coral conservation, etc. to create jobs for more than 30 youth employees, contributing to environmental protection and ensuring security for the local area. Although it has only been in operation since the end of the 2016 tourist season, the cooperative has served more than 400 visitors, creating an additional income of 500,000 VND per month on average for commune members who participated.
 - The garbage-collecting team in the cooperative provided an addition income of 1 million VND per person per month. Women on the team were supported with utensils to produce soft drinks from local seaweed to increase their income.
 - Members of the coral reef monitoring and conservation team have earned an income of 100,000 VND per person per day.
- " Although the cooperative has been newly established and operating from 6/2016 to October 2017, it has served 15,400 visitors, including 15,000 visitors to the coral reef protection zone, generating additional income of VND 500,000/person/month for the cooperative members who directly participate in the service. "*

SOCIAL IMPACTS

- **Through training activities of the project**, the people, commune staff and cooperative members, etc. have gained knowledge about laws, ecological protection and the tourism business. Key members are trained in basic skills such as coral-reef monitoring, business management and communication to keep the environment clean and to develop ecotourism for the locality.
- **The percentage of female members** participating in the project model is over 30%, in which 12 women benefit directly from the services of the cooperative (garbage collection and tourism services). Women participate in seaweed softdrink production to increase income.
- **Mobilize young people** to play a key role in the Board of Directors and cooperative group.
- **The establishment of a bài chòi folk team of Nhon Hai commune** is supported by the project, which brings together bài chòi artisans. A community center and equipment are provided to help preserve traditional cultural values of the fishing villages and to increase cohesion in the community. The team also composed and performed songs about protecting coral and the marine environment for visitors and the community, creating an attraction from indigenous culture and becoming a local tourism specialty. The team is invited to participate in competitions and in performances for tourists, which generates an income of VND100,000 per person per performance for participating members.

ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPE

- **The hygiene on both banks of the peninsula and in the water** is greatly improved from the active participation of the cooperatives and coral reefs conservation team. The beach of Nhon Hai commune is no longer dumped with rubbish, there is a wharf for tourists, the port for the coral reefs protection station and tourists guiding point., contributing to attracting tourists and ensuring environmental criteria to help Nhon Hai commune reach the new rural standard.



POLICY IMPACTS

- The project has assisted in drafting the provisional regulations on management of tourism activities of Nhon Hai Commune following the principle of "sustainable tourism development as prepared by planning and plan to ensure harmony among economic, cultural, social and environmental aspects. Conservation of tourism resources including ecosystems, natural life of animals and plants ... ". This is the first legal document on the management of local tourism activities issued by the Quy Nhon City People's Committee".



SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICATION

- The coral protection community for tourism development is a logical link between conservation activity and community interest. In Nhon Hai, the local people proposed the zoning area and supported the activities of the coral reef conservation community team. The Coral Reef Conservation raft combined with the Guiding Tourists on Watching Coral Reefs initiative, proposed by the community, has generated income. To link benefits with conservation is the basis for maintaining this model.
- The community-based ecotourism model is in its infancy, facing many difficulties. However, in order to ensure healthy competition with enterprises in the market economy, households have to participate in cooperatives to survive. On the other hand, to implement collective economic standards (the new set of rural criteria), the Quy Nhon City People's Committee has directed the Commune People's Committee to support stabilizing the cooperative, making public services (garbage collection, parking lots etc.) as a basis for maintaining and expanding business activities; and at the same time, has directed the neighboring communes to learn from Nhon Hai's experience to set up similar cooperatives as a core in the development of community tourism.

" Thanks to the project successes, the People's Provincial Committee of Binh Dinh has agreed to assign Nhon Hai Fisheries Tourism Co-operative to continue managing and protecting coral reefs in Hon Kho Nho where the project has piloted the community coral protection zoning "

LESSON LEARNED

1

The consent of the community and stakeholders and the unification of the guiding views of the provincial and grassroots levels of government are the prerequisites for the success and replicability of the models.

2

The conservation of the ecosystem must be linked to the community's interests, especially the interests of the people who are involved in ecosystem services.

3

Encouraging and using community-based indigenous knowledge and innovations when developing models will reduce costs, improve compliance and help people take full advantage of the initiative.

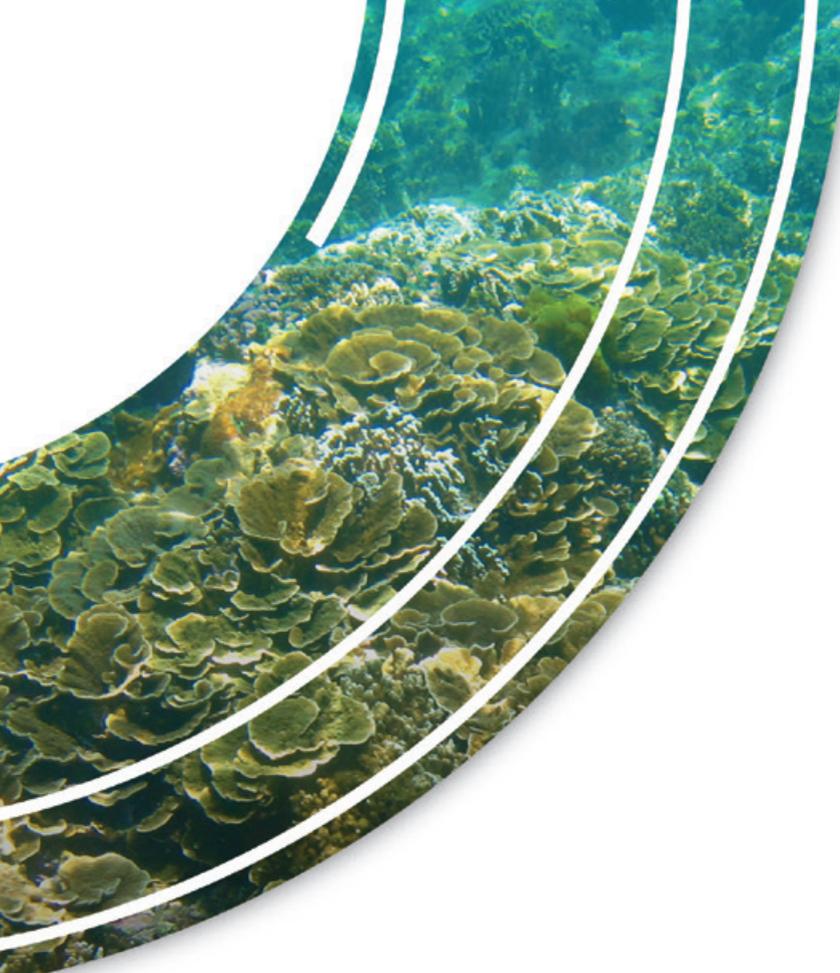
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Establishing a legal basis for models and finding sustainable financing requires that the project team must be professionally qualified, have good understanding of legal documents, and be eager and persistent on the goals.

5

It is important to understand ongoing local programs and projects to link activities and utilize resources to increase the effectiveness of the project.





THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME

Address: 304 Kim Ma, Ba Đình, Hanoi, Vietnam

Tel: +84-24 385 00150

Email: gef-sgp-vietnam@undp.org

Website: www.vn.undp.org | www.sgp.undp.org

BINH DINH FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

Address: 110 Tran Hung Dao, Quy Nhon, Binh Định

Tel: 0563 683114