

Marine Conservation and Fisheries Management Outreach

Campaign for the Gulf of Honduras

Project executed from July 1999 to August 2000

TIDE

Toledo Institute for Development and Environment

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Acerca de esta publicación

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Las opiniones e ideas presentadas aquí no son necesariamente respaldadas por USAID, PROARCA/CAPAS, o CCAD, ni representan sus políticas oficiales.

About this publication

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Presentación

CAPAS es uno de los componentes del Programa Ambiental Regional para Centroamérica (PROARCA), que responde a la necesidad de apoyar la agenda de la Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo (CCAD) y es financiado por la Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID). Por sus siglas en inglés, CAPAS significa Sistema Centroamericano de Áreas Protegidas.

En Centroamérica la responsabilidad de conservar y manejar adecuadamente los recursos naturales de la región recae tanto en entidades de gobierno así como en organizaciones de la sociedad civil. Se ha comprobado que las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) mantienen protagonismo constante en propuestas y acciones para conservar los recursos del área.

Consciente de este esquema y como parte fundamental del proyecto, PROARCA/CAPAS tiene como uno de sus objetivos fortalecer la participación de organizaciones, profesionales y comunidades -que conforman el sector ambientalista y social no gubernamental de Centroamérica- en actividades que benefician a la conservación y el uso sostenible de los recursos naturales de la región. Para alcanzar este objetivo, PROARCA/CAPAS a partir de 1997 ha brindado a las ONG financiamiento bajo el esquema de pequeñas donaciones.

Para el período 1999-2000, PROARCA/CAPAS por medio de un proceso de competencia seleccionó a 25 organizaciones de la región centroamericana para la ejecución de proyectos específicos. Dichos proyectos cubren uno o más de los siguientes temas:

- Areas Protegidas
- Ecoturismo
- CITES
- Tierras Privadas
- Agricultura y Forestería Pro Ambiental
- Coordinación transfronteriza
- Cambio Climático

Para PROARCA/CAPAS es de mucha satisfacción presentar el informe **Marine Conservation and Fisheries Management Outreach, Campaign for the Gulf of Honduras** entre los informes técnicos finales presentados por las ONG. PROARCA/CAPAS desea agradecer a todas las organizaciones y personas que participaron en la elaboración de este trabajo.

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I. Objectives

1. Create information (in English and Spanish) on the status of the fisheries, and on sound marine conservation and fisheries management for the Gulf of Honduras
2. Identify and train trainers in sound fisheries management and marine conservation.
3. Create three national forums (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras) to recommend means to harmonize tri-national fisheries policies and laws.

II. Methods

- 1.a. Augment current information in the three fishermen surveys (Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras) with inputs from fisheries biologist and economist, write (in English and Spanish), edit, and lay out information in an accessible manner to a broad readership. Present information in documents entitled, "Voice of the Fishermen."
- 1.b. Create additional educational materials to accompany the Voice of the Fishermen for use in train-the-trainer courses on sound fisheries management.
2. Organize and coordinate three train-the-trainers courses on sound fisheries management for strategically selected artisanal and commercial fishermen, government organizations, and NGOs.
- 3.a. Organize and coordinate three national-level workshops with participation from stakeholders in all sectors and recently trained trainers to disseminate the "Voice of the Fishermen."
- 3.b. Compile results into a tri-national document which will provide the basis for regional discussions and the harmonization of fisheries and conservation policies and laws.
- 3.c. Maintain contact with new trainers to request feedback on success of disseminating information on sound fisheries management and marine conservation.

III. Products and Final Results

- 1.a. Bound and circulated copies of the Voice of the Fishermen documents reflecting each country's survey results.
- 1.b. Course materials on sound marine conservation and fisheries management for train-the-trainers courses.
- 2.a. Three train-the-trainers courses held on sound fisheries management and marine conservation linked to national workshops (one per country).
- 2.b. 30 trainers trained in sound fisheries management and marine conservation.
- 3.a. Workshops to discuss marine and fisheries laws and policies in the context of the "Voice" documents (one for each country).
- 3.b. Recommendations on fisheries policies for the Gulf of Honduras compiled and distributed from all three national meetings.
- 3.c. Feedback from trainers regarding their perceptions on "Voice of the Fishermen" as influencing fisheries management and marine conservation policies.

IV. Project achievements

1. "Voice of the Fishermen" Documents

For the first time a genuine effort was made to meet with the fishermen of the entire Gulf of Honduras with a view of producing a document that reflected what the fishermen are actually saying. We wanted to document where they live and work, and get their thoughts on the state of their fisheries, the causes of the decline, and possible solutions to the problems. Fishermen were informed that this document would honestly reflect what they were actually saying and not what some technical person thought they should be saying.

The fishermen's knowledge and recognition of the issues affecting them, and the needed solutions, was impressive. They have a good grasp of real issues, and show great willingness to become a part of the solution.

It must be noted also that while many of the issues in the three "Voices" are similar, great effort was made to consider the individual concerns of each country. These documents explore local issues of each country, as well as the central issues important to the entire Gulf. The "Voices" not only outline the

issues, but also suggest solutions from the fishermen and the group of technical people who worked on the project.

2. Workshops

A part of this project was a series of three workshops, one in each country, involving more than 40 fishermen. The intent was to make these into “train-the-trainers” workshops. In reality the workshops were educational workshops on “Marine Biology and Fisheries Management” than they were train-the-trainers workshops. These courses were well attended, the materials presented were very helpful, and the practical courses were excellent (i.e., preparation of smoked fish, fly-fishing, and ecotourism).

The greatest achievement of these workshops was to provide both scientific explanations and a search for practical solutions. The scientific information on fisheries ecology was presented with drawings, pictures, and maps to make it both interesting and easily understandable. Time was spent outlining the direct benefits of protected areas and the part that NGOs can play in assisting local communities to develop skills so that they can benefit from the creation of these protected areas. The participants of these workshops were carefully chosen, and in all three countries were made up of the key fishermen in the areas. Discussions were open and frank, assisted by the fact that the course organizers had a genuine understanding of the issues, and did not try to provide solutions to the fishermen as much as listen to them.

Some weaknesses surfaced, mainly the difficulty of organizing tri-national workshops. Owing to the fact that TIDE was chosen to manage this project, it may have looked as if the workshops were local for TIDE. Thus other NGOs vital to the proper planning may not have invested the effort and time needed to properly contribute to the tri-national effort, particularly in the case of Guatemala. The workshop held in Livingston was not as well organized as it should have been, and the participants were only from Livingston. TRIGOH has to clarify that while one NGO may be chosen as Coordinator for a tri-national project, its success is dependent on a genuine tri-national effort.

Another weakness surfaced in the workshop in Livingston. There was an apparent lack of trust on the part of the fishermen. They were not as forthcoming with information as were their counterparts in Belize and Honduras. It is, however, not within the scope of this project to analyze the causes of this frustration, except that it affected the quality of information in the workshop. The fishermen in Livingston, however, were well informed and totally knowledgeable of the issues affecting them.

3. Trans-Boundary Dialogue

Probably the most important achievement of this project was to initiate dialogue at the level of fishermen to fishermen. While there are bodies that regularly carry out dialogue at a level of government to government and on a technical level, to TIDE's knowledge no effort has been made at initiating dialogue at the local level. Laws are made at the government level. For changes to be realized however, the local fishermen must be convinced that these changes are in their best interest. It has already been proven that laws alone do not provide solutions. Belize has good laws protecting its fishing seasons and size of catch. It has never, however, been able to successfully enforce these laws, particularly in the southern part of the country.

This project used information on fisheries ecology to inform the fishermen of the Gulf about the need for closed seasons, for protecting mangroves, for protecting spawning aggregations, and against using nets that can destroy their way of life as they know it. While there are political borders, these borders are not relevant to marine life. If the Gulf of Honduras fishery is to be protected and to remain an important economic factor to the people of the Gulf, then all must work together for its protection. Fishermen from all three countries were made aware of what is taking place with their neighbors. Lines of communications were opened that the NGOs must work hard to keep open.

4. Fishermen Exchange

This was not listed as an objective in the original proposal. After attending all three workshops and listening to what the fishermen were saying, I as Project Coordinator felt that it was vital to demonstrate to the fishermen the reality of some of the solutions that we had discussed in the workshops. The Fishermen Exchange, in reality, was an effort on the part of TIDE and the fishermen of southern Belize, who through the efforts of TIDE had been trained as sports fishermen. A group of individuals from Belize journeyed to Guatemala and Honduras in an effort to train their colleagues in fly-fishing and value-added fish products. This activity not only provided training, but it also allowed the fishermen from the three countries to visit their colleagues where they live, to better understand their situation, and to take a shared approach to solutions.

Additionally, fisherman from Honduras were brought to Belize. There they not only received training, but also were given lectures and field trips to successful protected areas. In this way they learned firsthand about the benefits to be derived from having these protected areas. This cross-country visitation was a huge success, and one that needs to be continued and built upon.

5. Fisheries Policies for the Gulf of Honduras

One of the central objectives of this project was to come up with specific recommendations on fisheries policies and laws for the Gulf. Because this document is named "Voice of the Fishermen," the recommendations were divided into those that came directly and unedited from the fishermen, and those that came from the technical people involved in the project.

The fishermen are very clear and direct in their recommendations. Success of the entire project will be judged on how successful the efforts are to bring all the parties together to analyze these recommendations and address them in the near future.

6. National Workshops

Because of time constraints, this objective was not carried out.

V. Project evaluation

The issues under this heading have been addressed in other areas of this report. This project failed in one main area--- it was not completed within the allocated time, and it did not carry out its objective of having the three national workshops. It had been decided not to have a tri-national workshop, as other organizations more capable of carrying out this objective were presently involved in doing so. While the Coordinator of this project must accept some blame for not bringing in this project on time, it was in essence a difficult and frustrating project. The project was not one that the Coordinator worked on from its inception, and its success was dependent only on certain factors beyond his control. There were essentially two major problems:

1. The Editor and Project Consultant became involved in other very important projects, which affected their ability to give time and effort for "Voices." They may have underestimated the time and commitment that is involved in successfully carrying out a project of this nature. They did a fantastic job in the end, but valuable time was lost that adversely affected the project and made it impossible to realize all its objectives.
2. PROARCA/CAPAS accounting policies were often very difficult to understand. TIDE engaged the services of a professional accountant particularly for this project. This accountant was taken to CAPAS office in Guatemala City and spent a few hours with CAPAS financial assistant for this project. Obviously there were some misunderstanding as far as what was expected, as there were many e-mails regarding what was acceptable before a second disbursement could be made. This held up the project for more than three months. I understand and respect CAPAS

for its stringent financial control. I do think, however, that CAPAS was inconsistent in what they requested, and that CAPAS may have changed its report form on more than one occasion.

The understanding and assistance provided by Teresa Robles and her team was much appreciated and vital to the success of this project. They were professionals that were always willing to go the extra mile to see the project succeed. As coordinator I cannot overemphasize my appreciation for their assistance. I do not see anything else that I would change. If I am to coordinate any project with CAPAS in the future, I would only have to be sure that its success was dependent on the efforts of TIDE and not on any factor beyond our control.

VI. Recommendations for the future

1. National and Tri-National Workshops

The national and tri-national workshops need to be held. This is the forum where governments, NGOs, and fishermen will sit together. It is essential that the “Voices” reach those who are in a position to make decisions, and that the NGOs and fishermen keep pressure on these individuals to make decisions. If this is not done, then these documents like many others will have provided good data but nothing towards a solution.

2. Continue Fishermen Exchange Program

NGOs have worked hard over the past years to gain community support for protected areas, to change methods of fishing, and to seek alternative economic livelihoods. The communities have in essence bought into these ideas, in some cases wholeheartedly, and in others still looking and analyzing. It is now necessary for the NGOs to deliver or lose this vital support that they now have.

Activities such as the Fishermen Exchange can go a long way towards building community faith and support. Not only is training provided in economic alternatives, but also the trainers are themselves fishermen. These are people who have tried and proven that not only do these alternatives exist, but also that they are economically viable and utilize the same skills that make them good fishermen. In addition the trainers are given the opportunity to understand more about their counterparts in other areas of the Gulf. The hope is that as organizations such as TRIGOH seeks to establish a tri-national ecotourism destination, individuals in the communities will be prepared for this future reality. This project also emphasized the “train-the-trainers” concept, whereby those trained will actually become trainers themselves.

3. Tri-National Projects

This project highlights the need for more careful planning and understanding of tri-national projects. As TRIGOH seeks to involve itself in transboundary projects such as this one, it is necessary that the different NGOs understand not only the necessity of working together, but also the importance planning carefully so that these projects can be successful. Projects that are tri-national, even if coordinated by one NGO, need that commitment and cooperation to succeed. This project would have been even more successful if it had had this type of commitment from all concerned.

4. Voice of the People

This project made a genuine attempt to record the voices of the fishermen. There are other voices out there with other genuine concerns. One important lesson learned from this exercise is that the local communities not only know and understand problems and causes, but also solutions. Moreover, they also want and need to be a part of any lasting and successful solution. There must be a genuine commitment on the part of all concerned, especially NGOs, to involve the communities at every level of planning and development. Just as this project focused on the voice of the fishermen, there may be a need to create other “voices” in the future that will address other concerns such as tourism development, culture, garbage collection, shrimp farming, and other concerns of the Gulf.

VII. Conclusion

The Gulf of Honduras is a body of water shared by Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. It represents the means of living for thousands of residents. This project sought to bring the voices of many of these individuals to the forefront. For the first time the voices of the fishermen have been heard and documented for all to hear. These fishermen share one thing in common – the Gulf of Honduras. This project is a vehicle through which we can all learn more about how we feel, think, and dream individually and collectively. It provides a vision through which we can work towards a common goal.

This was a well-conceived project that represented a refreshing change to the usual consultancy reports with a string of often empty recommendations. The documents are well presented and encapsulate an impressive amount of information in an unthreatening way. It is vital that the recommendations are not left hanging, but that serious efforts are made to carry out these recommendations. It is generally accepted that for fishermen to accept changes and restrictions on fishing, they have to be active in the discussion of the proposals. While this is often dependent on their capacity for organization and

self-enforcement, the principle remains: fishermen must be kept involved at all stages if these recommendations are to be successful.

It is vital that projects of this type be nurtured and allowed to succeed. If indeed our people are our greatest asset, then we must provide the forum through which their voices can be heard. Secondly, we must provide the training that will allow them to maximize their natural skills and wisely utilize this Gulf. By doing this, we will make them its greatest protector.