
Local Government Initiative

The coral reefs in the Lingayen Gulf are some of the most endangered in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. Thousands of people directly depend upon the gulf's coral reefs for food, but fisheries catch is typically low due to overfishing and persistent destructive fishing, although some effort is being exerted to reduce or eliminate them. Poor coastal zoning and negligent coastal development result in siltation and contribute to pollution of reefs.

The degradation persists because governance institutions have limited capability to implement and sustain measures to manage their coral reefs or coastal resources. Local government authorities responsible for coastal management often do not have access to critical information or technology to mitigate threats to their resources. Many laws to protect the viability of coral reef resources have been created and promulgated, but local governments have insufficient capacity to enforce these laws.

The downward spiral endures in many areas in the region because of a lack of awareness on the part of stakeholders, particularly the resource users themselves, on the importance and thresholds for exploitation of their coral reef resources. This lack of awareness limits participation and compliance by local communities to coastal management efforts.

As the designated CRTR Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Southeast Asia, the University of the Philippines (UP) Marine Science Institute was responsible for implementing the CRTR Program's Local Government Initiative in order to contribute to capacity building for science-based management of coral reefs in the Philippines, and provide inputs to policy decisions at the local and regional level.

The primary objective of the Local Government Initiative is to reach out to local governments and communities associated with the CoE to share new knowledge about threats to coral reefs within an integrated coastal resources management framework, what measures can be taken locally to address these threats, and to facilitate informed decisions and appropriate actions by resource managers.

Strategies and approaches Used

The Local Government Initiative focused on the coastal municipalities surrounding the Lingayen Gulf in northwestern Philippines, starting with Bolinao, Pangasinan, where the CoE has done extensive research and development. The UP Marine Science Institute has supported capacity building programs in the area through various projects since the mid-1980s. For the Local Government Initiative, the primary stakeholders were officials and technical staff of local governments as they are mandated by Philippine laws, specifically *Republic Act 7160* (the Local Government Code) and *Republic Act 8550* (the Philippine Fisheries Code), to protect, conserve and manage fishery and coastal resources within their respective municipal waters with the active participation of various stakeholders. This is an imperative given that critical ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass areas are located within the jurisdiction of local government.

Identifying the issues

Building on the learnings and outcomes of previous coastal resources management initiatives in the Lingayen Gulf area, a series of consultations with different audiences from community leaders to municipal mayors were carried out to identify the most prominent issues relating to coral reef management that still need to be addressed. The major issues stakeholders identified which continue to threaten coral reef were:

- destructive and illegal fishing practices
- pollution primarily from intensive mariculture
- sewage
- siltation
- effective enforcement of laws pertaining to these issues.

Science-based decision support

To enhance local experiences and knowledge with scientific information derived from research, a series of seminars and workshops were organized to provide a venue to exchange knowledge among LGU, stakeholders and scientists to address key issues and provide science-based decision support. The Local Government Initiative:

- provided technical inputs for the refinement or legislation of appropriate legal instruments and recommendations for the strengthening of existing law enforcement bodies
- gave technical advice to improve enforcement of existing Marine Protected Areas
- assisted in the establishment of Marine Protected Areas in other localities in the region.

Information, education and communication

To enhance the capacity of stakeholders to understand, initiate and support current and future programs for the conservation and protection of coral reef resources, IEC (information, education, communication) activities and

packages were developed, disseminated and used as inputs for various local and national fora including:

- Coastal Resources Management Forum
- Workshop on Sustainable Mariculture
- Videoconference: Establishing Resilient Networks in the face of Climate Change.

For local government leaders and mid-level managers, short, clear-cut presentations or lectures on basic marine ecological concepts and manuals on best practice for coral reef management were helpful in creating interest in coral reef management issues that are in need of support, and in better appreciating coral reef dynamics.

For members of local communities with more limited educational experience, simplified lectures and posters were provided. At this level, the focus were on raising the communities' level of awareness of the importance of coral reefs in their daily lives, to make them conscious of the vulnerability of reefs to various types of stresses, both natural and anthropogenic and on what they can do to help improve coral reef management. Where appropriate, traditional local knowledge was incorporated into the educational packages.

The CoE took the lead in packaging, publishing and disseminating an MPA Enforcement Protocol Guide (*Gabay Hinggil Sa Pagpapatupad ng mga Batas ng Sanktwaryo sa Bolinao, Pangasinan*) to help improve the law enforcement activities covering the eight MPAs in the municipality and serves as a guide for enforcers to discharge their duties and functions effectively.

Outcomes

The Local Government Initiative has contributed to cultural and practice change amongst local governments in the Lingayan Gulf. Outcomes include:

- Better informed local government leaders who understand the implications of their development policies and environmental management practices on coral reefs
- Commitment by local leaders to change their “business as usual” attitude that threatens coral reef ecosystem health and productivity by adopting reef-friendly governance practices; and
- Replication of good management practices by other local government officials to take action and champion necessary reforms
- Empowered local authorities and local community partners willing to continue to work together to improve coastal resources management and sustain coastal livelihoods
- Changes in values and behavior that have led to a reduction of unsustainable exploitation practices.