

**TURTLE ISLANDS INTEGRATED CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
(ICDP): A COLLABORATIVE GOVERNMENT AND NGO APPROACH FOR
MANAGEMENT**

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The Philippine Turtle Islands is a significant green turtle rookery in the Asia. Unlike the Sabah Turtle Islands that is protected entirely by law, Baguan is the only island declared as a marine turtle sanctuary. The other five islands support a sizeable human population that engage in marine turtle egg trade. The Philippine Government, through the Pawikan Conservation Project (PCP), Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (PAWB-DENR), implements MNR Administrative Order No. 33 which allows the residents of Turtle Islands to collect 60% of the egg production in 4 islands, namely: Taganak, Lihiman, Langaan and Great Bakkungan.

In 1996, a Memorandum of Agreement between the DENR and World Wildlife Fund (WWF-Philippines) paved the conception of the Turtle Islands Integrated Conservation and Development Project (TIICDP) which aims to enhance the participation of local communities in conservation while providing them economic opportunities to eventually wean them from turtle egg collection.

This paper presents the initial activities undertaken in the Turtle Islands in preparation for the implementation of an Integrated Conservation and Development Project in the area.

Information and Education Communications Program

The PCP conducts ecological tours for elementary and high school students in the Turtle islands. The students are given the chance to observe the activities and operations undertaken in Baguan Island. They are allowed to tag turtles, dig the eggs for transplantation to the hatcheries and release hatchlings to the wild. Short lectures are given and films on marine wildlife conservation are shown. However, bringing the children to Baguan Island depends on the weather conditions and availability of transportation to ensure the safety of the students.

In September 1996, Dalaw-Turo (DT)^a trainers and facilitators from PAWB-DENR conducted a week-long training that focused on familiarizing and preparing key persons to disseminate information on marine conservation. Lectures on marine wildlife conservation were delivered and problems/issues that beset conservation in the area were discussed as well. The participants were given lessons on the development of information materials that shall address the issues/problems raised. Also, they had several actors' workshops to further enhance their creativity in developing Information and Education Communications (IEC) materials, flexibility in dealing with various types of audience and to develop their personality towards learning as better communicators.

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^a vernacular for "Visit-Teach". Dalaw-Turo is an environmental education and awareness program of the DENR

After the training, IEC materials developed or produced that were presented to the community, are: environmental games and skits, interpretative talks selecting various features, nature interpretation such as brochures and posters. The beneficiaries of the IEC were appreciative and responsive to the activities of the trainees as manifested in the attendance and participation of the community during the presentation.

The DENR through its Gender and Development Program allocated some funds for the setting-up of a reading room for the residents of the Turtle Islands. WWF and PCP have solicited book donations for the reading room. Today, the facility is used not only by the students but also the grade and high school teachers. Some WWF staff also act as tutors in the area.

Establishment of Turtle Islands as a protected area

As previously mentioned, Baguan is the only island established as a marine turtle sanctuary. Notwithstanding the fact that the other islands are equally important as turtle habitats, the PCP worked for its inclusion as one of the ten priority sites of the Integrated Protected Areas System (IPAS). Presently, these sites are being managed by the Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP), a foreign-assisted project of the DENR with funding support from the Global Environmental Facility – World Bank. The establishment of the area as the Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary under Republic Act No. 7586 or the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1986 will enhance the conservation and protection of not only the sea turtles but also the diverse species of flora and fauna.

The PCP is currently assisting the CPPAP Office in the preparation of documents needed for the establishment of the area as a wildlife sanctuary.

Bio-physical Studies in the Turtle Islands

This study aimed at gathering relevant data on the various ecosystem components of the islands, which include geophysical characteristics (climate, oceanography, landscape and topography, geology) and inventory of the marine and terrestrial flora and fauna. A GIS-based information management system is being developed to store and map information to assess opportunities and constraints for the sustainable development of the island's resources and to illustrate development alternatives. A long-term monitoring program is also being developed to ascertain the islands' ecological integrity.

The results of the study were incorporated in the management plan being prepared for the Turtle Islands.

Livelihood program

Aside from turtle egg collection, dynamite and cyanide fishing now prevails in Turtle Islands. To address the situation, WWF's Endangered Seas Campaign supported a project that introduced to the residents of Turtle Islands an environmentally friendly alternative source of income. The project envisioned that there will be less dependence on turtle egg collection and eliminate the use of illegal fishing methods.

A participatory research assessment and relevant trainings were conducted. A cooperative was formed to operate an alternative livelihood enterprise and credit was provided for a boat to be used and managed by the cooperative. The female members of the cooperative also availed of assistance for the establishment of a mini-grocery store.

However, the project had its share of failures. This was mainly due to a number of fundamental differences between some of the basic principles of a cooperative system and the existing societal patterns in the area (Cola, 1998). This predicament was seen as an opportunity to reassess the approach in undertaking developmental initiatives in the area.

In 1998, WWF-UK and the Department of International Development of UK supported the ICDP approach proposed for the Turtle Islands. The first step was to conduct a comprehensive social analysis that included an in-depth social research, institutional assessment and gender and stakeholders analysis. The results of the analysis are currently used as basis in the development of an effective strategy to alleviate the social economic condition of the community. The study revealed that sea turtle egg collection is a significant source of livelihood, not a critical source of income as initially perceived.

Ecotourism Guidelines for the Turtle Islands

At one time, the Turtle Islands was subject to media blitz that catapulted the interest of businessmen to develop the islands as a tourism destination. This prompted the PCP, WWF and the Department of Tourism to work together to draft the ecotourism guidelines for the area. The primary considerations were the fragile condition of these very small island ecosystems and the destruction of the important habitats of the turtles. The draft Administrative Order and accompanying Manual is presently with the Office of the DENR Secretary for review and approval.

Also, WWF contracted consultants to draft the Turtle Islands Ecotourism Development Plan to attain rational utilization of the islands' resources for recreation and conservation.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The initiatives of the DENR through Pawikan Conservation Project is successful in its mandate to conserve sea turtles from a biological point of view. However, given the limited resources made available to the PCP, the social and economic concerns of the community are not addressed. This collaboration between the DENR and WWF-Philippines is an attempt to fill in the gap towards an Integrated Conservation & Development Program. As we progress in our efforts, it is now becoming evident that ICDP requires more than the participation of the DENR and WWF-Philippines. The strengthening of the municipal and barangay^b as a functional institution should be facilitated by this collaboration. A functional relationship among the stakeholders especially the local governments and community is a requisite for the implementation of ICDP. Such an environment will pave the way for addressing the following issues and concerns:

- Setting the conservation agenda of the community specifically for the Mapun & Tausug communities
- Capability building for local governance
- Negotiate with national government agencies to install social services, access (transportation) and infrastructure
- Enhance provision of health services and sanitation facilities
- Enhance existing livelihood activities to lessen dependency on egg collection
- Provide income opportunities for women to enhance economic productivity and control population growth
- Rationalize tenurial and land classification
- Improve educational system more follow-up activities in line with intensifying environmental education in Turtle Islands be pursued to fully achieve people's participation especially in promoting the community-based livelihood project of the TIICDP.

The implementation of an ICDP is a slow and tedious process and would require 10 to 20 years to attain its goals. All sectors of society must do its part to achieve this balance of conservation and development.

^b community or village

