

Alasdair Harris, Scotland, 29 years old

A passionate social entrepreneur creates of local community-run Marine Protected Areas.



Harbouring a life-long obsession with marine biodiversity, as a student Al found himself investigating the impacts of climate change and human disturbances on the unexplored coral reefs of south-western Madagascar. Here he experienced, at first hand, the grave threats facing the region's critically important marine biodiversity.

At the age of 24, Alasdair established Blue Ventures, a marine conservation organisation dedicated to promoting conservation efforts to safeguard the region's marine biodiversity as well as the livelihoods of its indigenous, semi-nomadic fishing communities, entirely dependent on marine resources for subsistence, income and cultural identity.

Since 2003, the focus of Al's work has been a partnership with the remote village of Andavadoaka. Building on the success of a pilot marine no take zone launched three years ago in Andavadoaka, Blue Ventures is now working with 23 neighbouring villages, Madagascar's Institute of Marine Sciences, and fisheries collection and export companies to develop a network of community-run marine and coastal protected areas that spans more than 700-square kilometres and aims to protect coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds and other threatened marine and coastal habitats.

His success is now feeding on itself, so that the area which is benefiting, and the numbers of people and villages who benefit, are in rapid expansion.

Al's work has also led to the first long-term coral reef, fisheries and socioeconomic monitoring programmes in the region. He has developed the Andavadoaka research site as one of the country's leading centres for applied marine research, conservation and environmental education activities.

To finance conservation operations Blue Ventures operates marine educational expeditions for international volunteers, demonstrating to local stakeholders the huge economic benefits that can be created through responsible community-based nature tourism.

The pilot has been so successful that Al's team is now working with other NGOs to replicate this model for resource management elsewhere in the region, along an ambitious 400 km of coastline.

For more information on Blue Venture: www.blueventures.org