

Boosting alternative livelihood creation in Asia

IUCN and IMM hold regional reef livelihoods diversification workshop to develop and test new approaches to livelihood creation

A lack of alternative livelihood options in coastal areas has been identified as a root cause of continued coastal degradation and poverty. While many programmes and projects dealing with natural resource management in the South Asia region have included alternative livelihood components, these have often been poorly conceived and ineffective in their implementation. This limited success is largely due to a poor comprehension of the full range of issues at stake, and a failure to systematically document the approaches to understanding livelihood diversification that have already been utilised.

To address the lack of institutional capacity within the region to systematically approach alternative livelihood creation in a participatory and poverty-focused way, IUCN and Integrated Marine Management Ltd (IMM) organised the first of three workshops from January 27 to February 3 in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, India. Bringing together 17 practitioners from 16 organisations involved in coastal livelihoods work in 5 countries across South Asia, the workshop aimed to increase participants' knowledge and understanding of sustainable livelihoods, explore the reasons behind the successes and failures in livelihood enhancement and diversification initiatives in reef dependent communities, and to jointly develop a Sustainable Livelihoods Enhancement and Diversification approach that could be piloted.

The Coral Reef Livelihoods Initiative, a partnership with CORDIO, ICRAN, Integrated Marine Management Ltd (IMM) and the South Asia Cooperative for Environment Programme (SACEP), aims to develop, test and fully document such approaches, disseminating findings through training sessions for practitioners and policy makers to redirect attitudes and management structures within the region, and demonstrate the inherent links between environmental degradation and poverty.

The concepts underpinning socioeconomic monitoring were also explored, with the objective of developing a socioeconomic monitoring plan for the communities in their pilot sites. Participants were given the chance to practice some of the techniques that they developed through community-based fieldwork with local fishing communities in the Gulf of Mannar, India.

A fieldwork methodology for the first phase of work was developed and is currently being implemented by the participants over a period of 3 months in 6 sites: Anadaman Islands (India), Baa Atoll (the Maldives), Weh Island, Aceh (Indonesia), Bar reef (Sri Lanka), Gulf of Mannar (India) and the Lakshadweep Islands (India). A follow up workshop to review phase 1 of the fieldwork, and to develop phase 2 of implementation, will be held in June 2007.

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