

Project Summary

The project is pioneering a marine conservation ecotourism model to diversify livelihoods among target coastal communities, generating a sustained source of income for the target population to incentivise local engagement in community based natural resource monitoring (CBNRM) activities for priority seagrass ecosystems and small-scale fisheries.

This project has been structured around a social enterprise model designed for self-financing community-based marine conservation activities while generating meaningful economic benefits for communities. Through this foundation, we aim for our work to continue well beyond the life of the project funding, to ensure marine conservation efforts on Atauro island have a stable framework for supporting locally led management and monitoring in the long term.



Main Activities

1. Selection and establishment of an ecotourism site.
2. The first ecotourists arrived in March 2016. Ecological monitoring methods used by ecotourists have been developed through consultations with Timor-Leste stakeholders to align with national data collection needs, allowing ecotourists to contribute to data collection efforts for seagrass habitats and dugongs, while supporting future CBNRM programs.
3. The community identified during site selection will be engaged alongside the ecotourism project to define threats and priority species for CBNRM. Community members will receive training in ecological monitoring, as well as seagrass and dugong monitoring. By project end it is intended that a co-management plan will have been developed with the community for priority marine habitats and species

Results

Ecotourists have contributed approximately 1,320 bed nights in the second half of 2016 and most spend between USD100-200 whilst they are in the local community.

The ecotourism model has already contributed to the maintenance and monitoring of the Adara LMMA through park fees (51 divers to date, at USD1.50 a dive).

Two members of the local community have been through PADI dive training, from Open Water to Rescue Diver, as well as studying and partaking in reef surveying.

18 members of the Atauro community attended training sessions for seagrass mapping and monitoring. Surveys of seagrass habitats will commence in early 2017.

We have made significant progress towards commencing homestays in the community of Beloi. Eight families in the village will host ecotourists for two weeks out of each six week expedition.



Dive and Science Assistant Mima Gomes, from Biqueli, diving in the LMMA in Adara



Seagrass survey training with CBMs and ecotourists



Amos da Costa and Mima Gomes, BV's Dive and Science Assistants

Next Steps & Lessons Learned

In early 2017, we welcome new staff to the Blue Ventures Timor-Leste team to see in the next phase of our activities in country under the GEF Dugong and Seagrass Conservations Project and beyond:

Our community-based monitoring team will begin working with our ecotourists to document the little studied seagrass habitats of Atauro.

We will move forward with homestays in Beloi and other communities to transfer direct economic benefits of tourism to local people.

We will continue to develop partnerships with local communities and stakeholders to ensure our work is meets community needs and national data collection priorities.

About Our Organization

We rebuild tropical fisheries with coastal communities
Blue Ventures develops transformative approaches for catalysing and sustaining locally led marine conservation. We work in places where the ocean is vital to local cultures and economies, and are committed to protecting marine biodiversity in ways that benefit coastal people.



A healthy reef off the coast of Atauro



A clown triggerfish, a rare and beautiful resident