

Project Update: April 2018

The project successfully started in December 2017 and is making great progress. The project took off with an 'internal' training for the project team about the goals of the project. Implementation strategies to be used were discussed and roles of each member was highlighted again. Chiefs and elders of the project communities were consulted to solicit their support for the project.

Education and awareness creation:

The project has conducted sea turtle conservation education programs in 12 schools and four communities. Also four radio programmes have been conducted using local and community radio stations. Education programmes in schools were conducted using English language while the local language was used in communities to increase the impact since illiteracy rate in fishing communities is high. Questions and answer sections were very interactive with the project team making the effort to address all questions before the programme ended. Fishermen expressed great support for sea turtle protection due to their realisation that sea turtles are important to their livelihood (improving fishery). Education materials (stickers and posters) were distributed at each of the education programmes. Stickers and posters were developed using pictures with very few words for easy and better understanding by community members since majority cannot read.

Training and capacity building:

About 150 fishermen were trained in the safe rescue and handling of sea turtles. This skill was very effective and impactful during the nesting season when sea turtle bycatch was highest. Sixty fishermen were selected and given training in law enforcement and monitoring patrol to serve as sea turtle protection volunteers. Selection of volunteers was done in consultation with traditional authorities to give the group the support of the traditional authorities. Nine turtles (six Olive Ridleys and three Leatherbacks) were successfully rescued and released back to sea by volunteers between December 2017 and February 2018.

Law Enforcement:

The project team encountered commercial scale sand mining along some nesting beaches in the new project communities. This has the tendency to destroy nesting habitats (through intensified beach erosion), reduce nesting success and recruitment, and ultimately cause population decline. The team through the support of the District Assembly (local government) arrested one truck which has served as deterrent to sand miners in the area. Education programmes have been modified to include sand mining as a major component to enlighten local communities on the dangers of collection of beach sand. Documentaries on sand mining dubbed "*where have our beaches gone to?*" has been secured from a local environmental organisation and is being shown in affected communities. Informant systems have been established to observe the beaches for sand miners and report immediately to the project team for appropriate actions to be taken.

The next phase of the project will focus on more education in schools and communities. More education materials will be distributed in schools and communities. Hotels and restaurants will be visited and encouraged to post education materials at the receptions to help promote sea turtle conservation and tourism.



School education.



Left: Participants at the Ghana National Sea Turtle Conference. Right: Community engagement.



Sand mining on nesting beaches.