

Project Update: September 2018

The project successfully started in December 2017 and is making great progress. The activities conducted from April to August 2018 are as outlined below:

Education and awareness creation

The project continued with sea turtle conservation education programmes in eight schools and six communities. Schools were on vacation so more communities were targeted to increase awareness before the major nesting season which will start from October 2018 to March, 2019. 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. Question and answer sections were again made an integral part of the education programmes to ensure that all issues bothering the community were addresses and clarified. The education programme increased the realisation by fishermen of the importance of sea turtle to their livelihood (improving fishery) as well as the effect of their activities (poaching, egg collection, sand mining) on the turtles.

Wildlife Clubs were formed in the schools to help sustain the interest in sea turtles beyond the education programme. In the future these schools will be engaged in further activities like beach cleanup exercises, tree planting, debates, etc. to strengthen the clubs. Education materials (stickers, brochures and sea turtle information booklets) were distributed at each of the education programmes. Posters were also posted at vantage points in schools and communities where majority of the people can see.

By-laws

Opinion leaders (including chief fishermen) of communities and fishermen groups from the core fishing communities were brought together to discuss drafting by-laws that will protect sea turtles in their various fishing communities. The project team target to complete the by-law before the major nesting season so implementation could start. Issues/challenges identified with the by-laws during implementation will be highlighted and amended accordingly.

Among the provisions of the by-law are:

- (a) Sea turtle captured at sea shall be released immediately back into the sea.*
- (b) Sea turtles shall not be landed by any individual at the beach whether dead or alive.*
- (c) No person shall at any time buy or offer for sale the meat, egg or any product of sea turtles.*

Major issues raised by most of the opinion leaders and community elders at the meeting was compensation for fishing nets damaged by sea turtles. This was in response to a clause in the by-law that said sea turtle captured at sea shall be released immediately by the fishermen. A challenge raised by the fishermen (through the leaders) was that the turtle destroy their net when they get entangled and so fishermen sell the turtle to offset some of the cost of purchasing the new net or mending the broken nets.

The next phase of the project will focus on more education in schools, communities and on radio. More education materials will be distributed in schools and communities in respect of the upcoming nesting season. More hotels and restaurants will be visited and encouraged to post education materials at the receptions to help promote sea turtle conservation and tourism. Further discussions will be held on the by-laws to review before implementation during the nesting season. Awareness on the by-laws will be created within the fishing communities for compliance and maximum impact. The fishermen trained in safe sea turtle handling and release techniques will be encouraged to use their skills during the nesting season to save turtles. Sea turtle volunteers trained will be encouraged to also conduct regular surveys to help prevent illegal activities such as poaching and eggs collection during the major nesting season.



Stakeholder meeting on sea turtle protection.



Meeting with opinion leaders and canoe owners on sea turtle protection issues.