

CASE STUDY

Reef Check Dominican Republic

Implementing Organization: Reef Check, Dominican Republic

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Executive Summary

Reef Check Dominican Republic

The Asociacion de Pescadores de Juanillo (APEJU) was formed to protect the rights of fishers and ensure sustainable fishing. This case involved exchange of fishers between APEJU and Mexican Fisher Cooperatives in Punta Allen, Puerto Morales, and Cozumel. The following objectives were predefined:

Objective 1: APEJU members gain sufficient knowledge and experience to work with stakeholders in the development and execution of a management plan for a marine protected area (MPA).

Objective 2: APEJU members are exposed to innovative fishing techniques and, where applicable, incorporate these ideas to develop more efficient and sustainable local fishing practices.

Objective 3: REEF CHECK director, Peace Corps Volunteer and APEJU members develop a stronger working relationship, resulting in a collaborative effort to conserve the Punta Cana reef through adoption of REEF CHECK reef monitoring practices.

Objective 4: Through increased knowledge of project execution and gained confidence, three additional fishermen take on new leadership roles within APEJU, such as joining the board of directors or leading special projects, as well as taking a leading role in needed internal reorganization.

The following outputs were achieved:

1. A 6 day, 7-night fishers exchange took place June 26 – July 2 in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.
2. Three local fishers, the director of Reef Check DR and a Peace Corps Volunteer participated.
3. An effective communication channel between Dominican Republic and Mexican fisherman
4. Lobster fishing workshop was conducted on fishing and casitas on 1 July
5. Fly fishing and tourist workshop was conducted on 30 June with National Reserve Park staff and fisher cooperatives
6. Sustainable fishing practices were examined. Mexico fishermen were able to learn lessons from DR fishermen on what could happen if sustainable fishing practices are not followed.
7. Some sustainable fishing practices that were discussed have already been implemented including construction of casitas and fish aggregation devices (FADs)

Analysis of the Environment

Activities were examined solely within the marine environment and specifically within Marine Protected Areas. The environment included examination of activities within the

commercial fishing sector as well as inputs from park staff and REEFCHECK, a local Dominican NGO. Fishing practices in the Dominican Republic have led to collapse of many fisheries due to unsustainable fishing practices. The exchange with Mexico was designed to examine alternative fishing activities and livelihoods with the goal to increase conservation and sustainability of fishing practices both in the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

The Experience

The vision of this experience was to develop sustainable fishing practices as well as alternatives to fishing in order to sustain livelihoods in fishing communities in the Dominican Republic. These communities had already determined that alternative livelihoods were an appropriate and desirable approach to solve the overfishing and lack of management for conservation of their marine resources. Toward that end, REEFCHECK and the Peace Corps have been working with APEJU leaders to begin a reef monitoring program, address organizational challenges, and establish permanent protection of an area where APEJU currently limits fishing. This exchange was an opportunity to validate and increase the leadership capacity of local fishermen, expose them to well-managed marine protected areas, and introduce them to alternative gear choices, sustainable fishing strategies, and alternative livelihoods including working with the tourist sector of the local economy.

Development

In the Dominican Republic, intensive fishing pressure by coastal communities has resulted in overfishing of many fish stocks and reduction of traditional employment opportunities. Punta Cana is now in the midst of a commercial building expansion thus resulting in demand for local fisheries resources. As a result, the local fisher organization (APEJU) has been meeting among their members and local fishers to develop strategies to help manage their local fisheries. Because of the lack of knowledge of sustainable fishing practices, REEFCHECK has been organizing, together with APEJU, community-based management meetings to develop and execute a management plan. The exchange that was conducted with Mexico provided details on both sustainable fishing practices as well as alternative livelihoods in the marine sector including MPA management and tourist-based activities. In the realm of sustainable fishing practices, lobster fishing workshops were conducted on sustainable practices including development of a casita fishery. Additionally, a fly fishing workshop oriented towards training local fishers to become fishing guides for the high end tourists who visit the resorts of Punta Cana. These workshops were conducted between June 26 2008 and July 2 2008 between National Reserve Park staff, Mexican fisher cooperatives, and the Dominican Republic fishers. Sustainable fishing practices were examined. Some sustainable fishing practices that were discussed have already been implemented including construction of casitas and fish aggregation devices (FADs). In addition, a video of the activity was produced and will be used to disseminate the information among fishers in the region.

Important Aspects for Decision Making

This hands on experience has opened the eyes to alternatives for the local fishers provide them the ability to that sustainability and conservation can be achieved by using alternative fishing practices as well as gaining employment in other sectors that are marine related. The direct contact of fishers from other cultures that benefit from employing these alternative approaches clearly demonstrated to the local fishers that

Pending Questions or Tasks

1. Are the methods utilized in Mexico directly applicable to the Dominican Republic
2. Is the Government structure in the Dominican Republic in favor of adapting these alternatives
3. How positive is the response from the local, regional, and national government entities to these changes
4. Does the private sector support and encourage these activities
5. Does the local community and other stakeholders support these activities
6. Can reasonable incomes be achieved using these practices
7. Is one exchange sufficient to develop the capacity required to
8. How can other stakeholder (including government official, hotel operators, tourist operations, etc.) be incorporated into this process.

Annexes

Annex 1.

Background of the case

The Asociacion de Pescadores de Juanillo (APEJU) was formed to protect the rights of fishers and ensure sustainable fishing. Juanillo, at one point an active beachside fishing village, was “moved” to its present location a few kilometers inland to make way for a large private resort. At present, fishers live in both “Nuevo Juanillo” and other communities much further inland. They have only one access point to the beach, consisting of approximately 50 meters of shoreline. Roughly half of the fishermen swim from this point to the reef each day to spearfish, which many believe is threatening the fishery due to over fishing such a small sector. Other pressures on the fishery include prolific use of lobster traps and hookah/compressor diving.

APEJU faces organizational challenges as well. In seeking experienced counsel during the initial formation of a union, or “sindicato,” they allowed many who are not fishermen to hold membership in the association. These members have begun to dictate the activities of APEJU and are dominating the board of directors. The APEJU president, with the support of some of the fishermen, is attempting to address this issue and strengthen membership requirements, but the process has been difficult.

REEF CHECK Dominican Republic, in collaboration with a local Peace Corps volunteer, has partnered with area fishermen to help them preserve and protect their own reef. REEF CHECK’s Coral Reef Monitoring Program offers a basic method of assessing reef health that the fishermen can carry out. Other strategies REEF CHECK employs include encouraging alternative income sources, and working with area stakeholders to develop a sustainable management plan.

Annex 2. Photographs of the Workshops



Current fishing practices in the Dominican Republic include spearfishing and the use of non-selective gear including fish traps.



The fishing fleet of Punta Cana consists of traditional fishig boats and a tourist oriented vessel.



Workshop with participants from APEJU and Mexico.