Evaluation summary

Shark Fin Bay sustainable development project

Country : **Philippines**

Theme : **Conserving and enhancing biodiversity**

Evaluators : **Thierry Clément et Lucie Royer (Oréade-Brèche)**
Date of the evaluation : **January - April 2023**

Key data regarding FFEM support

Project name: Shark Fin Bay sustainable development project

Project number: CPH1042

FFEM funding amount: 527 054 €

Grant date: 15/09/2020

Duration: 3,5 years (2020 – 2024)

Context

The island of Palawan in the Philippines is a world-renowned biodiversity hotspot. Nevertheless, the degradation of coral reefs and fishery resources is steadily increasing, in particular as a result of overfishing and destructive fishing practices (explosive, cyanide or compressor fishing). The destruction of these habitats not only threatens local biodiversity, but also the food security of local populations, who depend heavily on fish stocks for their diet, despite their drastic decline. The project, led by the Sulubaaï Environnement Foundation in Shark Fin Bay, aimed to tackle these issues through actions to restore and preserve marine and coastal ecosystems, educate children, train communities, conduct research in partnership with local institutions, and promote economic development in the bay.

Stakeholders and modus operandi

The project was implemented by the Sulubaaï Environment Foundation, with the support of numerous local partners (local administrations, government agencies and local universities) and international partners (in particular, many scientists and research institutes). A steering committee, a local monitoring committee and a scientific council ensured the project's follow-up and support. The involvement of the municipality of Taytay in the project was decisive in its success.

Objectives

The aim of the Shark Fin Bay project was to restore biodiversity and fishery resources in Shark Fin Bay for the benefit of local populations and their food security, through the establishment of community marine protected areas, the abandonment of unsustainable fishing practices and the physical restoration of environments and natural resources.

Specific objectives:

- Encourage local populations to adopt more sustainable fishing practices through the creation and management of three community-based marine protected areas (MPAs).
- Restore biodiversity and fishery resources in the project area, while promoting alternative activities to destructive fishing practices.
- Strengthen education and training initiatives aimed at a variety of audiences.
- Promote knowledge, capitalization and transfer of experience on a national and international scale.

Performance assessment

Relevance

The relevance of the project was and remains topical, insofar as fishing practices in the Philippines can be highly destructive, the populations concerned are very poor, their food security precarious, both local and national authorities lack resources, and the environments are degraded and poorly understood. As a result, the project's activities have brought concrete solutions to the three villages concerned, where the majority of stakeholders support the initiative.

Coherence

The external coherence of the project is very good, as it has enabled the implementation of actions in line with the country's international commitments, national policies in the same fields and in the specific field of marine protected areas, and the expectations of the municipality and villages. The project is the only one of its kind in the area. Internal coherence has also been very good, with the resources planned to carry out the activities being well sized (with a few rare exceptions) in relation to the objectives, which explains, among other things, a good efficiency.

Effectiveness

The project's effectiveness has been very good, if we take into account the first few years, which were impacted by travel restrictions linked to Covid-19. The following specific objectives have been achieved in a highly satisfactory manner: lead local populations towards more sustainable fishing practices, based on the creation and management of three MPAs (SO1) and strengthen the project's education and training actions aimed at various audiences (SO3). The other objectives, being very ambitious, are only partially achieved: restore biodiversity and resources in the project area while promoting alternative activities to destructive fishing practices (SO2) and encourage the capitalization and transfer of experience on a national and international scale (SO4).

Efficiency

Efficiency was rather good, despite a few difficulties encountered, but these were not major and did not block the project. The public-private set-up has proved its worth here, and made it possible to effectively resolve certain problematic situations.

Impact

The impacts of the project are also interesting, despite its short duration, as it has created a pilot for the creation and management of community MPAs, quite easily replicable in the area, as elsewhere in the Philippines. The project also demonstrated the positive effects of an MPA on the environment (restoration, spillover effect, etc.). The Sulubaaï Reef Pothesis (SRP) device has shown its effectiveness with a survival rate of 81% of transplanted corals. It initiated the "fishlab" concept with a dual ecological (reef repopulation) and economic (production of juveniles for community aquaculture) objective. The project has raised the awareness and skills of many people in partner villages (diving training; structuring, legalization and training of fishermen's associations; training teachers and schoolchildren in the bay's environmental challenges; etc.).

Viability/sustainability

The project has achieved the vast majority of its objectives, but it is a relatively recent initiative that needs to be supported over a longer period of time in order to sustain its achievements and enable it to be scaled up.

Added value of FFEM support

A network of officially-registered MPAs already exists in all municipal waters, but none of them has been materialized in the field, monitored or covered by a management plan. By financing this project, the FFEM has enabled the launch of an innovative virtuous process that can now be applied elsewhere in the area, as well as throughout the country, as confirmed by the Ministry in charge of the environment and natural resources. The FFEM funding has enabled Sulubaaï to test tools and protocols for restoring the natural environment, particularly coral, on a larger scale using an iterative approach supported by science.

Recommendations & lessons

This project has brought together local stakeholders (communities and authorities) and created the conditions for its replication on a larger scale. Interest in extending the project has been expressed both locally (by the Municipality of Taytay and other villages in the bay and an adjacent bay) and nationally (by the Minister for the Environment as part of the 30x30 objectives).

The main challenges for a possible continuation of the project can be summarized as follows:

- Set realistic, and achievable objectives.
- Continue to build the capacities of people and communities in the area, in order to move towards their empowerment in all areas of MPA management.
- Focus on applied research activities accompanying the MPA creation-management process.

In terms of themes to be covered and subjects to be treated, it will be necessary to:

- Move forward in the development of alternative income-generating activities to fishing (aquaculture, seaweed farming, community gardens, etc.), in particular through value chain projects.
- Broaden activities to take a more landscape-based approach, starting to integrate land-based activities beyond mangroves, in order to reduce pressure on the marine environment.
- Include improved management of shellfish harvesting, which was absent from the Shark fin bay project even though it represents an important source of protein for local populations.
- Work on increasing the proportion of pelagic fish in local diets and on their consumption (vs. sale).