



GRANTEE
Comunidad La Gloria



WATERBODY
Caribbean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem



PROJECT DURATION
Jun. 2009 – Dec. 2014



AMOUNT
US\$43,431

COFINANCING
US\$48,475

CASE 3

Mangrove Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries in Playa Florida, Cuba

PROJECT CONTEXT

Playa Florida is a coastal village in the south of Cuba adjacent to one of the most delicate and rich marine eco-systems in the Caribbean. This area is also one of the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and the local communities have had to evacuate during storms (such as Ike and Paloma in 2008).

The loss of the mangroves poses a risk to the local population by shortening the shoreline, increasing erosion and their vulnerability to floods, surges and storms. In terms of biodiversity, the damage to the mangrove ecosystem also reduces water quality and destroys the natural habitat of fish and crustacean species.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

In 2009, with the support of the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) and the technical advice from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, the community of Playa Florida set out to restore the coastal and mangrove ecosystem in Playa Florida. To achieve this goal the community started an awareness raising campaign on the importance of the mangrove ecosystem for the health of marine resources and as an adaptation tool to address climate change. The community also worked with fisher folk to improve their fishing practices and livelihood opportunities and reduce the pressure on the ecosystem. The project also provided better fishing gear and training on sustainable fishing practices



FIGURE 3

Google Earth image showing the section of mangrove that was regenerated (yellow line). The three arrows in red show where the water passes were constructed.



such as the use of wider fishing nets to reduce bycatch, promoting compliance and respect for fishing bans, and developing sustainable fishing plans. The project also worked with fisher folk to create a union that would enable them to get better prices.

In order to reduce mangrove deforestation, the community limited the use of mangroves for firewood and engaged the fishers in tracking the results of the mangrove restoration process. The community also partnered with government agencies to address the challenges caused by a 4 km elevated road which interrupted the flow of water to the wetland causing death to a large part of the mangrove to the east of the road. Specifically, the community identified the location of sea passes, along the road, to allow the flow of water into the eastern part of the mangrove and helped to construct them with funds from the local government.

RESULTS AND SCALING UP

As a result of the project, three kilometers of coastal and mangrove ecosystems have been significantly restored and local species of birds have started to appear including pink flamingos, gulls, frigate birds, pelicans, white and blue herons and zarapicos. Notably flocks of flamingos have returned to the area after a 15 year hiatus. Similarly, local fish species such as juvenile snappers, biajaibas, lisetas, caballerotes, horse mackerel, snapper and tarpon have been seen in the ecosystem.

The improvement in water flow and health of the mangrove ecosystem has also increased the resilience of the local community to climate change effects. In terms of livelihoods, the families of local fisher folk benefitted from a 20% annual income increase as a result of the creation of the fishing cooperative and by adopting improved fishing practices.



The community representatives also participated in the 9th and 10th International Conferences on Environment that took place in 2013 and 2015 increasing their visibility and outreach. The project also conducted empowerment activities that allowed women to improve their socio-economic status.

Following the mangrove ecosystem restoration activities and sharing of project results with key stakeholders, including the media, the Playa Florida beach started to attract more tourists. This created additional opportunities for small businesses such as housing rentals, restaurants and other services which have contributed to reducing pressure on fisheries.

In terms of capacity development, the project has been instrumental in helping the community to continue their efforts by facilitating access to other funds and donors, including funding from the European Union.

BROADER ADOPTION

Since the SGP project, the Ministry of Science Technology and Environment together with COSPE, an NGO supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union have provided six times the original funding of the SGP grant to continue the community's efforts in the area. The experience of the SGP project has been shared, by documenting the good practices and disseminating them through these partner networks and reaching students, citizens, media and other institutions. Alternative livelihood options for the community have been further expanded, especially in terms of sustainable agriculture. Today, the Playa Florida community is participating in the co-management planning process for two nearby protected areas and has influenced the design of large regional projects on how to involve communities in biodiversity and adaptation projects.

Information sharing between similar communities supported by SGP projects has allowed officials whose jurisdiction spans these governance zones to promote the spread of successful models to other nearby communities. This has resulted in a demand for projects on similar themes in multiple communities within the same governance region. In Playa Florida, the town delegate, who also is the President of the SGP Project Board, reports on the results of the project in municipal meetings held four times a year, as well as at the municipal assembly. This generated interest in neighboring fishing communities became interested in implementing Playa Florida's improved fishing practices. Following knowledge exchanges with the community of Playa Florida two fishing communities have replicated the participatory planning process to improve the management of their natural resources and livelihood opportunities.

EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Among the main lessons from SGP's experience in Playa Florida (Metzel 2015) is that early integration of diverse actors in planning processes is key to achieving results. SGP's co-financing requirements necessitated the formation of an early broad coalition of funding support to fill funding gaps. Reliance on government co-funding in the construction of Playa Florida's water passes was among the factors changing the way the municipality did its budgeting, which in turn increased its flexibility for funding community projects.

The group decision-making processes for allocation of project benefits created a sense of shared responsibility to the group and the community among those who received direct benefits from SGP projects. In Playa Florida, SGP and the communities decided that the grant would fund tools for repairing boats instead of provision of new boats, to allow for a more equitable distribution of benefits and greater cost efficiency in use of grant funds.

SGP's interactive application process promoted the selection of proven informal and formal leaders in the community. Two of the members of the Playa Florida Project Board are key people in organizing their community in their comparatively frequent storm evacuations to the mainland. These leaders have played an important role in mobilizing the community and ensuring participation.

The different levels and ways for community members to benefit directly and indirectly contributed to the informal diffusion of ideas. In particular, the presence of diverse benefits facilitated collaboration by a broad coalition of stakeholders. While one component of the project was very conservation-focused with intangible, long-term benefits like mangrove conservation, tangible individual benefits like provision of fishing supplies provided the "hook" that allowed for the space for the larger long-term environmental conversation.

