



Tools for Working with Coastal Communities in the Mesoamerican Reef Region

[Corozal] (February 22, 2013) Representatives of eight marine protected areas from Belize, Mexico and Honduras are currently being trained in socio-economic monitoring using the SocMon methodology.

The training was initiated by marine protected area (MPA) managers in partnership with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI). It is part of a two-year cooperative agreement with NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program to build marine protected area management capacity in the Mesoamerican Reef region.

"The participants all recognise that the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods for local communities is imperative and can enhance conservation efforts at their MPAs" explains the host of the training, Amanda Acosta-Burgos, Executive Director of the Belize Audubon Society.

The training is being held in Corozal, Belize with visiting lecturers from the University of Zamorano in Honduras. Specifically designed to help coastal managers better understand and incorporate the socio-economic context into coastal management, the SocMon approach to socio-economic monitoring is being implemented in many other parts of the Caribbean region as well as globally.

"We seek to promote sustainable livelihood options that will bring economic benefits to the communities surrounding our MPA, Turtle Harbour – Rock Harbour, and this requires an understanding of local skills, interests, concerns and the socio-economic setting," comments Ana Lorena Quinoñez from the Bay Islands Conservation Association in Utila, Honduras.

"Joining together with colleagues from Belize and Mexico for this training means we're sharing ideas and experience about working with fishers, which in turn is helping me plan how best to work with fishing communities at home in relation to sustainable livelihoods," she adds.

Also present from Honduras are representatives of the Natural Marine Monument Archipiélago Cayos Cochinos and the Special Marine Protection Zone Sandy Bay - West End; from Mexico the National Parks Arrecifes de Xcalak, Arrecife Alacranes, and Costa Occidental de Isla Mujeres, Punta Cancún y Punta Nizuc; and from Belize Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monument and South Water Caye Marine Reserve.

Equipped with a new set of research tools, the participants have spent time in the field at Copper Bank, an important fishing community for Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monument. Belize Audubon Society's Community Liason Manager, Lucito Ayuso, coordinated the field visit and described its achievements.

“With a large group of fishers from Copper Bank, we examined the seasonality of fishing income. Women from the community worked with us to rank livelihood options of interest to them according to their existing skills. A special focus on youths from the community highlighted their perception of the opportunities and challenges facing them,” he explained.

“As we promote sustainable alternative livelihoods here and in other communities, we’ll be undertaking a full SocMon assessment as part of the GCFI project. Our colleagues have given us a head start.”

The SocMon training is also serving as a reunion and networking opportunity for MPA colleagues from the Mesoamerican Reef region, some of whom last met at the GCFI-TIDE workshop on alternative livelihoods and sustainable tourism for MPAs in Belize in 2012, whilst others last met at GCFI’s workshop on MPA enforcement in the Florida Keys in 2012.

For more information please contact Emma Doyle at emma.doyle@gcfi.org or the regional SocMon Coordinator for Central America, Arie Sanders at asanders@zamorano.edu.



SocMon participant Jorge Gomez with fishers at Copper Bank, Belize (Photo: Dirk Francisco)