



Conserving Biodiversity and Empowering Fishing Communities

The Dominican Sustainable Tourism Alliance (DSTA) supported project, through Counterpart International, is working with fishing communities and other stakeholders to conserve biodiversity within Montecristi National Park and stimulate sustainable economic development in rural communities.

The DSTA-supported project successfully coordinated the first community fisher association meeting in the coastal fishing village of Loma Atravesada. At the meeting, both young and old fishers acknowledged that decades of overfishing and environmentally devastating fishing practices have depleted fish stocks and caused the destruction of coral reefs as well as mangrove forests. The meeting also served as a platform to facilitate discussion on solutions that combine protecting fragile marine ecosystems and sustainable fishing practices in order to halt the decline of coral reef and mangrove ecosystems.

Four trainings involving 235 fishers were also held to impart teachings on the rationale, policies, and practices of associations, as well as the responsibilities and duties of association members. The project seeks to promote use of the association to enable enhanced decision making for the collective good, and to ensure more equitable forms of governance.

By strengthening community-based organizations, the project is building the foundation for implementation of locally-driven sustainable practices and policies that enhance biodiversity and

steward economic development in the region. The project is conducting similar education and outreach activities in seven fishing villages within the Montecristi National Park, affecting over 400 fisher families.

“This project has awakened our village and it’s time for action.”

- President of Loma Atravesada Community Fisher Association

The result of this work is a co-management plan for the Park and the establishment of a co-management team consisting of residents of Loma Atravesada. The co-management plan will establish a process for long-term, effective and equitable administration of the Park’s natural resources and guarantee a path towards sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

While raising awareness of the importance of marine ecosystem protection will be a long and challenging process, the desire and commitment to improve the quality of life is already evident. At the close of the Community Fisher Association meeting, a young man acknowledged that he caught and sold juvenile lobsters that were under-sized and stated his promise to not let it happen again. The president of the association closed the meeting, thanking the young fisher for his story and wisely noted, “We’ve got to move forward and make things right. It’s in our hands.”