



Sub-Marine Park Offers Employment Alternative for Local Fishermen

The economy and livelihood of the coastal community of La Caleta, La Romana in the Dominican Republic rests primarily on the fishing industry, which in recent years has contributed to the vicious cycle of environmental degradation and over-exploitation of marine life. The prominence of commercial fishing has resulted in a diminishing number of marine species such as fish, invertebrates, and corals and has affected the diving community due to the degradation of underwater observation of reefs and sea-life in nearby tourist attractions such as La Isla Catalina.



Local artist José Ignacio Morales will create the sculptures for the Underwater Museum Project of La Caleta

Since its launch in September 2007, Fundación Vida Azul has been recognized as one of the few NGOs that has succeeded in protecting the Dominican Republic's coasts and educating citizens about marine life conservation.

Fundación Vida Azul has effectively implemented various programs concerning marine-life conservation and ocean waste management. Previous initiatives include the donation of trashcans to coastal communities, implementing an ocean and environmental education program in local schools, collaboration with domestic supermarket chains to eliminate the sale and misuse of plastic bags, and partnership with the Ocean Conservancy for the nation's annual Coastal Clean-up Day.

Marine devastation at La Caleta, La Romana has catalyzed Vida Azul's efforts to create alternative sources of income for the community while encouraging protection of the marine wildlife inhabiting the area.

Just three months after inauguration, Fundación Vida Azul approached Master Artist José Ignacio Morales, who has more than 30 years of experience with the fabrication of art structures and other decorations in the Dominican Republic, regarding the

possibility of designing underwater statues envisioned for what would become La Caleta's Underwater Museum Park. The creation of new sculptures submerged underwater will be presented in the form of a diving museum, located at strategic points off the coast in order to minimize impact on the current ecosystem.

Three years later, the project is now in the heart of its design stage and in the midst of conducting an environmental impact analysis which evaluates the potential areas for statue placement.

USAID-DSTA funding supports the purchasing of materials for the creation of the museum, the proper submersion of the statues, and the establishment of an office space and resource center for divers and locals alike.

The Underwater Museum Park will increase the influx of divers at La Caleta, ultimately changing the economic model of the fishing community to that of marine preservation for visitors and the benefit of the inhabitants of La Caleta. The execution of this project will provide alternate yet sustainable sources of income for local fishermen and their families who will benefit from the creation of micro-enterprises such as diver transportation services, restaurants, and lodging services.