

Project Update: December 2021

Achievements to date

- Increase the awareness and empower the local communities to curtail the spread of COVID 19 and support the rehabilitation of key marine turtles nesting sites in the Western region of Ghana – partially achieved.

The project team focused on interviews with fishermen and households on their perception of sea turtles and the impacts of COVID-19 on their fishing activity. A total of 190 people were interviewed (69 in Cape Three Point, 60 in Beyin and 55 Akwidaa).

A comprehensive report of this survey will be shared by the end of the project. Following the questionnaire survey, a 2:44 radio jingle was recorded in "Nzima", the local language in the study area. This jingle has been played on EBIANC 100.5 MHz at least four times daily prior to the beginning of the nesting season (June) through to December 2021.

In addition, a project staff member (Cosmos Etse) is invited once every month for a live interaction session radio programme to discuss the conservation of sea turtles and COVID-19 prevention protocols. Furthermore, a total of 550 branded reusable facemasks and 150 bottles of 100 ml hand sanitiser have been distributed to locals in the communities.

Engagement with local communities continued with visits to their homes and radio programmes to share information on the need to protect sea turtle and create awareness on the measures for curtailing COVID 19. The outstanding activity so far is the beach clean-up which has been moved to the next quarter of the project implementation due to safety protocols imposed by the government of Ghana.

- Ensure continuous protection of the nesting population of marine turtles visiting the Coastline of Ghana amidst the COVID-19 pandemic – partially achieved.

A total of nine local eco-guides from the three neighbouring communities have received theoretical and practical training on sea turtle conservation and were equipped to perform beach patrols at night. The equipment includes headlights, backpack, GPS, hand gloves and raincoat. The beach patrols are conducted at night and at dawn to deter poachers and also relocate exposed/unsafe eggs. Relocated eggs are being kept in hatcheries until they hatch.

Difficulties that arose during the first quarter of the project and how these were tackled.

The project enjoyed great reception from the coastal communities to include fishermen and community leaders but a small group of locals, presumably poachers, registered their dissatisfaction of the night patrols and threatened local guides but this difference was later addressed through the project developed grievance mechanism.

The project commenced at the onset of the nesting season which necessitated the use of the existing hatcheries to keep the eggs therefore the planned activity of renovating these hatcheries was not fulfilled and this is scheduled for the half of the project implementation.

Outcomes to date

The reporting period of the project saw many outputs achieved as listed below:

- Nine local eco guides had their capacity built on sea turtle significance to the ecosystem and the management techniques to the conservation of sea turtle.
- Information on the local perception to sea turtle was obtained through interviews with over 190 locals.
- Over 2000 locals were reached through the radio-based awareness creation on the needs to conserve sea turtle and taking measures to curtail COVID 19 spread in the landscape.
- Face masks and hand sanitizers were distributed to over 400 locals to help stay safe from COVID 19.
- All required equipment for beach patrolling such as raincoats, waterproof bags and torch lights were provided for the trained eco guide for their operations.
- A total of 543 sea turtle eggs have been relocated to the existing hatchery during the beach patrol for the reporting period.

Involvement of local communities so far

The project commenced with community entry and engagement with fishermen, local guides, and community leaders from the three selected communities of Cape Three Point, Akwidaa and Benyin. This was followed by interviews in the stated communities where over 100 individuals were interviewed to shape the project team understanding of local perception to sea turtle conservation. The project focused on the use of radio communication to reach an estimated audience of 2000 within the project landscape and beyond and distributing face masks and hand sanitisers to interviewed locals. The project has enjoyed warm relations with all project communities and where grievances were raised about the night patrols the project team addressed it without creating anymore challenges.

Planned activities for the next quarter of the project?

In the next 3 months, the project will continue with the beach patrol but not as intense as during the first quarter. This is because the nesting season is steadily coming to an end. The available hatcheries will be refurbished once all eggs are relocated, and the radio sensitising programme will enter its final stages. Community mobilisation for beach clean-ups will be a major event during the coming quarter.

Sharing results of your work with others?

The project's aim of providing an extensive report online for nesting and sea turtle conservation along the western coast of Ghana remains. The project team continues to compile a perception report on sea turtle conservation and monitoring the number of sea turtles visiting the beaches to establish trends that will be highlighted in the reports. The team is in close contact with a participant of the African Chelonian Conference in Senegal who has agreed to share the results and outcomes of this project to the African chelonian public.

Materials produced in relation to this project so far. Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The Rufford Foundation logo was branded on raincoats, face masks, and hand sanitisers distributed in the communities and to the eco guides. The accepted logo sent to the team at the start of the project were used as seen in the attached pictures.

Members of your team and briefly what was their role in the project.

Agyemang Opoku:

Agyemang leads the execution of all project activities and is responsible for communicating the project through reporting and social media posts. He has been present at all project activities and led the training organised for local eco guides.

Kosmos Cormas Arthur

He is the field lead of the project and a community conservation champion. He leads the radio programmes for sea turtle conservation and leads the beach patrols, he is responsible for monitoring identified hatcheries in the landscape and leads translation at the community level during interviews and survey.

Any other comments?

The locals have embraced the project and have expressed their appreciation for the radio education. Many have promised to join the beach clean ups in the coming period and are willing to participate in all project activities until the completion of the project.



















Script for the sea turtle sensitization.

- Cosmos: What are you doing?

- Poacher: Can't you see? I'm collecting sea turtle eggs.

- Cosmos: Ohhh why are you collecting these eggs?

- Poacher: Ohhh my brother you know how sweet they are right? Haven't you eaten some? I even wish I met the turtle which lay these eggs, I could have just killed her and bring the meat home. You know, with this COVID-19 pandemic, we don't have any other alternative to feed our family.

Poacher- Heee Chale, so you don't know that it's not good to collect eggs or to kill the turtles that visit our coast for nesting?

Cosmos- Ohh my friend why?

- You know, sea turtles feed on jellyfish and other non-edible species and therefore control their population in the sea. That allows fish to grow and fishermen to have a good harvest when go fishing. In addition, some turtles feed on seagrass, so they clean the sea-bed, making more available space for fish nurseries.

Poacher- Wahoo, my friend I didn't know all that ohhh, please can you tell me more?

Cosmos- Ohh yes, in hard times like this, tourists travel from afar just to see our turtles and contribute to the local economy by eating from our local restaurants, buying handicrafts from our artisans, and sleeping in our community eco-lodges. Also, these turtles are our cultural heritage from our ancestors, so we also have the responsibility to protect them for our children.

Poacher- My friend, thank you for the education, I will never kill a turtle nor collect the eggs. Please tell me, next time when I see a nest or a turtle nesting, what should I do?

Cosmos- You just have to let the turtle alone but protect and make sure she returns safely to sea after laying the eggs. If you only discover the nest, please just camouflage the site so that other poachers will not collect the eggs. You can also call the rescue team at this number.....

- BRUNA: Remember, poaching of turtles or collecting eggs is strictly prohibited by the law of The Republic of Ghana. Eating a turtle or eggs can take you to prison.

- Bruna: The sea turtle conservation program is supported by Rufford Foundation