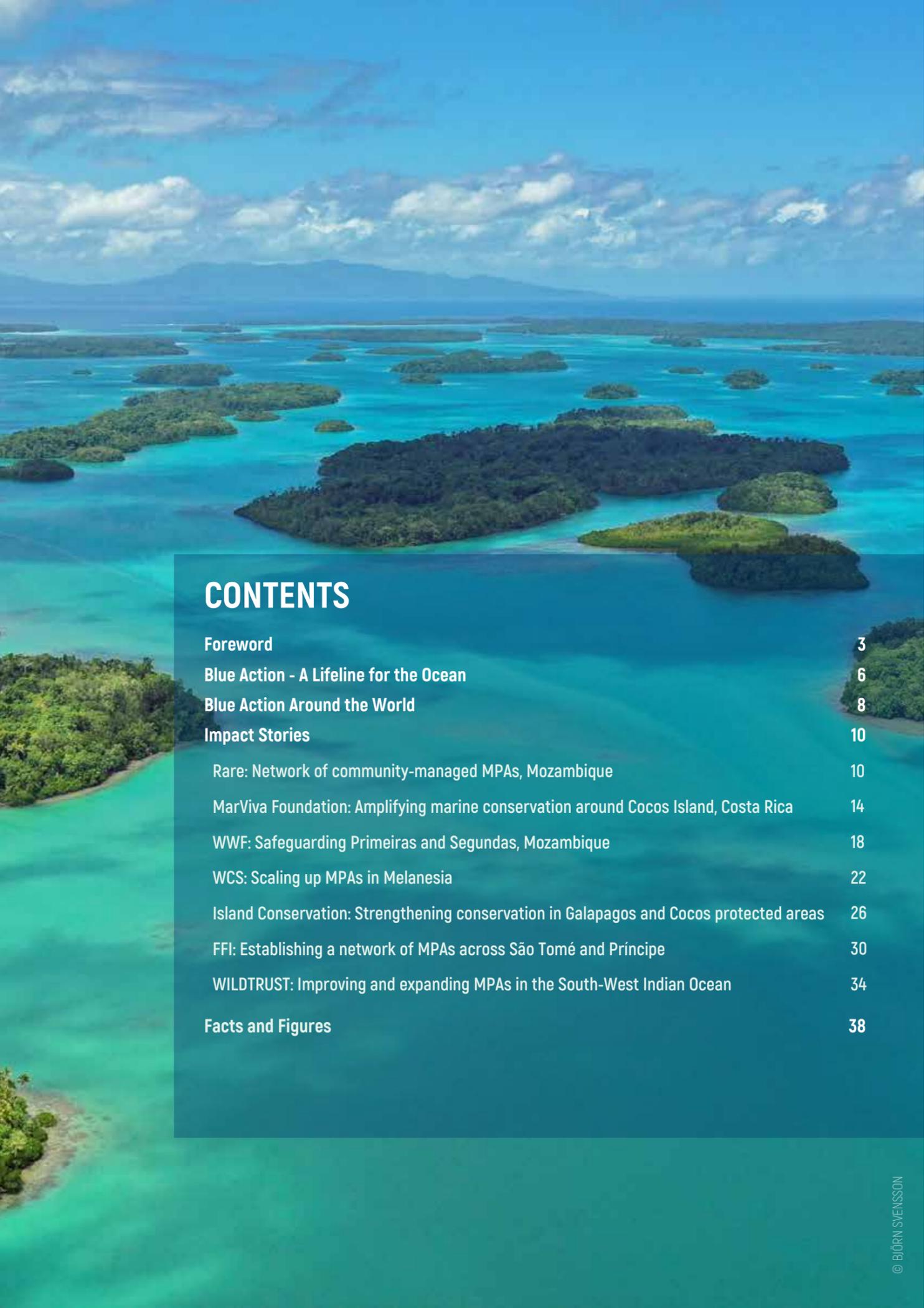




IMPACT REPORT

5 Years of Blue Action





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FOREWORD

The [Blue Action Fund](#) (hereafter 'Blue Action') is celebrating its five-year anniversary by sharing inspirational stories of the projects and people impacted by our work to support ocean protection and sustainable coastal livelihoods. We are incredibly proud to have been able to provide a vital contribution to ocean health, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought unprecedented challenges to island and coastal communities facing disruption to the tourism and fishing industries. And we are honoured to support so many exceptional projects that are making a real difference to our ocean and the people whose lives depend on it.

From Cambodia to Costa Rica, South Africa to the Solomon Islands, the Blue Action Grant Programme is providing a lifeline for a healthy ocean. The diverse projects you will read about in this Impact Report are combating dramatic losses in marine biodiversity while creating new opportunities for local people. Working closely with artisanal fishers, women's cooperatives, grassroots conservationists, and local authorities, the organisations we support are driving change both out in the water and in the heart of their communities by expanding effective marine protection and strengthening local livelihoods and food security.





From Cambodia to Costa Rica, South Africa to the Solomon Islands, the Blue Action Grant Programme is providing a lifeline for a healthy ocean

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Five years after our registration in 2016 and four years after becoming operational in 2017, our combined grant portfolio is on track to establish or enhance over 350,000 km² of marine protected areas (MPAs) and directly benefit more than 225,000 people. These projects are living proof that, although the ocean faces mounting threats, 'blue action' can unleash multiple benefits by boosting flood protection, food security, climate change adaptation, and community stability. The ocean is on the frontline of the climate and nature crises, and our grantees are showcasing how marine conservation has the power to spearhead the nature-based solutions needed to address them, from restoring mangroves to promoting sustainable fishing.

Protecting the global ocean and halting the devastating loss of marine biodiversity is both one of humanity's greatest challenges and critical for the survival of millions of coastal people. However, less than 1% of Official Development Assistance is used to promote the sustainable use of the ocean, leaving ocean conservation in the Global South greatly underfunded. To mitigate this funding gap, Germany, Sweden, France and Norway, as well as the Green Climate Fund, have in the last five years contributed around €170 million to Blue Action to bolster investments in strategic local action to reverse the decline in ocean health and to promote sustainable use of its resources. Blue Action has quickly established itself as a key component in the global ocean movement that is creating a wave of change across our blue planet.

As we reach this landmark anniversary, we would like to thank our funders – the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Agence Française de Développement, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and the Green Climate Fund – for making the rapid growth of Blue Action possible. This expansion means that – as we embark on our next five years – Blue Action will be able to make a major contribution to global ocean goals by supporting even more projects, protecting more of our precious ocean, and making a positive impact on the lives of coastal people. We hope that ocean-lovers and supporters everywhere will be inspired by our project impact stories and look forward to future blue action together.

Dr Heike Henn
Chair of the Supervisory Board

Stephan Opitz
Deputy Chair of the Supervisory Board





BLUE ACTION – A LIFELINE FOR THE OCEAN

Blue Action was created in 2016 to help conserve marine biodiversity for the benefit of future generations and improve the lives of coastal communities in developing countries today.

More than a third of the global population lives in coastal areas and hundreds of millions of people rely on ocean-based industries like fishing and tourism. Particularly in developing countries, where more than 95% of the world's fishers live, fish are a vital source of both protein and income, while marine ecosystems like mangrove forests and coral reefs protect coastlines against extreme weather, rising seas, and floods.

But all this is at risk. A perfect storm of mounting human pressures, climate change, and poor management is threatening our ocean and coastlines. Seawater is becoming warmer and more acidic, fish stocks are being overexploited, mangroves are being decimated, and the ocean is the final destination for never-ending flows of plastics and untreated pollutants.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are at the vanguard of action to protect the global ocean and coastlines from these multiple threats and create inclusive, sustainable opportunities for vulnerable coastal communities. That's why Blue Action is focused on boosting the impact of NGOs around the shores of Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, by facilitating their access to public funding so that their essential 'blue actions' can be fortified, scaled up, and replicated to enhance ocean protection and opportunities around the world.

All the NGO projects we support seek to establish, enlarge or enhance marine protected areas (MPAs) and to improve livelihood conditions and food security for the communities that live near them. They achieve this by focusing on activities that support MPA governance, sustainable livelihoods, species conservation, sustainable fishing, and habitat conservation and restoration in the most sensitive waters of Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Blue Action today has four government funding partners – Germany, through the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with KfW Development Bank; Sweden, through the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs; France, through the Agence Française de Développement (AFD); and Norway, through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). Moreover, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) joined as a funding partner in 2021 to provide additional funding for Ecosystem-based Adaptation in the coastal areas of the Western Indian Ocean. Together these funders have contributed around €170 million in the last five years since the start of our unique Grant Programme, turning Blue Action into one of the world's largest public funders promoting marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods for coastal people.



Designed as a flexible and nimble financing instrument, Blue Action takes advantage of the rigour associated with public funders, including on environmental and social risk management, combined with the implementation skills of experienced NGOs. Projects are selected through open Calls for Proposals that are appraised and selected with the support of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which is a Strategic Advisor to Blue Action.

HOW WE WORK

Blue Action is a non-profit foundation established under German law. It was created by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and KfW Development Bank in 2016, and later joined by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2017, the French Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in 2018, and most recently the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). Blue Action has also received funding from the Green Climate Fund.

By combining the funds of several major public donors, we provide a one-stop platform where NGOs can access funds to support their work. This creates a conduit between NGOs, who are drivers of change with local expertise and connections, and government bodies keen to strengthen practical conservation action. Through this work, Blue Action also contributes to the global evidence-based knowledge exchange on MPA development and management and promotes the urgently needed expansion of sustainable funding for marine protection by private, public and non-governmental sources.

Blue Action works through a special Grant Programme, which channels financial support to selected NGO-run projects working locally, nationally or regionally in medium- to large-sized grants. Grants are typically in the range of €2–5 million and are primarily awarded to NGO projects working in partnership with local actors and endorsed by the relevant government authorities. In this way, Blue Action aims to remain highly flexible and efficient.

Projects are selected following Calls for Proposals targeting specific ocean regions or priority areas, including Small Island Developing States, East Asian Seas, and the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean. In 2021, the Calls for Proposals focused on Africa's Atlantic Coast and Ecosystem-based Adaptation to climate change in the Western Indian Ocean.

So far, Blue Action has invested €43 million in 17 projects, with a combined ambition to establish or better manage over 350,000 km² of MPAs. It is estimated that more than 225,000 people – including users of marine resources and their families, fishers, and employees of MPA management authorities – will directly benefit from these projects.

The ongoing achievements of seven of these projects are presented in this Impact Report.



Funding Blue Action Around the World



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| <p>① Rare: Network of community-managed MPAs, Mozambique</p> <p>② CI: Fishing for a prosperous future, Eastern Tropical Pacific</p> <p>③ WWF: Safeguarding Primeiras and Segundas, Mozambique</p> <p>④ FFI: Establishing a network of MPAs across São Tomé and Príncipe</p> <p>⑤ WCS: Scaling up MPAs in Melanesia</p> <p>⑥ WCS: Creating a network of MPAs, Western Indian Ocean</p> <p>⑦ WILDTRUST: Improving and expanding MPAs in the South-West Indian Ocean</p> <p>● Ongoing projects ○ Proposals under consideration ● Closed projects</p> | <p>⑧ WWF: Strengthening MPA management, Tanzania</p> <p>⑨ WWF: Scaling-up protection of Quirimbas National Park, Mozambique</p> <p>⑩ WCS: Expanding and improving marine conservation, Myanmar</p> <p>⑪ FFI: Strengthening MPAs, Cambodia</p> <p>⑫ YKAN/TNC: Improving MPAs and community livelihoods, Indonesia</p> <p>⑬ Island Conservation: Strengthening conservation, Galapagos and Cocos</p> <p>⑭ MarViva: Amplifying marine conservation around Cocos Island, Costa Rica</p> | <p>⑮ Fondo Acción: La Minga: community-based marine conservation, Colombia</p> <p>⑯ TNC: Fostering MPA Management Effectiveness and Sustainable Fisheries, Peru</p> <p>⑰ Blue Ventures: Safeguarding Blue Forests, Indonesia</p> <p>⑱ Peace Parks Foundation: EbA to climate change in Maputo EPA, Mozambique</p> <p>⑲ Blue Ventures: Increasing resilience to climate change, Barren Isles, Madagascar</p> <p>⑳ WCS: Building a Blue Future on the East African Coast, Mozambique</p> <p>㉑ WILDTRUST: uThukela MPA Ecosystem-based Management Project, South Africa</p> | <p>㉒ WWF: Elevating EbA approaches, Mahafaly Biosphere Reserve, Madagascar</p> <p>㉓ FFI: Increasing socio-ecological resilience in Pemba Channel, Tanzania</p> <p>㉔ United Purpose: Community-based MPAs for socio-economic resilience, Senegal</p> <p>㉕ FFI: A network of effective MPAs, Cape Verde</p> <p>㉖ Namibia Nature Foundation: Strengthening and expanding Namibia's MPA network</p> <p>㉗ African Parks: Improved Management of Iona MPA, Angola</p> |
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RARE



Mozambique



The project has established Mozambique's first formal area of ocean under community co-managed access with reserves (CMA+R), aiming to cover 582 km² under sustainable management and 83 km² under full protection.

© RARE



NETWORK OF COMMUNITY-MANAGED MPAs, MOZAMBIQUE

PROJECT DURATION: MARCH 2018 TO DECEMBER 2021

BUDGET		KEY TARGETS	
Blue Action grant	€ 1,635,075 (75%)	Newly created MPAs	639 km ²
Match funding	€ 546,003 (25%)	Effectively managed MPAs	N/A
Total project costs	€ 2,181,078	Number of beneficiaries	41,495

Mozambique's coastal ecosystems are under direct anthropogenic threat from unsustainable natural resource use and intensifying fishing pressure. Fish catches are decreasing and – in combination with persistent socio-economic vulnerability – this is putting even more pressure on vulnerable coastal communities and the marine ecosystems they depend on. A Blue Action grant is supporting a project led by Rare that aims to sustain small-scale coastal fisheries and conserve marine ecosystems by working in partnership with the Mozambican government to establish a community-led approach to fisheries management and strengthen financial resilience in local fishing communities.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

Healthy coastal fisheries are critical to the food security, livelihoods, and well-being of coastal communities in Mozambique, but they are often overlooked and undervalued. Many communities lack the capacity to manage their fisheries effectively, leaving them vulnerable to overfishing and other destructive practices, as well as the impacts of climate change. National data reveals that fish catch landings and overall catch sizes are declining, and small-scale fishers are reporting that some species are no longer showing up in their nets at all. It is estimated that Mozambique's overall artisanal catch has dropped by nearly 30% over the last 25 years, and climate change is expected to exacerbate this situation as Mozambique's coasts are highly vulnerable to cyclones, storm surges, and flooding. To address these threats, Rare is empowering fisheries-dependent communities across six sites in Mozambique to establish and maintain locally community-managed access areas with reserves, enabling people to use their marine resources more sustainably and boosting their financial resilience.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

This project aims to increase ecosystem health, build local support for the protection of marine biodiversity, and improve the livelihoods of coastal communities. With the support of Blue Action, Rare has been able to benefit over 41,000 people directly and over 158,000 people indirectly. The project has reached communities in six districts of Mozambique, extending vital support to small-scale fishers, fish buyers, savings club participants, and other community members.

What has been achieved so far?

Since the project launched in 2018, it has helped the Mozambican government at all levels in demonstrating the benefits of taking a community-led approach to managing coastal waters, making a particular impact in six key areas by:

- Providing technical assistance to national government partners to develop the legal pathway for implementing community co-managed fisheries and rights-based approaches.





This project is empowering local communities to manage their natural resources and helps create alternate income sources that reduce fishing pressure. With the support of Blue Action, it benefits over 41,000 people directly and over 158,000 people indirectly, including small-scale fishers, fish buyers, and savings club participants. The good news is – it's a replicable model.

- Establishing Mozambique's first formal areas of ocean under community co-managed access with reserves (CMA+R), currently covering 428 km² under sustainable management and 65 km² under full protection. Additional areas will follow in the coming months.
- Building the capacity of community fisheries management bodies and fish buyers by helping them to acquire new skills and equipment needed for the electronic registration of catches, and by supporting self-governance and informed decision-making.
- Developing participatory ecosystem-based local fisheries management plans and submitting them for government approval.
- Strengthening financial resilience by designing supplementary income initiatives and supporting Savings Clubs for fishing communities, to bolster household incomes and reduce the pressure to overfish.
- Creating demonstration cases that show how locally managed fisheries and coastal communities can contribute to the implementation of nature-based solutions that support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the new Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

The project is working with the six coastal fishing communities to reduce post-harvest catch loss and increase the value of existing fisheries. In parallel, financial inclusion measures are helping people to retain, manage and augment their incomes. Overall, nearly 800 community members have been financially supported to start 11 community enterprises that provide alternative income sources, such as baking and hen farming, as well as to set up fisheries-related enterprises, like ice machines, that can reduce post-harvest loss, enhance livelihoods, and reduce fishing pressure. The 36 Savings Clubs supported by the project have a total of 992 members – 68% of whom are women – and have collectively saved over USD 270,000 so far. These savings increase financial stability and

social security, and allow fishing households to make decisions based on their long-term interests rather than the short-term pressures that can compel overfishing.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

As with any new project, there has been a learning curve. Following the pilot phase, the project will continue to scale up what works – like establishing Savings Clubs – and strengthen the local management bodies that oversee the management of coastal fisheries. Inevitably, the project had to face many challenges beyond its control – not least a global pandemic, cyclones, and severe storms that impacted several project sites and limited the ability to travel and engage with communities. The flexibility of both Rare and Blue Action was key to keeping the project on track, for example by pivoting to virtual trainings and meetings whenever possible. These events also highlighted the critical need to build the resilience of rural coastal people to give them the ability to adapt to changing and unexpected threats.

How can this project inform and inspire other communities to take similar action?

Rare's work is driven by the desire to empower local communities with the tools, knowledge, and rights they need to manage their natural resources effectively. With the support of Blue Action, it has been possible to achieve transformational results for both people and nature. And the good news is that it's a replicable model. Rare is continuing to expand its impact in more communities both in Mozambique and in other countries across the developing tropics where lives and livelihoods are closely tied to the health of coastal ocean ecosystems.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

This has been a watershed period for coastal communities in Mozambique. The passage of the revised Fisheries Maritime Regulation (REPMAR) in late 2020 was a major step towards granting local communities formal rights to steward their coastal fisheries. Building on that momentum, following this pilot phase Rare will roll out a provincial approach to supporting sustainable, climate resilient small-scale fisheries in Mozambique, focusing on biodiversity hotspots in high human dependency areas, and continue to advance community-led co-management of coastal waters. Priority focus will be on establishing CMA+R areas in other sites, working with savings clubs and microenterprises to build financial resilience at the community level and implementing strategies to increase the participation and leadership of woman in fisheries management bodies.



This project contributed to the expansion of the Cocos Marine Conservation Area by 150,000 km², helping Costa Rica to reach its target of achieving 30% marine protection by 2030.



AMPLIFYING MARINE CONSERVATION AROUND COCOS ISLAND, COSTA RICA

PROJECT DURATION: JULY 2021 TO JUNE 2026

BUDGET		KEY TARGETS	
Blue Action grant	€ 2,752,481 (74%)	Newly created MPAs	40,000 km ²
Match funding	€ 982,924 (26%)	Effectively managed MPAs	11,588 km ²
Total project costs	€ 3,735,405	Number of beneficiaries	5,180

The Cocos Island National Park and the Seamounts Marine Management Area are biodiversity hotspots that are home to over 1,600 marine species, including many that are endemic to the area. They are key to the sustainability of ecological and socio-economic dynamics in the vast seascape of the Eastern Tropical Pacific. A Blue Action grant is helping to protect this globally important marine area by supporting a project led by the MarViva Foundation aimed at strengthening the resilience of marine ecosystems through more effective MPAs, and relieving pressure on marine resources by creating alternative livelihood opportunities for the severely deprived communities in the Puntarenas province along Costa Rica's Pacific coast.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

Costa Rica's total territory is 92% ocean, with the location of Cocos Island expanding its EEZ far into the Pacific. The country aims to achieve 30% marine protection by 2030, building on MPA coverage, which at the start of the project in 2021 covered less than 3% of Costa Rica's Pacific jurisdictional waters. In addition, the ongoing challenge of linking the complex social and ecological connections between coastal areas and offshore ocean sites hinders both biodiversity protection and the vital environmental services that sustain the region's marine heritage and human well-being. With Blue Action funding, MarViva and its partners aim to support government authorities by facilitating the agreements, scientific studies, community consultations, and management plans needed to significantly expand the Cocos Marine Conservation Area, and to manage existing protected areas more effectively, helping Costa Rica to reach its marine protection target.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

Success for this project means achieving the vision of a healthy and resilient ocean where vulnerable species and ecosystems are protected and coastal communities can enhance their well-being by making responsible use of marine resources. The Blue Action grant is allowing MarViva to deliver this goal by advancing participatory, multisectoral Marine Spatial Planning in the Cocos Marine Conservation Area, and strengthening the operational, financial and monitoring capacities needed for the effective management of the target MPA sites, in partnership with its implementing allies. The support is also being used to improve compliance with MPA regulations through market incentives to promote ecotourism and fishing value chains, including the certification of responsible market stakeholders who support marine conservation, food security, and sustainable local development. By presenting productive alternatives to ocean exploitation, these interventions will reduce the human impact on this fragile marine ecosystem.





The project deploys the Blue Action grant to improve compliance with MPA regulations through market incentives to promote ecotourism and sustainable fishing value chains. By presenting alternatives to ocean exploitation, these interventions reduce the human impact on this fragile, globally important marine ecosystem.

What has been achieved so far?

In its first six months of activity, the project has made an impact in four key areas:

- An agreement was formalised with the National System of Conservation Areas, which will be supporting the execution of most project activities. Agreements have also been made with implementing partners, including local NGOs and scientific institutes, and collaboration agreements with commercial allies for the development of responsible fishing value chains are in progress.
- The Cocos Marine Conservation Area MPA expansion process, for which discussions began in 2017, led by the Ministry of Environment and Energy, and in which local project partners have played an important role, completed its public and stakeholder participation phase, resulting in the signing of an Executive Decree for the Expansion of the Cocos Island National Park and the Bicentennial Seamounts Marine Protected Area. The MPA expansion of 150,000 km² means that more than 30% of Costa Rica's waters are now protected.
- Biological baseline information studies are underway to assess the populations of keystone species such as sharks and tuna. The first project expedition in the Cocos Island National Park, the Marine Management Area Seamounts, and the waters around these MPAs took place at the end of 2021 and the findings will be used to improve management in the target area.
- A Social Progress Index (SPI) study has begun, in which 1,000 surveys will be carried out to analyse the socio-economic, human rights, and environmental situation in the coastal communities in the province of Puntarenas. This will help the project to identify groups of people who can benefit most from the development of alternative livelihoods.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

There is no local population on Cocos Island itself, but there are Costa Rican communities whose activities are closely connected to the marine resources sustained by the target MPAs and surrounding ocean areas, primarily in Puntarenas province, along the Central Pacific littoral. The coastal populations face high levels of poverty and low levels of education and literacy. The project aims to raise awareness, advance capacity building and public participation, and develop partnerships to promote: equitable access to marine resources; fishing best practices that reduce human impact on the ecosystem and increase resource productivity; value chains that offer market

incentives for artisanal fishers compliant with best practices and MPA regulations; alternative productive activities to encourage fishers and their families to diversify their sources of income; and the involvement of women's groups from the fisher community in ecotourism activities.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

Local economies that rely on the goods and services provided by the MPAs are under huge pressure due to resource over-exploitation and weak access to other income-generating options, which is impacting the fisheries sector, deepening poverty, and driving social unrest. Considering these threats, the most important challenge for this project is to work with the public and private sector stakeholders to offer coastal communities livelihood alternatives that both fit their skills and are sustainable. There is an urgent need to develop productive alternatives to fishing that can improve incomes while using resources responsibly. The goal is to contribute to strengthening the protection and management of this unique area of the ocean while also improving the quality of life of the people who depend on the sea.

How can this project inform and inspire other communities to take similar action?

The project's comprehensive vision presents a unique opportunity to develop a participatory marine resource conservation and management model that can be replicated in other parts of the world. It integrates the wide range of elements that effective marine conservation needs to incorporate, from strengthening conservation areas, to financial sustainability, generation of scientific and fishing information, responsible use of resources, and the development of new livelihood opportunities for coastal communities. Even though the MPAs targeted are more than 500 km from the populated coast, this project is the perfect example of how people and marine resources are connected and how, by working together, both communities and the ocean can benefit.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

In the coming months, MarViva and partners will prioritise the generation of MPA management plans and focus on the development of viable livelihood alternatives and responsible fishing value chains with coastal communities and local implementation partners.



By giving communities more opportunities to make a living, the vulnerability of both coastal families and PSEPA's unique ecosystems are being reduced and the project is creating a multiplier effect that extends the benefits to people and nature across the region.

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SAFEGUARDING PRIMEIRAS AND SEGUNDAS, MOZAMBIQUE

PROJECT DURATION: AUGUST 2018 TO AUGUST 2022

BUDGET		KEY TARGETS	
Blue Action Fund grant	€ 2,250,000 (75%)	Newly created MPAs	4 km ²
Match funding	€ 753,692 (25%)	Effectively managed MPAs	10,500 km ²
Total project costs	€ 3,003,692	Number of beneficiaries	9,455

The Primeiras and Segundas Environmental Protected Area (PSEPA) stretches along 200 km of Mozambique's spectacular coastline and is one of Africa's largest and most biodiverse MPAs. This beautiful ocean area is host to coralline islands with uniquely rich marine fauna, widespread seagrass beds, and extensive mangroves that form important nursery grounds. With the help of a Blue Action grant, WWF is working to give new meaning to "PSEPA" by encouraging the area to become "Precious Seas Effectively Protected and Administered" and creating new livelihood opportunities for coastal fishing communities. The project is engaging with government authorities and local stakeholders to set up a functioning marine management structure, including a coordinated enforcement system led by the government and supported by community rangers, and ensure strict protection in no-take zones to safeguard biodiversity hotspots like the coralline islands areas.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

The main challenges in PSEPA stem from human activities like illegal fishing, poaching, and mangrove cutting, which all put immense pressure on marine resources and ecosystems. These threats are driven by poverty in the coastal communities and further aggravated by the lack of an established MPA administration. This project promotes the sustainable use of natural resources and a reduction of fishing pressure by advancing sustainable fisheries management practices, awareness raising and co-management of resources through local communities, as well as providing alternative sustainable livelihoods, including through the new Farmer Field Schools and Village Savings and Loans groups. By giving communities more opportunities to make a living, the vulnerability of both coastal families and PSEPA's unique ecosystems are being reduced.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

For this project, the ultimate sign of success is when communities are inspired to replicate its activities and take the initiative to conserve their precious natural resources. The Blue Action grant helps make this possible. For example, the Muniga community sanctuary was established to increase the protection of fish nursery areas and mangroves in order to enhance catches and income for local communities. Cases like this have encouraged beneficiaries to share their knowledge and motivate neighbouring areas to also participate in mangrove management, while Farmer Field Schools have been replicated in communities not covered by the project. It is wonderful to see the project creating this multiplier effect that extends the benefits to people and nature across the region.





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By establishing 77 Farmer Field School groups in 19 communities, local farming and food security is also being strengthened by the project's Conservation Agriculture initiatives, which share knowledge and techniques to sustainably increase harvests.

What has been achieved so far?

The Blue Action funding has allowed this project to make a positive impact in PSEPA and the nearby coastal communities by supporting a wide diversity of actions, including:

- Supporting the establishment of the PSEPA Management Council, to ensure government commitment to the conservation area.
- Expanding the community Monitoring Oriented Management System (MOMS), including by increasing the number of MOMS agents – or “community rangers” – from 9 to 24.
- Selecting, training and equipping 25 community sanctuary monitors to participate in the monitoring and surveillance of the 4 Community Conservation Areas within PSEPA.
- Signing Memorandums of Understanding with community radio stations to spread the message about the conservation of coastal and marine resources and conducting awareness raising activities with PSEPA communities.
- Establishing the Muniga community sanctuary.
- Conducting a range of baseline assessments and monitoring programmes, including on coral reefs and seagrass, invertebrates and fish catches, mangrove health indicators, and socioeconomic and safeguarding indicators in local communities.
- Conducting an Assessment of Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) for PSEPA in 2020 and 2021.
- Establishing 77 Farmer Field School groups in 19 communities.
- Creating 217 Village Savings and Loans groups, including 2,941 women (61.9%) and saving a total of USD 114,452.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

Local stakeholders are at the heart of this project, both as active participants and beneficiaries. The Village Savings and Loans groups promoted by local implementation partners have enabled people to buy productive assets for their households and to start small businesses. For example,



women-headed households have improved their housing, purchased assets like solar panels and motorbikes, paid for children's education, or invested in new agriculture plots, seeds, livestock and equipment. Local farming and food security is also being strengthened by the project's Conservation Agriculture initiatives, which share knowledge and techniques to sustainably increase harvests. Many members of the Farmer Field Schools have already seen good results since adopting the new methods and are now expanding their plots. Beneficiaries are reporting increases in cassava production and the greater crop diversification means that they have vegetables, beans and cassava throughout the year. Overall, the active engagement of women is one of the most significant impacts of the project, and it is inspiring to see many women in leadership positions in savings groups, farm schools, and the natural resources management committees in all four districts of PSEPA.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

One of the biggest obstacles confronting the project is the deep poverty and low levels of literacy in the beneficiary communities. To combat this, WWF and local partners are implementing livelihood activities to help improve people's living conditions and encourage them to engage with the project, and disseminating messages in local languages on community radio stations. Special steps are also being taken to adapt project activities like the farm schools, savings clubs, and community surveys to make sure illiterate people can fully participate.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

In the final phase of the Blue Action grant, WWF and partners will be focusing on consolidating the establishment of the PSEPA surveillance programme by community agents in Integral Natural Reserves and building on successful community livelihood activities, for example by piloting a new Farmer Field Business Schools approach. Other priorities include designing sustainable livelihood interventions in six coastal fishing communities, and improving mangrove management by mapping new degraded areas, more planting, and better monitoring.



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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY



Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands

In its first two years, the project has made a major impact, with new MPAs in the process of being established in all three countries involved.



SCALING UP MPAs IN MELANESIA

PROJECT DURATION: JANUARY 2019 TO JUNE 2022

BUDGET		KEY TARGETS	
Blue Action grant	€ 2,712,903 (71.7%)	Newly created MPAs	26,312 km ²
Match funding	€ 1,070,770 (28.3%)	Effectively managed MPAs	451 km ²
Total project costs	€ 3,783,673	Number of beneficiaries	176,000

Melanesian cultures share a strong tradition of environmental stewardship and a deep commitment to ocean health. A Blue Action grant is supporting the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to build on this tradition by expanding the marine area under effective management in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea, and creating sustainable livelihoods through job training, reducing post-harvest fishing losses, empowering women, and developing new community-run sources of income. The project is combating the combined impacts of loss of traditional knowledge, rising levels of natural resource extraction, and accelerating climate change to make a real difference to local communities and contribute to the long-term regional goal of establishing large networks of MPAs to conserve ocean life and boost local economies.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

This project is working to tackle the twin global threats of marine biodiversity decline and unsustainable fishing in the unique local context of Melanesia's complex traditional marine tenure systems. The key solution is to establish marine management rules and livelihood ventures within Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), where the holders of local fishing rights can determine the most appropriate management measures and enforce compliance. Wherever possible, these community-based management plans are then linked to more formal, government declared MPAs. One aspect of the project that is making a special impact is its emphasis on empowering communities through financial literacy training, ranging from ensuring that people have the know how to manage their household finances to helping with more complicated challenges, like running a pearl oyster farm.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

Within the three-year project timeframe, the support from Blue Action is vital for building the foundation needed to meet the long-term goals of increasing ocean protection, creating more opportunities for marine biodiversity-based livelihoods, and conserving the keystone species needed for essential ecosystem services. Extensive stakeholder engagement within the project is ensuring a Free, Prior, Informed, Consent (FPIC) approach that will foster lasting community buy-in and encourage project implementation. Crucially, the grant is being used to support new community livelihood projects - including improved fish processing, developing locally managed businesses, and strengthening ecotourism opportunities - to provide more secure, diverse sources of income.





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Turtle monitoring in the Solomon Islands led to 567 critically endangered leatherback turtle nests being protected, ensuring that 20,000 hatchlings could safely enter the ocean.

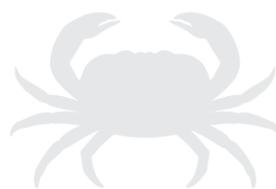
What has been achieved so far?

In its first two years, the project has made a major impact in five critical areas:

- New MPAs are in the process of being established in all three countries. In Papua New Guinea, 5,274 km² are under final consultations. In Fiji, draft regulations covering 13,650 km² have been submitted for review prior to government endorsement. In the Solomon Islands, a proposal for a 4,580 km² area is under consultation.
- A total of 18 new LMMAs in traditional fishing grounds have been developed by local fishing communities and are in the process of being legally designated.
- Support for new laws and policies led to the enactment of the Lovongai Local Level Government Marine Environment Law in Papua New Guinea, and a national Fish Warden Policy being submitted to the Ministry of Fisheries in Fiji.
- Over 25 training events were held involving more than 2,000 people in the three countries, including training on best practices in marine management implementation.
- Baseline surveys assessed 63 reefs for fish biomass and coral cover, analysed 14 sites for catch per unit effort to monitor sustainability, and gathered essential insight from 1,550 villagers, while turtle monitoring in the Solomon Islands led to 567 critically endangered leatherback turtle nests being protected, ensuring that 20,000 hatchlings could safely enter the ocean.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

The local community response to the project has been overwhelming, reflecting a dedication to marine conservation that even a global pandemic cannot diminish. Almost 6,000 villagers have been engaged in workshops and training sessions where local people have their say in determining how their resources are managed and learn new skills. WCS is working with a diverse range of stakeholders, from local fishing communities to government departments, tourism



groups, local law associations, and an array of environmental and social community organisations. One of the biggest impacts on communities stems from the new sources of income provided by the project's livelihood initiatives in areas like sustainable aquaculture and tourism.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

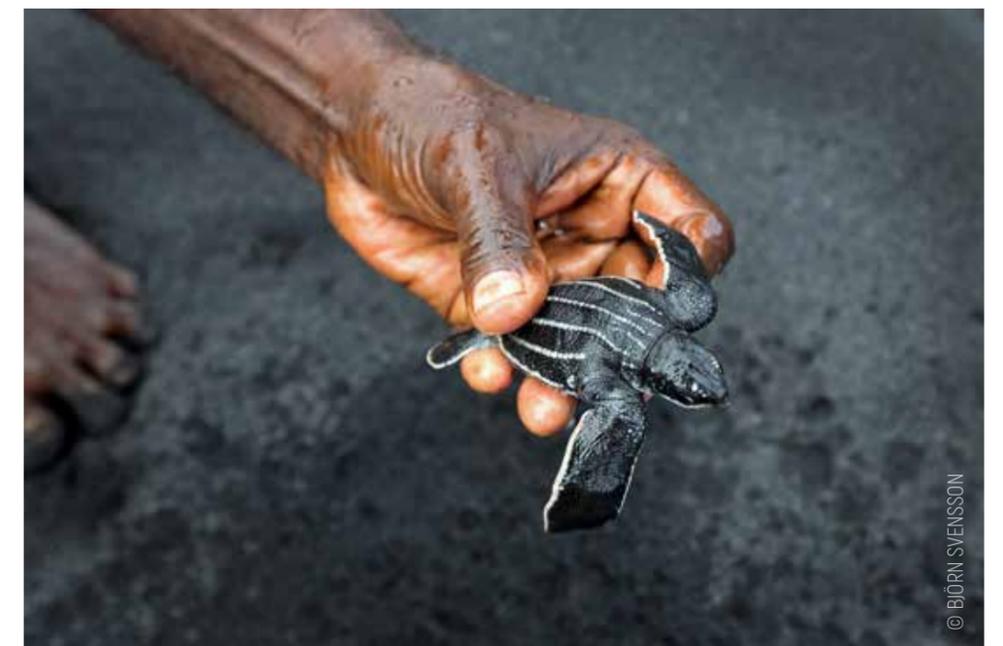
The region has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with consequences on public health and huge financial losses from tourism, but thanks to WCS investments in its local staff and capacity – and the flexibility of the Blue Action Fund – activities were able to adapt and continue. One specific challenge was establishing a community run pearl oyster meat farm in Fiji, a very new endeavour for WCS that required overcoming a myriad of logistical obstacles and relied on strong relationships with local partners with aquaculture experience.

How can this project inform and inspire other communities to take similar action?

Merging the concept of LMMAs with traditional Melanesian marine management structures is the cornerstone of the project's success and it's an approach that is already motivating other communities to seek similar support. WCS Melanesia is not only prolific in its publication of scientific papers to share project findings, but also makes sure information is widely accessible by giving regular interviews on local radio and television and developing practical "how to" guides that are translated into local languages and circulated across the region.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

Looking to the future, WCS will be focusing on securing official approval for the new MPAs, LMMAs, and community management plans. It is also vital that the pearl and mudcrab farms established by the project are entirely in community hands and have what they need to keep running, and for villages near the leatherback turtle nests to get ready to welcome tourists as soon as travel opens up again. WCS is also identifying additional partners and sources of funding so that they can keep supporting these communities beyond the timeframe of the Blue Action grant.



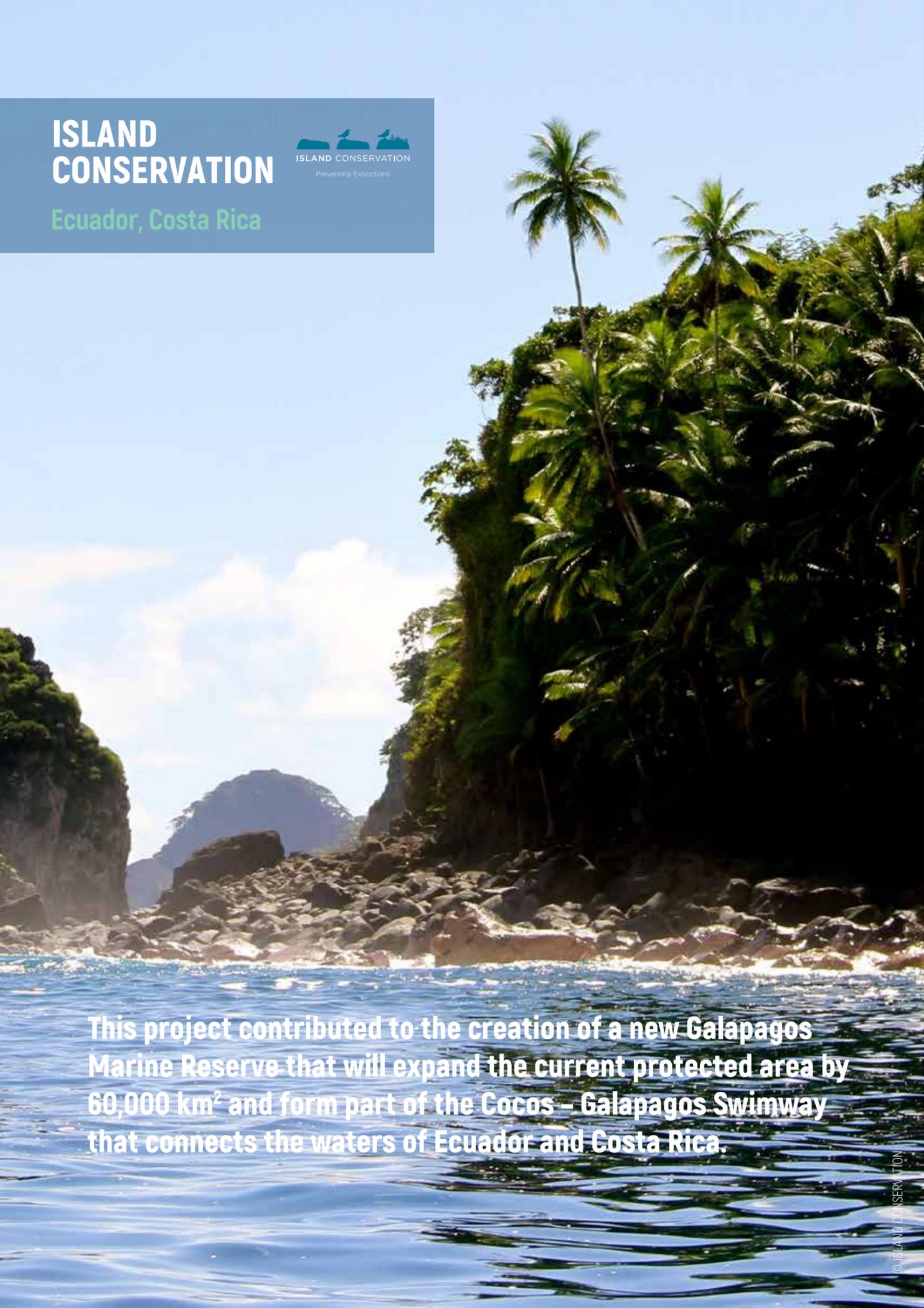
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ISLAND CONSERVATION



Ecuador, Costa Rica



This project contributed to the creation of a new Galapagos Marine Reserve that will expand the current protected area by 60,000 km² and form part of the Cocos – Galapagos Swimway that connects the waters of Ecuador and Costa Rica.

© ISLAND CONSERVATION



STRENGTHENING CONSERVATION IN GALAPAGOS AND COCOS PROTECTED AREAS

PROJECT DURATION: FEBRUARY 2021 TO JANUARY 2025

BUDGET		KEY TARGETS	
Blue Action grant	€ 3,121,912 (41%)	Newly created MPAs	69,000 km ²
Match funding	€ 4,475,474 (59%)	Effectively managed MPAs	149,629 km ²
Total project costs	€ 7,597,386	Number of beneficiaries	3,567

The Galapagos Marine Reserve and Cocos Island National Park are among the most biodiverse and productive regions of the Eastern Pacific Ocean. Linked by the Cocos Ridge, a critical swimway for marine species, they play a vital role in the protection of global ocean biodiversity and are a vital food and economic resource for local communities. Both sites host a high proportion of endemic species, such as the Galapagos marine iguana. A Blue Action grant is helping Island Conservation to ensure that the Cocos Island and Galapagos protected areas are effectively managed in order to stem the loss of marine biodiversity, prevent extinctions, and enhance livelihoods for coastal and island communities. The project has already helped to expand the Galapagos Marine Reserve and is now working to strengthen surveillance and biosecurity, increase incomes for local fishers, and reduce the risk from marine invasive species. The goal is to position the Galapagos Marine Reserve as a world class model that will inspire and guide ocean protection action in Latin America and globally.

At the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow in November 2021, Panama, Ecuador, Colombia, and Costa Rica made history by announcing the creation of the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor initiative – an expansion of protections that will create a “mega MPA” to protect one of the world’s richest ocean regions. The expanded Galapagos – Cocos marine corridor will form a key component of this globally important new marine corridor.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

The fact that such two such exceptionally important ocean sites are interconnected gives this project a truly unique setting. Its biggest challenge is to protect the massive open water area that links these sites by creating the western part of an international MPA, between the Galapagos Marine Reserve and Cocos Island. Island Conservation and its partners aim to improve the enforcement of MPA regulations and better protect near-shore species and pelagic populations, including threatened species. Endangered species that will benefit from the resulting reduced fishing pressure include whale sharks, basking sharks, scalloped hammerhead sharks, Galapagos fur seals, blue whales, giant manta rays, Galapagos penguins, and green sea turtles. In total, at least 45 IUCN-listed threatened species will benefit, including endemic seabirds like the critically endangered Galapagos waved albatross.





© ALEX HEARN



The project brings Island Conservation together with local stakeholders, governments, NGOs, and researchers to prevent extinctions by restoring island-marine ecosystems and ensuring that coral ecosystems and fisheries can thrive. Resources are being directed to critical needs not being met by other investors.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

The Galapagos and Cocos Island are among the most pristine places on our planet. By supporting action to preserve these ecosystems and foster sustainable practices, this Blue Action grant is showcasing how marine conservation and sustainable development can work hand-in-hand. Under this project, Island Conservation is working with local communities, stakeholders, governments, NGOs, and researchers to prevent extinctions by restoring island-marine ecosystems and ensuring that coral ecosystems and fisheries can thrive. And, as land and sea ecosystems are interconnected, expanding the Galapagos MPA means expanding the wildlife refuge that will directly benefit from the project's island rewilding interventions on land. This landmark initiative is directing Blue Action resources to critical needs that are not being met by any other conservation or livelihood investors and filling a key niche in the holistic strategy for marine conservation in this vast ocean area.

What has been achieved so far?

This project contributed significantly to the creation of a new Galapagos Marine Reserve that will expand the current protected area by 60,000 km² and form part of the Cocos – Galapagos Swimway that connects the waters of Ecuador and Costa Rica. The entire new MPA will be protected from destructive longline fishing and 50% will be a fully protected “no-take zone”. It will also be a key component of the game-changing Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor that was announced at COP26. This development is hugely significant. Currently, the Eastern Tropical Pacific is home to a constellation of Blue Parks but, the trouble is, many sharks and other iconic animals are highly migratory and travel between these areas, leaving them vulnerable to the industrial fishing fleets that gather just outside the reserves, waiting for animals to cross the invisible boundaries into unprotected waters. The proposed “mega MPA” will create a fishing-free corridor covering more than 500,000 km² in one of the world's most important migratory routes for sea turtles, whales, sharks, and rays, and protect one of the last great bastions of pristine ocean biodiversity.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

During the first phase of the project, most engagement has been with local fishermen and their families, industrial fishermen on the mainland, tourism operators, and government representatives. The goal is to enhance livelihood conditions for Galapagos fisher families and the inhabitants of Floreana Island by strengthening alternatives to marine sources of food and income, reducing bycatch, securing certification for artisanal fishers, and empowering women. As food security in

the Galapagos is negatively affected by climate change, the project is also advancing activities that simultaneously improve livelihoods while enhancing the community's climate resilience. For example, drip irrigation allows for year-round pasture production including during droughts, small cattle yards allow farmers to feed and water livestock, and irrigation makes it possible for people to grow vegetables all year. Together these actions will generate increased household incomes and food security in communities dependent on the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

One of the main challenges this project has to deal with is the sheer size of the MPAs involved, especially considering the new four-nation MPA and the expanded Cocos – Galapagos marine corridor. To be effective, the administrative, financial, and technical capacities of the National Park authorities involved will need to be greatly strengthened both during and beyond the timeframe of this project. Island Conservation aims to overcome this challenge by forging strong cooperation with project partners that have the unique expertise needed to meet the project goals.

How could your work inform and inspire other communities to take similar action?

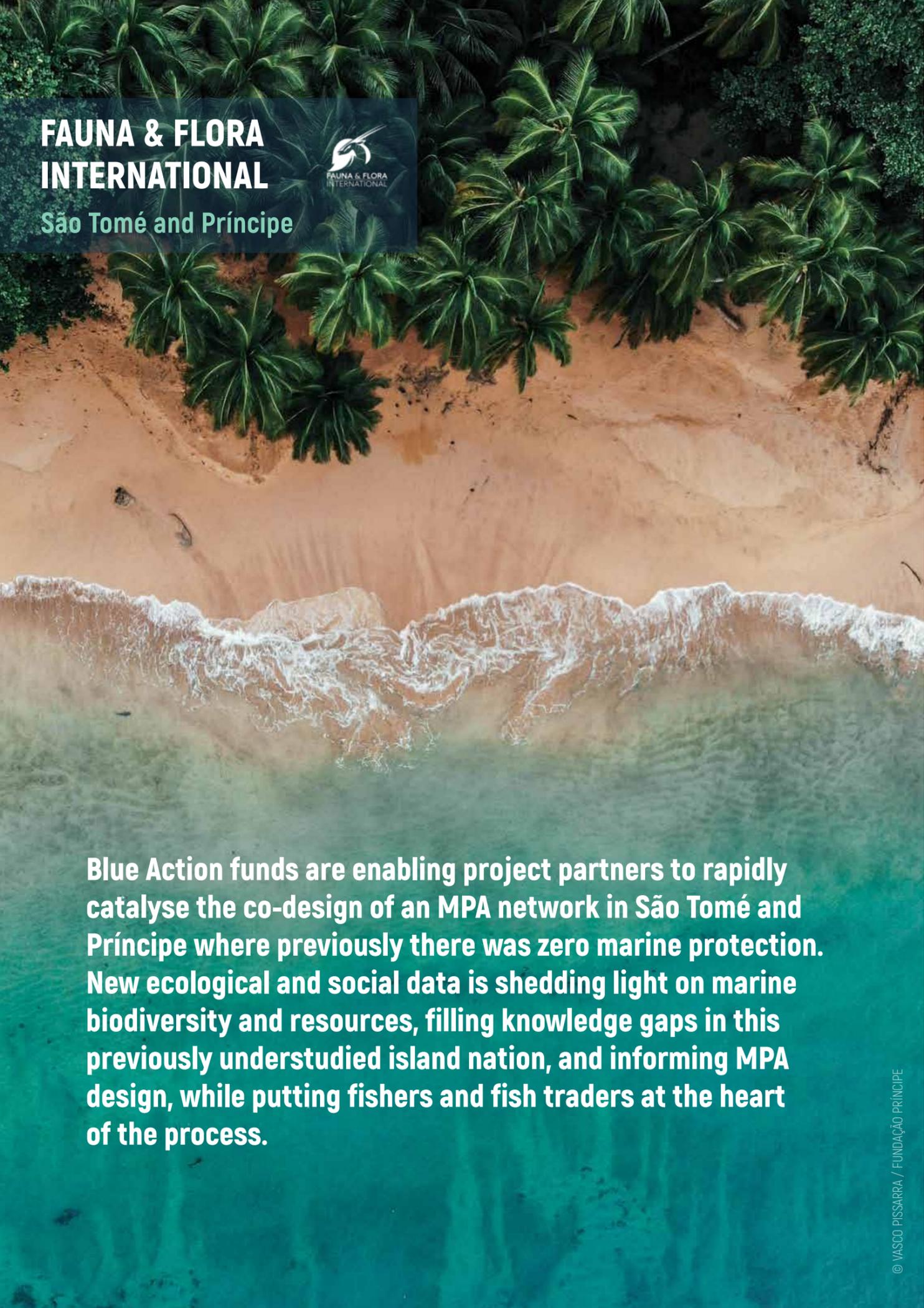
Island restoration and rewilding are important ocean conservation and climate resiliency tools, and a priority intervention to help restore MPAs. The holistic approach taken by this project serves as a model for how local communities, governments, stakeholders, and NGOs can work together to advance conservation initiatives that not only protect marine habitats and wildlife, but also enable these collectives to fully leverage the power of the island-ocean connection by restoring the land to restore the sea. This will facilitate further marine conservation opportunities across the region – like the one already seized by combining the Galapagos and Cocos Island marine areas into this project – and motivate governments to increase their investments in marine conservation.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

Island Conservation's future strategic vision is to dramatically increase the scale and scope of island restorations and rewilding to maximise the co-benefits to local communities, including by restoring adjacent marine ecosystems and MPAs and making these systems and communities more resilient to the effects of a changing climate. A Call to Action to Prioritise Ridge-to-Reef Restorations for Community Resilience has already been issued to encourage action that embraces traditional knowledge, bridges marine and island restoration and funding, and advances island-marine rewilding and research initiatives.



© ISLAND CONSERVATION



Blue Action funds are enabling project partners to rapidly catalyse the co-design of an MPA network in São Tomé and Príncipe where previously there was zero marine protection. New ecological and social data is shedding light on marine biodiversity and resources, filling knowledge gaps in this previously understudied island nation, and informing MPA design, while putting fishers and fish traders at the heart of the process.

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ESTABLISHING A NETWORK OF MPAs ACROSS SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

PROJECT DURATION: OCTOBER 2018 TO SEPTEMBER 2023

BUDGET		KEY TARGETS	
Blue Action grant	€ 1,941,308 (75%)	Newly created MPAs	1,000 km ²
Match funding	€ 648,287 (25%)	Effectively managed MPAs	N/A
Total project costs	€ 2,589,595	Number of beneficiaries	26,840

São Tomé and Príncipe is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) in the Gulf of Guinea where marine biodiversity is threatened by overfishing and habitat degradation, and the livelihoods of fishing communities have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A Blue Action grant is supporting a project led by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) aimed at establishing São Tomé and Príncipe's first ever MPAs and creating a network of participatory fisheries management and conservation zones. Working in a consortium of international and local NGOs, Fundação Príncipe, MARAPA and Oikos, the project is helping to build conservation leadership on the islands and enhance local livelihoods by promoting sustainable fishing practices and enabling local fishers and fish traders to engage in the MPA co-design and management processes.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

Until now, conservation on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe has almost entirely targeted terrestrial biodiversity, including by establishing national parks in tropical forest areas and a UNESCO biosphere reserve on Príncipe Island. This project therefore has the exciting challenge of building towards a national scale network of MPAs from a starting point of no formal marine protection at all, in a context where marine biodiversity has not previously been a priority, and where marine conservation is new for all parties involved in the co-management process. On top of this, the nation's unique geography means that activities are focused on two islands, 160 km apart, with significant differences in population size, fishing pressures, and engagement with the devolved government structures. The project is working at a national scale but must consider very different regional contexts.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

For FFI and the consortium of local and international partner organisations working on this project, the goal is to build a network of MPAs that are jointly managed by the government and local fishing communities and that deliver benefits to both marine biodiversity and livelihoods. Blue Action funds help deliver this objective by allowing project partners to rapidly catalyse the co-design of an MPA network, while the significant size and duration of the grant is making it possible to operate on a national scale and five-year timeframe that facilitates a robust community consultation process. The fact that the Blue Action funding is explicitly focused on establishing effective MPAs is helping the project to target its approach and optimise the use of expertise across the consortium partners.





In the face of declining fish catch, the project places a strong emphasis on involvement of small-scale fishers and fish traders. The grant has enabled this engagement and the filling of knowledge gaps, helping build momentum toward MPAs in a country that has none.

What has been achieved so far?

Since the launch of the project in 2018, it has generated a huge expansion of knowledge about marine biodiversity in São Tomé and Príncipe by both collecting new data and consolidating existing information, including:

- The first GPS tracking of seabirds in the Tinhosas islets, revealing the potential benefits of future MPAs for the largest seabird colony in the Gulf of Guinea.
- The first national scale campaign of Baited Remote Underwater Videos (BRUVs) to document species with conservation and commercial importance.
- Expanded community-led monitoring of fish catch landing data, with ongoing and frequent data collection essential to show changes in catch over time.
- After an intensive participatory stakeholder consultation process, the co-management Assembly of Príncipe agreed on the proposed first six MPAs.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

The MPA design and consultation process is a major ongoing participatory exercise taking place over multiple years. Multi-stakeholder technical working groups have been established, preliminary MPA sites were identified following participatory consultation, and local communities continue to receive training on MPA co-management. The project is dedicated to building local conservation leadership, so everyone involved was delighted when a local project staff member won a global award in marine conservation leadership.

Strengthening local capacity is vital for ensuring the project has a lasting impact on communities in São Tomé and Príncipe, where food security is so closely linked to marine biodiversity. Due to its remote island location, this SIDS has one of the world's highest dependencies on fisheries for nutrition, with fish contributing over 60% of people's intake of animal protein. The project is building on a previous fisheries project in São Tomé and Príncipe and has already held over 230 community meetings and expanded participation across 37 communities. Thanks to this proactive community engagement, results from household surveys in 2021 show that 97% of respondents surveyed in Príncipe now have a 'moderately positive to positive' perception of marine conservation, an increase of 60% since the start of the project.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

Communities in São Tomé and Príncipe have experienced acute hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic, creating additional challenges for the project to navigate and temporarily disrupting some of its livelihood components. In 2021, the average household income from fishing activities in households participating in the project was found to be 66% lower in Príncipe and 53% lower in São Tomé compared to the start of the project. In addition, the different political realities and levels of support for MPAs between the two islands require a carefully adapted approach, while the lack of a legal framework for MPAs or experience in MPA implementation means that the project is required to spend significant time and resources bringing in relevant examples from other locations and raise awareness about MPAs and their benefits.

How can this project inform and inspire other communities to take similar action?

The context of São Tomé and Príncipe offers valuable insight into how to tackle the daunting challenge of going from zero MPAs to effective marine protection on a national scale relatively quickly, with potentially significant benefits for both people and biodiversity. The project also offers an interesting opportunity to directly connect local fishers and fish traders to national and regional governments and decision makers in MPA discussions and planning. Although these short chains of decision making can also present challenges, the success of this project could inspire other fishing communities, particularly on SIDS, to become actively engaged at all levels of marine conversation.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

As the project advances into the next phase, the top priorities are to secure the formal designation of the proposed MPA sites and expand project livelihood initiatives with local communities. To achieve this, it will be important to consolidate MPA management structures and pilot management activities, such as joint marine patrols, and to continue strengthening the socio-ecological data needed to evaluate the project's impact and demonstrate the effectiveness of MPAs. Looking to the future, the project will also be exploring options for securing the sustainable financing of marine conservation in São Tomé and Príncipe.





This project is delivering improved MPA management to protect endangered migratory species and changing lives by addressing acute socio-economic challenges with skills training and help to create new jobs and enterprises.



IMPROVING AND EXPANDING MPAs IN THE SOUTH-WEST INDIAN OCEAN

PROJECT DURATION: JUNE 2019 TO JULY 2023

BUDGET		TARGETS	
Blue Action grant	€ 3,057,995 (74%)	Newly created MPAs	N/A
Match funding	€ 1,049,088 (26%)	Effectively managed MPAs	11,635 km ²
Total project costs	€ 4,107,083	Number of beneficiaries	4,400

South Africa is custodian of one of the longest coastlines in the world, but it is facing escalating ocean threats from resource extraction, foreign industrial fishing, and climate change that compromise both marine ecosystems and the livelihoods and food security of coastal communities. A Blue Action grant is supporting the Wildlands Conservation Trust (WILDTRUST) in its work at a global marine biodiversity hotspot, the iSimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage Site, in South Africa. Through capacity building, infrastructure development, and wildlife monitoring, this project is delivering improved MPA management to protect threatened ecosystems and endangered migratory species, while also actively addressing the acute socio-economic challenges faced by the people living nearby by providing training, new skills, and sustainable livelihoods support.

What unique issue is this project addressing?

Ocean protection in Africa is lagging behind many other parts of the world, both in terms of meeting the global target to have 10% of the ocean within MPAs by 2020, and ensuring the effective enforcement of the MPAs. South Africa currently has 5% of its continental EEZ within marine protected areas. The challenge is to achieve effective MPA management in a developing country context, under extremely tough capacity limits due to financial and human capacity constraints, and where impoverished communities depend heavily on marine natural resources. Ocean protection must also contend with the growing pressures being exerted on marine resources in the region by escalating marine hydrocarbon and mineral resources extraction, foreign industrial fishing, illegal fisheries, overfishing, and the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events that all threaten to further undermine food security and resilience in the region.

How is the Blue Action grant helping to deliver project goals?

The ideal outcome for this project will be to see MPA authorities and the adjacent communities working collaboratively, hand-in-hand towards common goals that benefit biodiversity and people. The Blue Action grant is helping WILDTRUST to achieve this vision by building the socio-ecological resilience of both local communities and nature. Project activities include the protection of important marine biodiversity – especially endangered species and ecosystems such as turtles, sharks and rays, and coral reefs – and the delivery of tangible benefits for coastal communities through sustainable resource use, improved relationships with the MPA managers, and new livelihood opportunities.





© CASEY PRATT

Activities include protecting endangered species and ecosystems – such as turtles, sharks and rays, and coral reefs – and delivering tangible benefits for coastal communities through sustainable resource use, improved relationships with MPA managers, and new livelihood opportunities.

What has been achieved so far?

Since the project began in 2019, it has been making an impact both in the ocean and in the community, by:

- Providing support to MPA conservation managers in the form of improved facilities, equipment, vehicles and boats, and training for MPA management staff.
- Developing work opportunities and skills for unemployed youth in the local communities, including as Beach Stewards, teacher's aids at schools, and in building community infrastructure.
- Carrying out community monitoring and protection of endangered biodiversity, especially through the monitoring of nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings.
- Improving ocean literacy and awareness among local communities, including at local schools.
- Establishing Community Resource Centres (Hubs) to provide support for training, small enterprise development, environmental awareness, community meetings, and access to internet and electricity.
- Generating new knowledge about marine biodiversity in the MPA, including filming rare coelacanths, a survey of previously unstudied deep reefs revealing diverse soft coral and sponge ecosystems, and the discovery of a previously unknown kelp bed ecosystem important for climate mitigation.
- Increasing understanding of the importance of the MPA for threatened sharks and rays, and about the value of sanctuaries for protecting reef fish and supporting surrounding fisheries.

What's the impact on local communities and how are they engaged in the project?

WILDTRUST is changing lives in coastal communities near the MPA by supporting sustainable local economic development through job creation, enterprise development opportunities, and social infrastructure development – all linked to the proximity and assets of the iSimangaliso MPA. Local people have been actively involved in constructing community resource centres, youth capacity-building, school support, biodiversity monitoring (e.g. turtles), environmental

education activities, creating job opportunities, and skills training. Looking ahead, local post-graduate marine science students have joined a network of Ocean Stewards and this will strengthen the local ability to effectively manage the iSimangaliso MPA complex in the future.

What are the main challenges faced and how is the project overcoming them?

High levels of unemployment and poverty in the local communities, coupled with financial constraints that effect the ability of the governments to perform their mandated functions, are ongoing challenges. To help overcome them, the project is now working actively on identifying and piloting mechanisms to provide sustainable financing for the MPA. Disruption by COVID-19 meant that some activities had to be adapted or delayed, but the project is on track thanks to intensified activities since the restrictions eased. Project partners also assisted the most vulnerable households during COVID-19 lockdowns by delivering food parcels and enabling local sewing groups to make masks and generate extra income. In 2020, the security situation in Northern Mozambique deteriorated, requiring the project's efforts targeting the Vamizi Islands to be discontinued. As a result, the project now exclusively focuses on South Africa's iSimangaliso MPA.

How can this project inform and inspire other communities to take similar action?

Other MPA initiatives targeting global biodiversity hotspots and/or World Heritage Sites in different regions, particularly in developing countries, could be inspired by the three-pillar approach taken by this project to combine effective management support, building biodiversity knowledge, and providing community support. This interaction between knowledge-building and on the ground implementation has been key to gaining the understanding and commitment needed for this project to achieve its goals.

What are the top project priorities for the year ahead?

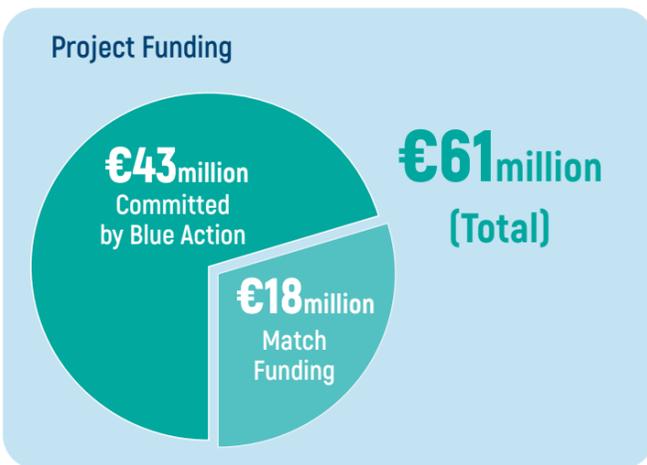
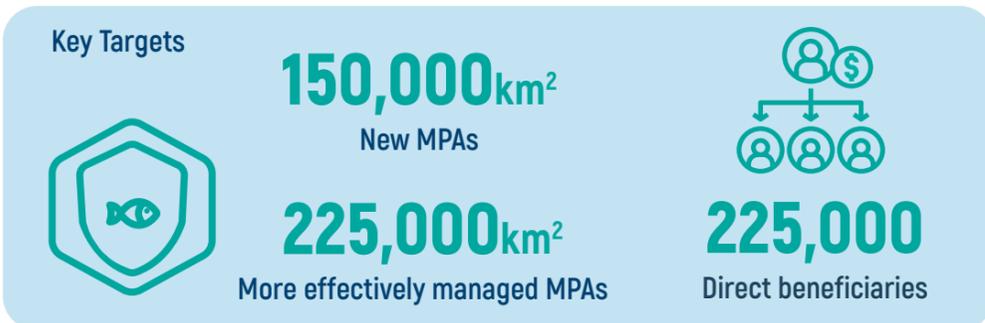
Looking to the future, the project will be rolling-out awareness and training activities and livelihood support initiatives at the Community Resource Centres; developing and implementing sustainable financing mechanisms to support both MPA management and community needs; and providing training and support for MPA managers.



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BLUE ACTION FACTS & FIGURES



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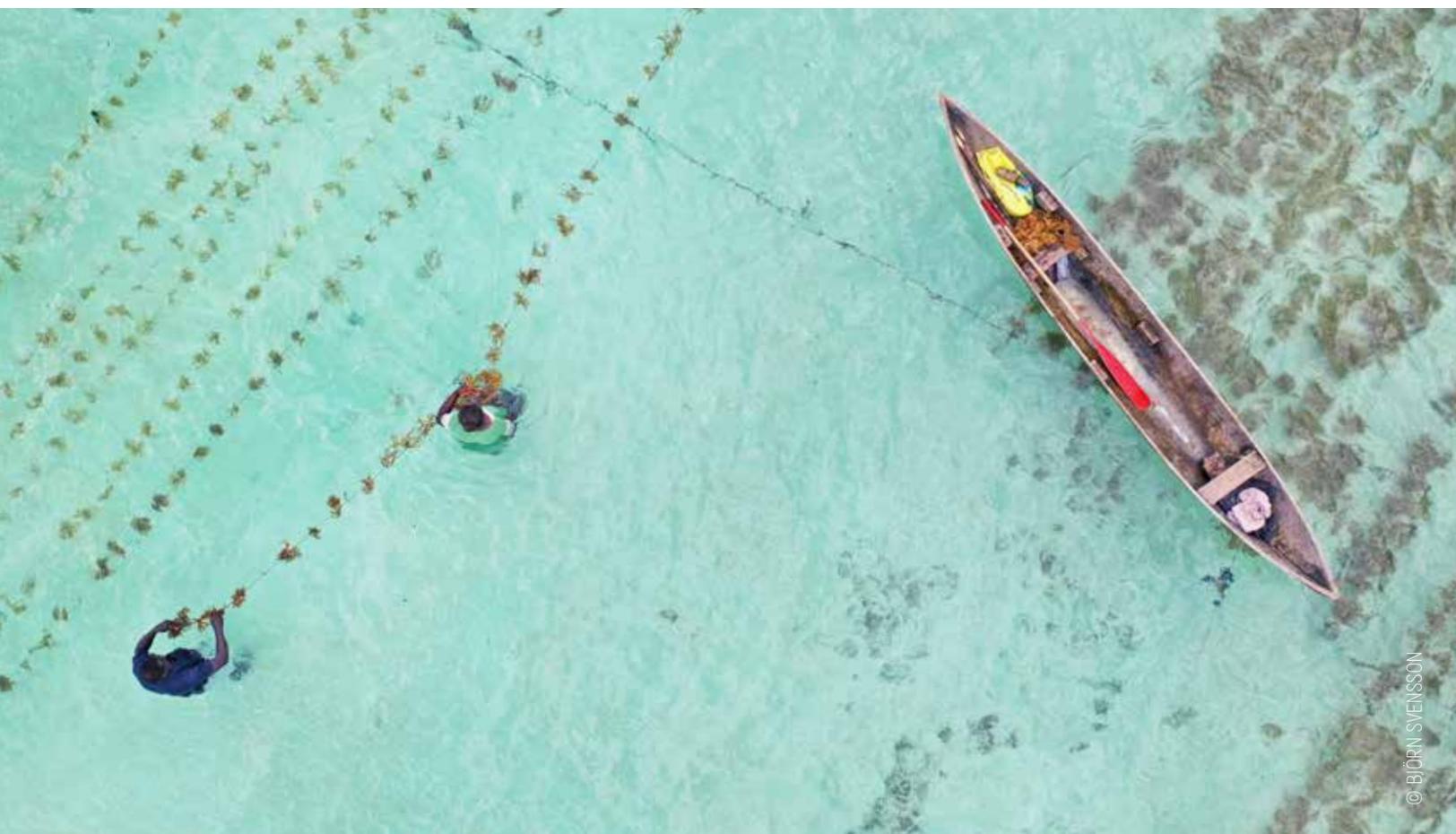


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Blue Action Fund

Friedrich-Ebert-Anlage 36, 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

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