

# Implementing an Ecosystem Approach to Coastal Management through Community-based Organizations: An Example from the Andaman Coast of Thailand

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Coastal ecosystems throughout the world are under significant pressure from a multitude of factors. Good coastal planning and management are an important element to maintaining and improving the health of coastal ecosystems. However, the effects poor planning and management are evident in many parts of the world and finding practical solutions that take into account the ground realities are needed.

This paper describes the learning from our work along a coastal stretch within Ranong and Phang Nga Provinces, Thailand. Assessments conducted identified human induced activities as one of the major drivers for change to the ecosystem. However, the legal mechanisms to implement an integrated approach are weak as the regulatory framework is complex and confusing, with overlapping jurisdictions.

To accommodate the situation, we have used an approach based upon a "reef to ridge" concept that encapsulates the ecosystem based approach which has been applied to coastal rehabilitation and management using a bottom up process that focused on local stakeholders with special emphasis on community based organizations.

By building upon the extensive base of community based organizations (CBO's) within the area, who have already demonstrated a commitment to managing their environment we anticipate that the long term sustainability on the interventions are more likely to be achieved.

A framework for action was developed through an extensive participatory process that involved engaging with stakeholders at multiple levels ranging from the village to national levels who



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have been involved at the three stages of participatory assessment, planning and implementation using local stakeholders.

The approach also builds on the existing strengths of the institutions within the landscapes that are strongest to deliver the ecosystem approach and also focuses secondarily on institutions that show interest but may not have the full technical capacity to implement. We demonstrate how action can be taken within complex systems where the ability to set up institutional mechanisms at a landscape level can be challenging and how a more decentralized approach can work to achieve similar results.

This approach has led to the building of a network of stakeholders who work cooperatively in a manner that takes into consideration the needs and capacity of the individual stakeholders. The paper will present the case of two CBO's a forest and river conservation group on how communities are managing and taking action to protect important ecosystems within the watershed.