



Philippine Community Benefits From Tourism

Challenge

Of the 100 families living in the Suba fishing community on Olango Island, alternatives for earning an income were becoming fewer. Fishermen faced with dwindling numbers of fish often resorted to illegal cyanide fishing to catch enough to supply the tropical fish aquarium market. Coral reefs were being destroyed by dynamite fishing which assured a more adequate catch from an increasingly depleted sea.

Village women who traditionally contributed to the family income by making crafts from shells, were finding the market to be oversaturated and the numbers of shells dwindling. The village was without electricity, potable water, toilet facilities and health services. The average family income was only about \$37 a month.



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

Marlyn Canete, the tour cooperative's secretary, has new confidence in her child's educational future because of the success of the cooperative.

Initiative

USAID funding enabled the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Coastal Resource Management Project (CRMP) to conduct a series of workshops for community members, acknowledging the residents' goal to improve the well-being of their families by creating a profitable tourist destination from the region's migratory bird flyway.

After a trial tour by international tourism experts in 1998, and earning an "A" rating, the authentic community ecotourism product was launched. In 1999, the cooperative took over administration of the tour operations and formalized collective ownership of the business. Word of mouth endorsements kept the community busy with an average of three tours a month.

Results

The Olango Birds and Seascape Tour, now managed by fifty-five cooperating community families, had thirty-three runs with 357 visitors during its introductory period, with 31% foreign guests from seventeen countries. More than thirty international organizations have visited the project. Familiarization tours were introduced for government agencies and tour operators to experience the potential of the project.

The simplicity of a program in which no infrastructure was built and nothing physically altered, using hopeful village residents as tour guides, won commitments and provided linkages. CRMP continued to provide support by organizing the community members, installing and implementing operating and financial systems, providing on the job training and marketing support before phasing itself out of the program at the end of 2000.

