

ATSEA

NEWSLETTER

Uniting for
Sustainable Seas
and Communities

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES TOWARDS RESILIENT COASTAL COMMUNITIES

ATSEA-2 Annual Report 2022
Promoting Sustainable Practices Towards Resilient Coastal Communities

ACHIEVEMENTS NUMBERS

347.22km

- 334.4km Rote Ndao, Indonesia
- 12.82km Barique, Timor-Leste

Coastline covered by Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) Program under ATSEA-2:



147 Technical Publications released

816 individuals benefited from livelihood-related trainings:

- 373 Men
- 334 Women

200

Events organised or co-hosted (2019-2022) to share ATS information, initiatives and enrich learning on coastal and marine management

2,329 individuals benefited from trainings/capacity building activities:

- 1,134 Indonesia
- 45 Papua New Guinea
- 850 Timor-Leste

54,045 individuals

- 31.6% Women
- 56.39% Men

of stakeholders engaged in various activities (2019-2022)

Co-Financing Commitment mobilised from 4 ATS countries and key partners (as of 2022):

- A. GRANT: US\$ 3,976,028
- B. IN-KIND: US\$ 23,158,713

Extent of coastline implementing Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) under ATSEA-2:

5,205.92km

4 EAFM Plans in place (3 EAFM Plans in Indonesia for Red Snapper, Shrimp and Barramundi; 1 EAFM Plan for South Coast Timor-Leste); EAFM Plans applied in Aru and Merauke of Indonesia, South Coast communities of Timor-Leste, and 1 draft Artisanal Fishery Management Plan for final validation in South Fly District of Papua New Guinea

Total hectare of Marine Protected Area (MPA) coverage

- A. Support to existing MPAs: Southeast Aru, Indonesia covers **114,000ha**, and Nino Konis Santana, Timor-Leste **55,660ha**
- B. New MPA established in Kolepom, Indonesia: **356,337.90ha**
- C. New MPA to be established in Manufahi, Timor-Leste: **~51,000ha**

5 local regulations issued

- 3 in Indonesia
 - 2 in Timor-Leste
- in support of ICM, pollution management, MPA establishment, IUU fishing

WELCOME

Welcome to the first edition of the 2024 ATSEA newsletter!

In this edition, join us as we come together to tackle illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing through Advanced Fisheries Intelligence Training. Our regional initiatives strive to empower stakeholders with essential tools and knowledge.

Explore our ongoing work to integrate strategic action plans into national programs, promoting sustainable fisheries management across the region. We hope these efforts will foster a coordinated approach to achieve our shared conservation goals and ensure the long-term health of marine ecosystems in the region.

Discover how we're supporting small and medium fishery enterprises in Indonesia, empowering coastal communities and boosting local economies. Explore the community-led initiatives of the Dale Esa Community Group, focused on preserving mangrove ecosystems.

In Papua New Guinea, find out how we're collaborating to enhance environmental conservation and sustainable development. Then, journey with us to Timor-Leste, where we're prioritising education, nutrition, and coastal resilience to empower coastal communities.

We hope this edition inspires you to join our commitment to coastal synergy and building resilient futures. Let's navigate the currents of change and progress together!

The ATSEA-2 Team

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Empowering Global Collaboration Against IUU Fishing Through Advanced Fisheries Intelligence Training

By Casandra Tania and Ni Luh Putu Yulia Dewi

The Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Phase II (ATSEA-2) Project supported the Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including to Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing Practices in the Region (RPOA-IUU) to organise the Advanced Fisheries Intelligence Training on 20 to 23 February 2024 in a hybrid format. The training underlines strategic global collaboration that was built upon previous training initiated in April 2022 and discussions from a Focus Group in June 2023. It was attended by 42 participants from 11 RPOA-IUU participating countries: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste dan Vietnam.

The training aims to enhance national capacities in intelligence-based analysis and interpretation of fisheries data, improve fisheries officers' practical skills for intelligence-led actions against IUU fishing, enable effective decision-making through intelligence insights, and foster an international platform for exchanging successful strategies to combat IUU fishing modus operandi.



Dr Handoko Adi Susanto, ATSEA-2 Regional Project Manager, delivers welcome remarks at the Advanced Fisheries Intelligence Training

Dr Handoko Adi Susanto, ATSEA-2 Regional Project Manager and Eko Rudianto, Deputy Executive Director of the RPOA-IUU Secretariat, opened the training by highlighting the significance of transforming data into actionable intelligence for fisheries management at the opening of the training. Dr Susanto emphasised, "There is an increasing demand to discover and enhance avenues for collecting information from both state and non-state entities, transforming it into actionable intelligence, evidence, and witness testimony."

Rudianto stressed the value of intelligence-led systems for transparency and effective planning in combating IUU fishing. Together, they advocated for a unified strategy in data analysis, reinforcing intelligence-led approaches as essential for sustainable fisheries management and addressing regional environmental challenges.

The training was delivered by nine experts from Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), INTERPOL, and the Joint Analytical Cell (JAC – a collaborative initiative established by the IMCS Network in partnership with TM-Tracking and Global Fishing Watch). The first sessions from DFO and JAC provided a comprehensive overview of fisheries intelligence methodologies aimed at

combating illegal fishing activities. Sessions delved into key concepts such as the Fisheries Intelligence Cycle, data categorisation, and utilising open-source tools for intelligence gathering. From the sessions, participants gained insights into the importance of standardised reporting systems and collaborative efforts between agencies to enhance the effectiveness of fisheries protection measures. Presentations also highlighted the integration of technology and human intelligence as critical components for successful enforcement strategies.

Moreover, sessions from INTERPOL underscored the intricate nature of transnational fisheries crime and the imperative of multi-agency cooperation in addressing it. The sessions emphasised the significance of intelligence-led approaches and global law enforcement collaborations in tackling challenges like flags of convenience and shell companies commonly associated with illegal fishing operations. The sessions provided an in-depth understanding of INTERPOL's tools and capabilities, including criminal intelligence analysis and operational support teams, as essential assets in the fight against IUU fishing and related crimes.

Lastly, case studies presented by DFO and JAC offered concrete examples of the strategic use of intelligence in law enforcement efforts. These studies illustrated how targeted asset deployment and the utilisation of open-source intelligence, such as tracking vessel activities, have led to increased awareness of illegal fishing operations. The sessions highlighted the importance of data analysis and international collaboration in effectively combating IUU fishing and ensuring the sustainability of marine resources.

A particularly enriching segment of the training was the presentations by representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. These presentations offered a window into the national strategies and best practices employed to combat IUU fishing. From detailing MCS activities to discussing legal reforms, technological advancements, and international collaboration efforts, the presentations reflected a rich tapestry of approaches unified in their goal to tackle the issue effectively.



Group picture of the Advanced Fisheries Intelligence Training Participants

As the training concluded, the positive feedback from attendees marks its success in meeting its goals. Amrih Joko Waspada, a participant from Indonesia, shared his enthusiasm, saying, "Participating in this training was a great honour for me. The content and approaches presented are incredibly valuable for addressing IUU fishing in Indonesia." He elaborated on his learning experience, noting, "The training introduced me to various methods to combat IUU fishing across RPOA-IUU participating countries. I believe that strengthening MCS practices is a highly effective strategy for tackling IUU fishing in our waters."

Based on the evaluation of the training session, the majority of participants confirmed that the training significantly enhanced their knowledge and skills, providing them with new insights critical to their existing roles and responsibilities. This positive feedback highlights the training's effectiveness in delivering essential competencies and perspectives to participants, thereby better equipping them for their duties. Specifically, the intelligence cycle and process, the intelligence-led operating model and the tools for fisheries intelligence emerged as the top three aspects according to the participants.

These elements stood out for their role in promoting a strategic approach to fisheries management and enforcement, reflecting the training's success in meeting the immediate and strategic needs of professionals in the field of fisheries regulation and conservation.

The training highlighted the importance of distinguishing between data, information, and intelligence in fisheries management and highlighted the crucial role of technology in enhancing MCS operations. A significant outcome was the collective agreement on the need for a regional mechanism for data sharing and the commitment of participating countries to strengthen their intelligence capabilities, including the exploration of establishing dedicated intelligence units in each country.

This move marks a key advancement in the fight against IUU fishing. Furthermore, the training emphasised the critical nature of international cooperation and collective action, laying a solid foundation for future collaborative efforts aimed at sustainable fisheries management and the conservation of marine ecosystems worldwide.

Collaborative Planning Promotes Mainstreaming of the ATS SAP and NAPs into Country Programs

By Cristine Ingrid S. Narcise



Enthusiastic attendees at the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and National Action Programme (NAP) Mainstreaming Workshop in Indonesia

In the first quarter of 2024, the ATSEA-2 Project held a series of national consultation workshops which aimed to promote the mainstreaming of key actions in the updated 10-year Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Arafura and Timor Seas (ATS), and supporting National Action Programmes (NAPs), into the work and budget frameworks of the countries and strategic partners in the region. SAP and NAP Mainstreaming Workshops were held in Dili, Timor-Leste on 1 February 2024, in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea on 5 February 2024 and in Bogor, Indonesia on 29 February 2024.

Engaged a total of 111 participants (45 women, 66 men) from various government agencies, local governments, the academe, development partners, and the regional and national project teams, the workshops in three countries were organised by the ATSEA-2 Regional Project Management Unit (RPMU) in collaboration with the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) of Indonesia, National Fisheries Authority (NFA) of Papua New Guinea, and Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Forestry (MALFF) of Timor-Leste, and the respective ATSEA-2 National Coordination Units.

The ATS SAP 2024-2033 provides a common framework for the ATS countries to work together in addressing four priority transboundary environmental issues in the region as identified in the updated Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) completed in early 2023. These include marine plastic pollution including abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gears (ALDFG), oil spills, small-scale illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and decline in endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species and critical habitats. The SAP also identifies key actions for integrating climate change and gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) concerns in addressing the four priority issues, and operationalizing the regional governance mechanism (RGM) to support the implementation of the SAP and NAPs.

The SAP was endorsed by the 5th ATSEA-2 Regional Steering Committee (RSC) Meeting on 22 November 2023 along with the detailed arrangements, transition plan and financing plan for the long-term RGM that will support its implementation. A 5-year SAP financing plan has been prepared, which will be finalised considering inputs from the mainstreaming workshops.



Participants at the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and National Action Programme (NAP) in Papua New Guinea

The workshops were opened by the ATSEA-2 National Project Directors. Mr. Celestino Da Cunha Barreto, Director General of Fishery, Aquaculture and Marine Resources of MALFF highlighted the importance of the workshop results for the Ministerial Forum which will be hosted by Timor-Leste in 2024. Representing Indonesia, Yayan Hikmayani, Head of the Centre for Fisheries Research of MMAF, expressed appreciation for how the SAP and NAP were developed in support of national priorities. While Leban Gisawa, Deputy Managing Director for Corporate Services of NFA of Papua New Guinea, reaffirmed NFA's support for ATSEA and the workshop objective to align the SAP and NAP with the national programs implemented by relevant national agencies.

The opening of the workshop in Timor-Leste was also graced by H.E. Mr. Marcus da Cruz, the Minister of MALFF. "The Government of Timor-Leste has laid out its priorities and the challenges we face. It is our expectation that government partners will internalise these priorities within our government programs for joint implementation. This includes a focus on marine biodiversity conservation, marine tourism, and other areas crucial to the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and National Action Programmes (NAP) for ATSEA."

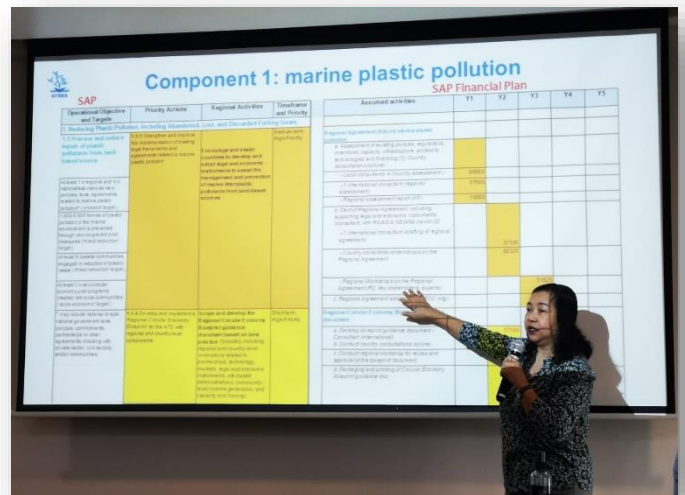


Workshop Participants in Papua New Guinea actively engages in discussions

In the three workshops, Dr Handoko Adi Susanto, the ATSEA-2 Regional Project Manager, provided updates on the development of the ATSEA governance system and benefits from the ATSEA collaboration. He highlighted ATSEA's role as the sole regional framework encompassing various environmental issues across the ATS region, involving the four littoral countries. "ATSEA stands out as the key regional platform for addressing diverse issues across the ATS region marking a significant step in our collaborative efforts," Dr Susanto stated.

In addition, Maria Corazon Ebarvia, ATSEA-2 Financial Consultant, presented the draft SAP Financing Plan including the estimated cost of implementing the SAP and the different financing options, while national consultants presented each country's NAP and accompanying financing plans. Representatives from key agencies in each country also delivered presentations that provided an overview of national policies and priorities for sustainable marine/coastal and blue economy development, and sectoral priorities and programs relevant to the priority issues in the SAP.

With this information, the workshops discussed key actions from the SAP especially in the first two years after the conclusion of the ATSEA-2 Project in December 2024, and identified relevant activities in the NAPs and other existing or planned country and development partner programs and funding sources that can support their implementation. Participants also agreed on key steps to facilitate the mainstreaming of



Maria Corazon Ebarvia, ATSEA-2 Financial Consultant, presents an insightful presentation on the SAP Financing Plan

priority actions into the countries and partners' work programs. Continuing in this vein, similar consultations are underway with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), ATSEA-2's national focal agency in Australia.

These discussions are critical to the broader aim of formalising the SAP, NAPs, RGM and their financing plans for implementation through a Ministerial Declaration to be signed at the Ministerial Forum in Timor-Leste in August 2024. This momentous occasion will mark the beginning of the transition from the donor-supported ATSEA-2 project to a sustainable regional governance mechanism, dedicated to realising the shared vision of "A healthy, resilient, and productive ATS that supports human wellbeing and nature," and ensuring the long-term conservation and productivity of the Arafura and Timor Seas.



Workshop participants in Timor-Leste discuss ideas in a group session



Meet “Dale Esa”: A Journey of Mangrove Conservation and Community Empowerment in Indonesia

By Stella Yovita Arya Puteri

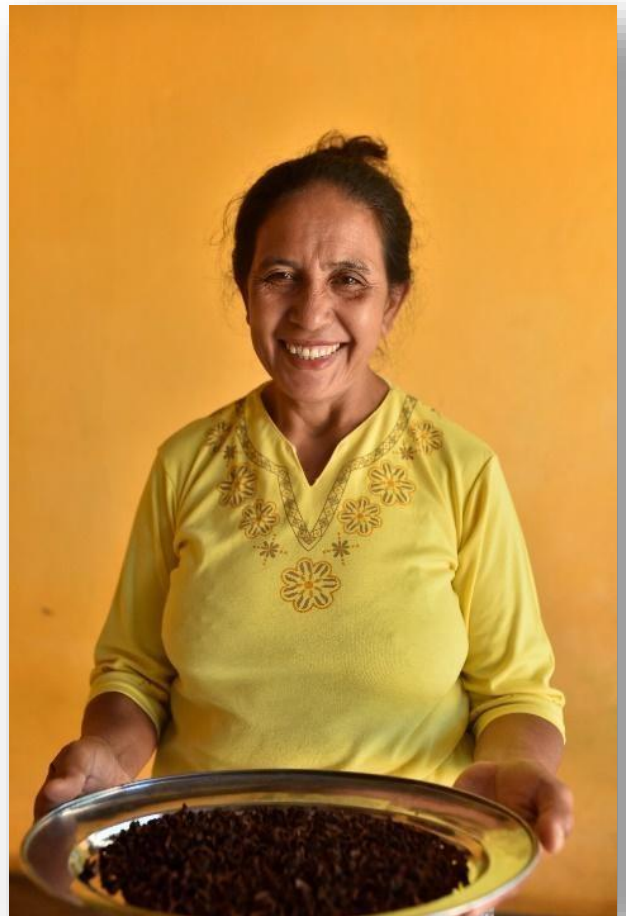
The Arafura and Timor Seas area is filled with wildlife, including important mangroves that are 25% of the world's total and have 45 different types. These mangroves are essential for many sea animals and protect coasts from erosion and climate change. They also support the livelihoods of people living nearby, showing the strong connection between human well-being and healthy natural habitats.

The Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Phase II (ATSEA-2) Project works together with various stakeholders to support communities on protecting this area's nature by using strategies that care for the environment while helping coastal communities thrive. It encourages working together to make mangroves stronger and supports activities like planting mangroves and fishing sustainably. This approach aims to balance human needs with the health of marine life, as practised in Daiama Village, Rote Ndao District, Indonesia.

In June 2023, the ATSEA-2 team witnessed this narrative firsthand, observing the village's commitment to environmental sustainability and economic resilience. This story is championed by local leaders like Novika Tupu (Mama Novi) and Steven Mesah (Om Steven), who are at the forefront of Daiama's innovative mangrove conservation efforts.

Dale Esa, translating to "unified heart," perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the community group led by Mama Novi. This group is the driving force behind the Mangrove Coffee Project, an initiative that seamlessly blends traditional skills with contemporary conservation methods. By doing so, Dale Esa not only aims to diversify Daiama's economy but also enhances the ecological value of mangroves beyond their protective roles. "This project could revolutionise our village's economy and broaden awareness of the importance of mangroves," the community believes, showcasing the transformative potential of the Mangrove Coffee Project on Daiama's landscape.

This endeavour highlights the untapped economic potential of mangroves, a revelation made possible through the comprehensive training



Mama Novi showcases the mangrove seeds that are soon to be ground into a rich and sustainable coffee blend



Om Steven in Daiama Village, on the land earmarked for new mangrove planting

provided by the ATSEA-2 project. With BPOM certification on the horizon, Mama Novi states, "The ATSEA-2 training has been crucial in revealing the economic opportunities mangroves offer our community. We're eager for the certification, anticipating a significant boost in our community's income."

Om Steven complements Mama Novi's economic initiatives with a strong environmental stewardship, leading the "Mulut Seribu" community surveillance group (*Kelompok Masyarakat Pengawas/Pokmaswas*). His effort in planting over 13,000 mangrove seedlings underline a profound commitment to the health of marine ecosystems. "Meaningful environmental action has been catalysed by government support and targeted training," reflects Om Steven, highlighting the importance of community vigilance and sustainable practices in conservation efforts.



Mangrove seeds ready to be ground

The collaboration between Mama Novi and Om Steven represents a powerful model of community leadership that marries economic innovation with environmental conservation. Their collective efforts not only showcase the economic value of mangroves but also underscore the critical role of community-led environmental protection. The ATSEA-2 project supports Daiama Village by providing training, facilitating dialogues with government bodies, and promoting alternative livelihoods, ensuring the longevity and impact of the village's conservation work. This approach illustrates the project's commitment to empowering communities for sustainable futures.

Empowering Communities for a Sustainable Future

Daiama's journey from traditional livelihoods to pioneering initiatives like the Mangrove Coffee Project is a testament to the power of community-led conservation. Highlighted by the ATSEA-2 project, Daiama's experience offers valuable insights into how integrated efforts can support global environmental objectives and improve community well-being.

Daiama Village's transition showcases the significant impact of empowering local communities through conservation. By accessing essential resources and fostering open dialogue, Daiama exemplifies effective community-led action in achieving sustainable environmental outcomes, ensuring the mangroves' longevity and the community's prosperity.



Roasting dried mangrove seeds with traditional methods in Rote Ndao

Elevating Local Economic Potential: Supporting Small and Medium Fishery Enterprises in Merauke and Aru

By Avicenna Wijayanto and Arrico Fathur Yudha B. (Taka Foundation)



The Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Phase II (ATSEA-2) Project, in collaboration with Taka Foundation, has organised a series of trainings to enhance the quality of processed fishery products and business administration management for fishing communities in the Aru Archipelago, Maluku and Merauke District, South Papua. Spanning from November 2023 to February 2024, this initiative has successfully supported five fishing groups across different locations, involving a total of 95 coastal communities.

In Merauke, the beneficiaries include Eltimo Food from Lampu Satu Village and Yanbui from Kumbe Village. Meanwhile, in Aru Archipelago, supported groups comprise Longgar Jaya from Longgar Village, Balobo Star from Aparas Village, Kora Evar

from Wangel Village the Dobo smoked fish group from Siwa Lima Village. Each group, with its unique commodities, embarked on this path with determination and hope.

Through comprehensive training sessions, the groups were introduced with practical insights into fish processing, business management and the vast potential of market linkage. The goal is to equip these communities with the skills and certifications necessary to elevate their products to meet the Domestic Industry Production Certificate (*Sertifikat Produksi Pangan Industri Rumah Tangga/SPP-PIRT*) and the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (*Badan Pengawas Obat dan Makanan/BPOM*) certification standards, thereby unlocking new markets and opportunities.

A critical component of the project was the development and implementation of market linkage strategies, both offline and online. Offline approaches involved direct consumer engagement, while online strategies leveraged digital marketplaces and social media platforms, significantly increasing sales projections and improving the financial stability of the involved community groups.

Additionally, the groups were supported in creating sticker designs for their fishery product packaging. This effort helps in fulfilling licensing requirements and strengthens the brand image of each group's products. For instance, the Dobo Smoked Fish group, which initially used plastic bags for packaging, transitioned to cardboard as a more sustainable alternative after undergoing training on hygienic and environmentally friendly packaging methods.

Economic Impact: Boosting Productivity and Profits

Beyond merely achieving certifications, the initiative catalysed a remarkable boost in income for these communities. In Merauke, the Eltimo group was able to produce a maximum of approximately 100 packets of fish balls, the Yanbui group with its new storage pallet could produce 100-300 kg of salted fish in one production cycle.

Groups in the Aru Archipelago also saw notable improvements. The Dobo Smoked Fish group maintained a steady profit, with an average daily production of 500-600 pieces and an income of IDR 1 million per day. The Kora Evar group took advantage of fish skins to produce 80 packets based on orders. Additionally, the Balobo Star and Longgar Jaya groups, who initiated the salted fish business, achieved a production of 500 kg and earned profits of up to IDR 15 million from November 2023 to February 2024.

In addition, partnerships have allowed products from Eltimo Food and the salted fish from Balobo Star and Longgar Jaya to reach markets in Jakarta from Merauke and Aru through Nizzam Food vendors. Feedback from an e-commerce platform highlighted that the salted fish lived up to its description, being both tasty and tender, exactly as advertised.



Freshly smoked catch from the Dobo Smoked Fish group, showcasing traditional smoking methods for exceptional flavour

Despite these successes, the initiative faced challenges, notably in limited access to public infrastructure like the internet. Unreliable network signals have significantly hindered online sales activities.

The impact of this program goes beyond mere sales achievements. It has successfully cultivated a network of collaboration among local businesses and other entities, fostering a community that shares knowledge, experiences, and support. This network is instrumental in driving sustainable economic growth in the region.



Enhancing Environmental Collaboration: The ATSEA-2 Project's Path in Papua New Guinea

By Kenneth Yhuanje

The Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Phase II (ATSEA-2) Project in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is actively working towards integrating its environmental program into the national policy. The project team is currently drafting a policy proposal for the National Executive Council with the goal of formally recognising the ATSEA-2 Project as part of PNG's national government policy. This proposal aims to ensure the implementation of the ATSEA Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and the PNG National Action Programme (NAP) by relevant government agencies. It also seeks to secure national financial support for the Regional Governance Mechanism (RGM), thereby bolstering regional environmental management.



Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and National Action Programme (NAP) mainstreaming workshop with relevant state agencies in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

The ATSEA-2 Project has been instrumental in fostering collaboration among countries adjacent to the Arafura and Timor Seas (ATS), addressing transboundary environmental and fisheries issues. This initiative has facilitated significant achievements in information exchange and capacity building, enriching both regional and national conservation efforts.

Despite the project's conclusion set for the end of 2024, its positive impact highlights the necessity of continued cooperation. In response, the SAP and NAP have been developed to perpetuate the accomplishments of the ATSEA-2 Project and maintain long-term collaboration through the RGM. Integrating these programs into national policies is essential for their success and requires each participating country to align with their own policy-making and implementation processes.

A key workshop in Port Moresby on 5 February 2024, convened state agency representatives to discuss aligning their programs with the SAP and NAP. The workshop emphasised the need for a policy endorsement from the National Executive Council, which would mandate state agencies to include SAP and NAP initiatives in their strategic planning and budgeting processes.

In preparation, the ATSEA-2 Project team in PNG is diligently reviewing the policy submission with legal advisors and the National Fisheries Authority. This review process is identifying the necessary steps and stakeholders involved in the policy approval process. The submission will include the endorsed SAP, NAP, and RGM documents, underscoring their critical role in environmental governance. Anticipating governmental delays, the project team is initiating this process promptly to ensure timely implementation.

The ATSEA-2 Project marks a significant effort to enhance regional environmental governance and collaboration across the ATS region. By embedding this initiative within national policies, it aims to sustain its environmental impact and promote a healthier marine ecosystem for future generations.



Nurturing Education, Nutrition, and Coastal Resilience in Manufahi

By Dominica Guterres and Stella Yovita Arya Puteri

In an ambitious move aligned with the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education's "merenda escolar" (school lunch) program, the Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Phase II (ATSEA-2) Project, in collaboration with Permakultura Timor-Leste (Permatil), is transforming elementary education in Manufahi through a pioneering school garden initiative. This initiative is a cornerstone of a broader strategy to meld education, nutrition and coastal resilience, fostering sustainable practices and environmental stewardship among the youth.

The initiative engages five elementary schools: Escola Basica Central Dotik, Escola Basica Filial Wesusu, Escola Basica Filial Colocau, Escola Basica Filial Wedauberec, and Escola Basica Filial Feric-Sare'e. Each school embarks on this journey with a clear mission: to integrate innovative horticultural practices into the curriculum, enhance the nutritional offerings of school lunches with home-grown produce and instil a culture of sustainability within the community.

The project's comprehensive approach involves equipping educators and parents with advanced horticultural technology and equipment, empowering them to guide students in the cultivation of high-value, drought-resistant plants. This initiative not only aims to augment the dietary quality of school lunches but also serves as a hands-on educational tool, teaching students valuable lessons in agriculture, ecology and sustainability.

Overcoming Challenges and Building Resilience

Despite facing adverse weather conditions that have occasionally impeded progress, the initiative has demonstrated remarkable resilience. Efforts to construct protective garden fences, prepare the soil, and produce organic fertilizers have laid a solid foundation for the gardens' success. Teachers and students, driven by enthusiasm and dedication, actively participate in these preparatory activities, eagerly anticipating the expansion of the project to allow each class to nurture its own garden space.



The impending phase of the initiative will see Permatil's continued support in the provision of essential seeds, selected meticulously to meet the specific needs and preferences of each school. This careful planning ensures that the gardens will not only thrive but also reflect the unique character and requirements of each educational institution.

By introducing modern farming tools and techniques, the collaboration between ATSEA-2 and Permatil enables educators and students to explore the cultivation of a diverse array of plants and herbs. Moreover, the initiative has spearheaded targeted activities such as water and soil conservation training for the Manufahi community, directly addressing critical issues like water scarcity. These efforts include:

- Water and Soil Conservation Activities held from 30 November to 2 December 2022, in Wedeberek Dotik Village; 14 to 16 February 2024, in Sarin Dotik Village; and 16 to 18 November 2023, in Sukaer-oan Kaikasa Village.
- Home Garden Activities that began with training from 15 to 17 March 2023, in Sarin Dotik Village.
- A School Garden Workshop conducted from 16 to 18 May 2023, involving teachers from five primary schools.

These efforts are instrumental in enhancing food security and creating economic opportunities through the sale of surplus produce, thereby contributing significantly to the community's well-being and resilience.

Impacting Lives and Landscapes

Impacting over 1,215 students across the participating schools, the school garden initiative stands as a testament to the power of collaborative efforts in promoting coastal resilience and sustainable development. Through this strategic partnership, ATSEA-2 and Permatil are not only nurturing young minds but also shaping a new generation equipped to steward their natural environment responsibly.

As this transformative initiative continues to evolve, its success stories and lessons learned illuminate the path for similar projects globally, showcasing the profound impact of integrating educational initiatives with environmental and coastal management strategies.

The school garden initiative in Manufahi goes beyond a simple cultivation project. It shows the crucial role education has in tackling environmental issues and promoting sustainability. With dedication, creativity, and community involvement, this initiative aims to have a lasting impact on the students, schools, and broader Manufahi community.

Announcement

EAS CONGRESS

Mark your calendars for an oceanic adventure! The [East Asian Seas Congress 2024](#) will be held in conjunction with Xiamen World Ocean Week from **6-8 November 2024 in Xiamen, China**. Orchestrated by the Ministry of Natural Resources of China, Xiamen Municipal People's Government, and the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), this event goes beyond a simple conference—it serves as a model for sustainable ocean management.

Be Part of the Wave - Register Now!

Are you ready to dive deeper into ocean conservation? Whether you're an individual passionate about the blue planet or an organisation striving to make a difference, this is your platform to connect, share, and innovate. Seize the early bird offer available until **30 June 2024**, and join the wave of change. Dive in for more details [here](https://eascongress2024.pemsea.org/register/) (<https://eascongress2024.pemsea.org/register/>).

A Call to Ocean Champions

Got a groundbreaking idea or initiative? The Call for Expression of Interest for partners and development organisations to co-convene technical sessions or side events is your stage. This is more than an invitation—it's a call to action for those ready to shape the future of our oceans. Make sure to anchor your interest by **15 May 2024**. Find out how to make your mark [here](https://eascongress2024.pemsea.org/program/host-organize-a-session/) (<https://eascongress2024.pemsea.org/program/host-organize-a-session/>).

Let's Make a Splash Together!

Join us in Xiamen for a voyage of discovery and impact, where every drop in the ocean counts towards a wave of change. For inquiries about the EAS Congress, you may email us at eas.congress@pemsea.org

THE ARAFURA AND TIMOR SEAS SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' MEETING

We are pleased to announce of the upcoming Arafura and Timor Seas (ATS) Senior Government Officials' Meeting (SGOM), taking place in **Brisbane, Australia, on 25 and 26 June 2024**. This meeting will act as a preparatory session for the ATS Ministerial Forum, offering guidance to the Regional Project Management Unit (RPMU). It will be followed by a Special Forum with Australian Agencies, aiming to foster knowledge exchange and synergy with the ATS Strategic Action Programme (SAP). Additionally, attendees will have the opportunity to visit the Australian Research Council's Training Centre for Bioplastics and Biocomposites at the University of Queensland, highlighting our commitment to collaboration and innovation.

THE ARAFURA AND TIMOR SEAS MINISTERIAL FORUM

Following the Senior Government Officials' Meeting (SGOM), we'd like to inform you about the Arafura-Timor Seas (ATS) Ministerial Forum, set for **September in Dili, Timor-Leste**. This forum is a key event for launching the ATS Regional Governance Mechanism (RGM) and kick-starting the implementation phase of the ATS Strategic Action Programme (SAP) along with the National Action Programmes (NAPs) for 2024-2033. A highlight of the forum will be the signing of the ATS Ministerial Declaration 2024, marking a significant milestone in our collaborative efforts for regional sustainability and governance.



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