In implementing the BMZ project on ecologically and socio-economically sound coastal ecosystem rehabilitation, methods based on a holistic, ecosystem approach were adopted by the Thailand programme of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This approach was applied to a coastal stretch along on the North Andaman coast of Thailand that included a wide range of inter-connected habitats from coral reefs and seagrass beds to mangroves and undisturbed montane, dry and moist evergreen forests.

The approach is based on the interpretation of the 12 principles from the Convention on Biodiversity into practical actions, with emphases on the most important principle that all relevant stakeholders of society and scientific disciplines should be involved in identifying and applying actions. Thus, IUCN engaged with government agencies, local authorities, and experts, in nine tambons in four districts, encompassing 32 villages, 1,800 households with a population of 6,500 people. Fifty seven meetings were held initially at national, provincial, district, sub district and community level with a suite of stakeholders.

Critically, for the future conservation, the need to engage with youth at all sites in which it worked was promoted as part of the ecosystem approach. Youth groups across the watershed were engaged in monitoring their environment with 240 school children and school leavers from seven villages being actively involved. Investing in youth groups is an investment for the future, as the youth of today will be the ambassadors for conservation tomorrow.
Initial training and subsequent monitoring

Youth groups at all sites were initially given scientific training on
- monitoring water quality and flow of their respective local rivers;
- monitoring the extent and quality of seagrass beds; and
- rehabilitation of the Water Lily species endemic to the region.

This process involved training for implementing simplified scientific assessment methodology. During the first year, IUCN provided technical input and supervision. However, during the second year of the project, the youth were sufficiently competent to carry out the monitoring on their own, three times a year at given permanent stations, with minimal supervision. They are also able to analyse their data and explain the results to the rest of the community, thus raising awareness amongst their own communities.

Networking, to exemplify the reef to ridge approach

The next step in this process was to network the youth groups from the watershed areas to youth groups from the estuary.

This is now a regular event where empowered youth armed with science-based knowledge are able to share this with their peers from a different area.

The culmination of this process is a youth seminar which will gather the youth networks in both the Ranong and Phang Nga Provinces where ideas will be shared, issued raised and problems discussed.

Long term sustainability

For seagrass conservation, IUCN has established and forged strong links have been made with the Phuket Marine Biological Center, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and villagers. A three-year project of seagrass monitoring has now been established. The government and IUCN will share the expenses, while two demonstration sites have been selected through a participatory process and set up. The aim is to continue the collection of local information and include it in to a national database.

The youth groups in the BMZ project sites have demonstrated the following:
- that simplified technical assessments can be used at the community level to gather science-based data; and
- that networking from reef to ridge is possible, allowing for sharing of technical knowledge, clarifying issues and creating of awareness among adults.

Local level empowerment with knowledge has resulted in a powerful advocacy tool that is being used from reef to ridge.

Photocredits: Cover page and reverse right: Training in river monitoring and mapping © S. Soonthommanawaphat/IUCN; reverse, left: Youth group member explaining river flow changes to visitors © IUCN.