

# COMMUNITY-LED CORAL REEF RESTORATION at Laughing Bird Caye National Park, Belize

**Lead Organisation:** Fragments of Hope, Belize Ltd. **Location:** Laughing Bird Caye National Park, Belize  
**Project Duration:** Ongoing (2006 – Present) **Focus:** Adaptation [www.fragmentsofhope.org/laughingbirdcaye](http://www.fragmentsofhope.org/laughingbirdcaye)



## Project Overview

Formally established in 2013, Fragments of Hope (FoH) is a not-for-profit community-based organisation based in Placencia, Belize, focusing on restoration of coral reef habitats and advocacy for sustainable management of associated habitats. FoH has been coordinating and engaging local stakeholders in community-based restoration and sustainable management of coral reef habitats in the Laughing Bird Caye National Park since 2006, with their work lauded locally and internationally as an example of effective restoration.

Laughing Bird Caye National Park is one of the seven marine protected areas that make up the Belize Barrier Reef World Heritage Site. Recognised as a key resource for tourism, it provides significant social and economic benefits to local communities. However, major hurricanes, bleaching and disease events in 1998 and 2001 caused significant damage to the reef system, reducing coral cover to less than 6 percent. In response, in 2006, active restoration through the transplantation of corals was initiated within the

National Park by FoH with the engagement of the local community, including fishers and tourism operators as well as staff from the Belize Fisheries Department.

Project funding is primarily sourced from grants written and leveraged by FoH including from: the World Wildlife Fund; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP); CARIBSAVE; Inter-American Development Bank; Mesoamerican Reef Fund; Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre; World Bank; the Adaptation Fund; Protected Areas Conservation Trust; and private sector donations. Amounts have ranged from US\$25,000 from GEF-SGP to US\$230,000 from the Inter-American Development Bank.

### Four key elements of the ongoing initiative include:

1. focusing on the shallow reefs which offer the most shoreline protection against high wave energy and coastal erosion and flooding;
2. training and employing local fishers and tour guides to restore and protect coral habitat;
3. developing and curating educational products such as reef restoration methods and manuals to support knowledge sharing and transfer; and
4. offering routine capacity building workshops and information products on restoration and sustainable reef habitat management to local Placencia community members.



## KEY RESULTS

- Over 86,000 nursery-grown corals outplanted and a 10-20% annual increase in coral cover after outplanting at Laughing Bird Caye National Park.
- Establishment of 28 in-situ coral nurseries throughout Belize, and over 160,000 corals outplanted nationwide.
- Over 70 Belizeans, including women, trained in coral reef restoration and over 15 locals employed as snorkeling and diving guides over the past 10 years. For the women, they can earn up to 3 times more than the national minimum wage.
- Development of a manual and three-day training curriculum targeting coastal community members and actors with interests in the reef, to support capacity building and knowledge mobilisation.
- Endorsement of FoH's restoration approach by the Belize Fisheries Department.
- International recognition for FoH's work by the International Coral Reef Symposium and United Nations Secretariat for Climate Change in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Recently recognised as First Implementers by the United Nations Decade of Restoration.



## Innovations and Lessons

The local community's consistent involvement in and direct ownership of the restoration process has been a critical contributor to its successes. Key project activities are coordinated through FoH's Board, which consists of and is chaired by Placencia community members. In addition, the extensive stakeholder engagement and participatory approaches which combined science-based methods and local knowledge have been endorsed by the Belize Fisheries Department.

The strong partnership between FoH and the Belize Fisheries Department, as well as other conservation organisations in Belize, has positioned them as a civil society representative in national climate initiatives and decision-making activities, including in the development of a national reef restoration plan.

The project also emphasizes the importance of continued capacity building, knowledge sharing and transfer. This includes both formal national exchanges and published restoration manuals, as well as community-based workshops and ecosystem tours to transfer restoration knowledge and engage coastal community members. FoH also shares its methods and experiences online, works with local artists to develop free educational tools in the form of colouring books, puzzles and posters, and has provided training and insights to various regional and international partners with practitioner exchanges with Jamaica, Mexico, Honduras, St Barths, and Colombia. Its restoration sites and work attract a range of visitors to Placencia, including documentary filmmakers and a wide array of researchers, some of whom partner to pioneer methods for restoration and monitoring.

Over the project's duration it has been recognised that securing consistent, long-term funding is a key persisting challenge. Thus far, FoH has been able to use its expertise and experience in pioneering coral restoration and its networks to leverage multiple regional and international sources for sustained access to finance.

*This case study has been developed under the Enhancing Caribbean Civil Society's Access and Readiness to Climate Finance project. Its content is the sole responsibility of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and does not reflect the position of the Green Climate Fund or other partners.*