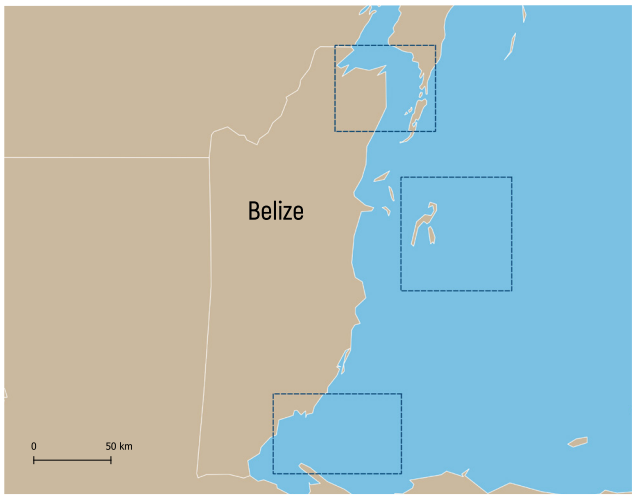
GRANT FACT SHEET

Building environmental, social, and economic resilience of MPAs and coastal communities in Belize





Project duration	January 2025 – December 2029
Country	Belize
Lead organisation	Belize Audubon Society
Partners	Toledo Institute for Development and Environment; Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development; Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association
Total project costs	€ 6,508,121
Blue Action Fund grant	€ 3,251,983 (50%)
Match funding	€ 3,256,138 (50%)


Photo: BAS/Jose Sanchez

Belize is the smallest nation in Central America and its only Small Island Developing State. It sits at the heart of the Mesoamerican Reef – the world's largest transboundary coral reef system, shared with Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. Its coastal and marine environments are globally significant, forming part of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This vibrant reef, the longest in the Western Hemisphere, is bordered by offshore atolls, mangrove forests, seagrass beds and clear waters. These ecosystems support traditional fisheries, Indigenous communities, and tourism. Belize's marine protected areas (MPAs) protect more than 100 species of conservation concern, including 25 Critically Endangered Red List species, such as the Nassau grouper and reef-building corals like the elkhorn, which are vital to reef health.

Belize's marine environment faces urgent threats, with unsustainable fishing – especially illegal and transboundary incursions – posing the greatest risk. Key species such as lobster and conch are nearing stock collapse due to overharvesting, weak enforcement, and economic pressures. Coastal and cay development, particularly for tourism, accelerates mangrove loss and reef damage, while climate change and coral diseases have significantly reduced live coral cover. Coastal communities rely heavily on traditional fishing and remain highly vulnerable due to climate exposure, their dependence on marine resources, and limited livelihood options, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable conservation and diversified income support.

Locally led by the Belize Audubon Society and partners, this project addresses a significant conservation gap and will strengthen the capabilities and capacities of local NGOs to support coordinated conservation efforts. It aims to strengthen the co-management of the Belize Marine Protected Area Network (BMPAN) under a shared governance model through formal agreements with the Belize Government. The BMPAN includes seven MPAs, with three additional sites proposed, and will expand Belize's MPA coverage to approximately 17% of Belize's waters; this would be under direct management of the BMPAN. Management Plans for all MPAs will be updated, and implemented using adaptive management frameworks that incorporate climate mitigation and adaptation. The project will also actively engage Indigenous people, local communities, and vulnerable groups including the Garifuna people, and it will promote gender equity through business training and seed grants for women. The project aims to enhance biodiversity awareness, monitoring, enforcement and stakeholder engagement, and will be supported by Local Advisory Committees. Efforts will focus on promoting sustainable livelihoods through financial support, small business development mentoring, and training, to foster community leadership roles for women and youth through environmental stewardship programmes such as Reef Protectors. The project will align with a complementary Blue Action-funded project – implemented by a WWF-led consortium – to maximise conservation outcomes.

KEY TARGETS

Newly created MPAs:	Effectively managed MPAs:	Number of beneficiaries:
N/A	5,572 km^2	4,298

KEY ACTIVITIES AND AREAS OF WORK

MPA GOVERNANCE

- Update, approve and implement Management Plans for all MPAs. These will adopt adaptive management frameworks and integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Facilitate financial reporting for each BMPAN organisation by standardising financial management systems, including a financial manual, tracking tools, and reports
- Enhance capacity building for MPA staff and ensure they have the infrastructure and equipment to effectively enforce regulations and reduce illegal and unsustainable fishing activities
- Establish and fully operationalise four Local Advisory Committees to ensure effective and meaningful stakeholder input into management decisions
- Promote youth engagement and environmental stewardship through programmes such as Reef Protectors and Junior Mangrove Protectors, while also providing 100 women with community conservation leadership training

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

- Establish two business incubators to provide capacity building, ongoing support and mentoring for community stakeholders for small business development
- Set up a microgrants and microloans programme to invest in small businesses in the northern and southern communities
- Provide financial assistance to youths from fishing families by offering 43 educational scholarships to improve their employment opportunities beyond fishing

SPECIES CONSERVATION/SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES

- Actively engage with fishers through boat-to-boat and house-to-house exchanges, improving their knowledge of regulations and good stewardship and increasing their participation in protected area management decisions



Photo: Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association (TASA)



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