



Department
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Darwin Initiative Main & Extra Annual Report

To be completed with reference to the "Project Reporting Information Note":

(<https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/information-notes/>)

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 20 pages** in length, excluding annexes)

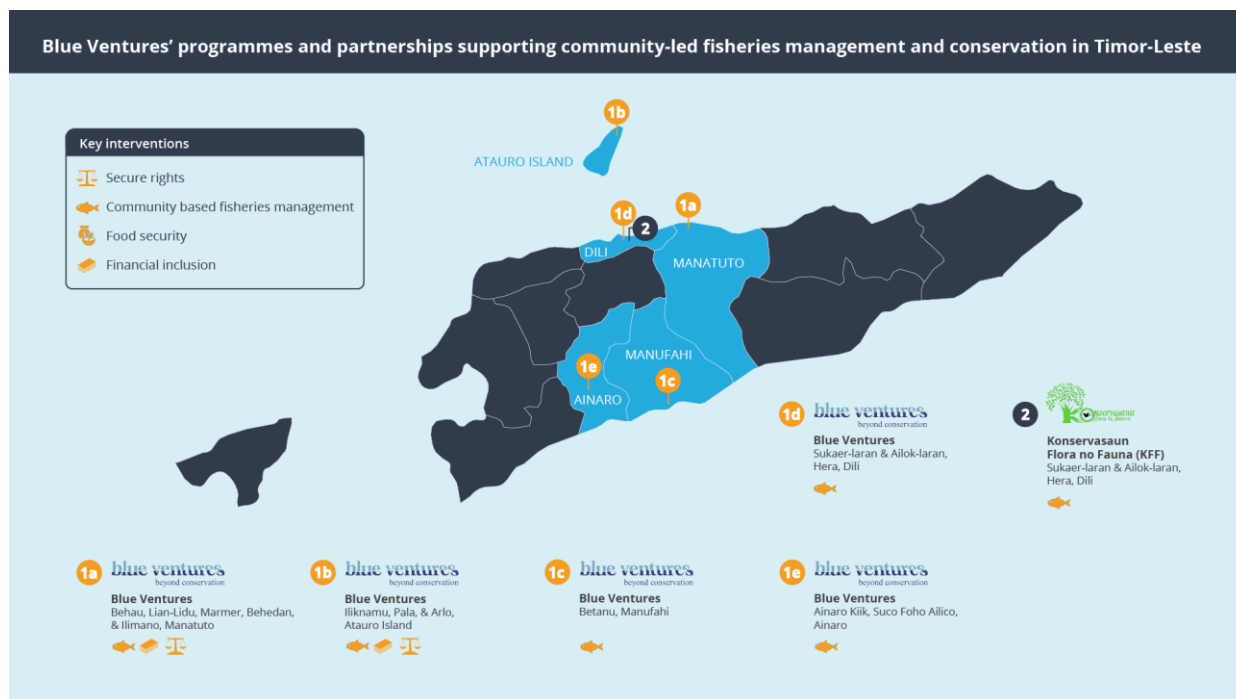
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Darwin Initiative Project Information

Scheme (Main or Extra)	Main
Project reference	30-027
Project title	Improving fisher livelihoods and protecting marine biodiversity in Timor-Leste
Country/ies	Timor-Leste
Lead Organisation	Blue Ventures Conservation
Project partner(s)	Government of Timor-Leste, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries WorldFish Dreamers Dive Academy (DDA) Assosiasaun Mariniero Timor Leste (AMTL)
Darwin Initiative grant value	£443,652.27
Start/end dates of project	1st April 2023 to 31st March 2026
Reporting period (e.g. Apr 2024 – Mar 2025) and number (e.g. Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 Annual Report 2 (AR2)
Project Leader name	Bernardete Fonseca
Project website/blog/social media	http://www.blueventures.org
Report author(s) and date	Nelson Amaral, Elizabeth Nevin 30th April 2025

1. Project summary



Timor-Leste lies within the Coral Triangle, the world's most biodiverse marine region. Despite its ecological significance, communities in Timor-Leste face deep challenges: nearly 42% of the population live below the poverty line, and 60% experience food insecurity. Coastal fisheries, particularly coral reef and small pelagic species, are vital for livelihoods and food security. However, overfishing, habitat degradation, and climate change, compounded by a lack of effective fisheries management, are threatening biodiversity and the well-being of local communities.

This project is being implemented across five sites: Arlo (Beloi), Pala and Iliknamu (Biqueli) on Atauro Island, and Behedan and Usu'un (Ilimano) in Manatuto Municipality on the north coast of the mainland. These communities consist of small-scale fishers who depend heavily on coastal fisheries for their livelihoods and income. The project and communities are working together to establish and strengthen Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), incorporating traditional practices and local governance systems known as Tara Bandu. By reviving customary management and building capacity for local data collection and use in decision-making, the project aims to empower communities to sustainably manage their natural resources.

Early efforts have focused on community consultations, baseline data collection, and preparations for Tara Bandu ceremonies to formalise fisheries management measures. These actions aim to protect critical habitats and support the recovery of fish stocks, while enabling sustainable use of marine resources to build community resilience. To address financial vulnerability as a major driver of overfishing, the project is also introducing financial literacy and savings mechanisms to build household resilience. By strengthening traditional governance, building capacity for data-informed management, and improving financial stability, this initiative aims to empower coastal communities to sustainably manage their resources and secure long-term well-being.

2. Project stakeholders/ partners

Blue Ventures (BV) launched its Timor-Leste country programme in 2016 at the invitation of the government of Timor-Leste. The purpose of BV's partnership with government and civil society organisations within Timor-Leste is to build national and local capacity for marine conservation and sustainable fisheries management.

As project lead, BV is delivering the main activities for all project outputs. BV's resident in-country team focuses on all community-level consultations, training workshops and post-training support.

The technical and support team provides the guidance for site selection, fisheries monitoring and assessment, impact evaluation and analysis, and the dissemination of project results to partner communities and national stakeholders. In managing this project, BV has worked with a variety of partners and stakeholders, building strong relationships to ensure long-term impact and ownership of the project objectives in the coastal and fisheries management sectors. The partners have grown and expanded during this period, both at local and national levels.

Timor-Leste's **Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)** (newly known as the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries (MALFF)) is the central Government body responsible for the design, execution, coordination and assessment of the policy defined and approved by the Council of Ministers for the areas of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and livestock. BV continues to consult the Ministry as part of this project's efforts to promote community-led fisheries management. BV holds a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with MAF to support the legal recognition and protection of communities and resources supported by the project; quarterly updates and meetings ensure alignment with the government's Strategic Plan. The partnership is also active in promoting exchanges, study visits and livelihood training among project stakeholders.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (previously the Secretary of State for Environment) is responsible for the design, implementation, coordination and evaluation of relevant policies, defined and approved by the Council of Ministers. This Ministry supports the implementation of the "Blue Economy" development strategy. The "Blue Economy" concept emphasises sustainable use of ocean resources, economic growth, and environmental conservation. BV continues to consult the Ministry as part of implementing Tara Bandu for marine areas.

Our partnership with **WorldFish** has strengthened our cooperation with government agencies and academic institutions, such as the University of Timor-Leste (UNTIL) who we collaborate with on socio-economic surveying, data collection training and focus group discussion activities, and the government's agriculture technical staff who have been supporting with livelihood (fish processing) training.

Dreamers Dive Academy (DDA) is a project partner providing experienced dive professionals who support training, equipment and international certification for project activities such as for safety at sea. We are exploring further opportunities for collaboration with DDA on ecological monitoring in the coming year. BV is also partnering with the Coral Triangle Center (CTC) to strengthen field activities, and is exploring options for collaboration and co-development of ecological surveying methods to be carried out across five sites by the end of the project.

Assosiasaun Mariniero Timor Leste (AMTL) is a Timorese seafarer association that promotes safety, security and protection between seafarers and ship owners in Timor-Leste, and promotes gender equality within the maritime sector. BV has collaborated with AMTL on a consultancy basis to support the delivery of safety at sea training sessions to enhance the knowledge and skills of Tara Bandu committees or fishers' groups, empowering them to better monitor the areas and to inform local management.

The project works closely with suco (village) councils in relevant areas to support dissemination of small-scale fisheries programmes and LMMAs. The activities include being involved in the meetings, training, assessments, surveys and financial inclusion activities, and involving women representatives from the councils in savings and loans activities, to boost female participation in fisheries management through involvement in preparing village plans and making decisions in their respective council meetings.

3. Project progress

3.1 Progress in carrying out project Activities

Output 1 - Savings and loans groups established and livelihood projects piloted with fishing dependent households, are improving the economic resilience of coastal community households and contributing to support for conservation goals by the end of the project period.

In tandem with LMMA stakeholder consultations (see Output 2), household socio-economic surveys have been conducted in new communities where work has begun this reporting period, and in a total of four communities across the project period to date: Behedan (54 households), Ilicnamo (87 households), Pala (175 households) and Arlo (31 households). Baseline socio-economic surveys are carried out with a phased timeline as each community decides to engage with BV to begin the LMMA consultation and financial inclusion process. Therefore, we plan to conduct the socio-economic survey in Usu'un in Year 3 (Activity 1.8).

Community consultations about Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) under the project have been followed by the establishment of a total of eight groups across four communities (Activities 1.1, 1.2). The groups are supported through monthly meetings to track activity progress, provide support when needed and collect information on the total savings and loans (Activity 1.5). From May to October 2024, savings and loan training was conducted for six new groups and two existing groups. Each group participated in a three-day training session covering an introduction to VSLAs, group leadership and structure, and fund regulations (Activity 1.4, Annex 4.1). The objectives of the training were to explain the role and function of VSLAs, the different types and terms of loans and the benefits for members, and to improve financial literacy including knowledge of interest rates, repayment schedules, and risk. As a result of the training, each group was able to manage their own transactions and record keeping. Across the eight groups there are 137 members (97 women, 40 men), with over \$6,000 in circulation (Annex 4.2). Additionally, two groups from Atauro successfully conducted their share-out of savings this reporting period, with a total of \$2,017.50 shared from this savings cycle.

Value chain assessments were completed in August 2024 across the mainland (one community) and Atauro island (two communities) (Activity 1.7) to assess species sustainability and resilience, market demand, post-harvest losses, and the potential increase in income from value chain activities. A total of 87 households were interviewed - 104 men and 19 women (Activity 1.7).

The results were subsequently shared with communities via data feedback sessions to identify which species to focus on for future value chain work. In Atauro, 61% of respondents indicated that fishing is their primary activity, followed by livestock (20%), business (7%), seasonal work (7%), and agriculture (5%). On the mainland, the majority of respondents also indicated that fishing is their primary activity (43%), followed by collecting dry wood (28%), livestock (9%), business (9%), agriculture (4%) and seasonal work (5%). Fish are often stored in cool boxes before being sold, and the community uses ropes, nets, and buckets for storage. The primary use of fish is for sale (55%), followed by personal consumption (30%) and processing (15%). Fish are typically sold to buyers or directly on the roadside, at the market, or for processing. Communities have a minimum income of less than \$7 and a maximum income ranging from \$10 to \$20.

In January 2025, technical training was conducted by technical staff from MAF Post-Harvest Department (with whom BV holds an MoU) on the production of fish 'meatballs', with 20 participants (18 women, 2 men) in Behedan (Activity 1.11). Participants were eager to attend the two-day session. The training consisted of half a day of theory and one and a half day of hands-on practical work, making fish meatballs. One attendee stated, "As the head of the village, I am very happy with this programme because it allows me to host this training, which is facilitated by the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture. I will help BV follow up on this activity so that it can continue within my community." A second training was conducted in Iliknamu on Atauro later that month, with a total of 55 participants (41 women, 14 men). The participants included fishermen,

gleaners, fisheries monitors, VSLA members, as well as local authorities such as village heads, sub-village heads, and priests. As a result, two communities began making their own fish meatballs in March using the skills and knowledge they gained from the training. As a result, all of the fish meatballs they made were sold at roadside selling points. One of the group members, stated, "The income from selling fish meatballs each day ranges from a maximum of \$10 to a minimum of \$5. I hope to earn more in the future. Thank you so much to BV for facilitating the training; now I can apply what I've learned to increase my income." (Activity 1.9).

In September and October 2024, gender and social inclusion training (Annex 4.3) was conducted over five days with VSLA members and fisheries monitors (see Output 3) from six communities with a total of 100 participants (82 women, 18 men) (Activities 1.3, 3.14). The training was facilitated by a gender consultant (via co-funding) and aimed to improve community knowledge and skills related to decision-making in daily life, covering both leadership and issues related to domestic violence, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and sexual abuse of minors and women's roles in decision making processes. Participants included fishermen and women, gleaners, local authorities, as well as church members such as pastors, catechists, and priests. Community members expressed enthusiasm with receiving gender and inclusion training for the very first time, with feedback showing that fishers and gleaners can apply what they learned in their day-to-day life.

Output 2 - Local marine management plans in place, governed by effective LMMA committees and implementing sustainable marine management measures which reduce threats to biodiversity, by the end of the project period.

Under this output, BV aims to establish a total of five Tara Bandu. In the second year, two communities formalised their Tara Bandu and established LMMAs covering a total area of 2.48 km². Community consultations also reached the final stage in two further communities where local management measures are being developed using Tara Bandu and initial consultations began in the fifth project site. During this reporting period, activities have focused on establishing Tara Bandu committees and formally setting up LMMAs in each community. This includes providing functional support to the committees to ensure effective LMMA implementation, as well as ongoing consultations in new locations interested in establishing their own LMMAs.

Behedan (in the village of Ilimano, Manatuto, mainland Timor-Leste)

Consultations with the local authorities and community in Behedan continued in Year 2. Upon completion, the LMMA was finalised, covering an area of 1.37 km² closed to octopus fishing for six months, followed by a one-month reopening period; this cycle will continue for two years (and includes temporary closures for certain fish species within the same timeframe). The LMMA committee in Behedan was formed, consisting of 19 members (15 men, 4 women), and a survey of 57 households showed 100% approval for the Tara Bandu (Activities 2.4.10, 2.4.7). The regulation and decision were finalised during a workshop with the council, which included 30 participants (18 men, 12 women), including members of the council and chiefs, LMMA committee representatives, and the fisheries monitoring group (Activity 2.4.11).

On the 29th October 2024, the Behedan community held a formal LMMA launch ceremony, bringing together 102 participants (60 men, 42 women) including representatives from neighbouring communities, the fisheries monitoring group, NGOs, and municipality and national government (Annex 4.4). The Tara Bandu regulations were officially signed by the council, municipality authorities and traditional leaders, and buoys and signboards were installed to mark the boundaries of the area (Activities 2.4.8, 2.4.11-2.4.14). Following the establishment of the Tara Bandu, BV developed a Tara Bandu booklet (50) and distributed it to stakeholders (government authorities, NGOs, dive operators, fisheries representatives, neighboring villages, LMMA structures, and local fishers) to raise public awareness about the newly established Behedan LMMA (Activity 2.5).

To ensure appropriate monitoring and surveillance of the newly established LMMAs, three committee members from Behedan's LMMA attended the safety at sea and surveillance training.

The training aimed to strengthen their preparedness in fisheries management activities, equipping them with essential skills to prevent accidents, respond to emergencies, and safeguard their lives and livelihoods, particularly while monitoring the Tara Bandu area. To ensure continuous monitoring and support for the LMMA committees, BV provided surveillance equipment such as torches, binoculars, and first aid kits (Activities 2.6, 2.7, 2.11).

In March 2025, the initial meetings with local authorities and community members took place in the fifth project community, Usu'un, another sub-village in Ilimano. The meeting brought together 39 fishers and gleaners (28 men, 11 women) and featured information sharing sessions to highlight the potential benefits of establishing a LMMA. As part of the session, a vote was conducted to assess community support for launching the consultation process. All 39 participants voted in favour, signalling strong interest and willingness to engage in further steps including the Tara Bandu process (Activities 2.2, 2.3). However, this vote does not represent a final decision to initiate the process as the 39 participants present represent <50% of the community population. BV will conduct household-level focus group discussions in Usu'un to gather deeper insights into their willingness to proceed with the LMMA consultation process (Activities 2.3, 2.4.1, 2.4.5). Following the initial meeting, with support from the fishers, BV began identifying areas for participatory mapping of fishing and gleaning sites to help determine potential locations for temporary closures, which will inform community decision-making (Activity 2.4.2).

Iliknamu and Pala, Biqueli, Atauro Island

The Iliknamu LMMA was officially launched on the 25th of September 2024 (Annex 4.4) and a ban on all fishing will be in effect for five years. The launch ceremony, attended by 201 participants (108 women, 93 men) representative of the national government, president of Atauro municipality authority, suco council and communities, concluded with the signing of the LMMA regulations and the installation of buoys and signboards at the site (Activities 2.4.12-2.4.14), and was covered in the news (see Table 2 and Annex 4.4). The next steps are to distribute the regulations to relevant stakeholders and train the Iliknamu LMMA committee on sea safety and surveillance. This training will empower the community to effectively monitor and protect the LMMA (Activities 2.5, 2.6, 2.11).

In Year 1, 70 community members and the chief of Pala community voted to establish a Tara Bandu. However, the community wished to wait until its neighbour, Iliknamu, had established Tara Bandu. In January 2025, meetings were reorganised with the community and local authorities to conduct a follow-on vote, accompanied by information sharing on BV's strategy and the impact and benefits of establishing a LMMA. These meetings brought together 120 participants (79 men, 41 women), including representatives from both older and younger groups of fishers and gleaners, as well as the village chiefs. Of the 120 attendees, 108 voted in favor of establishing a Tara Bandu, while 12 left before the vote concluded. Based on this result, the community and local authorities agreed to collaborate with BV to develop and implement a Tara Bandu (Activity 2.2–2.4.1). Participatory mapping subsequently identified the local fishing and gleaning areas, including landing sites, key habitats (mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs), and potential zones for no-take areas. The results were shared with the community during a participatory fish assessment workshop, which brought together 137 participants (75 men, 62 women) to discuss and evaluate potential options for establishing a Tara Bandu zone (Activities 2.4.2–2.4.3).

In March 2025, a community meeting was convened with 141 participants (74 women, 67 men) to discuss potential management strategies and propose boundaries for the protected area. Through collective agreement, the community decided the designated area will cover 1.35 km² for a five-year general Tara Bandu, which includes a separate six-month closure for octopus harvesting followed by a one-week open season (Activities 2.4.4–2.4.7). Before officially re-opening the area, they will first assess the presence and condition of octopuses. If no significant results are observed during the first closure period, the closure will be extended. This decision was made based on the community's understanding of the octopus life/reproductive cycle. During the opening period, only spearfishing will be permitted for catching octopus, while fishing for other species will remain prohibited.

Based on the decision made during the meeting in Pala, a Tara Bandu zone will be established to prohibit any activities such as anchoring, fishing, and gleaning using nets, spears, or lines. However, seaweed farming (carried out by women) in the shore area, boat passage, and tourism activities such as diving and snorkeling will be permitted. The Tara Bandu regulations for fish and octopus, along with the management agreement, are currently being drafted, with the intention of launching in the first half of Year 3 (Activities 2.4.9 - 2.4.14).

Arlo, Beloi, Atauro Island

In November 2024, initial consultation meetings were held in Arlo, Beloi with local authorities and community members and a vote was conducted regarding the establishment of a Tara Bandu. Out of 70 meeting participants, 50 voted in favor, one voted against, and 19 abstained or left before voting. Based on this result, the community and local authority agreed to work with BV to develop and establish a Tara Bandu (Activity 2.2–2.4.1). In December, the fishing and gleaning areas were mapped, including landing sites, habitats of seagrass and reef, and the potential areas for no-take zones. The progress was shared with the community through a one-day participatory assessment workshop, attended by 61 participants (38 women, 23 men) to evaluate options for the Tara Bandu zone (Activity 2.4.2–2.4.3). Subsequently in March 2025, the results were presented to 41 participants (21 women, 20 men) and sparked discussion on the potential management strategies and proposed location for the designated area. The group reached a consensus to implement a three-year general Tara Bandu or fisheries closure covering 0.20 km² (20 hectares), acknowledging Arlo's relatively small coastal area for fishing activities (Activity 2.4.4 - 2.4.7).

Based on the recommendations from fishers during the workshop in Arlo, Tara Bandu zones will be established to prohibit any activities such as anchoring, fishing with nets, spears, or handlines, and gleaning. However, boat passage and tourists will still be permitted to engage in low-impact activities such as diving and snorkeling. The Tara Bandu fisheries regulations and the management agreement are currently being drafted (Activity 2.4.9).

Safety at Sea Training

In February 2025, a three-day safety at sea training was conducted with 22 fishers representing LMMAs and fishers from five sites (three of which are communities supported under this project, and two in collaboration with another project) (Annex 4.8). The training consisted of both theory and practical in-water sessions, facilitated by two Timorese instructors and six assistants from DDA. The sessions focused on three key areas: first aid, CPR, and basic sea rescue techniques. The primary goal was to equip participants with essential life-saving skills to help prevent accidents, respond effectively to emergencies, and safeguard both lives and livelihoods, especially during the monitoring of Tara Bandu areas. In addition to the safety training, BV also delivered a full day session on surveillance practices, including guidance on surveillance procedures and proper documentation during community patrols. A follow-on training session is scheduled for Year 3, targeting the communities of Usu'un, Biqueli, and Arlo (Activity 2.11).

LMMA Knowledge Exchange

In March 2025, a three-day community learning exchange was held in the Timor-Leste capital of Dili followed by visits to two villages on the north coast, bringing together 106 participants (52 women and 54 men) representing LMMA committees, Community Fisheries Management (CFM) members, fishers, gleaners, and government staff from five coastal communities. The event fostered knowledge sharing on marine resource management, conservation practices, and community-led initiatives.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Lino de Jesus Martins, National Director of Marine Spatial Plan and Aquatic Resource Management (also representing the General Director of Fisheries) expressed, "the activities being undertaken by BV are aligned with Government priorities, and the Government continues to provide strong support to BV." Participants in the exchange engaged in field visits, interactive discussions, and peer-to-peer learning, strengthening collaboration among communities and deepening their understanding of effective LMMA implementation. This exchange served as an inspiring platform for showcasing progress, addressing shared

challenges, and learning from one another's experiences. It contributed to enhanced collective action toward sustainable fisheries and the protection of marine ecosystems across Timor-Leste's coastal areas. The activity highlighted the growing momentum of LMMA work in Timor-Leste and underscored the power of community-to-community learning in advancing sustainable and resilient coastal livelihoods (Activity 2.9 & 3.13).

BV continues to collaborate with the Government of Timor-Leste, and on the 26th March 2025 (Annex 4.5), a quarterly coordination meeting was held at the BV office with representatives from the Directorate of Fisheries, the Directorate of Biodiversity, and the Directorate of Environment. The purpose of the meeting was to provide updates and discuss the progress of ongoing project activities. Key topics included the collaboration on joint monitoring efforts between the Conservation Department under MAF and BV. The government has also been actively involved in supporting field activities, including the launch of LMMAs and the development of an LMMA manual. These discussions and collaborative efforts are expected to continue into the third year of the project (Activities 2.8, 2.12).

Output 3 - Communities are engaged in collecting ecological and fisheries data, which is being regularly analysed and fed back to communities to inform marine-management decisions, by the end of the project period.

In January 2025, new CFM groups were established in Pala and Arlo on Atauro island (Activity 3.4, Annex 4.6) and a one-day training session was delivered for 16 female CFM members in Pala, and 8 in Arlo. This training also covered landings profiling, use of BV's digital data collection tool, known as Kobo Toolbox, and data collection methods, with a particular focus on fish and octopus data (Activity 3.5). The CFM group in Pala completed fisheries landing profiling, with landing monitoring initiated earlier, in March 2025, to assess current fishing productivity and establish baseline data to support the community's final discussions on LMMA regulations (Activity 3.8). In Arlo, adverse weather conditions prevented fishers from going out to sea, leading them to recommend postponing the landing profiling and monitoring activities to April, in Year 3 (Activities 3.8, 3.9, 3.10).

The data collected in Pala indicate that fishers primarily rely on mangrove, seagrass, and coral reef habitats as their main fishing grounds. Several key species (such as octopus, parrotfish, fusilier, and spinefoot) were identified as particularly important and were subsequently incorporated into the LMMA regulations. These findings informed the decision-making of the community, fishers, and local authorities to designate a 1.35 km² general fisheries closure area, including a seasonal closure for octopus. This Tara Bandu zone encompasses mangrove, coral reef, and seagrass habitats.

Although landing data collection in Arlo was delayed until Year 3, BV facilitated a focus group discussion to gather qualitative data to support local decision-making. These discussions revealed that Arlo fishers predominantly depend on seagrass and coral reef habitats, with fish and octopus being their primary catch. Based on these insights, the community agreed to establish a 0.20 km² fisheries closure area, including a seasonal octopus closure within their Tara Bandu zone.

BV continues to provide regular support to the CFM groups which were established in Year 1 in Iliknamu and Behedan through monthly meetings to review collected data and offer additional technical support (Activity 3.10). This includes training sessions on fish species identification, data literacy, and communicating data findings back to the community (Activities 3.2, 3.11).

In August 2024, five BV Timor-Leste staff received two days of virtual training from the BV global data science team in data validation, visualisation, and interpretation to strengthen their capacity to deliver informed feedback to communities. Subsequently, in January 2025, staff received two days of in-person training at the BV Dili office from the BV regional data science team in data sharing and feedback sessions (Activity 3.7). Looking ahead, data-sharing events and a CFM exchange are planned for the early Year 3.

To further support ecological data collection within the LMMA sites, BV is exploring a collaboration with the CTC, a regional expert in reef monitoring, to conduct joint monitoring surveys across all five sites in Year 3 (Activity 3.15).

3.2 Progress towards project Outputs

Output 1 - Savings and loans groups established and livelihood projects piloted with fishing dependent households, are improving the economic resilience of coastal community households and contributing to support for conservation goals by the end of the project period.

In Year 2, six new groups have been established in four communities (Indicator 1.1.1), bringing the total number of VSLAs to eight (Annex 4.2). The total number of members in the six new groups is 137 (97 women, 40 men), with a total of \$6,063 in circulation.

To increase the economic resilience of coastal community households and contribute to supporting conservation, areas of opportunity for livelihood work were identified through focus group discussions and value chain assessments in two communities with a total of 104 men and 19 women (Indicator 1.2.1). Following the assessments, 75 fishers and gleaners attended technical training to develop the skills and knowledge to trial livelihood projects, and have formed two groups to make and sell fish meatballs (Indicators 1.2.2 and 1.2.3). In Year 2, 40 members (34 women, 6 men) from four VSLAs received two days of gender training, delivered by a consultant (Indicator 1.1.2, Annex 4.3). Baseline household income data has been collected in all communities with a VSLA, and endline surveys to measure the final change in household income, wealth and support for having an LMMA in their community will be delivered in Year 3 (Indicators 1.3 and 1.4).

Output 2 - Local marine management plans in place, governed by effective LMMA committees and implementing sustainable marine management measures which reduce threats to biodiversity, by the end of the project period.

In Year 2, significant progress was made toward achieving Output 2: two local marine managed areas were established, guided by active LMMA committees and supported by suco councils.

Having completed consultations, mapping, and zoning of Tara Bandu areas, the project has supported two communities in establishing an LMMA committee, and a third community is in the final stages of establishing its LMMA committee and has begun drafting its Tara Bandu agreement, to be completed in early Year 3 (Annex 4.4). Moreover, an additional two communities have shown interest in receiving support during Year 3 in both establishing LMMA committees and implementing management measures (one of which has begun drafting their Tara Bandu agreement), placing the project in a strong position to meet targets under Indicators 2.1 and 2.2 by the end of the project.

Following this, 34 individuals (25 men, 9 women) were actively engaged and supported as members of marine management or LMMA committees in Iliknamu and Behedan. An additional 20 individuals from Arlo, Usu'un, and Pala are expected to participate by the end of Year 3 under Indicator 2.3. Data collection training using a mobile tool has been delivered to all active CFM members and compliance with regulations has been observed on a qualitative basis. Formal management, advocacy, and data literacy training, along with quantitative compliance surveys, are scheduled to be delivered and assessed across all five communities in Year 3 (Indicators 2.4 and 2.5).

Output 3 - Communities are engaged in collecting ecological and fisheries data, which is being regularly analysed and fed back to communities to inform marine-management decisions, by the end of the project period.

The collection and integration of community fisheries data to support the establishment of LMMAs has further progressed this reporting period, with four CFM groups (Indicator 3.1) with a total of 50 members (48 women, 2 men) (Indicator 3.2, Annex 4.6) established to date across four

communities (10 in Behedan and 40 on Atauro Island) (96% women, 4% men). Intensive and regular fishery data collection was completed at an existing site, and a new site also began this process. Therefore, the project is currently on track to achieve its targets for Indicators 3.1.

In Year 2, a two-day gender training session was held with 14 CFM members (7 women from Iliknamu and 7 women from Behedan). Building on this, gender and leadership training is scheduled to continue in Year 3 (Indicator 3.3) for three additional communities.

Data sharing is integrated into community consultations to inform decision-making for establishing Tara Bandu, with each of the three communities (Iliknamu, Behedan, and Pala) participating in one such session. To enhance future feedback processes, the BV regional data science team trained Timor-Leste staff in January 2025 on effective fisheries data feedback delivery, and three further feedback sessions are planned per community by the end of Year 3 (Indicator 3.4). Although specific ecological data was not collected in Year 2, participatory mapping was undertaken in four communities, capturing ecological information such as the presence of seagrass, mangroves, and coral, which contributed to boundary designation of management areas. Ecological monitoring is scheduled to be completed by the end of Year 3 in all five communities (Indicator 3.5).

3.3 Progress towards the project Outcome

Outcome - Reducing fishing pressure and protecting biodiversity in five coastal communities in Timor-Leste through community-based marine resource management and sustainable livelihoods benefits 3,210 people.

In the second year of the project, five coastal fishing communities across the north coast and Atauro island of Timor-Leste have been supported with community-based marine management and livelihoods. Of these five, two communities have successfully established LMMAs covering a total area of 2.48 km², governed by Tara Bandu agreements that formalise their rights to implement management measures, local LMMA committee structures and CFM groups (Indicators 0.1 and 0.2). Two additional communities are in the final stages of LMMA establishment, and a final community is in the initial consultation phase to set up community-based management or LMMAs, along with CFM groups by the end of the project.

In total, 231 fishers and gleaners (28 men in Behedan, and 126 men and 77 women in Iliknamu) have been engaged and actively participated in community-based management. We plan to engage 269 more fishers and gleaners across Arlo, Pala, and Usu'un by the end of Year 3 to reach the project target (Indicator 0.3). Fisheries data has been collected by CFM groups through intensive and regular landing data collection in all communities with an established LMMA; the data were analysed and used to inform locally appropriate management measures. An additional one CFM group was engaged to begin training and data collection in earlier year 3, with a plan for all five targeted sites to have operational data collection systems in place by the end of the project (Indicators 0.2 & 0.4). Baseline data for household income is available for each VSLA group, however the measurement of improved economic resilience (Indicator 0.5) will be calculated at the end of the project on completion of the endline survey.

3.4 Monitoring of assumptions

Outcome assumptions

Assumption: Communities and other stakeholders are willing to participate in collaborative co-management of marine resources.

Comments: The initial assumption still valid, as demonstrated by the agreement of five communities, Behedan and Usu'un (Ilimano), Iliknamu and Biqueli (Pala), and Arlo (Beloi), which collaborated with BV in the development and establishment of a Tara Bandu or LMMA for fish and seasonal octopus regulations.

Assumption: There is no significant unexpected increase in demand for marine resources (i.e. Covid-19 outbreaks).

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid. No restrictions have been implemented due to the COVID-19 outbreak during the project lifetime, and none are anticipated in the near future.

Assumption: Political strategies are favourable to the sustainable management of natural resources.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid. This project's outcomes continue to align with the government's National Strategic Plan 2011-2030 by enhancing community resilience to climate change. Specifically, it supports coastal communities in protecting and managing their resources through the implementation of customary law (Tara Bandu).

Assumption: Engaging with project activities and access to economic incentives will improve attitudes towards protection of marine biodiversity.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid, as community members, particularly women, expressed deep interest in participating in savings and loans, livelihood activities, and CFM work associated with the establishment of a LMMA for coastal marine biodiversity protection during consultations.

Assumption: Socio-economic assessments are able to accurately define households' relationship with marine and coastal resources.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid. Socio-economic assessments are a useful entry point to support the community to decide for the implementation of LMMAs, and the information from the assessments provided data on community marine resource usage.

Assumption: Improved marine management measures will contribute to a long-term aim (10 years) to halt declines in fisheries productivity.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid as this project is supporting sustainability in marine resource usage, including in developing community-led fisheries management measures that are informed by data.

Assumption: Savings and loans groups and livelihood schemes will be sufficient to increase household financial security within the project lifespan.

Comments: Assumption is still valid. Thus far, savings and loans group members have saved \$3,063 and have accessed loans and received training on how to manage their income.

Output 1 assumptions

Assumption: There are a suitable number of livelihood interventions identified that community members are interested in and that do not have a negative impact on marine conservation.

Comments: Assumption is still valid and will be monitored as livelihood interventions are implemented throughout the project.

Assumption: Savings and loans groups and livelihood schemes will be sufficient to increase household financial security within the project lifespan.

Comments: Assumption is still valid.

Assumption: Income from livelihoods acts as a catalyst for further local natural resource management and provides resilience to global shocks.

Comments: Assumption is still valid.

Output 2 assumptions

Assumption: Communities wish to continue with management measures after the project ends.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid as the LMMA activities strengthen customary law (Tara Bandu), the community will manage their own resources by using the existing traditional and cultural law.

Assumption: Legislation and policies in Timor-Leste do not change, and/or the legal provision for allowing locally-led marine resource management is maintained.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid: the government priority remains to support small-scale fisheries to enable coastal communities to utilise their resources sustainably.

Assumption: There are no natural disasters or other unforeseen events that affect managed areas.

Comments: The initial assumption is still valid. Thus far, there have been no natural disasters or other unforeseen issues affecting the areas managed.

Output 3 assumptions

Assumption: Community members are interested and have the time and ability to be part of participatory monitoring.

Comments: Assumption is still valid. Community members are actively engaging in community meetings with women voluntarily joining CFM groups.

Assumption: Knowledge from participatory monitoring is used to design community-led management plans.

Comments: Assumption is still valid.

Assumption: Ecological data collection is not delayed by adverse weather or other unforeseen events.

Comments: Assumption is still valid.

3.5 Impact: achievement of positive impact on biodiversity and multidimensional poverty reduction

The project aims to support 3,210 people across five coastal communities to establish effective management of their fisheries to secure livelihoods, improve food security and build financial resilience, through three linked interventions; strengthening fisher household financial resilience, scaling up locally led management, and community data collection for local decision making. In Year 2 continued progress has been made to implement these interventions and achieve a positive impact on biodiversity and poverty reduction, thus far with four communities, and through early discussions with a fifth community.

To strengthen fisher household financial resilience, we have established eight fisher VSLAs and continue to carry out monthly monitoring and mentoring of these groups. Fisher savings groups help with the upfront costs of more effective and sustainable fisheries management and allow fishers to remain economically stable during the implementation of LMMAs and during fluctuating fishing income, allowing them to increase their ability to build household financial resilience. Livelihood technical training was carried out in collaboration with the project partner MAF to equip fishers with the tools/training they need to improve the quality of their catch, reduce wastage and reach high value markets to reduce poverty. Value chain assessments were carried out in all active project communities to assess species sustainability and resilience, market demand, post-harvest losses, and the potential increase in income from value chain activities, and subsequently a fish processing trial took place with two communities.

We continue to promote the use of customary-based law, Tara Bandu, as the predominant participatory management tool throughout the project to scale up locally led management and achieve positive impact on biodiversity. We are working with communities to gain formal tenure and rights to their fishing grounds, and have already facilitated consultations and support towards the development of local marine management plans to be endorsed and ratified by the national government. Two communities have successfully formalised their Tara Bandu regulations and launched LMMAs. Consultations and planning continue in three further communities with the presence of fisher and gleaner representatives to take forward their management measures. In Behedan, the six-month octopus fishery closure is scheduled to temporarily open at the start of

Year 3, yet discussions are already taking place in the community to assess the area's status and extend the closure if necessary, to potentially maximise reversed declines in catches and prevent losses in associated fisher earnings and food security. Using Tara Bandu, which is endorsed by communities and authorities, increases the area of marine habitats under local protection, improving ecosystem health and the preservation of nearshore biodiversity, at the same as building community resilience.

4. Project support to the Conventions, Treaties or Agreements

The project is contributing to several objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) via the Global Biodiversity Framework's 23 global targets for 2030, including the following:

Reducing threats to biodiversity, Targets 1 & 3: The project supports the planning and management of marine and coastal areas to reduce biodiversity loss through the establishment of LMMAs. In this reporting period we have reinforced participatory management of marine resources, utilising customary Tara Bandu regulations to establish two community-led management zones in highly biodiverse areas; these are practicable actions to rebuild fish populations, protect key habitats and ensure equitable governance for local communities to benefit sustainably from biodiversity.

Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10: The project is enhancing biodiversity and sustainability in fisheries through establishing marine management associations that increase the application of temporary closures, no-take zones and sustainable gear to protect critical ecosystem functions and services and build food security.

Enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of resource provision and use, Targets 21 & 22: Establishment of CFM groups utilising BV's mobile data collection tool known as Kobo Toolbox aims to ensure that the best available data, information and knowledge are available and accessible to guide decision makers, first and foremost at the local level to lead participatory management and strengthen traditional knowledge. By working in a participatory manner with fishers to manage biodiversity, the project is using Tara Bandu to protect and formalise the rights of coastal communities to access, use and manage their local waters with the goal of protecting biodiversity and reducing poverty.

5. Project support for multidimensional poverty reduction

Timor-Leste's coral reef and small pelagic fisheries underpin the livelihoods and food security of coastal communities. The project is directly integrating proven mechanisms to improve financial resilience, and help fisher households retain, manage and safeguard income from their fisheries and maintain a financial safety-net for fluctuation in income, thus aiming to strengthen that connection between community-level management and household-level benefits.

Economic resilience strategies linked with participatory monitoring, marine resource management and capacity building of communities are being delivered to enable fishers to sustain these actions in the long term. The project has introduced participatory marine monitoring and fisheries management through establishing monitoring groups that are entirely women-led and delivering the necessary training to facilitate robust data collection methods with four communities. Marine management interventions have been formalised in two communities - LMMAs governed by Tara Bandu regulations and managed by community associations - and the project is incorporating financial inclusion work via VSLAs and livelihood improvements (including fish processing and quality improvement measures, as demonstrated via the fish meatball trial) to address community income as a whole. Baseline data has been collected on VSLA members' income, and improvements to economic resilience and household wealth will be formally calculated after endline measurements by the project end. In addition to monetary measures, the project is contributing to wider human development and wellbeing components that influence poverty reduction, such as data literacy, financial literacy, business management and governance through tailored training led by in-country experts, including gender and leadership training delivered to CFM and VSLA members this reporting period, and planned business training in Year 3.

6. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

GESI Scale	Description	Put X where you think your project is on the scale
Not yet sensitive	The GESI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach	
Sensitive	The GESI context has been considered and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.	
Empowering	The project has all the characteristics of a 'sensitive' approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups	X
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change	

The project continues to consider the GESI context in the planning and implementation of activities, and is engaging participants to increase equal access to assets, resources and capabilities for women and marginalised groups both through marine management and financial inclusion.

Four CFM groups using digital data collection tools have been established and are comprised entirely of women; a previous evaluation of women in CFM groups indicates that membership can elevate their role in decision-making forums and increase their contribution to marine management for communities. Recognising that gender is not only about women, men have been included in project activities such as gender training to increase understanding of key challenges like gender-based violence. Both men and women are involved in VSLA groups, although the groups have particularly high participation from women (71% women, 29% men), and, similarly to CFMs, presence in VSLAs increases women's roles in community and council decision-making. In addition, young people are able to join as members of VSLAs to contribute savings and benefit from interest (although young people aged 1-17 are not permitted to take out loans, until they reach 17 or above).

In this way the project is supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, including targets to improve women's rights to economic resources, use technology to promote empowerment of women and ensure women's participation in decision making. The project is incorporating learnings from Year 2 to continue building on its GESI approach, for example through the experience of inclusion of a community member (and fisher) with a speech impairment in LMMA discussions using signing and the support of surrounding community members.

In alignment with comments and feedback from the external reviewer in Year 1, the project has progressed in Year 2 to 'empowering', as members from across the communities have been engaged in and influenced decision-making through involvement in CFM, VSLA and LMMA groups. There is also diversity and a number of women on the project board and in senior leadership, including the BV Timor-Leste Country Director and Project Lead.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

BV implements projects using an adaptive management approach, guided by a continuous cycle of project design, implementation, monitoring, result reviews, and revision of plans and strategies. Reviews occur across different timescales, with day-to-day activities reviewed more frequently (at least monthly). In Timor-Leste, BV has a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) function, led by a Programme Officer for Data for Decision-Making based in-country. The Programme Officer oversees all project data, ensuring it serves as a central resource for informed decision-making. In line with BV's 'communities first' value, our M&E activities are participatory and largely community-led.

Data collected through M&E activities is used to continuously assess the project's progress and the assumptions underlying its design, ensuring that outputs and activities remain relevant. In Year 1, logframe change requests were submitted to ensure indicators were time-bound and activities reflected key findings as a result of pilot studies and/or community surveys which took place or were finalised between proposal submission and the beginning of the project.

Two communities have established Tara Bandu regulated LMMAs covering 2.48 km² and reaching over 200 fishers. Three additional communities are on track to establish Tara Bandu / LMMAs in Year 3. CFM groups have been formed in four communities slightly ahead of the project timeline, with a further group from a fifth community currently in development. These groups gather fisheries data used to inform management measures that contribute to the project's conservation goals. Additionally, we have introduced a smartphone-based system for fisheries monitoring to deliver efficient, real-time data access. Summarised data are also shared with the national government to support evidence-based decision making.

Opportunities identified under the project are based on community needs assessments and consultations initiated in Year 1 through household socio-economic surveys and participant surveys, which established baseline data. Baseline surveys have been completed in Behedan, Iliknamu, Arlo, and Pala, with the survey in Usu'un scheduled for early Year 3 (baselines are carried out with a phased timeline as each community decides to engage with BV to begin the LMMA consultation and financial inclusion process at a different time). Endline surveys will be conducted at the project's conclusion to evaluate the success and challenges of the livelihood and savings initiatives. In Year 3 the surveys will be finalised and conducted among those participating in VSLAs or livelihood programs to track relevant indicators.

Following BV's participatory approach, focus group discussions are held with fishers and other stakeholders to assess LMMA support and identify community concerns regarding fish stocks. This qualitative feedback is used to adapt project activities as needed. Surveys at the end of the project will measure the level of community support for LMMA management measures, ensuring the initiative remains community-driven. During the consultation process and drafting of Tara Bandu regulations, habitat mapping data are shared with communities to guide decisions about resource access, use, and habitat protection, enabling adaptive management based on current data.

Our monitoring systems have remained consistent since the project's inception. However, we are continuing to explore ways these strategies and systems could evolve, particularly to ensure their sustainability beyond the project's conclusion.

8. Lessons learnt

In the first half of Year 2, the project encountered challenges in maintaining consistent stakeholder engagement, primarily due to the remote locations of the communities and limited local transportation options. The availability of rental cars is scarce, and certain newly engaged communities are inaccessible by road, requiring visits to be made by motorbike, an option for which no rental services are available in one of the project regions, Atauro island. These logistical constraints began to impact the timing of field activities, resulting in longer than expected approval processes for the Tara Bandu regulations and the installation of LMMA signage and buoys. Additionally, local government availability was affected by events such as a visit from the Pope in September 2024, which diverted attention towards religious activities, and the schedules of local authorities have fluctuated. Adverse weather conditions, including strong winds and large waves from June to August, also hindered the community's ability to conduct GPS mapping and install buoys at the LMMA sites, leading to postponement of these activities until the weather improved. While these delays have caused slight adjustments to the project timeline, they have not significantly impacted overall progress.

To address these challenges, we have remained flexible in adapting our fieldwork schedules when possible. The project submitted a budget revision (approved in October 2024) to reallocate budget from travel to capital equipment, enabling the purchase of two motorbikes for project field staff. In the second half of Year 2, this form of transport has enabled more reliable and efficient access to communities, supported ongoing engagement, and helped to mitigate logistical risks.

9. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

The following comments were shared in the project's Year 1 Report Review in June 2024.

Comment: Provide information / update on biodiversity monitoring plans and activities proposed for Year 2 / 3

Response: During the Tara Bandu consultation process, assessment and mapping of local habitat types are discussed in a participatory setting with communities to guide decisions about the management measures and area boundaries. Ecological data for each LMMA site based on habitat present (seagrass, mangrove or reef) will be formalised via monitoring surveys in Year 3 (within the first six months for existing LMMAs, and by the project end in all five sites). Plans and methodology are being co-developed with partners DDA and CTC to support the surveys via training, equipment and technical expertise. The methodology will vary with the habitat type present and according to safety considerations such as the risk of crocodile presence in some of the project sites which restricts in-water surveying. Additionally, logistical considerations include appropriate seasonal timing based on weather conditions. Local communities are involved and traditional knowledge captured via focus group discussions to validate the ecological data collected, serving as a baseline for the health of managed areas and change over time prior to the project start.

Comment: Make reference to the project's contribution to the CBD's GBF targets and goals rather than the Aichi targets

Response: Please see Section 4. The project is contributing to several objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) via the Global Biodiversity Framework's 23 global targets for 2030, including the following:

Reducing threats to biodiversity, Targets 1 & 3: The project supports the planning and management of marine and coastal areas to reduce biodiversity loss through the establishment of LMMAs. In this reporting period we have reinforced participatory management of marine resources, utilising customary Tara Bandu regulations to establish two community-led management zones in highly biodiverse areas; these are practicable actions to rebuild fish populations, protect key habitats and ensure equitable governance for local communities to benefit sustainably from biodiversity.

Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, Target 10: The project is enhancing biodiversity and sustainability in fisheries through establishing marine management associations that increase the application of temporary closures, no-take zones and sustainable gear to protect critical ecosystem functions and services and build food security.

Enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of resource provision and use, Targets 21 & 22: Establishment of CFM groups utilising BV's mobile data collection tool known as Kobo Toolbox aims to ensure that the best available data, information and knowledge are available and accessible to guide decision makers, first and foremost at the local level to lead participatory management and strengthen traditional knowledge. By working in a participatory manner with fishers to manage biodiversity, the project is using Tara Bandu to protect and formalise the rights of coastal communities to access, use and manage their local waters with the goal of protecting biodiversity and reducing poverty.

Comment: Ensure that the Darwin Initiative identity is recognised in project materials and online posts

Response: The Darwin Initiative identity has been recognised in materials and media across the project, including but not limited to LMMA signboards and information booklets, local press coverage and social media posts. Evidence of this is available in Section 12, Table 2 and Annex 4.4.

10. Risk Management

An updated version of the risk register, including notes on risks and adaptations, can be found in Annex 4.7.

11. Scalability and durability

The project Outcome and Impact are likely to be sustained after the project ends if there is continued interest and commitment to the core activities and structures established by both the local communities and the national government. There is evidence from other similar initiatives that the techniques and structures put in place can catalyse local engagement for marine and coastal management linked to small-scale fisheries (Project application).

BV is committed to continue engaging with the project communities and the government after Year 3 of the project. During this reporting period, a peer-to-peer learning exchange took place between the communities and representatives from MAF to share stories, challenges, practices, solutions, and expectations for the future. Experience has shown that these exchanges are an opportunity for fisher-fisher education to build support for maintaining community-based fisheries management, creating a culture and tradition of conservation to ensure that actions continue beyond the project term; a further exchange is planned for Year 3.

A national guide for the LMMA process is currently being drafted that will help to maintain support for established LMMAs and provide guidance for setting up further ones in the country. This will be further refined in partnership with BV's global technical knowledge team and the national Timor-Leste government during the final project year. In addition, the project management team has begun assessing and developing recommendations on ways of working beyond the project, including exit strategy. The legacy of the Darwin Initiative's support will include increased engagement with the Government, providing the potential to achieve impact on a national scale and a project that has been based on community priorities and inclusive participation.

12. Darwin Initiative identity

In the project's second year, we fostered strong collaborations with government agencies, civil society organisations, and community partners to execute the planned activities. Throughout this period, we consistently and transparently acknowledged the generous support provided by the Darwin Initiative and the UK Government. Across all communication channels and materials, we prominently featured the Darwin Initiative's contribution. This included showcasing the Darwin Initiative identity on our social media platforms, banners, and presentations, LMMA signboards, information booklets and local press coverage. Project-related social media content and press releases can be viewed in Table 2 and Annex 4.4.

13. Safeguarding

14. Project expenditure

Table 1: Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)

Project spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2024/25 Grant (£)	2024/25 Total Darwin Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff costs (see below)				
Consultancy costs				
Overhead Costs				
Travel and subsistence				
Operating Costs				
Capital items (see below)				
Others (see below)				
TOTAL	177,088			

Table 2: Project mobilised or matched funding during the reporting period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)

	Secured to date	Expected by end of project	Sources
Matched funding leveraged by the partners to deliver the project (£)			Secured match funding from Wilstar Social Impact (November 2022 - October 2025)
Total additional finance mobilised for new activities occurring outside of the project, building on evidence, best practices and the project (£)			N/A

15. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

For information, two new recruits joined the project team in Timor-Leste this period - Communications and Advocacy Officer (Ricardo Valente Araujo), and Program Officer Data for Decision-Making (Afonso Ximenes). Two internal staff transitioned into new management roles earlier in the year in line with ongoing organisational growth. Subsequently, the new staff appointed are supporting these roles, and so are being charged to the Communications Coordinator and Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator staff budget lines respectively. In the final two months of Year 2, staff time increased on the project to support administrative and financial requirements in delivering the final year's activities.

In October 2024, Ebrima Saidy took over as BV's CEO, following more than two decades of extraordinary leadership from founder Al Harris. It has been critical that this transition takes place smoothly, with effective management of both external and internal stakeholders to demonstrate that Blue Ventures will continue to deliver growth and impact in the short term and long term. Ebrima visited our Timor-Leste programme in early 2025.

16. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements or progress of your project so far (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes.

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to edit and use the following for various promotional purposes (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here).

Image, Video or Graphic Information:

File Type (Image / Video / Graphic)	File Name or File Location	Caption including description, country and credit	Social media accounts and websites to be tagged (leave blank if none)	Consent of subjects received (delete as necessary)
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No
				Yes / No

1. Annex 1: Report of progress and achievements against logframe for Financial Year 2024-2025

Project summary	Progress and Achievements April 2024 - March 2025	Actions required/planned for next period
Impact: Healthy and diverse marine ecosystems in Timor-Leste are effectively managed and monitored to form a foundation for local coastal communities to improve their livelihoods, food security and climate resilience.	<p>The project continues to scale up locally led management to achieve positive impact on biodiversity through a participatory approach utilising the Tara Bandu customary-based law. Two LMMAs are now active, increasing the area of marine habitats under local protection, and local management and decision-making of fisheries within those areas, improving ecosystem health and the preservation of nearshore biodiversity. To strengthen community resilience, we have established eight savings groups in four communities to support fishing households to remain economically stable during the implementation of LMMAs and during fluctuating fishing income. Livelihood training, value chain assessments and a fish processing trial have begun, aiming to improve the quality of catch, reduce wastage and reach high value markets to reduce poverty whilst building fisher household financial resilience.</p> <p>Please find supporting evidence documents in Annex 4.</p>	
Outcome - Reducing fishing pressure and protecting biodiversity in five coastal communities in Timor-Leste through community-based marine resource management and sustainable livelihoods benefits 3,210 people.		
0.1 Area of ocean under community management increases by 2km ² by end Yr 2 and at least 5km ² by the end of the project	LMMAs were designated in two communities, covering a total of 2.48 km ² of ocean (1.11 km ² in Iliknamu and 1.37 km ² in Behedan). Additionally, zoning was completed in two new communities, Arlo and Pala, covering a combined area of 1.55 km ² - these two management measures are scheduled to be implemented in Year 3 of the project.	In Year 3, plans are underway to expand the total managed areas to reach the target of 5 km ² by the end of Year 3: establishment of previously zoned LMMAs in two communities, totalling 1.55 km ² , is planned within the first half of Year 3, with a fifth LMMA to be zoned and established in the second half of the year.
0.2 Five communities are supported to establish LMMAs and CFM groups (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)	Two communities (Iliknamu and Behedan) have successfully implemented community-based fisheries management through the customary Tara Bandu system, having established LMMA committees to manage the areas, and a third community (Pala) is in the final stage of LMMA development. Four communities have been supported to establish CFM groups.	Three additional communities (Arlo, Pala, and Usu'un) will establish LMMAs in Year 3, and in Usu'un the process will also involve community support to establish a CFM.

0.3 At least 500 fishers under community-based management (260 fishers by end Yr 2 and an additional 240 by end Yr 3)	A total of 231 fishers are engaged in community-based management (154 men, 77 women) across two communities.	The project aims to reach a further 269 fishers across three additional fishing communities (Arlo, Pala and Usu'un) through community-based management efforts by the end of Year 3 to meet the project target.
0.4 Fisheries data collected by CFM groups used to inform management measures that protect biodiversity in five sites by the end of the project (data collected by three groups by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)	Four CFM groups have been successfully trained and are collecting fisheries data which is being used to inform locally appropriate management measures.	In the first half of Year 3, an additional CFM group will be formed and trained in fisheries data collection. By the end of Year 3, all five targeted sites will have functioning data collection systems in place.
0.5 By project end, at least 50% of households participating in savings and loans groups and/or livelihoods schemes for more than one year have improved economic resilience compared to baseline.	Households across four project communities are participating in VSLAs (eight VSLAs formed across four communities) and livelihood interventions (two communities) to date. Baseline data has been collected on household income, and the final measure of improvement to economic resilience will be available at project end.	A household financial resilience and income questionnaire will be delivered in Year 3, and endline measurements calculated.
Output 1 - Savings and loans groups established and livelihood projects piloted with fishing dependent households, are improving the economic resilience of coastal community households and contributing to support for conservation goals by the end of the project period.		
1.1.1. Establish savings and loans groups with five communities by end of project (one by end Yr 1, and additional two by end Yr 2, and a further two by end Yr 3)	Eight VSLAs (137 members) have been established in four communities. Additional communities have shown interest in and have established their own VSLAs, with training being delivered from April 2024 to March 2025.	By the end of the project, a further VSLA will be formed in one more community.
1.1.2 40 savings and loans group members receive gender training (members from three groups by end Yr 2, total of five groups by end Yr 3)	Gender training was delivered to 94 VSLA members (74 women, 20 men) in October 2024.	In the final year of this project, a follow-on gender training will be delivered to two further communities.
1.1.3 40 savings and loans group members receive financial literacy and/or business training (members from three groups by end Yr 2, total of five by end Yr 3)	Basic financial training including bookkeeping and savings management has been delivered to all active VSLA groups. A business training guideline is in development with BV's Global Technical Team.	Further formal financial literacy and business training will be delivered to groups in five communities by the end of Year 3.
1.2.1 Areas of opportunity for livelihood work identified in consultation with three communities (one by end Yr 2, an additional two by end Yr 3)	This reporting period, two communities have been supported to identify livelihood opportunities, with value chain assessments carried out in both.	Three further communities (Pala, Arlo and Usu'un) will be supported by the end of the project with livelihood consultations.

1.2.2 Individuals taking part in livelihood projects receive technical training/support	A total of 75 individuals participated in technical training on fish processing to produce 'meatballs' (59 women, 16 men).	Technical livelihoods training will continue in Year 3 with a further three communities.
1.2.3 Livelihood projects linked to sustainable LMMA management measures that reduce threats to biodiversity piloted in at least three communities by project end	Two communities with an LMMA in place have been supported with assessments to identify livelihood and value chain improvement opportunities this reporting period, with a fish processing trial successfully carried out.	Three further communities will be supported to explore opportunities for livelihood projects.
1.3 50% of households participating in savings and loans groups and/or livelihoods projects for more than one year have increased household income or wealth by project end compared to baseline	Baseline household income data has been collected in all communities with a VSLA (four communities).	Endline surveys to measure the final change in household income or wealth will be carried out towards the final months of the project.
1.4 >20% of households participating in savings and loans groups and/or livelihood schemes have increased support for having an LMMA in their community by project end compared to baseline	Baseline household support has been collected in all communities with an LMMA.	Endline surveys to measure the final change in household support for having an LMMA in their community will be carried out towards the final months of the project.
Output 2 - Local marine management plans in place, governed by effective LMMA committees and implementing sustainable marine management measures which reduce threats to biodiversity, by the end of the project period.		
2.1. At least five communities with an established LMMA committee (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)	In Year 2, two communities established LMMA committees, which functioned to support management efforts. A third community is in its final stage of LMMA committee establishment.	The third community will finalise its LMMA committee structure at the start of Year 3, and two additional communities will have established LMMA committees by the end of Year 3.
2.2. At least five communities implementing sustainable management measures that reduce threats to biodiversity (e.g. no-take zones or gear restrictions) (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)	Two communities have been implementing sustainable management measures: Iliknamu has set up and maintained a five-year no-take zone for general fish species; Behedan implemented a six-month temporary octopus fishery closure. A third community, Pala, has begun drafting its Tara Bandu regulations, which will secure legal status for the community to implement its planned management measures.	The third community will complete its Tara Bandu regulations and launch its management measures in the first half of Year 3. Additionally, two more communities have agreed to draft formal agreements and implement measures in Year 3.
2.3. At least 30 people directly involved in marine management by the end of the project (active LMMA committee members); disaggregated by sex (20	In Year 2, 34 people (25 men, 9 women) were engaged and directly involved in marine management as members of LMMA committees.	Additional community members (estimated 20 people) will be involved as LMMA committee members by the end of Year 3.

people end Yr 2, and an additional 10 by end Yr 3)		
2.4. 30 individuals receive management, advocacy or data literacy training	Data collection training using a mobile tool has been delivered to all active CFM members. In Year 2, data literacy training materials were developed in preparation for formal training to be delivered to CFM members at all 5 sites.	Management, advocacy, or data literacy training is planned to be delivered with LMMA committees and CFM groups across five communities by the end of Year 3.
2.5. Compliance with management measures stable or increasing from Yr 2 to Yr 3	In Year 2, compliance with management measures has been observed on a qualitative basis via monthly meetings with LMMA committees, which have indicated that neighboring fishers have been entering the LMMA area in Behedan. However, the LMMA committee has been patrolling the area and issuing warnings to fishers and local authorities. The LMMA in Iliknamu have reported that no one has entered the area over the 7 months management has been in place.	Quantitative compliance surveys will be conducted across all active LMMAs by the end of Year 3.
Output 3 - Communities are engaged in collecting ecological and fisheries data, which is being regularly analysed and fed back to communities to inform marine-management decisions, by the end of the project period.		
3.1. Five new or existing CFM groups supported (100% women) at sites with LMMA consultations, by project end (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)	Four new CFM groups have been established and regularly supported at each site with an LMMA or where LMMA consultations have taken place.	The plan is to establish one further CFM group with the fifth project community, meeting the indicator target total by the end of Year 3.
3.2. Number of women participating in fisheries monitoring increases by 40 (24 by end Yr 2 and an additional 16 by end Yr 3)	A total of 48 women (of 50 members) are actively participating in CFM groups.	Additional community members (estimated 8 women) will join a fifth CFM by the end of Year 3.
3.3. CFM group members receive leadership and gender training by end Yr 3	In Year 2, 14 CFM group members, 7 women from Iliknamu and 7 women from Behedan, participated in gender and leadership training facilitated by a consultant over two days at each site.	Gender and leadership training for three additional communities is scheduled to continue in Year 3.
3.4 At least four data sharing events facilitated in each of five communities to share analysed fisheries data among community members and wider stakeholder groups (Yrs 2 and 3)	In Year 2, data sharing occurred during community consultation phases to support decision-making regarding the establishment of Tara Bandu. Each of the three communities, Iliknamu, Behedan, and Pala, participated in one data sharing session. To strengthen future feedback	'Consultation-phase' data sharing is planned with the remaining two communities (one session per community) and two 'regular' data feedback sessions plus one data sharing session with stakeholders and national government are planned for each community in Year 3, resulting in a total of four sessions per community over the project

	efforts, BV's regional data science team delivered training to BV Timor-Leste staff in January 2025 on delivering effective fisheries data feedback to communities. Subsequently, further data feedback sessions will be conducted in Year 3.	period.
3.5 Ecological data collected in each LMMA site based on habitat present (seagrass, mangrove or reef)	Participatory mapping in four communities has been carried out to capture key ecological information on the habitat present at each site of LMMA implementation, informing the development of Tara Bandu regulations. Occurring habitats are as follows: Pala - seagrass, mangroves, and coral reef; Iliknamu - seagrass and coral reef; Arlo - seagrass and coral reef; Behedan - coral reef.	In addition, BV is exploring collaboration with DDA and CTC to co-develop ecological surveying methods for quantitative monitoring. Surveys will be conducted at five sites by the project's end.

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4. Annex 2: Project's full current logframe as presented in the application form (unless changes have been agreed)

Project summary	SMART Indicators	Means of verification	Important Assumptions
Impact: Healthy and diverse marine ecosystems in Timor-Leste are effectively managed and monitored to form a foundation for local coastal communities to improve their livelihoods, food security and climate resilience.			
Outcome: Reducing fishing pressure and protecting biodiversity in five coastal communities in Timor-Leste through community-based marine resource management and sustainable livelihoods benefits 3,210 people.	<p>0.1 Area of ocean under community management increases by 2km² by end Yr 2 and a total of at least 5km² by the end of the project</p> <p>0.2 Five communities are supported to establish LMMAs and CFM groups (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>0.3 At least 500 fishers under community-based management (260 fishers by end Yr 2 and an additional 240 by end Yr 3)</p> <p>0.4 Fisheries data collected by CFM groups used to inform management</p>	<p>0.1 Documents for Tara Bandu and/or community signed zoning/delineation maps, recorded annually</p> <p>0.2 Documents for LMMA management groups and CFM groups</p> <p>0.3 Fisheries profiling data</p> <p>0.4 Fisheries monitoring data collected by CFM groups, calculated annually</p> <p>0.5 Household socioeconomic surveys, baseline and endline</p>	<p>Communities and other stakeholders are willing to participate in collaborative co-management of marine resources.</p> <p>There is no significant unexpected increase in demand for marine resources (i.e. Covid-19 outbreaks).</p> <p>Political strategies are favourable to the sustainable management of natural resources.</p>

	<p>measures that protect biodiversity in five sites by the end of the project (data collected by three groups by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>0.5 By project end, at least 50% of households participating in savings and loans groups and/or livelihoods schemes for more than one year have improved economic resilience compared to baseline.</p>		<p>Engaging with project activities and access to economic incentives will improve attitudes towards protection of marine biodiversity.</p> <p>Socio-economic assessments are able to accurately define households' relationship with marine and coastal resources.</p> <p>Improved marine management measures will contribute to a long-term aim (10 years) to halt declines in fisheries productivity.</p> <p>Savings and loans groups and livelihood schemes will be sufficient to increase household financial security within the project lifespan.</p>
<p>Output 1 - Savings and loans groups established and livelihood projects piloted with fishing dependent households, are improving the economic resilience of coastal community households and contributing to support for conservation goals by the end of the project period.</p>	<p>1.1.1 Establish savings and loans groups with five communities by end of project (one by end Yr 1, and additional two by end Yr 2, and a further two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>1.1.2 40 savings and loans group members receive gender training (members from three groups by end Yr 2, total of five groups by end Yr 3)</p> <p>1.1.3 40 savings and loans group members receive financial literacy and/or business training (members from three groups by end Yr 2, total of five by end Yr 3)</p> <p>1.2.1 Areas of opportunity for livelihood work identified in consultation with three</p>	<p>1.1 Savings and loans group meeting minutes, documents, training records and attendance sheets</p> <p>1.2. Livelihoods strategy outline completed</p> <p>1.3 Savings and loans groups organisational documents</p> <p>1.4 Livelihood intervention project reports</p> <p>1.5. Household socioeconomic surveys conducted pre- and post- savings and loans group establishment and/or livelihood pilots</p>	<p>There are a suitable number of livelihood interventions identified that community members are interested in and that do not have a negative impact on marine conservation.</p> <p>Savings and loans groups and livelihood schemes will be sufficient to increase household financial security within the project lifespan.</p> <p>Income from livelihoods acts as a catalyst for further local natural resource management and provides resilience to global shocks.</p>

	<p>communities (one by end Yr 2, an additional two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>1.2.2 Individuals taking part in livelihood projects receive technical training/support</p> <p>1.2.3 Livelihood projects linked to sustainable LMMA management measures that reduce threats to biodiversity piloted in at least three communities by project end</p> <p>1.3 50% of households participating in savings and loans groups and/or livelihoods projects for more than one year have increased household income or wealth by project end compared to baseline</p> <p>1.4 >20% of households participating in savings and loans groups and/or livelihood schemes have increased support for having an LMMA in their community by project end compared to baseline</p>	<p>1.6. Participant surveys conducted pre- and post- savings and loans group establishment and/or livelihood pilots</p> <p>1.7 Training records and attendance records</p>	
<p>Output 2 - Local marine management plans in place, governed by effective LMMA committees and implementing sustainable marine management measures which reduce threats to biodiversity, by the end of the project period.</p>	<p>2.1. At least five communities with an established LMMA committee (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>2.2. At least five communities implementing sustainable management measures that reduce threats to biodiversity (e.g. no-take zones or gear restrictions) (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>2.3. At least 30 people directly involved in marine management by the end of the project (active LMMA committee members); disaggregated by sex (20</p>	<p>2.1. LMMA management committee agreements</p> <p>2.2. Management plan documenting management measures, map of closure area(s)/ calendar of seasonal restrictions</p> <p>2.3. Census and local authority records</p> <p>2.4. LMMA management committee agreements, activity reports and meeting attendance records (disaggregated by male and female association members)</p>	<p>Communities wish to continue with management measures after the project ends.</p> <p>Legislation and policies in Timor-Leste do not change, and/or the legal provision for allowing locally-led marine resource management is maintained.</p> <p>There are no natural disasters or other unforeseen events that affect managed areas.</p>

	<p>people end Yr 2, and an additional 10 by end Yr 3)</p> <p>2.4. 30 individuals receive management, advocacy or data literacy training</p> <p>2.5. Compliance with management measures stable or increasing from Yr 2 to Yr 3</p>	<p>2.5. Training records and attendance records</p> <p>2.6. Yearly compliance surveys</p>	
<p>Output 3 - Communities are engaged in collecting ecological and fisheries data, which is being regularly analysed and fed back to communities to inform marine-management decisions, by the end of the project period.</p>	<p>3.1. Five new or existing CFM groups supported (100% women) at sites with LMMA consultations, by project end (three communities by end Yr 2, and an additional two by end Yr 3)</p> <p>3.2. Number of women participating in fisheries monitoring increases by 40 (24 by end Yr 2 and an additional 16 by end Yr 3)</p> <p>3.3. CFM group members receive leadership and gender training by end Yr 3</p> <p>3.4 At least four data sharing events facilitated in each of five communities to share analysed fisheries data among community members and wider stakeholder groups (Yrs 2 and 3)</p> <p>3.5 Ecological data collected in each LMMA site based on habitat present (seagrass, mangrove or reef)</p>	<p>3.1. CFM training records</p> <p>3.2. CFM training and meeting attendance/participation records</p> <p>3.3. Biannual data sharing workshop attendance records.</p> <p>3.4. Ecological monitoring data records</p>	<p>Community members are interested and have the time and ability to be part of participatory monitoring.</p> <p>Knowledge from participatory monitoring is used to design community-led management plans.</p> <p>Ecological data collection is not delayed by adverse weather or other unforeseen events.</p>
<p>Activities (each activity is numbered according to the output that it will contribute towards, for example 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are contributing to Output 1)</p> <p>Output 1 - Savings and loans groups established and livelihood projects piloted with fishing dependent households, are improving the economic resilience of coastal community households and contributing to support for conservation goals.</p> <p>1.1 Conduct preliminary community consultations with communities about savings and loans groups</p> <p>1.2 Pilot savings and loans scheme with fisher groups in four communities</p> <p>1.3 Conduct gender training with savings and loans group members</p> <p>1.4 Conduct financial literacy and/or business training with savings and loans group members</p>			

- 1.5 Provide ongoing support for savings and loans groups including regularly attending meetings
- 1.6 Conduct stakeholder consultations and focus group discussions in communities to identify areas for livelihoods interventions
- 1.7 Conduct market and value chain assessments in three identified communities
- 1.8 Baseline household socioeconomic survey
- 1.9 Early stage implementation of other new LMMA livelihood activities as identified from community consultations, focus group interviews and market and value chain assessments
- 1.10 Surveys at baseline and project end to assess community support for LMMA management measures
- 1.11 Provide focused livelihood technical training to fisher groups depending on interests identified during stakeholder consultations (fish cleaning, drying fish, targeting larger fish, equipment training etc.)
- 1.12 Endpoint household socioeconomic survey

Output 2 - Local marine management plans in place, governed by effective LMMA committees and implementing sustainable marine management measures which reduce threats to biodiversity.

- 2.1 Identify potential communities using rapid assessment of environmental and social factors for site selection
- 2.2 Initial consultation meetings with local authorities and community members
- 2.3 Information sessions with communities about the benefits of developing an LMMA
- 2.4 LMMA consultation process with five priority communities and support them to develop and implement marine management measures
 - 2.4.1 Consultations start-up meetings and focus group discussions with fishers, gleaners and other stakeholders to agree consultation process and establish relationships with key community contacts
 - 2.4.2 Participatory mapping of fishing and gleaning area
 - 2.4.3 Participatory fish assessment workshop with each community
 - 2.4.4 Community workshop(s) to discuss options for management measures and management area location
 - 2.4.5 Via a combination of techniques e.g. community meetings, house to house canvassing, Focus Group Discussions, work with community representatives to carry out in-depth community consultations with relevant stakeholders, including neighbouring villages on proposed management area and management measures
 - 2.4.6 After each LMMA consultation activity, BV staff to analyse data from participatory workshops, surveys, mapping and community consultations and share results with community.
 - 2.4.7 Community workshop/meeting to share results of wider community consultation on proposed management area and management measures, and adjustment of proposed measures and management area as necessary based on feedback from consultation process
 - 2.4.8 GPS mapping of proposed LMMA areas
 - 2.4.9 Meeting with stakeholders and local authorities to draft LMMA management agreement and decide structure of LMMA management committee
 - 2.4.10 Support suco and aldeia leaders and community representatives to establish structure and roles and responsibilities of LMMA management committee, ensuring representation from women and men
 - 2.4.11 Share draft LMMA management agreement with local authorities, neighbouring villages, local and national administration and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF)
 - 2.4.12 Erect signs and place marking buoys to delineate LMMA areas, and hold opening ceremony for LMMA
 - 2.4.13 Publicise and socialise new LMMA areas and management measures with fishers from other relevant areas who fish in the area
 - 2.4.14 Hold formal local traditional Tara Bandu (local management law) launch ceremony with community, MAF and other relevant stakeholders

- 2.5 Develop materials and deliver a public awareness campaign to new and existing LMMA communities on basic ocean ecology, focused on fish life-cycles and how reef, seagrass and wider marine ecosystem health affects fish populations
- 2.6 Provide capacity building support, including management, advocacy and data literacy training to LMMA committee members
- 2.7 Provide ongoing monitoring and support to LMMA committees and suco and aldeia leaders in managing the LMMA
- 2.8 Develop a guide on how to facilitate and co-design the LMMA process to be presented to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) in order for it to be used nationally
- 2.9 LMMA peer-to-peer knowledge exchanges (Yrs 2 and 3)
- 2.10 Yearly compliance surveys
- 2.11 Safety at sea training in five communities as a means of engagement, building relationships and improving the safety of fishers
- 2.12 Increase engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), including regularly attending meetings and providing summarised data

Output 3 - Communities are engaged in collecting ecological and fisheries data, which is being regularly analysed and fed back to communities to inform marine-management decisions.

- 3.1 Assess existing CFM data collection protocols and amend as required to adapt to management needs
- 3.2 Continue our support to community members to collect fisheries catch data through five new or existing CFM groups
- 3.3 Analysis pipeline automated to produce near real-time summarised data
- 3.4 Recruit at least 24 women to form three new CFM groups in communities with an LMMA
- 3.5 Provide training to new group members on data collection protocols and use of kobotoolbox
- 3.6 Data literacy training for new CFM members and refresher training for existing members
- 3.7 Data analysis training for BV staff (fisheries and M&E)
- 3.8 Fisheries Landings Profiling survey carried out by CFM groups with support from BV staff
- 3.9 Intensive 30-day fisheries monitoring survey as baseline for each LMMA carried out by CFM groups with support from BV staff
- 3.10 Regular (weekly) fisheries monitoring carried out by CFM groups with support from BV staff
- 3.11 Monthly meetings with CFM groups to review data collected and identify/deliver any training needs
- 3.12 At least four data sharing events held with each community to share analysed ecological data among stakeholder groups and community members
- 3.13 At least two local CFM peer-to-peer knowledge exchange (Yrs 2 & 3)
- 3.14 Leadership and gender training for CFM members
- 3.15 Collect appropriate ecological data on reef, seagrass and/or mangrove habitat quality in each of the five LMMA sites