



# Welcome to the Darwin Initiative Seminar Series!

Day 2: Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026





# Session 4: Lessons from the Past 30 Years

**Session chaired by: David Macdonald**



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs





# Improving fisher livelihoods and protecting marine biodiversity in Timor-Leste

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Food & Rural Affairs



**BIODIVERSITY**  
CHALLENGE FUNDS

# Exchange Inspires Change in Atauro



**“Fishing is getting harder, but where LMMAs/*Tara Bandu* is practiced, fish are abundant again.”**

– Antonio Pereira, a local fisherman from Bikeli.

- Community learning exchanges inspired the establishment of three Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) on Atauro Island within two years.
- Exchange activities are driving strong behavioural change within the community and in fishing practices.
- Women's participation transforms decision-making processes

# Introduction



## About Me

- Timor-Leste Blue Economy Youth Ambassador.
- Small-Scale Fisheries Management Practitioner and Expert.
- Driven by a passion to make a meaningful impact on coastal communities.

## About Blue Ventures in Timor-Leste

- Working in Timor-Leste since 2016 at government invitation.
- Partnership model: Government, communities, and civil society.
- Focus: **Community-based Fisheries Management, Financial Inclusion, Secure Rights, Food Security, and Data-driven management**



# About Timor-Leste

- Coastline: **782.88 km.**
- Marine area, including the exclusive economic zone (EEZ): Approximately **77,000 km<sup>2</sup>.**
- Coastal population: 85%.
- Located in world's most biodiverse marine region **Coral Triangle.**
- **42% of population below poverty line; 60% face food insecurity.**
- Coastal fisheries vital for livelihoods and food security.
- **Major threats:** Overfishing, habitat degradation, climate change.



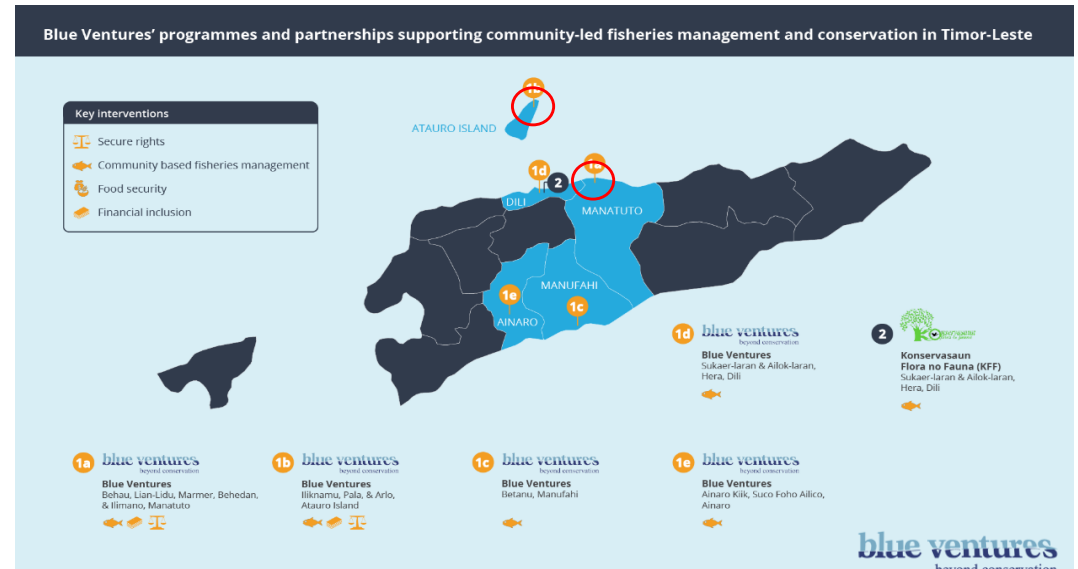
# Project background (30-027)



- **Project Title:** Improving fisher livelihoods and protecting marine biodiversity in Timor-Leste.

- **Timeline:**  
April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026.

- **Sites:** 5 priority communities:
  - **Atauro Island:** Arlo, Pala, and Iliknamu.
  - **Mainland (Manatuto):** Behedan and Usu'un.



- **Evolution:** This project follows Project 24-012, which pioneered community-led conservation on Atauro.

# Project Progress: Integrating 3 Key Outputs



To achieve transformational change, the project links three pillars:

- 1. Financial Resilience:** Establishing 8 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) with 132 members (f:96, m:36) with (71% women)
- 2. Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs):** Over 400 hectares of coastal seas under community stewardship.
- 3. Data for Decision-Making:** 58 Community Fisheries Monitors (CFMs) collecting near-real-time fisheries data.



# GESI in Action: Empowering Women



- **Advancing Equality:** The project has moved from "sensitive" to "empowering" on the gender, equality, and social inclusion (GESI) scale.
- **Community Stewardship:** Women make up over 90% of fisheries monitoring groups (*Grupú Monitorizasaun Peskas/GMPs*).
- **Outcome:** *"It is about building our confidence... and showing what women in coastal communities can achieve when given the chance."* – Mana Teresa (community fisheries data collector).



# GESI in Action: The Pala LMMA



- **Story from Pala (Atauro):** During locally managed marine area (LMMA) planning, the community adjusted the no-take boundaries specifically to preserve access for gleaners and seaweed farmers (predominantly women), ensuring their livelihoods were not displaced by conservation.
- **The Conflict:** Initial boundaries included critical gleaning and seaweed farming areas.
- **The Solution:** The community adjusted boundaries to ensure women could continue these activities while protecting 1.35 km<sup>2</sup> of coral, seagrass, and mangroves.



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# Ecological and Fisheries Monitoring



- **The importance of fisheries and ecological monitoring to LMMAs:** Community monitoring groups provide the evidence needed for adaptive management.
- **Near-Real-Time Data:** Implementation of digital tools like **Mermaid** and **KoboCollect** to provide "near-time" data feedback.
- **Impact Measurement:**
  - Atauro sites show hard coral cover exceeding 60%.
  - Observed increases in fish biomass and populations since 2017 baseline.



# Financial Inclusion and Market Linkages

- **Livelihood Diversification:** Beyond fishing, women are innovating through seafood processing.
- **Success Story:** The "Fish Ball" Initiative: Women in Behedan and Iliknamu transformed local catches into nutritious fish balls.
  - Endorsed at the **2025 National Ocean Fair**, generating an additional \$5–\$10 in daily household income.
- **The Buffer:** Savings groups provide a financial safety net during periods of low catch or extreme weather.



# Key Learnings: Scaling Community Stewardship



- **BV Works:** Blue Ventures works to connect communities with each other, with partners, and with governments.
- **National Government Buy-In:** Success depends on integrating local customary law (*Tara Bandu*) into national legal frameworks, supported by high-level endorsement.
- **Long-Term Flexible Funding:** Conservation is a long-term effort that requires sustained investment, trust-building, and flexible support.



# Key Learnings: Community-Based Approach



- **Community Knowledge Exchanges:** Learning exchanges between communities (e.g. mainland fishers visiting Atauro sites) are powerful and fast catalysts for behaviour change, accelerating LMMA adoption.
- **Patience and Ownership:** Engagement requires time; resolution must come from within the community, not external mediation.
- **Data-Driven Community Empowerment:** Improved access to data, supported by digital tools, enables near-real-time feedback while fostering adaptive management, transparency, and trust within communities.

*“Conservation works best when communities lead it.”*



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# Exit Strategy & Sustainability (i)

- **Capacity Building:** Training LMMA committees in surveillance, data literacy, and safety at sea to ensure they can lead long after project end.
- **National Integration:** BV is Developing a national guide for the LMMA process to be presented to the government to replicate this success across other municipalities.
- **Local Governance:** Strengthening the capacity of *Tara Bandu* committees ensures management continues after the grant ends.



# Exit Strategy & Sustainability (ii)



- **Economic Independence:** Self-reliant savings groups and ecotourism businesses (like the **Atauro Homestay Association**) create a legacy of conservation-linked income.
- **Legacy:** Creating a "culture of conservation" where financial inclusion and resource management are self-sustaining.
- **Community-pathway:** Guides communities to build capacity, assess needs, plan strategically, and access resources—supporting progress toward thriving fishers and healthy oceans.



# Contributions to Global Biodiversity Framework



## The project supports multiple CBD GBF Targets:

- **Targets 1-3:** Reducing threats through marine area management
- **Target 10:** Sustainable use and benefit-sharing in fisheries
- **Targets 21-22:** Data accessibility for community decision-making



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Thanks for listening!



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# Ensuring the socio-ecological viability of High Atlas cultural landscapes

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# Who We Are



Global Diversity Foundation works with changemakers to help communities and environments flourish.

In Morocco, we work with Amazigh communities on High Atlas cultural landscapes conservation, focusing on biodiversity and livelihoods. Cultural landscapes are:

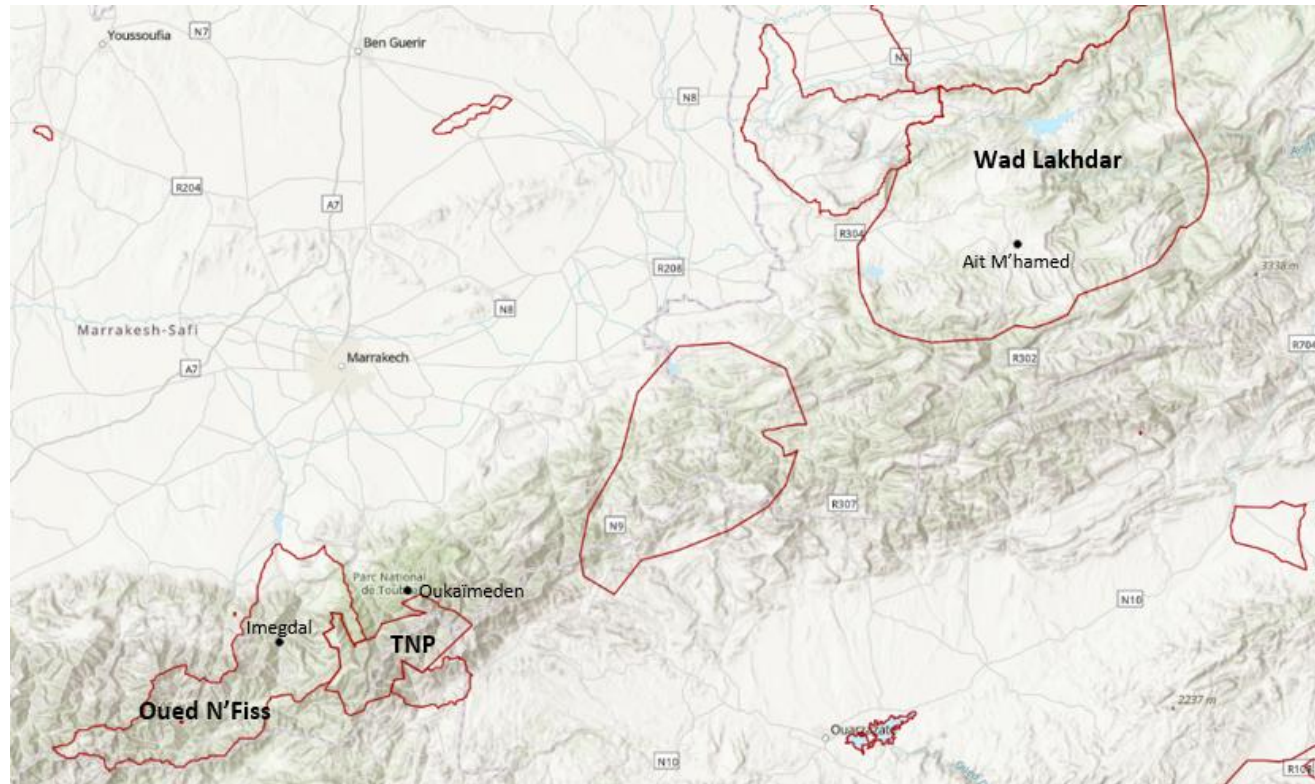
**“Dynamic mosaics of habitats and land uses that have been shaped over the years by interactions between people and nature in ways that maintain biodiversity and provide humans with goods and services needed for their wellbeing.”**

- Satoyama Initiative, COP 10 of Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010



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# Where We Work



**Map of High Atlas Key Biodiversity Areas** around the cities of Marrakech and Beni Mellal, including the initial three sites of the Programme: Imegdalen, Oukaïmeden and Ait M'hamed. TNP: Toubkal National Park KBA

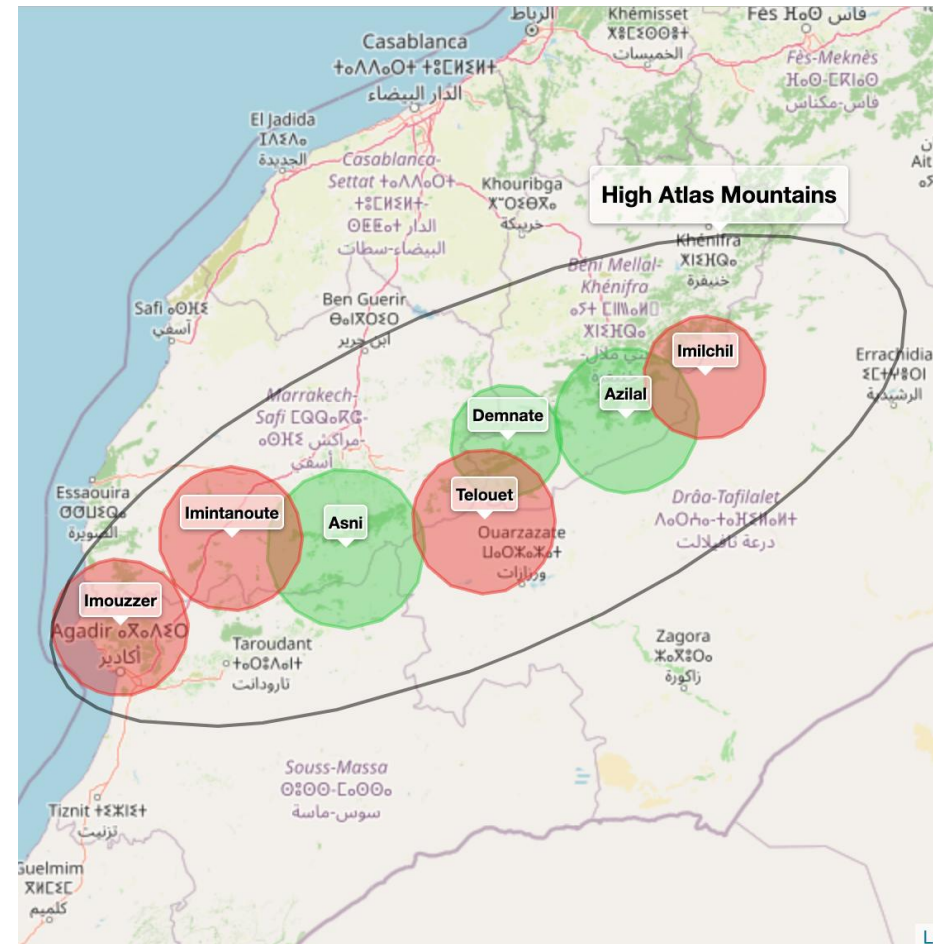
# Scaling up across the High Atlas

## Ensuring the socio-ecological viability of High Atlas cultural landscapes

(DAREX002, 2022 – 2027)

We support **200 rural cooperatives** – mostly women-led – to improve livelihoods of **5,000 households** through innovative production and marketing of local goods while they conserve High Atlas biodiversity and cultural landscapes.

We support the enhancement of regenerative agropastoral activities over a **30,000 km<sup>2</sup>** area of central Morocco.



Map of Project Hubs 2022 – 2027  
Existing hubs: green; Areas of expansion: red

# DAREX002 Project Approach



## Regenerative Conservation Activities

- Expanding community-based plant nurseries
- Agroecology capacity building

## Local Product Certification & Labelling

- Supporting food safety certification
- Developing a label for collective marketing

## Rural Entrepreneurship Skill Building

- Training across key areas for business development
- Developing a label for collective marketing

## Product Innovation

- Product diversification
- Creation of new products/services

## Digital Entrepreneurship

- Digital inclusion for community-led cooperatives/enterprises
- Online tools for market access



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# Supporting Smallholders



- Field Schools for training and Farmer-to-Farmer exchange.
- Strengthening seed exchange.
- Seed distribution, recuperation, and ongoing reproduction post-earthquake.
- 25,000+ medicinal and aromatic plants distributed yearly through 5+ community plant nurseries.
- 5,230 households supported through cooperative activity and agroecological programming



# Supporting Pastoralists



- Field Schools for training and peer-to-peer exchange.
- Veterinary Caravans.
- Over 1,000 pastoralists supported through training, animal medical care, and post-earthquake relief.



# Role of Cooperatives in Rural Economy



- Movement of community-led institutions.
- Space of women's leadership.
- Countering rural out-migration.
- Cooperatives integrated into policy.
- Project reach: 154 cooperatives benefitting from capacity building, visual identity support, and solidarity markets.



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# Accumulated Lessons



- Community ownership starts at ideation.
- Center relationship building in scaling up.
- Digital inclusion for urban-rural linkages, rural enterprise visibility, and resilience.



# Lessons in Community Resilience



- Diversity as a source and strategy for resilience.
- Role of traditional practices:
  - Return of elder councils or *jmaa*
  - *Tiwizi* or practices of solidarity.
- Cooperatives' contribution to post-earthquake recovery.
- Gender, Equity, and Social Inclusion strengthened by cooperative leadership in post-earthquake context.



Thanks for listening!



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