



KFW



NASO ETHNIC ECOTOURISM IN THE BONYIC COMMUNITY



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The Naso are an indigenous community located in the buffer zone of the Palo Seco Protected Forest within the administrative area of the International Park of La Amistad (PILA, for its Spanish acronym) in the Sub-division of Teribe, District of Changuinola, Province of Bocas del Toro in the Republic of Panama. It is a community of 14 indigenous settlements with approximately 400 people, including 150 adults and senior adults.

The Naso share an indigenous cosmology that holds great respect for nature, particularly elements that allow them to cover their basic needs, such as the Teribe River and the forest. The Naso people have also felt the adverse effects of climate change; they have suffered the increase of natural phenomena in the community. They have suffered landslides and flooding affecting their plantations and homes.



The Naso indigenous people are mainly dedicated to the production of basic grains, cacao, tubercles, crops and plantains. They have a duly certified organic production program, that not only

allows them to access better markets, but also helps them contribute towards the conservation of the environment in harmony with their ancestral respect of nature.

In recent years, many indigenous families have ventured into rural community tourism economic activities, by elaborating and selling indigenous crafts, as well as offering lodging, meals and tours for tourists. These activities have increased due to the greater number of tourist that are flocking to the islands of Bocas del Toro.

The community lacks electrical power, but several families have invested in solar panels, allowing them to provide illumination during the evening hours. They also lack potable water or sanitation services.

Regarding access to education, the community has a primary education school: PreK to 6th grade. Secondary education students must travel about 30 minutes by taxi, to the only high school located in community of El Silencio, which also has the only health center nearest to the Naso community.

An interesting aspect of the Naso community indigenous administration is the fact that they have a King, a family dynasty lineage dating back to the founding of the community. The King exercises all authority and leadership of the community; and decisions must be abided by all inhabitants and visitors.

In the community of Naso de Bonyic, Mrs. Rosibel Quintero, President; Nilka Sánchez, Treasurer; Cinthia Nicolás, Secretary; Isabel Sanchez, Rosibeth Torres, Leidy Torres, Lisnet Quintero, Nilsa Sánchez and Edith Santiago, which are members of the Organization of United Women of Bonyic (OMUB) shared the main challenges faced by the community and mentioned the support received by the Central American Community Farmer's and Indigenous AgroForestry Coordination Association (ACICAFOC, for its Spanish acronym) and the German Development Bank (KfW) from the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mrs. Isabel explained that one of the issues faced by the Bonyic women was the systematic loss of their indigenous Naso identity, particularly stemming from the mix with other ethnicities, such as with the Bribris, Ngöbe and non-indigenous), and the constant discrimination against the indigenous people, which only hinders the young members of the community in maintaining their cultural traditions and expressions. A clear example of this issue was the near complete loss of their mother tongue of Nasoterdi, as well as other cultural expressions, such as writing, traditions, celebrations, chants and dances.

Another issue faced by the Naso people is related to the constant presence of people from the City of Changuinola and other neighboring non-indigenous communities that take day trips to the Teribe River and leave all their trash and waste scattered throughout. Also, other people near the territory constantly overfish the rivers with fishing nets.

Mrs. Rosibel also indicated the limitations that the community had in regards to education, health and employment opportunities, especially for

women. The indigenous women also suffer from domestic violence and marginalization, which emotionally affects them because they already feel denigrated.

Many of these women simply couldn't continue living with their partners and decided to separate and sought to look for their own means to support their families.

"God made us administrators of the land, not owners. It is our duty to take care of the land; but if we don't, then we will be punished for not protecting what was giving to us by God"

- Rosibel Quintero
OMUB President

Mrs Rosibel recalled that the women of the organization started seeing the arrival of many tourists seeking a closer contact with nature, contact with the indigenous community and with the Naso culture. These tourists started requesting for lodging, traditional indigenous meals and tours, but the local families did not have the appropriate conditions to provide such services and would lose the opportunity to generate additional financial resources.

With this situation, in 2004, the Organization of United Women of Bonyic (OMUB) was established. It is a group of indigenous Naso women formed by 14 members of the community, 13 of these members are women. OMUB was formed with the intention of improving the quality of life of the community, through the development of sustainable tourism, and the conservation of natural and cultural resources considered as Patrimony of the Naso Community. The organization was formally and legally constituted, and has an active Board of Directors, which periodically meets in official assemblies.

Through OMUB and with the support of the Integrated Indigenous Natural Resource Management Program funded by the German Development Bank (KfW) from the Federal Republic of Germany, a sub-project called “Naso Ethnic EcoTourism in the Bonyic Community” was implemented in 2019 with a total investment of EURO €82.000; 39% of these funds came from resources obtained from local contributions of the benefitted community.



The sub-project directly benefitted 120 people and approximately 400 people indirectly; 50% are women. All income generated by the OMUB is destined to education and health of the community.

The sub-project had the intention of strengthening the cultural use of the territory and the wellbeing of the Naso community through alternative traditional and ancestral Eco-Ethnic Tourism. It specifically sought to improve OMUBs tourism endeavors in harmony with nature and cultural resources of the Naso territory, through infrastructure and the conservation of biodiversity, as well as

strengthening OMUBs capacities to provide improved services of quality and quantity for tourist in adherence to Naso’s cultural values and practices.

In terms of results, the subproject strengthened the tourism endeavors of OMUB with the construction of an office, a cafeteria hall, two bathrooms and the installation of solar panels. The organization’s capacities were improved by providing enhanced services of quality and quantity to tourists through workshops, which trained several Naso members on integral tourism services.

A webpage was created for the organization (www.posadamedialuna.com), as well as technical support that manages and updates the website, to help promote the organization for at least one year and have greater presence as a tourist destination. Additionally, an ethnic-botanical garden planted with edible and traditional medicinal plants was implemented to help foster conservation and use of agro-biodiversity.



After the subproject was implemented, the impacts or effects on the improvement of the quality of life were visible in the benefitted population, mainly in terms of greater income, organizational capabilities of the community, by empowering women in organizational and decision-making processes.

“We now feel empowered, we are not afraid to talk and say what we want and think. We will not remain silent, we are capable of asking and demanding the things that we deserve and need”

- Isabel Sánchez
OMUB beneficiary

Thanks to the subproject, the number of visitors to the territory has increased considerably.



OMUB showcases the indigenous vision of life and the possibility of walking through one of the largest tropical forests of the Americas, rich in biodiversity and sources of water. It allows visitors to harvest crops, prepare indigenous meals, elaborate indigenous crafts and contribute towards the conservation of the environment, by reassessing indigenous values that have been maintained throughout time. It has allowed families to

generate extra income when tourists stay additional days at the organizations' facilities.



They have also managed to revive one of the most relevant cultural and gastronomic traditions of the Naso people with the implementation of an ethnic-botanical garden with edible and traditional medicinal plants. Furthermore, recipes and medicinal preparation are shared with children and youth of the community, strengthening the inter-generation transmission of indigenous customs.

In conclusion, thanks to the support of the German Cooperation Agency and ACICAFOC, the people of the Naso community have been able to significantly improve their conditions of livelihood, through the empowerment of women, the advocacy of their cultural identity, sustainable environmental resource practices and the production of ethnic foods that improves their economic conditions and capacities.