
Mesoamerican Reef Alliance

Stretching over 625 miles (1,000 Km) of coastline, the Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) System is the largest continuous reef in the Western Hemisphere and has been identified as a unique and globally important coral reef ecosystem on whose diverse habitats and associated terrestrial environments human populations rely for much of their livelihood and sustenance.



As one of the most biologically diverse habitats on Earth, unfortunately the MAR is widely treated as a limitless open resource and evidence indicates that it is under severe natural and human-induced threats. In recognition of these threats and of the ecological and socio-economic richness of the MAR, many local, national, and regional-level resource conservation and sustainable development projects have been initiated in the MAR region since 1990.

The International Coral Reef Action Network (**ICRAN**), established in the year 2000, through the generous support from the United Nations Foundation, is a collaborative effort working to halt and reverse the decline in health of the world's coral reefs. Throughout the world, and by creating alliances, ICRAN draws on its partners' investments in reef monitoring and management to create inter-linked and complementary actions across local, national, and global scales. ICRAN is thus the first partnership to respond to conservation needs at the global scale by recognizing both traditional and scientific perspectives of coral reef dynamics and respective social dependency.

A primary objective of ICRAN activities in the Wider Caribbean has been to build the capacity on the ground for sustainable management of coral reefs, emphasizing the role of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), local communities and the tourism sector. To this end a number of regional and local activities have been implemented including promotion of best practices, training, coral reef monitoring and assessments, mapping of MPAs and their habitats, along with public awareness building targeted mostly to decision-makers and developers.



Funded by the United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the ICRAN-Mesoamerican Reef Alliance (**ICRAN-MAR**) initiative brings together major stakeholders in reef conservation engaging them in activities around three key components: *Watershed Management*, *Sustainable Fisheries*, and *Sustainable Tourism*. The project's primary objectives seek to minimize impacts to the MAR by improving sustainable business practices in the three areas primarily through capacity building, development of better practices and building partnerships with the private sector. The United Nations Environment Programme, Caribbean Environment Programme through its Regional Coordinating Unit (UNEP-CAR/RCU) manages project execution.



The **ICRAN-MAR** partners conduct a set of inter-linked, complementary activities to enable the proliferation of good practices for coral reef management and conservation. After little over 14 months of implementation, the project is entering its second year of activities accomplishing tangible results in the region at the site level. Work is carried out in close coordination and collaboration with the GEF-funded Meso-American Barrier Reef System Project (GEF/MBRS) and with USAID PROARCA, bringing new partners and international

expertise into the region thus promoting economically and environmentally sound management of the reef, and strategically engaging major components of the private sector.

As a multilateral initiative, the **ICRAN-MAR** gives considerable focus to local and community-level work. The ICRAN partners have a wealth of experience working at this level and pride themselves in being engaged at field-based activities, working with the resource users and proposing a reasonable blend of bottom-up and top-down strategies. Effort has also been taken to describe how proposed activities in the region build upon previous and current work by PROARCA and GEF/MBRS. Implementing partners are the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Reef Check, the World Resources Institute (WRI), the United Nations Environment Program –World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the United Nations Environment Program – Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP-DTIE).

Project activities are coordinated under the management and oversight of a Strategic Objective Steering Committee (SOSC) and the guidance of the Technical Oversight Committee (TOC) in charge of the analysis and resolution of activity implementation issues. When the project is completed ICRAN expects adoption of best practices in the respective sectors to have increased, and to see new investment by the private sector supporting environmental management to protect the reef.



Photos 1, 2, & 3: Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve (Oscar Alvarez); 4: Hol Chan Marine Reserve



For more information on the Mesoamerican Reef Alliance or on how you can join this effort, please contact

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