



Mesoamerican Reef: Enabling Community Adaptation to Climate Change

WWF Central America is working on the ground to aid communities of the Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion (MAR) to prepare for coping with climate change effects.

Exhibiting the largest coral reef system in the Atlantic, the MAR encompasses some 1,000 kilometers of coastline from the Bay Islands in northern Honduras to Belize, Guatemala and Mexico.

Global climate change is a real threat to ecological systems as well as human lives, livelihoods and lifestyles. WWF assists communities to cope and adapt to changing climatic conditions, given the high biological diversity of the region that should be conserved, and the possibility of impact to national economies, namely fisheries and tourism.

A significant percentage of the population lives along the coast and the current trend is increased concentration of development, population and wealth within already vulnerable coastal areas. This offers the potential for increased impact to properties and lives due to sea level rise and storm events (e.g. flooding associated with torrential rains).

The impact to people's lives from climate change related events is a reality. Changes in temperature, precipitation, and extreme weather are all effects of a changing climate. There is a critical need to put a human face on climate change and disseminate information on its associated impacts on people's lives and livelihoods.

Climate change is expected to have significant impacts on the MAR, ranging from coastal inundation linked to rising sea levels, increased mass coral bleaching events due to warming seas, to run-off (sediments, nutrients, other pollutants) due to high intensity storms.

Documenting local observations will help raise the level of social and political concern about global warming effects, and prompt policy initiatives aimed at the identification and adoption of climate change adaptation measures.

Information collected through this project will be used to create policy recommendations on how to mitigate threats to coral reefs and mangroves as well as explore alternative financing arrangements for Marine Protected areas in countries like Belize.

WWF Central America is approaching its climate adaptation work from both the ecological and human perspectives, and is placing a lot of effort into climate outreach, climate witness studies and climate change policy advocacy.

In order to improve the ability of the MAR to adapt to climate change, current human threats need to be minimized, ecosystem resilience enhanced and connectivity between habitats improved.



Belize flood

Insufficient measures are being taken to actively protect coastal vegetation that buffers coastal communities from storm generated winds and wave surges.



Development, population and wealth are concentrated in vulnerable coastal areas.

OUR WORK

Promoting Protection of the Marine Environment in the Face of Climate Change Effects

WWF Central America works to train managers and conservationists in biological monitoring techniques. The aim is to enable a long term monitoring of human and climate change impacts on marine habitats such as coral reefs, which are home to important marine species that are critically linked to livelihoods associated with tourism and fisheries.



Outreach to Communities

WWF Central America is reaching out to communities to initiate discussions on identification of plans to address community level adaptation, and foster increased resilience to adverse impacts of climate change. Work is being done with three coastal communities within Belize to identify strategies that could be replicated throughout the Mesoamerican Reef.

A program is also being developed with schools within targeted communities to have school children assist with climate change outreach at home and within their respective community.

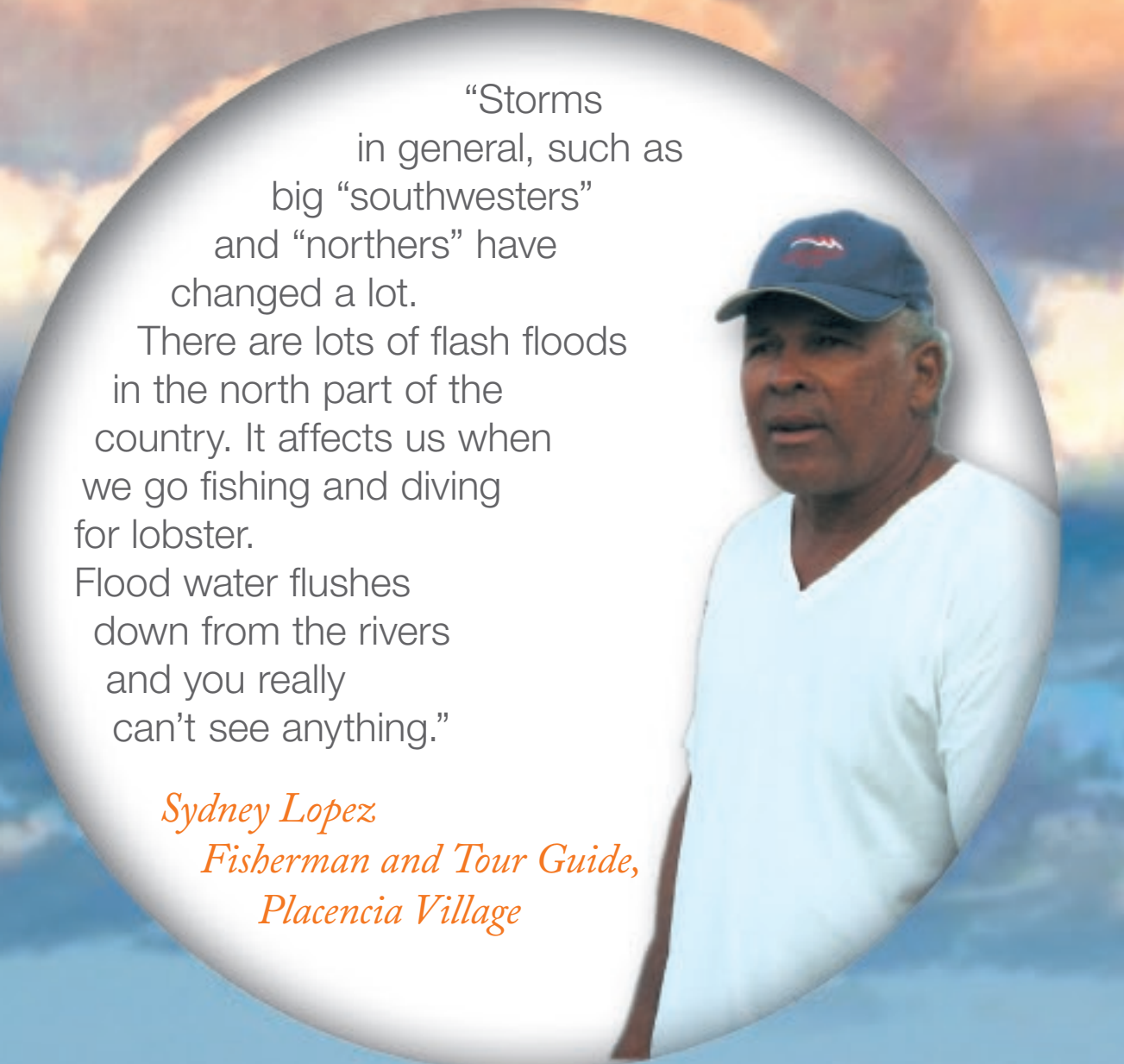


Climate Witness: Working with Communities to Have their Concerns Heard

WWF Central America collected personal stories of how climate change has altered the livelihoods and lives of fishers and other community members within three coastal towns in Belize: San Pedro Ambergris Caye, Belize City and Placencia Village.

A large percentage of the population within these towns depends on natural resources to provide for their families. The idea is to ensure that these valuable stories are captured and shared with a global audience. The overall aim is to highlight the need for actions to be taken at both the global and local levels to address climate change.

From the Mouth of Some of Our Witnesses:



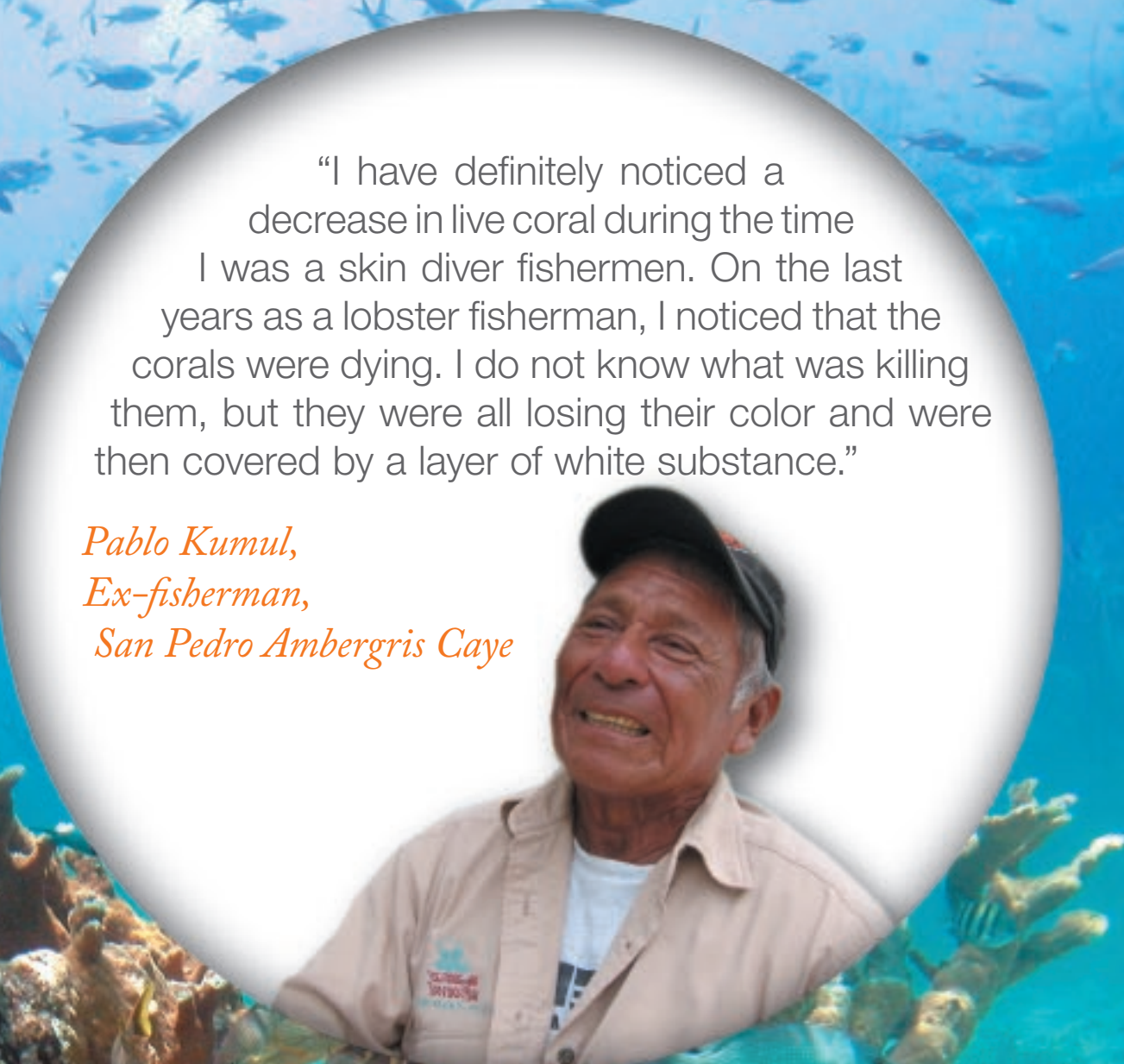
"Storms in general, such as big 'southwesters' and 'northers' have changed a lot. There are lots of flash floods in the north part of the country. It affects us when we go fishing and diving for lobster. Flood water flushes down from the rivers and you really can't see anything."

Sydney Lopez, Fisherman and Tour Guide, Placencia Village



"I think the climate is changing a lot. Some months have gotten hotter than they used to be. March, April and May used to be cooler and now they are hot."

Rosenda Aldama, Fisherwoman, Placencia Village



"I have definitely noticed a decrease in live coral during the time I was a skin diver fisherman. On the last years as a lobster fisherman, I noticed that the corals were dying. I do not know what was killing them, but they were all losing their color and were then covered by a layer of white substance."

Pablo Kumul, Ex-fisherman, San Pedro Ambergris Caye

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