

# The Sanctuary That Saved Oracabessa Bay

Shaping coastal livelihoods in harmony with nature

By **UNDP Jamaica**  
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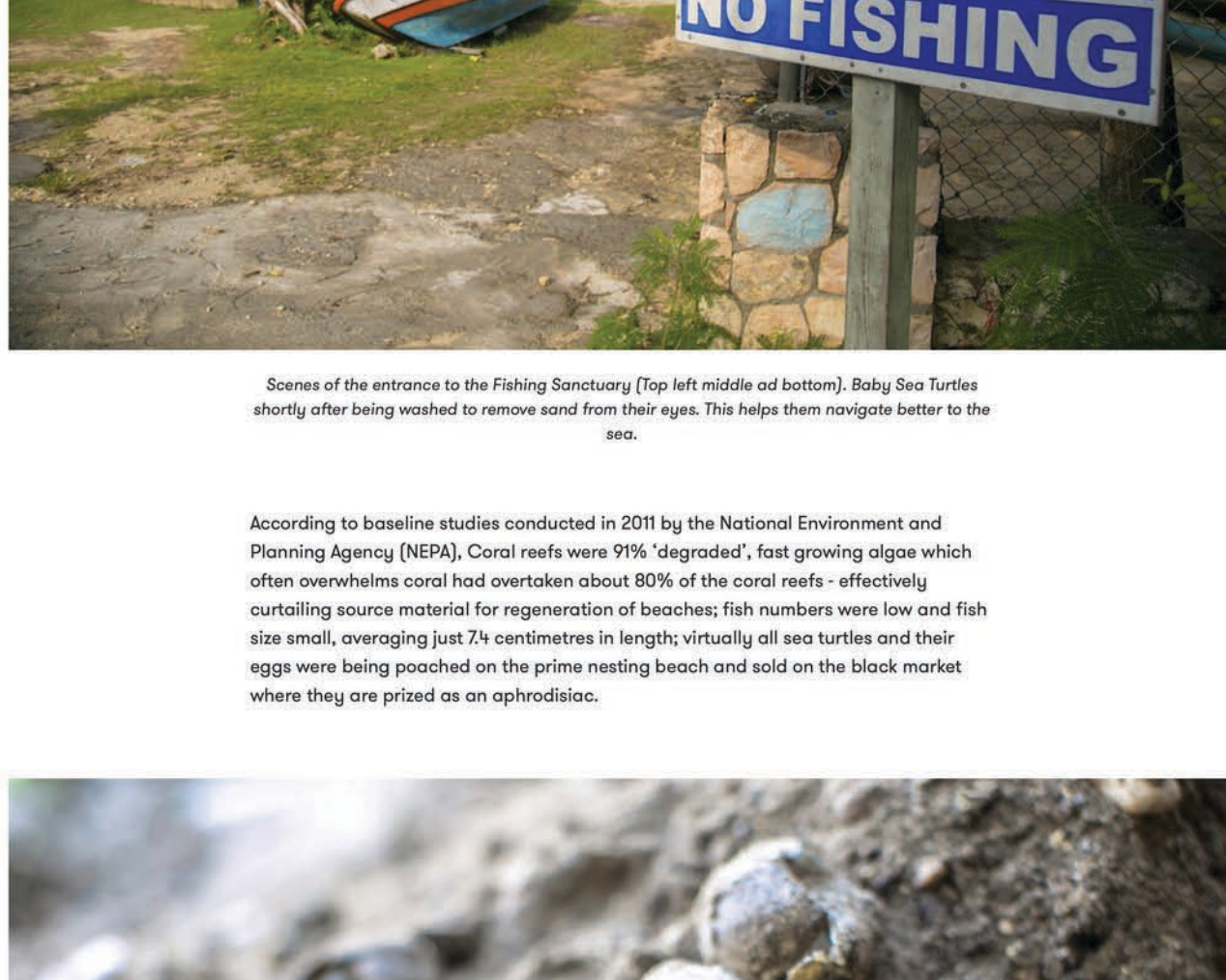
In the small fishing village of Oracabessa Bay on Jamaica's north coast – where Ian Fleming wrote all of his James Bond spy novels – residents ranging from high net worth owners of boutique hotels and villas to fishers playing its coastal waters have united in a common pursuit to protect its biodiversity.



Left: James Bond author the late Ian Fleming penned all Bond novels from Goldeneye, on a bluff overlooking the sanctuary. Right: a fisher works harvest caught outside the borders of the protected area

Oracabessa Bay is a nesting site for the endangered hawksbill sea turtle, endangered Acropora corals, and a key ecosystem that supplies seafood to the local markets.

However, indiscriminate fishing significantly reduced fish stocks and land-based pollution continues to kill coral reefs, a crucial part of the defence infrastructure and seafood basket of coastal territories. This environmental decline has severely affected the income of fishers while threatening the Bay's tourism offer.



Scenes of the entrance to the Fishing Sanctuary (Top left middle ad bottom). Baby Sea Turtles shortly after being washed to remove sand from their eyes. This helps them navigate better to the sea.

According to baseline studies conducted in 2011 by the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), Coral reefs were 91% 'degraded', fast growing algae which often overwhelms coral had overtaken about 80% of the coral reefs - effectively curtailing source material for regeneration of beaches; fish numbers were low and fish size small, averaging just 7.4 centimetres in length; virtually all sea turtles and their eggs were being poached on the prime nesting beach and sold on the black market where they are prized as an aphrodisiac.



Top photo - Sea turtle eggs are vulnerable to predators and must be protected. Middle photos - Fries and juvenile fish seen up close near the docking bay at the Sanctuary. Bottom, fishers head out

This was ground zero for the Oracabessa Bay Fishing Sanctuary (OBFS) established 2010 when the St Mary's Fisherman Cooperative joined forces with the Oracabessa Foundation, a not for profit founded by Island Records founder Chris Blackwell who first signed Bob Marley and introduced him to the world.



Fish Sanctuaries are strict No Fishing zones.

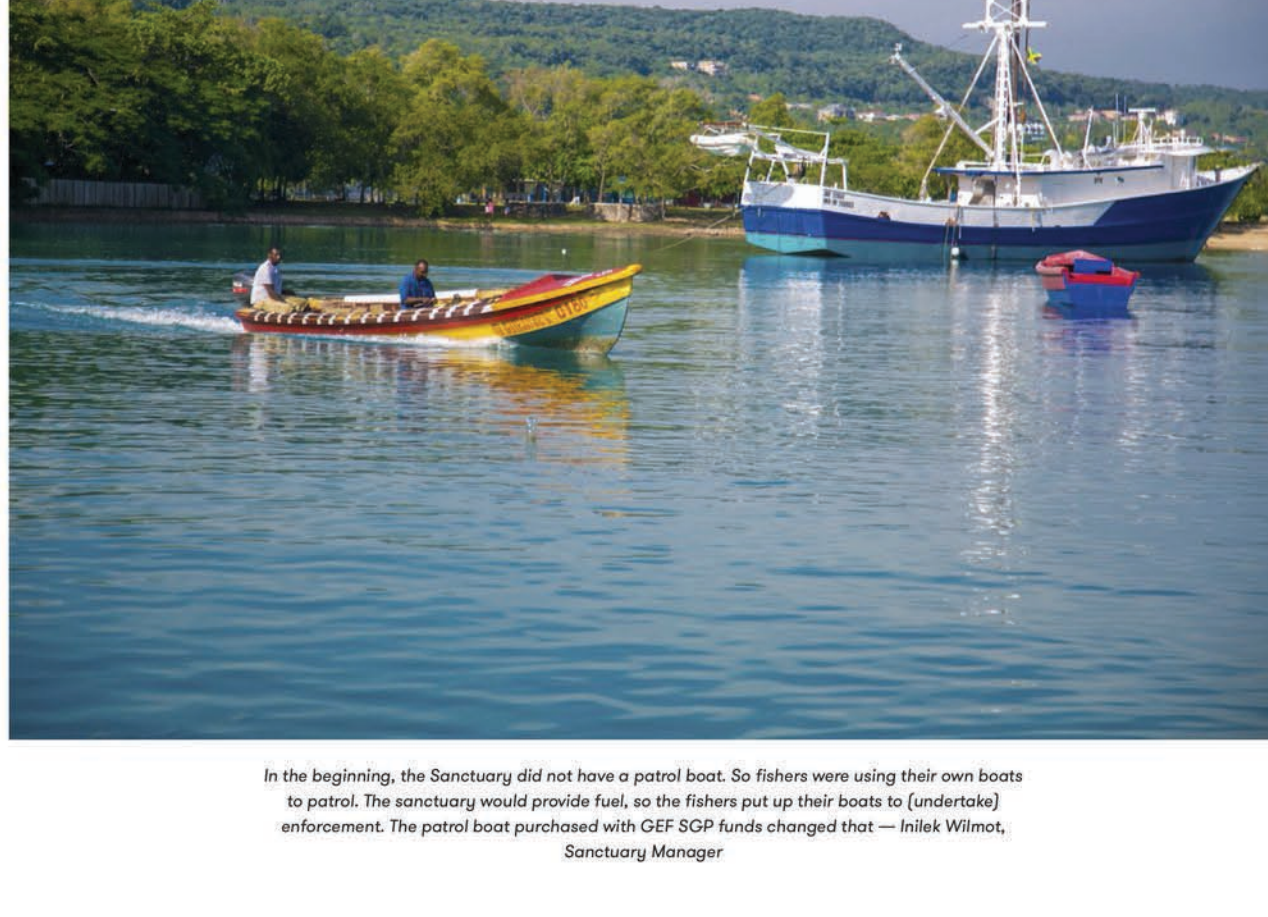
## Guardians of the Bay

Fishers, marine biologists, hotel owners - united not only to restore corals, fish stock and sea turtles, but also to establish sustainable livelihoods and a community capable of living in harmony with nature.

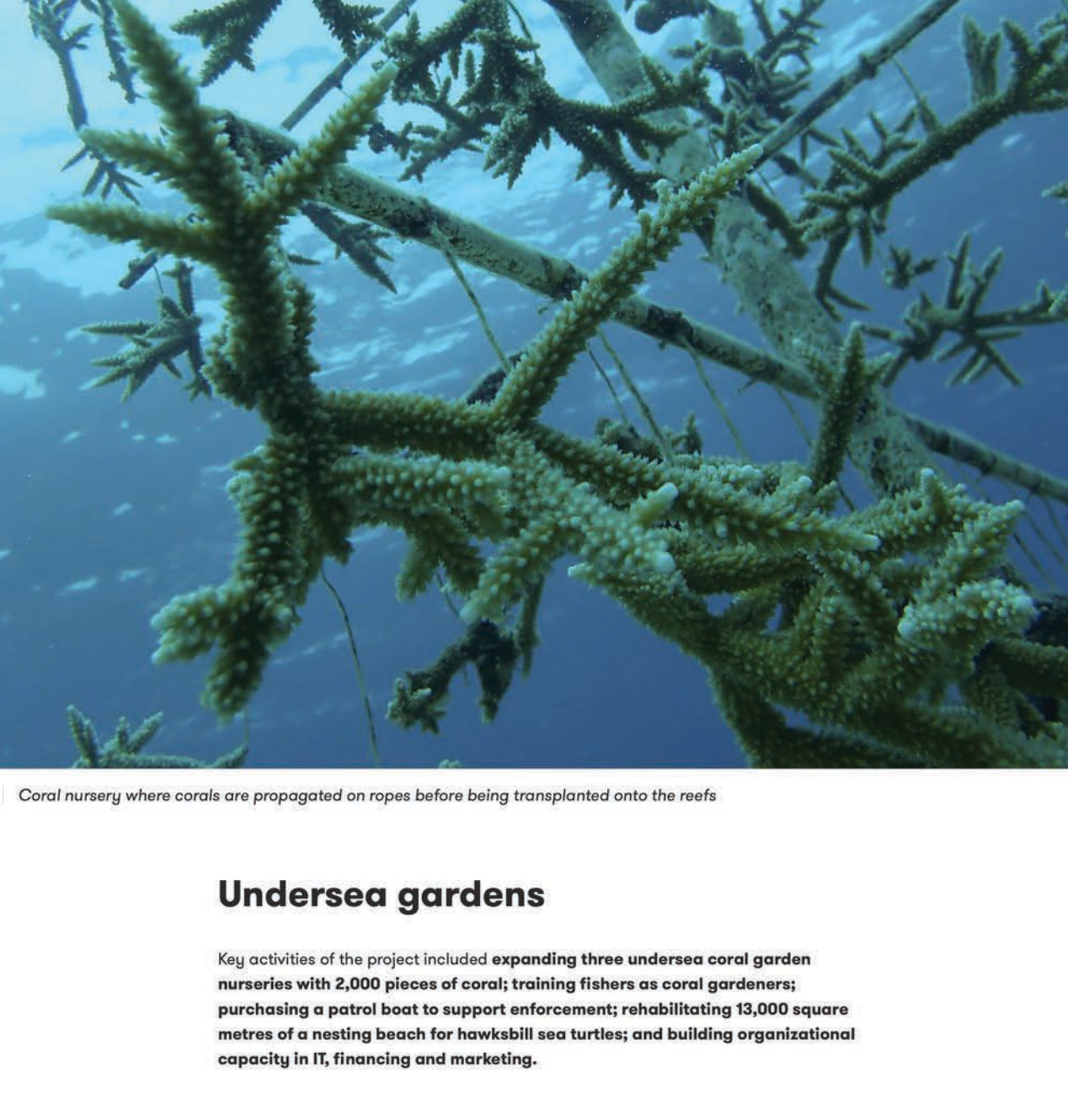


Team effort.

With support of the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme (SGP), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Oracabessa Bay Fish Sanctuary aimed to preserve the marine ecosystem in the 74-hectare Sanctuary and to increase the biodiversity of the ecosystem, including sea turtles and corals.



In the beginning, the Sanctuary did not have a patrol boat. So fishers were using their own boats to patrol. The sanctuary would provide fuel, so the fishers put up their boats to (undertake) enforcement. The patrol boat purchased with GEF SGP funds changed that — Inilek Wilmot, Sanctuary Manager



Coral nursery where corals are propagated on ropes before being transplanted onto the reefs

## Undersea gardens

Key activities of the project included expanding three undersea coral garden nurseries with 2,000 pieces of coral; training fishers as coral gardeners; purchasing a patrol boat to support enforcement; rehabilitating 13,000 square metres of a nesting beach for hawksbill sea turtles; and building organizational capacity in IT, financing and marketing.



Hyacinth Douglas, National Coordinator, GEF SGP in Jamaica helps release sea turtle hatchlings. Tourists love this activity. Some get emotional, Mervyn Tennant of the restoration project says.

With a relatively small investment into strategic entry points of the Sanctuary's work, and a shared community vision, the project was able to achieve high impact.

By 2013, NEPA's monitoring reports indicated a 153% increase in coral cover; a 272% increase in fish density; 16% increase in fish size; a 564% increase in fish biomass (mass of living fish per area); and a 43% reduction in harmful algae covering coral reefs.

