Behavior Change Action Plan

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Case Overview

Hundreds of nesting sea turtles come ashore each year between the Volta River and Togo border. Approximately 100% of the turtles are being killed by local community members, many before they have the chance to lay eggs. While there is a Wildlife Division office in the area, law enforcement is ineffective due to a lack of resources and motivation to patrol the beach and deter these killings. This area is stricken with poverty and there is limited access to education, health care, and other basic needs. The turtles are mainly killed for food (sustenance) and for local sale (income). Anecdotal evidence gathered from fishermen and traders indicate that some of the turtle meat is sold in neighboring countries like Togo and Benin.

While the threat to sea turtles in this case is direct take, poverty and a lack of basic needs is contributing to and exacerbating this conservation challenge.

Target Audience & Key Stakeholders

The target audience and key stakeholders for this strategy include: a) the communities that are engaged in poaching, b) community members with special knowledge about community needs, c) outside (and local) entities with the ability to provide funding and expertise to help meet the community members basic needs (e.g. food, healthcare, education).

A) Of the 12 or more small fishing communities that are involved with poaching, project leaders have said that 3-5 are potentially receptive to collaboration with conservationists at this time, and we suggest starting to develop the campaign in these communities. This should involve interfacing directly with community members, as well as with community leaders such as village chiefs, fishing chiefs, and religious leaders who may have outsize influence (see Diffusion of Innovation theory below).

B) Any community members with special knowledge about the community's needs should be an important target for engagement. This may include existing health providers or aid agencies working in the communities, women's group leaders, the chiefs and religious leaders, or other influential and centralized people in the community.

C) We also recommend that the project target outside entities for potential partnership, such as international development organizations, aid organizations, government agencies, and any others with the ability to raise/provide funding for community development needs, and to implement community development programs.

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

"Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a model for understanding the motivations for human behavior. It maps different motivations onto a pyramid, with each level representing a different human need. These include physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization." - Read more via Medical News Today

This framework asserts that people can not focus on satisfying needs higher up the pyramid until their foundational needs have been met.

In the context of this specific challenge, Maslow's theory suggests that we must first focus on supporting community members to meet their basic needs (e.g. food, health, employment) before they will be willing or able to engage in conservation behaviors that fall higher on the pyramid (e.g., as a sense of connection or by self-actualization).
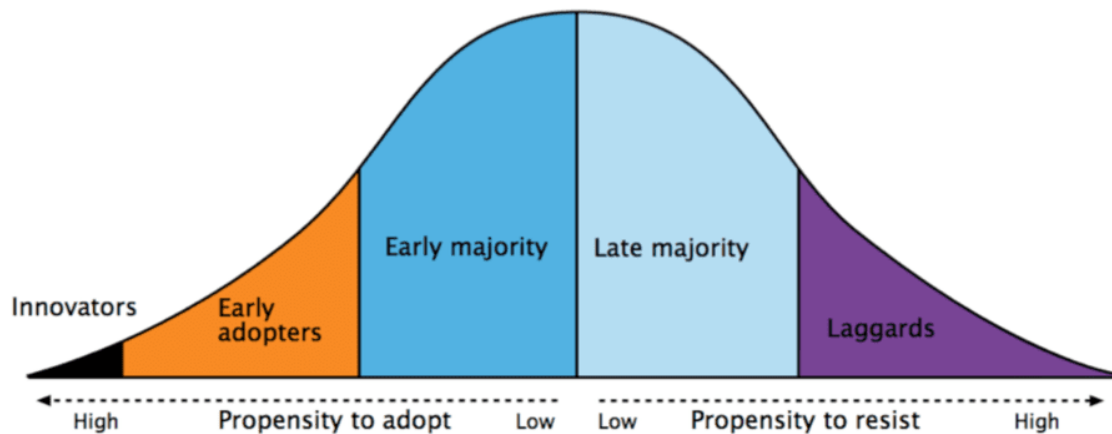
Diffusion of Innovation Theory

"Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory is one of the most foundational social science theories. It originated in the communication field to explain how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a population or social system. The end result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, or product. Adoption means that a person does something differently than what they had previously (i.e., purchase or use a new product, acquire and perform a new behavior, etc.). The key to adoption is that the person must perceive the idea, behavior, or product as new or innovative. It is through this that diffusion is possible.

Adoption of a new idea, behavior, or product (i.e., "innovation") does not happen simultaneously in a social system; rather it is a process whereby some people are more apt to adopt the innovation than others. Researchers have found that people who adopt an innovation early have different characteristics than people who adopt an innovation later. When promoting an innovation to a target population, it is important to understand the characteristics of the target population that will help or hinder adoption of

the innovation. " Read more, via
https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/sb/behavioralchangetheories/behavioralchangetheories4.html

In the context of this specific project, Diffusion of Innovation theory suggests that the project should focus on identifying the innovators and early adopters as targets for partnership for meeting the community's basic needs. This will include opinion leaders, such as chiefs, and other community members who demonstrate an interest in innovation and leadership, as well as communities that are more interested in collaboration.

Key Message

We believe that the project should focus on further exploring and attempting to address the root causes of the poaching (needs), as well as building goodwill with the chiefs and priests, rather than diving into conservation focused messaging. Without addressing those issues, messaging will likely be ignored (see additional comments and resources in the conclusion section).

In terms of messaging, a simple message might be one of caring, for example: "We care about this community and want to ensure health and wellbeing for generations to come."

Implementation

Ideas for implementation include:

- Focus on building ties with chiefs in communities that are already receptive to conservation messaging. Explore opportunities for religious integration and community engagement.
- Begin by opening a dialogue with community members and chiefs to better understand what they view as the community's greatest needs. Is it food? Medicine/healthcare? Money for school uniforms, books, or fishing gear? Improvements to the soccer field or church? Something else? Gaining a better understanding of what community members feel they lack may help the project: a) better understand the specific motivations behind the poaching, and b) discover opportunities to build goodwill with the community by contributing to needs. For example, as a complement to other efforts, the project could sponsor a soccer team called "The Leatherbacks", support a school or church, or provide other support that not only helps to alleviate the need to

poach, but also build alliances with community leaders around turtle conservation. This type of engagement will help demonstrate that the project has the community's best interests at heart and can help paint sea turtle conservation in a positive light.
- Work to establish partnerships with other entities that can help provide needed services to the community, such as health services, education programs, job training, or others that help community members meet their needs for income, safety, and food.
- While these efforts alone will not stop poaching, when done in tandem with efforts to improve patrolling, enforcement, or education, they may make a powerful contribution to the project's success. We suggest that patrolling, enforcement, or education efforts be planned as future phases of the project, once a positive relationship and open dialogue is established with the community and its leaders.

Evaluation

The most important metric for evaluation would be the incidence of poaching, which can be monitored through beach patrols, community surveys, or market surveys, if applicable. Additional metrics could include the number of chiefs or communities engaged with the project, results of attitude surveys, or other metrics depending on the final scope of the project.

Conclusion

Given that the poaching of turtles is seemingly rooted in the community's basic needs (food, income), this is indeed a complex and sensitive issue and any behavior change efforts must be approached carefully. Change is not likely to happen overnight, and pushing too quickly or forcefully for conservation may backfire by damaging relationships between conservationists and community members. Instead, we believe that it is essential at the outset of this program to focus exclusively on finding ways to support the community's basic needs and on building trust and goodwill rather than trying to implement direct conservation strategies. While this may seem counterintuitive, there are a number of examples from programs for which such an indirect strategy has proven effective. Some of those examples include:

- [Improving rural health care reduces illegal logging and conserves carbon in a tropical forest](#)
- [Investing in the health of girls and women: a best buy for sustainable development | The BMJ](#)
- [Rainforests and Communities — Health In Harmony](#)
- [Providing health care to improve community perceptions of protected areas | Oryx | Cambridge Core](#)

Such an approach may also open up the possibility for partnership with organizations or agencies that focus on community development, healthcare, women's rights, food security, or other related topics.

The Team BEACH coordinators would be happy to discuss these ideas further with you if it would be helpful to schedule a call in the near future. We also encourage you to stay engaged with the Team BEACH network by joining our listserv and exploring our past webinars and other free tools and resources available at https://www.seaturtlestatus.org/team-beach.

On behalf of the Team BEACH community, thank you for contributing your time and ideas to our network, and for allowing us to explore and contribute to your important work.