

## COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT FOR SEAGRASS CONSERVATION AT HEPU DEMONSTRATION SITE, SOUTH CHINA

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With the aim of maintaining the existing biodiversity and environmental condition and utilize the seagrass resources rationally and sustainably, a seagrass demonstration site has been established in Hepu under the funds from UNEP/GEF as well as central and local government of China since July 2005. This is to be accomplished through maintaining the balance between utilization and conservation, based on community and government involvement. For this purpose, the actions being taken in the demonstration site mainly include: (1) Establishing cross sectoral management framework for the sustainable use of the Hepu seagrass site; (2) Sustainability of site management; (3) Conservation of seagrass bed ecosystem as major habitat in the site; (4) Education and training for increased involvement of all stakeholders in preserving the seagrass habitat.

From July 2005, many activities under the above 4 actions have been carried out. (1) Founding the management board, which will consist of departments engaged in environmental protection, ocean, maritime affairs, aquatic product etc., convening meetings of the management board regularly to render reports of work progress & plans. (2) Conducting widespread publicity, education and talent cultivation. Publicity and instructive activities of various forms has been carried out in major scenic spots, schools, and key areas of towns & villages. (3) Setting up the seagrass information system, designing the county's first seagrass website, creating a primary seagrass database and a management system. (4) Intensifying rectification to unlawful practices within the demonstration site and doing an earnest job in protecting seagrass habitat. Offering guidance for people protecting & making reasonable usage of seagrass and restraining economic policies that contribute to impairment on seagrass. (5) Redoubling scientific studies on seagrass and setting up dedicated research institutes to identify monitor contents including seagrass species, area, biodiversity and endangered species at the demonstration site.

To deliver more effective protection to seagrass, the following works will be implemented. (1) Constructing the first seagrass education center in China. (2) Setting up the seagrass information system; perfecting the county's first website dedicated to seagrass. (3) Furthering studies on seagrass, cultivating researchers in the field, intensifying international academic exchanges, and encouraging researchers to publish their researching process as well as findings for sharing.

**Keywords:** seagrass, demonstration site, public awareness, co-management, Hepu, South China