

Cuba's "Mi Costa" project approved by the Green Climate Fund

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Seoul, March 22 (RHC)--The Green Climate Fund (GCF) has approved \$23.9 million in funding for a coastal resilience project along Cuba's southern coastline.

This funding will be provided by the Green Fund for the first 8 years of the project and will be complemented by \$20.3 million from the Cuban government for the implementation of an ecosystem-based adaptation approach to coastal protection.

The 30-year "Mi Costa" project will improve the climate resilience of more than 1.3 million people and protect vulnerable coastal habitats.

Implemented by the Environment Agency, part of Cuba's Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment (CITMA), and supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the project furthers the Cuban government's ambition to contribute to the Paris Agreement by strengthening ecosystem-based approaches along 1,300 kilometers of coastline in 24 municipalities. It also provides an important basis for implementing the "Tarea Vida" (Task Life) State Plan to address climate change.

The island of Cuba is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. While the Cuban government shows impressive results towards sustainable development, coastal erosion, flooding, saline intrusion, drought, and sea-level rise threaten these hard-won economic and social achievements.

"The impacts of these climatic factors pose a threat to the existence of coastal settlements and communities. With funding from the Green Climate Fund and UNDP support, this new project will provide valuable inputs to governments' work on Task Life. Together, these efforts will help vulnerable populations adapt to the risks associated with climate change," said Dr. Odalys Goicochea, Director of CITMA's Environment Directorate.

Projections show that, in the absence of interventions, by the end of the 21st century, some 21 coastal communities will disappear completely in Cuba, and more than 98 will be severely affected by climate-related hazards.

Hurricanes have also damaged the island's infrastructure considerably. In October 2016, Matthew crossed the western tip of Cuba, causing more than \$97 million in damage (2.6% of GDP). Hurricanes Ike (2008) and Sandy (2012) accounted for \$293 million (12.05% of GDP) and \$278 million (9.53% of GDP), respectively.

"Adopting ecosystem-based and cost-effective approaches, this innovative project will protect and restore natural habitats, reefs, seagrasses, and mangroves, and help communities care for their environment from present and future risks due to severe tropical storms and hurricanes, sea rise, and others related to climate change. A key aspect of the project is its focus on working with communities and local authorities to understand the value of ecosystems to their own resilience and livelihoods," said Dr. Maritza Garcia, President of the Environment Agency.

In total, the project will restore more than 11,000 hectares of mangrove, 3,000 hectares of bog forest, and 900 hectares of bog grassland. This contribution will help improve the health of more than 9,000 hectares of seagrass beds and approximately 134 kilometers of coral reef crests, essential protective barriers to rising seas and storm surges.

The integrated ecosystem approach will enable ecosystems to act as barriers to climate change impacts, manifested in coastal erosion and flooding while controlling saline intrusion.

"Ecosystem interventions, with the participation of communities, will benefit more than 1.3 million people. "Mi Costa" will represent a critical contribution to Cuba's efforts in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, set out in the 2030 Agenda," said Ms. Maribel Gutierrez, UNDP Resident Representative in Cuba.

"Mi Costa" will build on the results of a successful coastal resilience project, "Manglar Vivo", financed by the Adaptation Fund and also implemented by UNDP and the Environment Agency.

This new project will strengthen the adaptive capacity of vulnerable coastal communities in southern Cuba by rehabilitating the coast, seascapes, ecosystems, and hydrology, replanting and restoring mangroves and reefs, and strengthening the climate governance of communities living on the frontline of the climate crisis. These will benefit from the promotion of local centers for environmental education, capacity building centers, and local and national coordination mechanisms, which are part of the long-term approach to climate change management.

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