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**ACTIVITY PLANNER**

## Coral reef replanting success for Sumatra island hit by tsunami

By Ian Wood

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A one-man coral replanting project has proved remarkably successful in helping a coral reef devastated by the tsunami in 2004 to recover.

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The idea is the brainchild of Pak Dodent, a resident of the island of Pulau Wey off the north coast of Sumatra.

The narrow channel between his small village of Ibioh and a nearby island was particularly badly hit by the tsunami.

"It was like a washing machine out there and all of the coral was broken," he told me.

"Afterwards I thought to myself what can I do to make the coral grow again and I started to experiment."

The best system he has found is to make concrete moulds using a bucket and then embed a plastic bottle or tube so that it sticks out of the top of the concrete.

When these are set he drops them by boat onto the shallow sandy sea bed and leaves them there for a month before starting to transplant coral to them.

"This allows time for any chemicals present in the concrete so that they don't affect the new coral growth," he said.

"It is just like gardening; I cut a little bit of coral from the healthy reef on the far side of the island and bring it to my new reef. I am careful to only take a little from here and there so that I don't affect the healthy eco system."

He then uses cable ties to attach the transplants to the plastic tubes so they are not dislodged by tides or currents.

advertisement We swam out to inspect his new reef and the results were quite stunning.

The areas that are now over 3 three years old are completely covered with coral and fishes with virtually no remaining sign of the concrete bases. He has already replanted in excess of 200 square meters of coral with over 26 different species.

Once planted his work is by no means over as red and green algae can build up on the young coral and destroy it. His answer is to dive down and gently clean the infected coral with a toothbrush.

"I monitor and clean it for one year, after that it is up to the fishes," he said.

His work has recently attracted the interest of Fauna and Flora International who have now given him a small grant to develop his project.



Pak Dodent and the concrete moulds (top) and the coral reefs that he has grown (bottom)

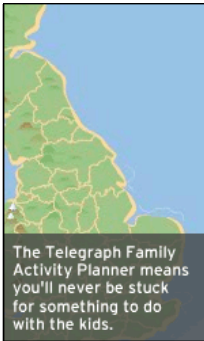
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The organisation Reef Check carried out a survey of several coral reefs in Sumatra in 2005 to monitor the effects of the tsunami and earthquake. Their results found that the effects of these natural disasters were less destructive than the problem of over fishing.

"Very little was previously known about the health of the reefs in this area," said Dr Gregor Hodgson, Reef Check founder and executive director.

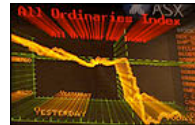
"This expedition points to the need for better management of coral reefs in this mega-biodiversity region. The wonderful thing about reefs is how quickly they can recover if we take care of them."

The future of these reefs depends on the local community and their attitudes to conservation. The tsunami was such a huge event in north Sumatra that many people have changed their view on the power of nature and there are more positive signs that the local people are changing their fishing habits.

There is now a net fishing ban on several reefs on Pulau Wey that is being observed. Pak Dodent summed it up perfectly by saying: "People always take from the ocean but if we carry on like that we will soon destroy it all."

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