

Challenges and Successes in Small-Scale Fisheries in the Marine Stewardship Council's Program

Desafíos y Éxitos en la Pesca en Pequeña Escala en el Programa del Marine Stewardship Council

Défis et Succès de la Pêche Artisanale dans le Programme du Marine Stewardship Council

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is a global non-profit dedicated to tackling overfishing and marine habitat destruction by driving the fishing and seafood industry towards sustainability. The globally recognized MSC Fisheries Standard is produced and updated by the organization. Fisheries voluntarily hire third-party auditors to conduct assessments against this benchmark on three criteria: stock status, habitat impact and management. If a fishery is successful and becomes MSC certified, seafood it lands is eligible to bear the MSC ecolabel as long as all of the supply chain (processors, retailers etc) can meet the traceability benchmark, the MSC Chain of Custody Standard.

Currently, about 15% of global seafood landings by volume is either certified or in-assessment in the MSC program (MSC, 2019). Small-scale fisheries comprise about 16% of this certified or in-assessment volume. Globally, small-scale fisheries are critically important, especially in the Global South, as they contribute around half of global fish catches and employ more than 90 percent of the world's capture fishers and fishworkers, of whom almost half are women (World Bank 2012). In addition, hundreds of millions of people rely on fishing for their livelihoods. However, many small-scale fisheries operate in areas where catch levels and threats to marine biodiversity and local economies are high.

The MSC recognizes that these fisheries can often face additional challenges when becoming sustainable and MSC certified. These challenges may include: low awareness of the MSC, poor fisheries management, lack of government support, and lack of data. Through the organization's experience working in small-scale fisheries, specific challenges have been identified, and solutions to those challenges are in progress. Two fisheries, one that has withdrawn from the program and one that is currently certified, were examined to inform key lessons and takeaways for small-scale fisheries in the MSC program.

The Sian Ka'an and Banco Chinchorro Spiny Lobster fishery is an artisanal fishery off the coast of Mexico. The fishery became certified in June 2016 but struggled to raise enough money for the subsequent annual audits, and so ultimately withdrew from the program in July of 2012 (MSC 2019). The client group for the fishery consisted of six fishing cooperatives, and they harvested 200 metric tons of lobster annually (MSC 2019). Despite leaving the program, the fishery continues to utilize the MSC Standard as a benchmark for progress and sustainability. The fishery also made changes to the government system in place while participating in the MSC program. The fishery wrote a letter to MSC leadership upon their withdrawal outlining the challenges they faced while in the program, and that insight has contributed to the reinvigorated Global Accessibility team at the MSC.

The Bahamian Spiny Lobster fishery started a fishery improvement project (FIP) in 2009, and ultimately achieved certification against the MSC Standard in August 2018 (MSC 2019). This fishery is artisanal and utilizes casitas as the primary fishing method. About 3,000 mt of lobster tails are harvested from the fishery annually (MSC 2019). The FIP consisted of strong partnerships between exporters of spiny lobster (The Bahamian Marine Exporters Association), the World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy and several corporations based in the United States. Collaborators and the fishery worked closely with the Bahamian government, academics and other stakeholders to implement harvest control rules and improved enforcement in the fishery, among many other things.

There are several characteristics of small-scale fisheries that contribute to their success in achieving certification. Any project should have clear motivation and benefit of action for engaging with the MSC program. It is imperative for communities to have clear rules of use and enforcement of those rules in place to be successful. Finally, strong community support paired with an enabling environment are essential. The MSC is committed to ensuring that the MSC Program and its benefits are accessible to all fisheries, regardless of size or region. We are continually working to improve the global accessibility program and offer a wide variety of tools to fisheries interested in engaging with the MSC, including capacity building training, fishery improvement tools and the Ocean Stewardship Fund.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable, small-scale, ecolabel

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