

MSC certification

A small start

An experiment in Prainha do Canto Verde tests the MSC's principles and criteria for community-based certification of a fishery

The rich lobster fishery of the northeastern part of Brazil has been exploited since 1955. The older fishermen remember a certain Mr. Morgan introducing traps from Florida and starting to export lobsters to the US. The fishery was artisanal, using small canoe-shaped boats with sails, called *canoas* and sail-rafts called *jangadas*. (Interestingly enough, the word *jangada* originates in India and comes from the Malayalam word *changadam*).

There was no danger of overfishing until the motorized fleet was introduced in 1965. But, in the 1970s, once the fleet had grown out of control and greedy merchants began to buy undersized lobsters, the first danger signs appeared.

The fishery was administered by a federal agency called "SUDEPE", together with scientists and the syndicate of exporters. Artisanal fishermen and the Fishermen's Union were simply ignored. Even when the newly created IBAMA (Environmental Institute of Brazil) took over responsibility for fisheries, management was conducted in a very isolated manner. The result was that Brazil's total lobster capture and exports crashed from a peak of 5,000 tonnes to 3,200 tonnes in 1993 and, later, to 1,700 tonnes in 1999. The struggle for participation in fisheries management started in 1993 after conflicts with crews of fishing boats with illegal diving equipment led to several deaths on both sides. Fed up with the *laissez faire* attitude of the government and law enforcement agencies, fishermen in Prainha do Canto Verde reacted and went on a 76-day protest trip to Rio de Janeiro on the *jangada S.O.S. Survival* (see *Sailing for a Cause*, SAMUDRA Report No 18, 1997).

In the last eight years, a lot has changed and the fishermen are now part of the

decision-making process. The NGO "Instituto Terramar" (which was founded as a result of the protest in 1993) started to bring together fishing communities, organized a statewide awareness campaign and nursed along the first initiatives of community fisheries management. (For more background information on the project Prainha do Canto Verde/Instituto Terramar go to www.fortalnet.com.br/~fishnet). The government and the fishing industry continued to drag their feet, not addressing the main problems: excessive fleet, lack of control of the access to the fishery and predatory fishing.

I have been following the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) experience and the debate promoted by ICSF with great interest, seeing the potential, on the one hand, of a market-based instrument, and, on the other, its limitations for small-scale and artisanal fisheries. Julia Novy, director of Community-based Certification (CBC) in the WWF Endangered Seas Campaign had learned of our community management experience in Prainha do Canto Verde. She invited me to participate at a workshop in Seattle in 1999, together with a number of representatives of community fisheries and several WWF staff from all over the world (Europe, USA, Asia, Australia and Latin America) and the directors of MSC.

Open mind

Being a newcomer to fishing, I am always keen on participating and learning, and keep an open mind for anything that may bring some hope to our lobster fishery. The workshop was, thus, an excellent opportunity to learn from other community experiences and, at the same time, get a chance to debate the issue with representatives of MSC. It seemed just great to have the opportunity to test the

principles and criteria of MSC, knowing, from the SAMUDRA debate, that these were being questioned.

During the debate, MSC project manager Carl-Christian Schmidt talked about field testing of the certification system in small-scale fisheries, but there remain doubts whether small or community-based fisheries had really been made part of the consultation process.

It was clear to me from the beginning that our lobster fishery would have great difficulty to obtain certification under any scheme, because it is so badly managed. But I felt that to go ahead with the experience would be useful for three reasons:

- It would provide the opportunity to test MSC's principles and criteria in a community fishery.
- It would alert the lobster fishery stakeholders to the need for action.
- It would allow an independent and international entity to furnish evidence to pressure Brazilian fishing authorities to implement the existing fisheries management plan.

The WWF took over the costs of the project, which included a preliminary phase,

including awareness raising for stakeholders and the pre-assessment for MSC certification.

It was quite a surprise for the fishing industry in Brazil to learn that NGOs and fishermen were once again a step ahead. Fisheries managers had very little information about MSC, but got very keen when they learned that the Western Australian lobster fishery was already applying for MSC certification. Suddenly, we became more interesting as partners. Five NGOs and fishermen entities were quickly admitted to the "Lobster Foundation" an organization that is supposed to lead the search for responsible fisheries management.

Thus, on 26 November 1999 in the five-star Hotel Marina Park in Fortaleza, Ceará stakeholders and the media got firsthand knowledge of the Lobster Foundation and the MSC's first appearance in Latin America. Two days later, the presentation for fishers and communities took place at the traditional *Jangada* Sail Race in Prainha do Canto Verde.

Media coverage

The event, which attracts over 10,000 fans, and for which we had outstanding TV coverage, was ideal to introduce fishers from many communities to certification and community fishery management as it is practised in Prainha. The former Environmental Minister and Member of

the Board of MSC, Henrique Brando Cavalcanti, was present and was impressed with the state of community organizations in Ceará.

Over the next five months, the community-based certification concept and the community fisheries management plan were presented in communities of the eastern seaboard of Ceará, to fisheries managers, scientists of two universities and the two main research centres of the country (the lobster fishery extends over nine federal States and 1,800 nautical miles of coastline).

In May 2000, Chet Chaffe of Scientific Certification Systems of Oakland California, who had led the team that certified the lobster fishery in Western Australia two months earlier, arrived in Fortaleza.

At a workshop, 20 scientists and fisheries technicians were briefed about certification, before the address to 250 delegates at a fisheries industry gathering sponsored by the fishing industry.

The visit to the lobster fishery at sea and the days spent with the fishermen and contacts with lobster specialists quickly revealed the obvious:

“The pre-assessment does show that certification will not be possible in the short term. The Brazilian government needs to do something about saving the lobster fishery first as it is in a very bad condition. However, potential buyers can rest assured that the fishing co-operative in Prainha do Canto Verde is doing everything it can and doing it well. If the government were doing its job properly, the catch out of Prainha do Canto Verde would meet the MSC requirements for certification. The fact that it does not, is no fault of the fisherman.” (For the detailed report of Scientific Certification Systems go to www.fortalnet.com.br/~fishnet and search for the MSC page).

The result just confirmed what we already knew: we can't save just the lobster fishery of Prainha do Canto Verde; it's all or nothing. The recovery of the lobster fishery is crucial for the survival of coastal communities. Over the past 15 years, the

lobster fishery has become more and more artisanal, and exporters depend on the small-scale fishers for the harvesting of lobster. Price increases on the international market are passed on to fishermen. In this particular fishery, everybody stands to benefit from MSC certification.

The pre-assessment was a positive experience. During the hours spent with Chet, we learned that we know very little about our fishing area. Since then, fishers of Prainha have started to innovate. They are in the process of marking and mapping “their” ocean, firstly, to obtain detailed knowledge about all the resources, and, secondly, to manage it better. We need to convince fishing authorities that the whole coastal area has to be managed in a new way, through community areas with management teams that integrate fishers and scientists.

Maintaining contact with Julia Novy and her community management team has allowed me to keep abreast of the discussions going on around the world. Participants at a WWF-sponsored Community Fisheries Workshop in Sydney in 2000 had some very interesting discussions.

The conclusions they reached do not differ much from the ones we reached in Prainha. But they took the debate a step further and started a discussion on how community certification schemes might look like.

I hope that Julia Novy will keep SAMUDRA readers informed about the progress of this discussion and that the WWF expands its activity in the field of community management to other continents.

Lack of data

Some of the difficulties under MSC certification are the non-availability or poor quality of data in community fisheries or, in the case of Prainha, the lack of comparative data from other communities; or the fact that most resources move around and the community has no control outside its fishing area; and the lack of enforcement capacity. To prepare a fishery for a “real” MSC certification would need time and resources that community fisheries don't

and international funds and organizations. The MSC could be one of the sponsors of a community-based certification “seal of excellence for community fisheries management”, with financial support by MSC signatories and certified fisheries. ICSF, WWF and other NGOs that work with small-scale fisheries could be the stewards for this initiative. A community-based certification programme will be a powerful tool for sustainable coastal development.

Since the MSC presentation in 1999, the community of Prainha do Canto Verde and Instituto Terramar have gained national recognition and are pushing for major changes. At a regional level, we have been able to convince mayors of six coastal counties (municipal governments) to launch a regional management effort along 200 km of coastline, including enforcement actions with a community-owned motor boat and over 50 local actions aimed at controlling the fleet, eliminating backyard lobster buyers (trafficking in undersized lobsters), launching awareness campaigns and many local actions to create alternative fisheries or alternative sources of income in order to take the pressure off the lobster fishery. The federal government has already indicated that it is supporting the initiative and is making available money from the National Environmental Fund to support the plan.

Next on our list are Brazilian exporters and US importers of seafood; we do hope they come aboard. But if they don't, we are in touch with the organizers of the Boston Sea Food Show to present our “case” in March 2002. At this year's show, one of the conference themes was: “Boycotts, Petitions and Purchasing Guides: What's the Industry to Do?”

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have, while the returns would not justify the investment.

For most community fisheries, the benefit may not necessarily be money, but: recognition, validation of community management techniques, technical and financial support for community management programmes, employing community leaders to transfer the knowhow to other communities and the long-term sustainability of the fishery. Active WWF support for community-based efforts to sustainably manage their local fisheries can help convince national governments to support these efforts. That is one thing we still hope will happen in Brazil.

Just the fact of having been chosen to test MSC certification has helped the community of Prainha do Canto Verde find sponsors for the project of marking and mapping their fishing area, and there is a good chance to obtain support from the federal government to extend the experience to other communities.

We may come to the conclusion that the way it stands, MSC is an unlikely instrument to certify artisanal or small-scale fisheries. But we should not deny it the recognition that it has started a discussion that could go a long way to advance community fisheries management and put it on the agenda of national governments, multilateral banks