2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

CLA Drives Paradigm Shift in Approach to IUU Fishing In the Philippines

Name:

Dorelyn Jose

Organization:

University of Rhode Island, Philippines Branch

The Philippines' Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and USAID Fish Right jointly launched the first-ever Philippine IUU Fishing Assessment Report in September 2022. Credit: USAID Fish Right

Summary:

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains among the top threats to marine biodiversity and sustainable fisheries in the Philippines. To strengthen the Philippine Government's response capacity, the USAID Fish Right program is complementing the traditional 'enforcement-heavy' approach in reducing IUU fishing in the Philippines, with a collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) approach. The program collaborates with the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in developing and applying the IUU Fishing Index and Threat Assessment Tool (I-FIT), an innovation in assessing IUU fishing, developing IUU fishing reduction plans, and monitoring improvement in compliance. By collaborating with its national and local government partners in rolling out the innovation, the program was able to foster collective responsibility and harness collective expertise. I-FIT has since undergone a series of CLAs. The implementation of the I-FIT showed the importance of having a broader as well as a CLA approach to assessing and reducing IUU fishing. A better picture of the IUU fishing situation in the country is emerging because of I-FIT, both in the national and local levels. As a result, the government and its partners are coming up with more targeted and adaptive solutions. Addressing IUU fishing is now seen as a multi-faceted challenge, and not just a law enforcement issue. This paradigm shift is happening within the partner government agency from national to local levels, where CLA is also becoming an organizational culture in countering IUU fishing.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

The USAID Fish Right Program (2018-2025) is a bilateral partnership between the US and Philippine governments that works to put an end to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and minimize the threats to the country's rich marine biodiversity. IUU fishing has persisted despite the many enforcement-focused interventions undertaken to deter and eliminate it. Tactical enforcement actions for all kinds of illegal fishing activities usually lack a specific analysis of the various types of IUU fishing activities and the different approaches as well as the practicality of addressing specific IUU activities. The program gathered that reducing IUU fishing would be greatly facilitated by a collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) approach.

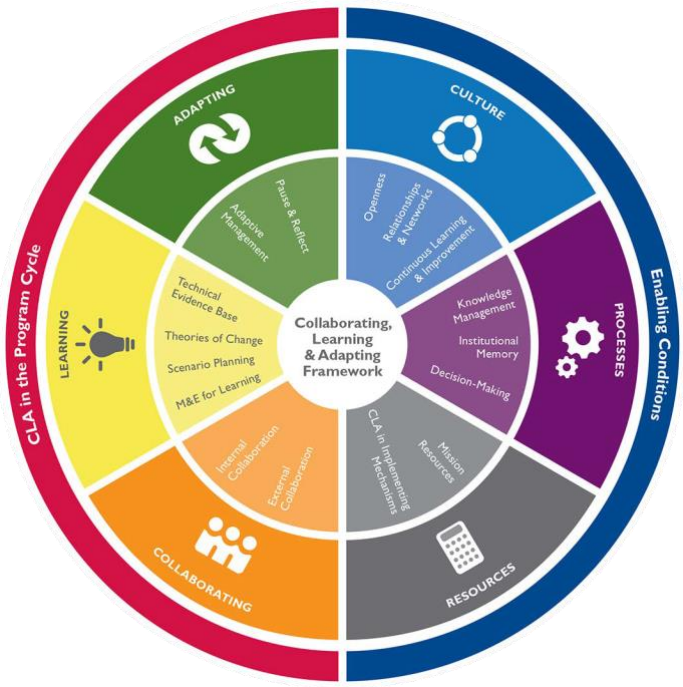
In 2020, Fish Right co-developed with the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) the Philippine IUU Fishing Index and Threat Assessment Tool (I-FIT) that promotes a multi-faceted approach to eradicating IUU fishing in Philippine waters. Through the I-FIT, DA-BFAR works with local government units (LGUs) and fisheries management area (FMA) managers to assess the status of IUU fishing in municipal waters and FMAs in order to develop a technically-robust adaptive management process for addressing IUU fishing and to track their progress in reducing IUU fishing. Fish Right piloted this tool in its project sites and trained field facilitators from DA-BFAR and local government units to use and refine I-FIT.

Fish Right, a consortium of universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led by the University of Rhode Island, offers distinct skills-set to seek science-based solutions to IUU fishing. Our work is based on three decades of documented learning from the USAID experience in fisheries management informed by USAID's Evaluation Policy and CLA principles that foster participatory reflection and greater collaboration among stakeholders, which are key to addressing IUU fishing.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Collaborating

Learning



3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

Securing government and stakeholder buy-in is crucial for an innovation such as the IUU Fishing Index and Threat Assessment Tool (I-FIT). By collaborating with the Philippine government's DA-BFAR and local government partners in implementing the I-FIT, the Fish Right program was able to foster collective responsibility and harness collective expertise in combating IUU fishing.

Fish Right and DA-BFAR pilot-tested I-FIT in four key municipalities in the Calamianes Island Group in Palawan in face-to-face workshops with fisheries technicians and law enforcement agencies in February 2020. Insights from this initial run informed the design of the I-FIT training for trainers for wider application to the rest of Fish Right's sites, but implementation was put on hold with the COVID-19 lockdowns. As a result, the FR team and DA-BFAR modified the training through an online orientation session. Shifting conditions required continuous collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA).

Fish Right then introduced the tool to the municipal level through two stages of online sessions: (1) DA-BFAR management and technical staff from the central and regional offices; and (2) National government agencies; academe (state colleges and local partner colleges); and NGO partners. Fish Right facilitated over 40 I-FIT local implementation workshops with DA-BFAR and other partners. Results from these initial assessments were presented at the virtual launch of the I-FIT tool in June 2021.

As health protocols eased up, DA-BFAR facilitators, with support from Fish Right, rolled out the implementation of the I-FIT tool to coastal municipalities around the country. DA-BFAR's I-FIT focal points conducted in-person assessment and planning workshops with municipal agriculturists and fisheries technicians, members of fisherfolk associations, community enforcement volunteers, Philippine National Police, Coast Guard, academic institutions, and NGOs.

The program's I-FIT focal points provided DA-BFAR management with regular briefings, sharing critical data to better develop policy and programs.

In response to a request from the ground, Fish Right also piloted the assessment of IUU fishing at the much-larger fisheries management area (FMA) scale to feed into the FMA's management framework plans then being developed. This collaborative process between Fish Right and different offices of DA-BFAR's central and regional offices provided key insights into setting up data retrieval and sharing systems within DA-BFAR and other enforcement agencies when conducting IUU fishing assessments beyond local government level.

Fish Right and DA-BFAR set up an online chat group, in addition to regular meetings with I-FIT facilitators, to share lessons learned throughout I-FIT's implementation. With these continuous learnings come adapting as well: for example, I-FIT for Commercial Fishing Vessels was developed to address IUU fishing beyond municipal waters, an IUU fishing reduction board game was developed and used in I-FIT trainings to challenge fisheries managers to think beyond tactical enforcement operations, and so on.

In 2022, Fish Right and DA-BFAR further expanded the I-FIT training resource pool to include the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB), which enhanced the coordination between both government agencies and further accelerated the I-FIT rollout.

As of May 2023, I-FIT has been used in 273 municipalities, or about 30% of coastal LGUs in the Philippines. The LGUs have been using the I-FIT assessment results as a basis for their IUU reduction plan. These IUU reduction plans now highlight non-enforcement interventions as well. The fisheries managers stress the need to evaluate and enhance various aspects of fisheries management in the country such as licensing and registration, use of satellite technology, monitoring fishing activities, among others. The implementation of I-FIT showed the importance of having a holistic as well as a CLA approach to assessing and reducing IUU fishing.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

A. DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

A. DEVELOPMENT RESULTS: How has using a CLA approach contributed to your development outcomes? What evidence can you provide?

More targeted and adaptive solutions for IUU fishing is emerging because of I-FIT.
Addressing IUU fishing is now seen as requiring multi-faceted actions, and not just law enforcement. For example, at a recent Regional IUU fishing Reduction Planning workshop conducted by DA-BFAR Region 6, the different divisions (training, planning, communication, licensing and registration, and enforcement) were all present, including the respective provincial fisheries officers of the provinces. The resulting Regional IUU fishing Reduction Plan identified specific unlicensed and unregulated fishing practices as the priority based upon the systematic assessments of many municipalities, with the different divisions identifying strategies to ensure that unlicensed and unregulated fishing in the different municipalities and provinces are reduced, if not eliminated, in the next two years. In the past, strategies identified were often for illegal fishing activities in general.
With more robust IUU fishing data from I-FIT, the various managers are able to develop solutions that are more targeted and appropriate for their level. For example, the provincial LGU concentrates on big commercial trawl fishing while the municipal LGU is focusing on fine mesh nets. At the national level, DA-BFAR changed its indicators to make these more suited to the I-FIT index for commercial fishing as it shifts its strategy to focus on commercial fishers.
Overall, IUU fishing risk in municipalities that were scored using I-FIT assessments more than once in the last two years has decreased. Specific LGUs have reported decreases in the prevalence of IUU fishing although this has not yet been broadly observed across many LGUs in the short time of these interventions. Instead, responses or actions taken to reduce IUU fishing have generally become broader (e.g., offering more incentives for compliance). I-FIT has also provided LGUs a way to assess if their strategies are working.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

The program builds on over two decades of USAID support to the Philippine government in increasing fisheries law enforcement capacity and improving fisheries management effectiveness. Many of Fish Right's staff have been part of these USAID initiatives and therefore have forged strong relationships with fisheries stakeholders in the country. The major actors in this approach—the Fish Right team, USAID AOR, and DA-BFAR technical officers—have long-standing working relationships and thus shared norms of reciprocity, professional honesty, and cooperative behavior, providing a common ground to facilitate trustworthiness and deeper social interactions.

The Fish Right Theory of Change was developed based on the best available evidence, but the changing context of our work required our approach to evolve. The main enabling factor that helped us respond quickly to the IUU fishing challenge was USAID's full support for what would essentially be a process of testing assumptions and hypotheses beyond the narrow focus on program outputs or deliverables. USAID showed us that they valued the process of experimentation, which motivated our team to be more reflective and deliberate about program strategies.

Communication is an essential element of the CLA approach and Fish Right is constantly facing the challenge of communicating the immensity of IUU fishing without forgetting the commitment of the Philippine government and the hard work of countless enforcement officers to reduce this onerous threat. We are always careful to vet our messages with BFAR to make sure that they focus on seeking solutions to IUU fishing issues rather than on making sweeping judgments on the government's response.

Fish Right interventions are continuously adapted to contextual changes based on annual pause and reflect sessions. The CLA principles foster participatory reflection and greater collaboration among stakeholders, which we have since applied in shifting the paradigm in addressing IUU fishing in the country.

The CLA Case Competition is managed by USAID's CLA Team in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) and by the Program Cycle Mechanism (PCM), a PPL mechanism implemented by Environmental Incentives and Bixal.