ECOFISH

Enhancing equitable economic
growth by promoting sustainable
fisheries in the EA-SA-IO region

A BRIEF ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE, LESSONS LEARNED, AND BEST PRACTICES EMPHASISING THE ECOFISH SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS IN THE EA-SA-IO REGION

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A brief on the importance of documenting and sharing knowledge, lessons Learned, and Best Practices emphasising the ECOFISH Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries Demonstration Projects in the EA-SA-IO Region

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1.0   Introduction

The paper has been prepared for the *Knowledge Fair organised by the ECOFISH programme in partnership with AU-IBAR and IGAD in Mombasa on 13-16 June 2023*. It aims to harness their wealth of knowledge and innovations, policy guidance, experiential learnings and best practices in the field of the *Blue Economy, Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and Aquaculture Development and Aquatic Biodiversity conservation* to contribute to the political, socio-economic and ecological aspirations of Africa Agenda 2063. Empowering Change through Effective Implementation! It builds on a seamless collaboration between EU-funded ECOFISH and FISHGOV 2 and the SIDA-funded Blue Economy and Aquatic Biodiversity projects to resonate the *Team-Up Europe Initiative* into a strong *African Alliance to operationalise Sustainable and Inclusive Development* of the continent from the Green and Blue Economy perspectives.

2.0   Synopsis of the ECOFISH Programme

ECOFISH is a cross-regional Initiative of the 11th EDF promoted and administered by EUD Mauritius and implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) in partnership with the mandated regional economic and fisheries organisation. It leverages effective cooperation to foster sustainable management of the inland and marine wild fisheries resources to contribute to the Blue Economy of Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO) region. It attempts to operationalise the fundamental principles of Sustainable Development, i.e., the triple-bottom-line, Economic Efficiency – Environmental Health – Social Well-Being, in the fisheries sector amid the unprecedented challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and inequalities. It empowers institutional stakeholders at various governance scales to unleash the development potential of sustainable fisheries as a resilient growth engine for shared prosperity across the local and national economies.

Three expected results, Result 1 drive ECOFISH's global objective - Enhanced fisheries policy, institutional and governance frameworks; *Result 2* - Strengthened fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance capacities and *Result 3* – Call for Proposals for aspirational projects to operationalise sustainable and responsible management of small-scale inland and marine fisheries in local communities. These are delivered by five synergistic work plans diversely managed by EUD - Mauritius through a decentralised project management and governance architecture to ensure ownership and long-term sustainability of actions.

Work Plans 1 and 2 support the sustainable management of the shared fisheries of LVFO and LTA. *Work Plan 3* focuses on the coastal fisheries of the EA-SA-IO region and is implemented by the IOC Secretariat in collaboration with the four African RECs. It also facilitates consolidating and institutionalising the IOC - Regional Fisheries Surveillance Plan - PRSP. *Work Plan 4/Result 3* relates to implementing and monitoring nine sustainable small-scale fisheries demonstration projects in the inland and marine sector of the EA-SA-IO region. Finally, *Work Plan 5* consists of those functions facilitated by EUD – Mauritius, including a long-term Technical Assistance Team,

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grants provided to eligible PRSP participating countries to conduct regional sea and air fisheries patrols, capacity building, external evaluation, etc.[2]

Through this event, ECOFISH intends to share the learning investments of its aspirational sustainable inland and marine small-scale projects in the EA-SA-IO region with the rest of the African continent through collaboration with AU-IBAR and FISHGOV 2 and vice-versa. The main objective is to promote hand-holding ecosystems among stakeholders for a V shape transformative change in the African fisheries and Aquaculture on the margin of Africa Agenda 2063 and associated strategic policies such as AU-PFRS 2014, the Blue Economy Strategy 2019 and the AfCFTA 2020, etc.

Besides its Social and Policy Labs under Result 3 / Work Plan, ECOFISH will also share its achievement, experiential learning and best practices in operationalising the fundamentals of sustainable development in the inland and marine fisheries sector. It includes re-engineering the existing policy instruments to transition the small-scale fisheries from open access and informal sector into a sustainable and resilient growth engine for share prosperity; climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience measures in local fishing communities and strengthening coastal biodiversity conservation, restoration of degradation ecosystems and sustainable livelihoods nexus by involving fishing communities.

ECOFISH will also capitalise on the sub-regional and thematic platforms established in the inland and marine fisheries in collaboration with the mandated Regional Economic and Fisheries organisations of the EA-SA-IO region. For instance, the IGAD Fisheries Coordination Platform (IFCP) has been established to facilitate effective collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and strategic alliance among the member states in inland and marine fisheries. Furthermore, the collaborative arrangement between LVFO and LTA has been strengthened as a powerhouse for driving sustainable management of inland shared and internal fisheries resources in the ESA region. Moreover, a sub-regional platform involving these two RFBs and four ECOFISH inland SSF Demonstration Projects is active, providing a hands-holding ecosystem for mutual learning and capacity-building.

1.0   Introduction

Documenting and sharing knowledge, lessons learned, experiential learning, and best practices is crucial to promote continuous improvement in policy-making and management decisions to drive sustainable development programmes and projects. The practical definitions of these terms are as follows:

Knowledge encompasses *factual knowledge, theoretical concepts, practical know-how, and insights from various sources*, including research, education, and personal experiences. It refers to information, understanding, or skills individuals or communities possess through learning, experience, or study.

Experiential learning is *acquiring knowledge, skills, and insights through direct experience and reflection*. It involves active engagement in real-life situations, hands-on activities, or practical tasks, allowing individuals to connect their experiences and the concepts or theories they are learning. Experiential learning often emphasises reflection, analysis, and application of lessons derived from personal experiences.

Lessons learned are the *insights, conclusions, or recommendations* derived from analysing and reflecting on past experiences, both positive and negative. For projects, they are *specific takeaways or key findings that guide future actions*. They may relate to project management,

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strategies, approaches, challenges, successes, or other aspects that can inform decision-making and improve future outcomes.

Best practices refer to the *recognised and proven approaches, methods, or techniques* consistently producing superior results in a particular field or context. These practices are identified through *experience, research, and evidence-based assessments*. Best practices are considered benchmarks or standards to strive for, as they represent the *most effective and efficient ways of achieving desired outcomes* while minimising risks and maximising benefits.

1.1 Significance of Knowledge Management

The management of knowledge, lessons learned, and best practices plays a crucial role in improving the effectiveness of small-scale fisheries projects.

i) Preserve Knowledge - Documenting lessons learned ensures that *valuable knowledge and experiences acquired during the project are preserved for future reference*. It helps capture insights, challenges, successes, and strategies employed, preventing the loss of knowledge when project participants move on or when the project concludes. This knowledge can be utilised in future projects or initiatives, enabling the continuity of learning and improvement.

ii) Continuous Improvement - Lessons learned documentation provides *a foundation for constant improvement in small-scale fisheries projects.* By analysing and reflecting on past experiences, project stakeholders can identify areas that require improvement, address challenges, and capitalise on successful strategies. In addition, it helps in *refining project planning, implementation, and management processes* to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and overall project outcomes.

iii) Avoid Same Mistakes - Documenting lessons learned helps *prevent repeating mistakes or failures*. By identifying and analysing the root causes of challenges or setbacks encountered in previous projects, stakeholders can develop strategies to mitigate risks, avoid pitfalls, and make more informed decisions in subsequent projects. It saves time, resources, and effort that would otherwise be wasted on reinventing the wheel or making similar errors.

iv) Informing Decision-making - Lessons learned documentation provides valuable insights and evidence that can inform decision-making processes in small-scale fisheries projects. It reduces uncertainty, improves decision quality, and increases the likelihood of project success.

v) Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building - Documented lessons learned can be shared with other stakeholders, communities, or organisations involved in small-scale fisheries. It helps foster collaboration, mutual/collective learning, and capacity building within the fisheries communities.

vi) Policy Advocacy and Scaling-up - Lessons learned help advocate for policy changes, institutional support, or funding for small-scale fisheries projects. They can influence policymakers, donors, and relevant stakeholders to scale up successful initiatives or improve regulations and support for small-scale fisheries.

2.0 Pilot and Trial Projects

A pilot project is a small-scale, preliminary initiative designed to *test and evaluate the feasibility, viability, and effectiveness of a new approach or intervention before its broader implementation*. It typically involves a limited scope, duration, and target audience, allowing project organisers to assess its potential outcomes, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments before scaling up or implementing it on a larger scale. The primary purpose of a pilot project is to *gather empirical evidence, validate assumptions, and inform decision-making* regarding the project's future expansion or implementation.

A trial project, also known as a field trial or experimental project, refers to an initiative to assess the performance, effectiveness, or impact of a particular intervention, technology, or methodology in a real-world setting. It involves implementing the project in a controlled or semi-controlled environment, closely monitoring its progress, and collecting data to evaluate its outcomes and efficacy. In addition, it aims to test the applicability, assess the results, and gather evidence to support or refine the intervention before replicating and upscaling it.

A pilot and trial project is a small-scale, experimental initiative conducted in a real-world setting to test and evaluate the feasibility, effectiveness, and impact of a new intervention, idea, or approach before broader implementation. In the context of the ECOFISH programme, the Social and Policy Lab is the grassroots to address the disconnects between the local communities, governments and markets in the sustainable and inclusive management of small-scale fisheries. The key features of the pilot-cum-trial projects are as follows:

i) *Develop a clear theory of change / Statement of Work or Terms of Reference within a clearly defined log frame and stakeholder engagement plan;*

ii) *Establish rules of procedures for project cycle management (PCM), emphasising the Monitoring and Control processes to document lessons learned from start to finish. It is critical to ensure that the flagship does suffer from amnesia of lessons learned;*

iii) *Assess capacity needs and gaps (institutional, organisational, technical, Research & Development and Human resources – both tangible and intangible and the possibilities to bridge these gaps proactively.*

iv) *Ensure sound financial management to attain value for money from the learning investment. In order words, to avoid disproportionate expenditure compared to external technical expertise and management cost.*

v) *Conduct a situation analysis to harness adequate baseline information to capture the cultural change, viability, scalability and replicability of the concepts and the lessons learned. It can be called a living lab in terms of social science.*

2.1   Expected Outputs

Besides the benefits to the target stakeholders at the experimental stage. The pilot/trial project is bound to ensure these mandatory deliverables:

i) *Documented experiential learning or lessons learned (both positive and negative) and best practices;*

ii) *Observe the Techno-economic feasibility, Cost-benefit of Gross Income Analysis, and Value chains & supply chains ecosystem analysis. It implies a deeper understanding of political, economic, social and environmental dimensions from a policy-making perspective.*

iii) *Viability Report: Findings, Recommendations and the Way Forward based on points (i) and (ii).*

iv) *Revised or updated strategy and project plan, if necessary.*

2.2   Misconception about Pilot/Trial Projects

Pilot or trial projects are often considered quick wins and shortcuts to achieve project objectives. But unfortunately, they usually turned out to be quick fixes and disappeared after the external supports were concluded. So, it is crucial to ensure robust project management systems to harness the full potential of pilots. Efficient management can salvage a bad project, whereas weak management can kill a good project. Moreover, the long-term is a myth in project management, and I consist of a series of short-term goals and objectives. Therefore, the

fundamentals of a good pilot/trial project rely on a realist logical framework, theory of change and Scope of Work that entails the following:

i) *Defined boundaries of the project or intervention*

ii) *The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders, including contribution in assets or kind of the counterparts;*

iii) *Implementation modalities for executing the works, monitoring and control processes;*

3.0   Documenting Lesson Learned

A lot of fuzziness about this topic hampers the delivery of value through experiential learning, sharing, upscaling and replicating. Lessons learned are knowledge that comes from learning by doing or experience, and that can help or impact the works of others, assuming that there is no inherent avoidance of understanding on the part of recipients. A Lesson Learned documents the experience gained during a project. These lessons come from *working on or solving real-world problems.* Collecting and disseminating lessons learned helps to eliminate the occurrence of the same issues in future projects. The experience may be positive or negative – Failures and successes are sources of lessons learned. They are more organisation-specific than Alert Systems and *are not an investigative process for blame and shame*.

It is essential to distinguish between the lesson "learned" and the lesson "identified". Anyone working on a project for a while would attest to the difference between the two terminologies. *Some people keep on identifying the same lessons again and again but never learn them. Business as usual and expecting a different outcome?* So, lesson learned is a process of observing, documenting and disseminating lessons that can be replicated. In project management, a lesson learned is an investment undertaken by the Monitoring and Control process and runs through the project life-cycle from start to finish. A good lesson learned can be defined as a "*Specific Actionable Recommendation*" based on the following:

i) *Reflection on Experience* - Think back and brainstorm as a team what happened;

ii) *Identification of learning points* – Where was there a difference between what was planned and what happened or happening? Either a positive or a negative difference.

iii) *Analysis* – Why was there a difference? What are the root causes?

iv) *Extrapolation*– What is the learning point? What should be done in the future activity to avoid the pitfall or repeat the success?

v) *Instructions* – A lesson has been identified and will be helpful if others learn or can learn from it.

4.0   Conclusion and the Way Forward

In conclusion, documenting lessons learned in small-scale fisheries projects is paramount for promoting learning, continuous improvement, and informed decision-making. By systematically capturing insights, challenges, successes, and best practices, project stakeholders can preserve valuable knowledge, avoid repeating mistakes, and enhance project outcomes. Lessons learned serve as a foundation for continuous improvement, inform future project planning and implementation, and contribute to the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries. Through knowledge sharing and collaboration, the lessons learned from one project can benefit others, fostering a culture of learning and innovation within the fisheries community. By embracing the abovementioned measures, the small-scale fisheries sector can harness the power of lessons learned, experiential learning, and best practices to drive transformative change, foster innovation, and ensure long-term sustainability and resilience.