The Mediterranean Sea is both geographically crowded and politically complex. Some 20 countries share their shores along its 45,000 kilometre coastline and the Mediterranean region is both geographically crowded and politically complex. These contribute significantly to the socio-economic wellbeing of the 750 million people who live along the coastal areas – providing direct and indirect employment to 1.2 million people and earning the Mediterranean countries some US$ 3.8 billion a year, not to mention contributing to regional food security.

However, the state of the resources that form the basis of these livelihoods is not good. Catches of many Mediterranean fish species peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fish catch per unit of fishing effort – a measure that weighs the amount of fish caught against the effort used to catch them – has been declining for many species. While overfishing is a leading problem, weakening Mediterranean fish stocks.

The donors that have worked with and supported FAO in this work come from both within and outside the region.
Advocacy and Awareness Raising

Before: Many countries were unaware of the need and possible synergies of working with their neighbors, especially as regards shared fishery resources.

Today: Advocacy as before organized by the FAO projects has raised the visibility of fisheries management in the political agenda of many, if not all, coastal nations. Countries with shared stock recognition they cannot manage their fisheries effectively unless they recognize the need to work with researchers and other stakeholders to develop reliable information to develop national management strategies that will support economic and social goals while ensuring sustainability.

Scientific Cooperation

Before: Most cooperation was bilateral and few avenues existed for cooperation between the different nations for the need to work with researchers and other stakeholders to develop reliable information to develop national management strategies that will support economic and social goals while ensuring sustainability.

Today: FAO has facilitated implementation of research to support fisheries management to work to set priorities from across the region to work together to set priorities and undertake coordinated research to support fisheries management at national and subregional levels, which is essential for the sustainable use of shared resources.

Capacity Development

Before: Few Mediterranean countries had capacity to collect and analyze fisheries data.

Today: FAO has provided training activities to national fisheries management institutions, developing capacity in fisheries data collection and analysis across the region, and enabling all countries to work together as equals.

Knowledge Gathering, Analysis and Sharing

Before: Information gathered and analyzed by countries often was not standardized or shared, and information on national fisheries sectors was scattered, leaving managers with an incomprehensive picture of the fisheries resources.

Today: FAO has facilitated adoption of standardized methodologies that can enable countries to compile and share national data, contributing to the regional knowledge base. The increased data availability has facilitated completion, publication and distribution of information on fisheries and shared stocks, making it easier for government institutions to see their fisheries in a larger perspective.

The Process

FAO fisheries projects established in the Mediterranean have been instrumental in developing a regional approach toward fisheries management in the area and the countries that share the fisheries resources. In particular, regional working groups established by FAO, fisheries managers and researchers across the region work together specifically to set priorities and undertake coordinated research to support fisheries management at national and subregional levels, which is essential for the sustainable use of shared resources. Through this collaboration, countries in the Mediterranean subregion have been able to undertake research on shared stocks and deal with common fisheries management issues while fostering trust among participating countries.

The projects

Linking countries and subregions to support the use and conservation of marine resources


When COPESD-1 was launched in the central and western Mediterranean, it was an ambitious initiative to undertake a comprehensive research on shared fishery resources, scientific cooperation, and fisheries management projects so that cooperation could advance on an equal term. COPESD-2 was able to expand on COPESD-1’s efforts, integrating fisheries administration and management, and enhance technical assistance for joint data collection, assisting scientific investigations, facilitating a subregional approach to discussions on shared stocks and strengthening national capacity in the field of fisheries statistics. Standardization and mechanisms developed by the project have improved knowledge of marine resources in the subregion.

ADRIAMED 1999-2012 Countries of the Adriatic Sea

Although it is one of the largest Mediterranean areas with shared fishery resources, scientific information about the Adriatic Sea fisheries was fragmented until AdriaMed sought the countries of the subregion together in 1999. Many of these countries had recently been through turbulent times, nevertheless they recognized the need to have joint management of their shared fisheries resources. AdriaMed increased awareness and capacity of the countries participating in the advanced research and monitoring of their resources. AdriaMed enabled countries to establish a solid framework for the discussions, a foundation for fisheries management, and agreement on the way forward in research and sustainable use of common resources. This was achieved by standardizing monitoring, fisheries and research programs, and providing technical assistance in areas such as statistics, biology and socio-economic issues, together to establish a multidisciplinary approach to fisheries.

MEDISUDMED 2001-2012: Countries of the South-Central Mediterranean Sea

Even though fishing in the Strait of Gibraltar supports significant fleets and fish production, knowledge of fishery resources and ecosystems was often scarce. MEDISUDMED started with a goal of increasing scientific cooperation, focused initially on building capacity of the countries to participate in assessment and monitoring of their fisheries resources. Today, the countries are not only gathering data but also analyzing the data related to landings and surveys and implementing the biological and social aspects of fisheries management. To make this happen, the project developed and implemented standardized methodologies and monitoring protocols useful, for example, increase knowledge on the spatial distribution of shared fish stocks, especially in the squawing and nursery areas.

EASTMED 2009-2014 Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean

Before EASTMED was launched, FAO brought together representatives of the countries in the subregion for the first time to bring together discussion where they shared their perceptions of the Mediterranean. This subregion does not have a tradition of sharing data, thus EASTMED was faced with building trust among members and giving them the confidence to share information about what they felt they could provide. Building from this, EASTMED now provides technical assistance in capacity development, training on stock assessment and has established initiatives to undertake a reliable and unbiased protocol. It also has undertaken institutional strengthening activities, reaching institutional stakeholders through partnerships among administration and scientific communities.

General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

GFCM promotes the development, conservation and best utilization of fisheries resources as well as sustainable development of fishing industry in the Mediterranean. The FAO Mediterranean projects maintain a high level of coordination and cooperation with GFCM. GFCM, together with all the participating countries, provide scientific contributions for discussions and support implementation of national reports to GFCM activities. When the project began in 2011, capacity had been raised to reliable and timely statistical information database.

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