Case study

Professionalization Enables Mexican Fishing Cooperative to Improve Social and Environmental Performance

Price premiums result in new employment opportunities for women and investments in no-fishing reserves

- 100% higher ex-vessel prices for approximately 50-70 fishers
- 60% of product value returned to the fishing community (5-6 times more than the standard for the artisanal sector in Mexico)
- Establishment of no-take marine conservation areas and fishery closures during spawning season

The Triple Impact Fisheries Evaluation Framework empowers local organizations and those working in FIPs to maximize their impact by including social and financial improvement in their work. View the complete Framework at www.oceanoutcomes.org.
An integrated approach to improvement addresses socioeconomic needs, resulting in big wins on the ground.

Due to their isolation, limited access to capital and lack of markets, artisanal finfish fishers in Baja California are often trapped in a vicious cycle of overfishing. As price takers they receive low prices for their fish and can only respond by increasing the volume of their catch. Increased volumes lead to lower quality, driving prices even lower. This vicious downward spiral contributes to poverty, overfishing and high bycatch rates, depleting fishing communities and marine ecosystems alike.

SmartFish AC – with support from Ocean Outcomes and building on the work of COBI AC and FairTrade USA – empowered fishers to interrupt the vicious cycle through an integrated approach to fishery improvement. This approach led to improved fishing and handling practices, such as bleeding and icing, as well as the addition of processing, which together have reduced spoilage and generated higher prices. Increased attention to quality has generated new processing jobs for women and others in the community. The Cooperative Assembly adopted public commitments to ongoing monitoring of the fishery, adopting and respecting minimum sizes, and improving internal reporting and transparency. Fishers are now retaining 60% of the final value of their catch and are paid 100% more. With these increased profits fishers can maintain their no-take reserves and spawning season protections – two key conditions of the provided business support.

### KEY ACTIVITIES

- Conducted economic analyses to identify business opportunities and developed a plan for increasing profitability.
- Offered food handling training to achieve food-safety certification.
- Trained and facilitated co-op to freeze, process and pack finfish for retail sale.
- Trained and equipped co-op with comprehensive traceability system.
- Identified supply chain inefficiencies to increase savings and profitability.
- Linked co-op with a “good intermediary” that negotiates with open-books policy, co-finales supply chain improvements and requires comprehensive traceability and social and environmental performance.
- Identified environmental issues and implemented an integrated, systematic plan to reduce fishery impacts.

### OUTCOMES

01 --- Higher prices and greater profitability for fishers and new fishing industry jobs for the otherwise under- and unemployed.

02 --- A reduction in overfishing and an increase in fishing closures during spawning seasons to support stock health and recovery.

03 --- Maintenance of no-take zones to reduce fishery bycatch and minimize fishery impacts on the greater marine ecosystem.

04 --- Increased value retention by fishers and their co-operative, Food safety certifications and digital traceability from landing to final consumer.