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Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management: A Learning Evaluation September 2023

This document was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Environmental Incentives, Foundations of Success, and ICF for the Measuring Impact II (MI2) Contract.

CONTRACT INFORMATION

This program is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of its requisition number REQ-EGEE-18-000127 (Measuring Impact II), implemented by prime recipient Environmental Incentives, LLC in partnership with Foundations of Success and ICF International, Inc. Measuring Impact II has been issued under contract number GS-00F-193DA Order No. 7200AA18M00013 and supports the same program objectives as described in RFQ number 7200AA18Q00020. Measuring Impact II is funded and managed by the USAID Biodiversity Division in the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation.

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Front Cover Photo:

Steep cliffs project into the sea at El Moro National Park in the Dominican Republic, one of those supported by IMEM activities. Photo by Tahira Vargas.

Back Cover Photo:

The mangroves at El Yuti National Park in the Dominican Republic have been made more resilient by the recanalization efforts of IMEM-supported community associations. Photo by Tahira Vargas.

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ACRONYMS

CODOPESCA	Dominican Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture (<i>Consejo Dominicano de Pesca y Acuicultura</i>)
IMEM	Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management Program
MI2	Measuring Impact II
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The coastal regions of the Dominican Republic and Haiti are facing severe overexploitation of fisheries and degradation of marine ecosystems, threatening ecological collapse. Through its Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management (IMEM) activity, a \$1.8 million cooperative agreement implemented by Counterpart International from September 6, 2019, to September 5, 2022, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aimed to strengthen local governance and participatory management of marine protected areas in the northern coastal border area of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, promoting sustainable fishing and farming practices to reduce pressures on biodiversity within coastal and marine ecosystems. The project pursued three objectives: implement participatory management provisions in designated marine protected areas in both countries; foster local-level, cross-border collaboration and experience-sharing; and disseminate and implement best practices in fishing, farming systems, and ecotourism. While IMEM worked extensively with partners in Haiti, the evaluation team was unable to evaluate the impacts of IMEM in that country due to worsening security conditions during the evaluation period.

Under USAID's Evaluation Policy, evaluation "has two primary purposes: to ensure accountability to stakeholders and to learn to improve development outcomes" (USAID 2020a, p. 3). This evaluation was focused on learning from IMEM's community engagement activities to inform future marine programming in the region. The evaluation provides an analysis of the activity's effectiveness in helping communities address environmental challenges and promoting sustainable practices in the coastal and marine ecosystems of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It reveals that IMEM has achieved significant milestones in its efforts to protect and preserve natural resources, engage local communities, and foster inter-institutional collaboration.

Overall, the evaluation found that IMEM's interventions achieved their desired results, especially in engaging local fishers and communities. Key findings highlight the successful implementation of participatory and adaptive management approaches, with the formation and strengthening of fisher and rice producer associations, training programs, and dialogue platforms. These initiatives have facilitated community involvement, resulting in a stronger commitment to environmental stewardship and the adoption of responsible fishing, farming, and tourism practices. Notably, the activity's identification card program for fishermen's association members has played a pivotal role in promoting a sense of belonging and unity, facilitating recognition by government institutions and encouraging responsible fishing behaviors. Community participants lauded IMEM's implementation, identifying eight specific actions IMEM took that helped beneficiaries:

1. Raising awareness among fishermen's associations about responsible fishing practices and their potential economic benefits.
2. Developing binational cooperation activities between Haitian and Dominican fishermen to exchange experiences and promote responsible fishing practices.
3. Building a relationship between fishermen's associations and government institutions by creating a follow-up committee.

4. Providing technical training to government personnel on environment, tourism, marine species, and protection mechanisms to promote governance.
5. Providing technical training to personnel from government agencies on the environment, tourism, marine species, and protection mechanisms to ensure the sustainability beyond the life of the program.
6. Helped fishermen transition to alternative livelihoods.
7. Increased awareness in the tourism sector about the importance of preserving the marine ecosystem.
8. Fostered participatory governance through the implementation of the identification card program.

The evaluation identifies several challenges that hindered IMEM's implementation, such as lack of resources and support from relevant Ministry staff, and the deteriorating security situation in Haiti. The evaluation also reveals some unintended outcomes of the project, such as the creation of alternative sources of income and the development of new relationships with naval forces. The evaluation also identifies several factors that facilitated IMEM's successes, such as including well-connected local stakeholders throughout all phases, and emphasizing intersectoral and interinstitutional coordination.

Based on these findings, the evaluation offers four lessons and associated recommendations for future marine programming:

Lesson 1: Empowering local associations, while challenging, transformed community attitudes and behaviors and strengthened marine protections, but without monitoring data, the impacts on the ecosystems are unknown.

Recommendation: Focus on building capacities of local community organizations to strengthen marine protections. Build trust with community leaders and influencers. Tie short-term benefits of new behaviors to long-term durable improvements. Track threat reduction and ecosystem health data.

Lesson 2: Establishing co-management committees, which empower local and national government as well as local community members to protect marine areas, dramatically strengthened marine protected area management. However, partners, such as the local enforcement bodies, need adequate resources to contribute to the joint efforts.

Recommendation: Replicate the approach of establishing co-management committees. Build strong partnerships and collaborative networks to align efforts, pool resources, and work toward common goals. Include support and advocacy for adequate monitoring and enforcement funding.

Lesson 3: Co-management committees provided a platform for local communities to actively participate in joint monitoring. IMEM's *whole system in the room* approach ensured all relevant stakeholders contributed to strategy development and ensuring buy-in.

Recommendation: Replicate the successful practice of joint monitoring to benefit from community stewardship and collaboration, traditional knowledge, and informed decision-making.

Lesson 4: Official recognition of fishermen, through an identity card program, promoted responsible fishing practices and enhanced community engagement.

Recommendation: Identify ways that officials can recognize and support good actors to change their behavior. Foster a sense of belonging and collective responsibility among stakeholders.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that IMEM had positive impacts on the targeted communities, including the development of responsible fishing practices and the empowerment of the fishing sector to protect marine resources. The evaluation recommends USAID continue to support efforts to engage communities in sustainable management of marine resources in the Caribbean region.

INTRODUCTION

The coasts of the Dominican Republic and Haiti face severe overexploitation of fisheries and degradation of coastal and marine ecosystems, threatening ecological collapse. Mangrove forests, critical for marine health and providing ecosystem services, are also under pressure from agriculture and charcoal production. National policies in Haiti and the Dominican Republic fail to address the integrated nature of marine ecosystems. Further, they do not consider the relationship between communities and the environment, as poverty and lack of sustainable alternatives hamper compliance with regulations.

Both countries have established marine protected areas, but need more resources, stakeholder buy-in, and livelihood alternatives to manage and conserve the region's biodiversity. The most vulnerable coastal communities face challenges in achieving the behavior change necessary for effective management and conservation.

Through its Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management Program (IMEM), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aims to strengthen local governance and participatory management of marine protected areas along the northern Haitian-Dominican border, promoting sustainable fishing and farming practices to reduce pressures on biodiversity within coastal and marine ecosystems. Furthermore, the activity aims to minimize economic and cultural disruption for communities that depend on those ecosystems, and ideally create new economic opportunities for those communities. IMEM collaborates with local sub-grantees, the Foundation for Protection of Marine Biodiversity in Haiti, and AgroFrontera in the Dominican Republic, to consider local resource use practices, politics, culture, history, and economics in both countries.

Coastal and marine ecosystems on the northern coastline of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are under significant pressure due to pollution from agricultural runoff, habitat conversion, and overexploitation of natural resources (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Designed to address these challenges, IMEM's theory of change (Figure 1) emphasizes the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing between the two countries, strengthening participatory and adaptive management in the governance of marine protected areas, and sharing best practices in alternative livelihoods, sustainable fishing, and farming practices. By fostering an inclusive and diverse community-led effort, IMEM aims to reduce local pressures on biodiversity, enhance the effectiveness of marine protected areas, and strengthen the local economy. The program also addresses underlying economic issues in the Dominican Republic by introducing integrated nutrient, water, and residue practices in rice production, while simultaneously promoting the increased protection of mangroves. Through these efforts, the program strives to support environmental sustainability and contribute to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.

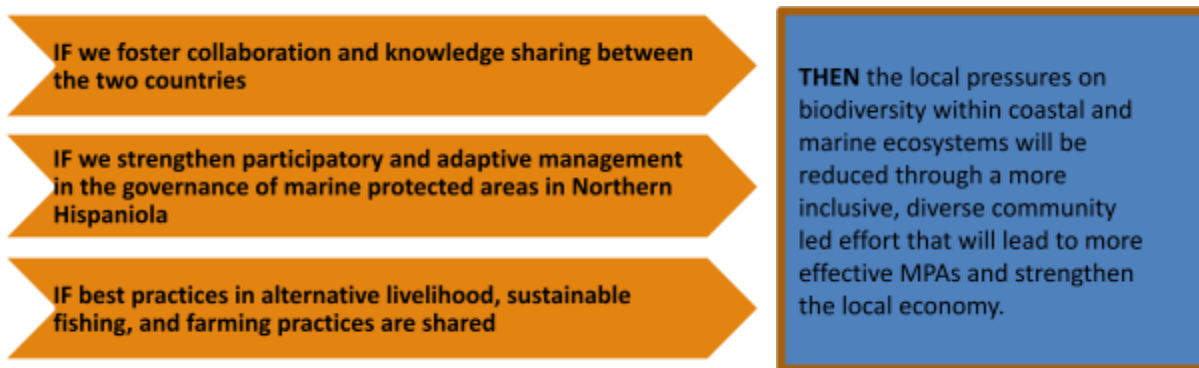


Figure 1. IMEM Theory of Change, from [the Cooperative Agreement between USAID/Dominican Republic and Counterpart international \(USAID 2019\)](#).

IMEM built on existing work, ensuring effective local governance for legally-recognized marine protected areas and facilitating dialogue between fishers and farmers in both countries. It also supported the adoption of sustainable practices and alternative economic opportunities, such as by transforming fishing systems, introducing eco-friendly farming practices, and promoting locally-based ecotourism opportunities.

This report presents an evaluation of the responses of various beneficiary stakeholders to IMEM's interventions. An independent research team carried out the evaluation by traveling to the target areas and conducting qualitative research. The evaluation ran from late November 2022 to May 2023. The team carried out local research trips to Montecristi and El Morro in the Dominican Republic for focus groups and face-to-face interviews in February, and conducted phone interviews with stakeholders in Haiti throughout March.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This evaluation report examines IMEM's performance and outcomes to share lessons learned and recommendations, delving into best practices, success stories, and challenges encountered and resolved. USAID can use this report as a resource, applying the outcomes as appropriate, including using lessons learned from IMEM during the design and implementation of similar current and future regional marine biodiversity conservation activities in the Caribbean and other regions. IMEM is a \$1.8 million cooperative agreement implemented by Counterpart International and managed by the USAID/Caribbean Biodiversity Program.

The team collected and analyzed qualitative data from internal and external sources to address the evaluation questions, which focused on the process and performance of the activity. These sources included:

- Documents and other written information, including activity reports, planning documents, and other resources.
- Stakeholders and partners, including IMEM, USAID, and local and regional governments.
- Beneficiaries, including local community members, fishers, and training recipients.

Data collection methods included semi-structured or open-ended interviews and focus group discussions, which were held in person during the team's site visits to the Dominican Republic, and virtually with participants in Haiti. The team thematically analyzed the data around the evaluation questions. This kind of qualitative research is at risk of *researcher bias*, e.g. "the selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that 'stand out' to the researcher" (Maxwell 1996, 90), and *reactivity*, e.g. "the influence of the researcher on the...individuals studied" (Maxwell 1996, 91). To guard against these risks, the team used *triangulation*, "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell 1996, 93). Thus not only did the team collect data from multiple sources, they have also integrated quantitative information the IMEM team collected when relevant to a research question.

LIMITATIONS

Like any research project, conditions outside the control of the evaluation team introduced bias into the findings presented here. First, the results were geographically biased. The team gathered a significant amount of information from individuals in the Dominican Republic about activities involving both coasts. However, due to safety concerns, it was not feasible to travel and conduct in-person interviews in Haiti. To overcome this challenge, the team tried to gather as much information as possible through phone conversations with Haitian fishermen and other stakeholders, yet the number of contacts were quite limited. This resulted in limited information from Haiti, so **we were unable to adequately investigate the Haiti activities and their impacts**. Moreover, as the situation in Haiti has deteriorated, we were unable to ascertain which activities the IMEM partners were able to implement in Haiti. Thus, throughout the findings, we only include Haiti when we were able to confirm the finding was relevant to Haiti.

Second, the evaluation more prominently incorporates feedback from benefited stakeholders than other stakeholders, which may bias the findings. This is partly due to the complexity of the intervention, including its diversity of activity approaches, the absence of control sites, and the number of stakeholders working in the same intervention areas with the same counterparts and beneficiaries. Furthermore, the activity ended in 2022, and by the time of the evaluation in early 2023, there had been changes in government officials, leading to changes in points of contact and staff. The evaluation team found many new staff were unfamiliar with the project's implementation. To counteract this bias, this evaluation includes the perspective of new government officials as much as possible. As a result of the preponderance of data from beneficiaries, **the evaluation focused on the perceptions of beneficiaries and was unable to fully uncover IMEM's impacts on government stakeholders or on the relationships between government officials and local community members**.

This assessment focused on how IMEM activities influenced the beneficiaries and other local stakeholders. Thus the team gathered qualitative data from discussions with those stakeholders. Quantitative data about most of the research questions do not exist to validate some of the specific results stakeholder mentioned; however, the team has included activity quantitative data relevant to the research questions when available.

EVALUATION STAGES

The research team conducted the evaluation in three phases.

1. **Inception:** To begin, the researchers consulted with the IMEM team and reviewed activity data to better understand the activity and its results. They also:
 - a. Consulted with the IMEM activity team to collect information about key informants for interviews and focus groups and priority sites to visit, as well as refine the evaluation questions. This step secured IMEM support for the evaluation.
 - b. Reviewed activity documents and monitoring and evaluation data (see Annex D. Documents Reviewed and References).
 - c. Developed a draft evaluation work plan and methodology. The USAID point of contact reviewed and approved these documents. The team developed the evaluation work plan and methodology in English (see Annex A. Evaluation Design and Methodology). They developed the data collection tools in Spanish and Creole (see Annex B. Data Collection Instruments).
2. **Investigation:** Next, the team conducted qualitative, open-ended interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including USAID and IMEM staff, partners, and beneficiaries (see Annex C. List of People Interviewed). The team completed two site visits in the Dominican Republic. During the visits, the team conducted focus groups and interviews, including:
 - a. Thirteen key informant interviews, using structured and focused interview guides.
 - i. These interviews included sub-grantees and key informants, such as the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources.
 - ii. Due to privacy concerns in the region, the team did not record or transcribe the interviews. The researcher made notes for each interview and focus group.
 - iii. The team conducted interviews in Spanish and Creole.
 - b. Six focus group discussions, using structured and focused discussion guides.
 - i. Informants included activity beneficiaries and communities.
 - ii. The team did not record or transcribe the focus group discussions.
 - iii. The team conducted the focus group discussions in Spanish
3. **Insights:** Finally, the team conducted thematic data analysis to synthesize participant responses and literature to respond to the evaluation questions and generate relevant recommendations, including:
 - a. Thematic analysis of documents and informant notes.
 - b. Iterative drafts of the evaluation report.
 - c. Review and vetting of the report by USAID and IMEM staff.
 - d. Final report publication.

FINDINGS

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive field evaluation conducted by a group of researchers from November 2022–March 2023, focusing on stakeholders involved in the IMEM project in the Dominican Republic and, as possible, Haiti. Through formative research, the team gathered valuable insights and data to systematically evaluate the activity’s effectiveness and contributions towards improved management and conservation of marine ecosystems on the northern coasts of Haiti and DR.

The learning questions serve as essential categories of analysis in this evaluation. They provide a framework for evaluating the extent to which IMEM achieved its intended goals and results, validated the hypothesis in its theory of change, identified factors that facilitated or hindered its success, and uncovered any unintended outcomes. Additionally, the learning questions explore the level of community involvement in the implementation process, identify best practices and lessons learned, assess the effectiveness of management and governance councils, examine the benefits of the program, evaluate the sustainability of tools and strategies provided, and highlight the role of monitoring information in guiding activity implementation and adaptive management. Organizing the evaluation findings around these learning questions allows for a comprehensive understanding of IMEM’s performance and the creation of informed recommendations for future improvements and interventions.

LEARNING QUESTIONS:

Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent did IMEM achieve its intended goals and results as defined by the results framework?
 - a. Did the observed achievements validate the hypothesis in the IMEM theory of change?
 - b. What factors facilitated IMEM’s ability to realize the desired results?
 - c. What challenges hampered the activity’s ability to do so?
 - d. What unintended outcomes resulted from the implementation of this activity?
 - e. How did IMEM involve community members in the implementation, and what resulted from that involvement? Did the involvement address the gaps identified in the Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program evaluation?
2. What did stakeholders identify as the activity’s best practices? What contribution did these best practices have to the targeted communities?
3. Were Management and Governance Councils an effective mechanism for managing marine protected areas? Why or why not? What other factors, if any, facilitated or hindered marine protected area management?
4. What benefits, if any, did the “whole system in the room” approach to the activity have? Did stakeholders in the activity value it, and if so, why?
5. How sustainable are the tools and strategies provided to beneficiaries for their use beyond the life of the activity?
6. How did monitoring information inform activity implementation and adaptive management?

I. INTENDED GOALS AND RESULTS

Evaluation Question 1. To what extent did IMEM achieve its intended goals and results as defined by the results framework?

IMEM's Results Framework (Figure 2 below), detailed the activities IMEM would undertake to achieve its goal of improving, "the management and conservation of marine ecosystems on the northern coasts of Haiti and the [Dominican Republic] while minimizing economic and cultural disruptions for communities that depend of those ecosystems." The Results Framework organized IMEM's partner's activities around three outcomes, each of which would support a key result. When all three key results were achieved, IMEM's goal would be achieved. The Results Framework also included the indicators that IMEM planned to track to monitor progress toward their outcomes.

Goal: Improve the management and conservation of marine ecosystems on the northern coasts of Haiti and DR while minimizing economic and cultural disruption for communities that depend on those ecosystems.		
Result 1: Coastal communities will find an understanding of common barriers and opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of coastal and marine resources and improved livelihoods through sharing best practices and lessons learned. Outcome: Foster local-level, cross-border collaboration and experience-sharing related to participatory governance of MPAs Activities: - Conduct a Socioecological Assessment and Survey - Build capacity of local actors to lead in the governance of MPAs - Modify adaptive management plans for MPAs and empower effective participation of local stakeholders in their revision. Indicators: - Number of normative documents approved by IMEM Governance Councils for implementation of MPAs	Result 2: The Dominican and Haitian governments have a legal mandate to manage them in a way that safeguarded and enhances the biodiversity of the coastal and marine ecosystems while contributing to improved and sustainable livelihoods for local communities. Outcome: Implement participatory and adaptive management provisions established in the management plans for the marine protected areas of Mangroves of Estero Balsa National Park, Cayos Siete Hermanos Wildlife Refuge and El Morro National Park in DR and Three Bays National Park in Haiti Activities: - Create and sign MOW for Cross Border MPA Working Group - Launch bi-national fisher and manager roundtables	Result 3: Farmers and fishers are motivated to adopt more sustainable practices and they have the skills and resources they need to do so. This will also reduce pressure on natural resources, particularly in Haiti, by generating alternative economic opportunities. Outcome: Disseminate and implement best practices in fishing and farming systems and ecotourism Activities: - Promote marine biodiversity conservation through responsible fishing practices and improve the fish market economy. - Promote adoption of sustainable farming practices in the DR - Promote Best Practices in sustainable farming in Haiti - Promote locally-driven alternative livelihoods Indicators: - Number of farmers certified by the Sustainable Rice Platform

Number of established participatory mechanisms, partnerships established by and between local partners and beneficiaries, and advocacy activities that foster participation in the public policy decision-making process Number of people with improved economic benefits derived from sustainable natural resource management and/or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance. (EG.10.2-3)	with Cross Border MPA Working Groups Indicators: Number of agreements/MoUs signed between Haitian and Dominican stakeholders on MPA management common practices Number of hectares of biologically significant areas under improved natural resource management as a result of USG assistance. (EG.10.2-2)	Number of people trained in sustainable natural resources management and/or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance (EG.10.2-4) Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, estimated in metric tons of CO₂ equivalent, reduced, sequestered or avoided through sustainable landscapes activities supported by USG assistance (EG.12-6) Percentage decrease in highly toxic pesticides applied by the beneficiary farmers. Percentage decrease in the amount of irrigation water used for rice production.
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Figure 2. IMEM Results Framework, replicated from graphic shared by USAID.

To answer this research question, the evaluation team considered how stakeholders discuss their interactions with the activity and how their lives have changed as a result. Most stakeholders considered all IMEM activities as a package and didn't differentiate any particular activity as leading to a particular outcome. Thus, the research team could not tease apart whether one specific activity was more or less effective. Instead, we sought to understand whether or how stakeholders reported outcomes aligned with the activity's three key results.

The evaluation found that overall, **the IMEM interventions did result in the three key results, especially in engaging local fishermen and communities.**

Regarding result 1: **Coastal communities gained an understanding of common barriers and opportunities to enhance biodiversity and improve livelihoods through sharing best practices and lessons learned.** Through IMEM, fishermen from the Dominican Republic and Haiti participated in binational joint awareness and training processes, leading to agreements on proper fishing methods and tools. These efforts have led to significant outcomes, including providing resources and training for Haitian and Dominican fishermen's associations on responsible fishing practices. Fishermen's associations were also empowered to take on monitoring roles for sustainable fishing practices, demonstrating their commitment to the conservation of marine resources.

Regarding result 2: **The Dominican and Haitian governments have a legal mandate to manage fisheries in a way that safeguards and enhances biodiversity while contributing to sustainable livelihoods.** In addition to sharing best practices, the binational processes of joint awareness and training, IMEM facilitated open conversations between the nations. For example, the groups agreed to refrain from using prohibited and acidic small mesh nets within the Bay of Manzanillo. IMEM's most notable achievement was to overcome communication and interaction barriers between

Haitian and Dominican fishermen, who engage in the same economic activity on the border. This has contributed to reducing tensions between the two groups.

Regarding result 3: **Farmers and fishers are motivated to adopt more sustainable practices and have the necessary skills and resources to do so.** With support from sub-grantees, the activity motivated and trained rice producers and fishers in Haiti to adopt more sustainable practices, including over 500 people in its multiple trainings (Radosti 2022). It empowered rice producer associations to decide on fertilizer applications and soil management, reducing production costs and unnecessary chemical applications. According to IMEM's Final Report (Radosti 2022), IMEM rice farmers reduced their application of toxic pesticides by 81%. Specifically, the IMEM rice farmers completely eliminated 12 out of 21 harmful chemicals used in conventional rice farming. This significant progress was a result of the program's success and the data analysis conducted after the second rice harvest. IMEM also extended the dissemination of sustainable agricultural practices for rice production to other rice farmers beyond the initial beneficiaries and educational institutions, promoting the adoption of eco-friendly techniques to enhance the quality and yield of rice while preserving natural resources.

Furthermore, the activity achieved results through its ecotourism initiative in the Dominican Republic's San Fernando de Montecristi (the capital of Montecristi Province) and Pepillo Salcedo-Bahía de Manzanillo (a municipality in Montecristi Province that includes the Bay of Manzanillo). It trained people to defend the marine ecosystem and guide tourist groups in the region, which respondents reported was helping reduce the extinction of fish. The training covered how to become a marine ecosystem defender and how to guide tourist groups visiting the province. The project also provided training to tour operator groups in economic resource management and environmental management.

Overall, the project team achieved several key results, including promoting collaboration between fishermen from both countries, facilitating the formation of fishermen's associations, empowering rice producer associations, disseminating sustainable agricultural practices, and promoting ecotourism.

Subquestion 1a. Did the observed achievements validate the hypothesis in the IMEM theory of change?

Data from stakeholders as well as from the IMEM final report confirm much of the IMEM theory of change. The activity fostered collaboration, strengthened participatory MPA management, and shared best practices and these actions seem to have resulted in more inclusive community-led MPA management and more effective MPAs. IMEM's final surveys noted that participants were better off economically after the activity (Radosti 2022). However, the evaluation team did not have access to information that could confirm the hypothesis that these actions, at the scale of IMEM, would decrease the local pressures on biodiversity within coastal and marine ecosystems as threat reduction data was not collected.

The evaluation team gathered information in the Dominican Republic from a wide variety of stakeholders, including the AgroFrontera technical team; various local government agencies such as the Dominican Republic Ministries of Agriculture, Tourism, and the Environment; and fishing, rice production, and ecotourism associations. **Stakeholders engaged in many activities reported a**

variety of positive outcomes, at the national and bi-national level, and at the local level.

IMEM also strengthened transboundary collaboration both by building continuous consultation, mediation, dialogue, monitoring, and interaction between government agencies and associations.

At the national level, the activity promoted responsible fishing practices by offering binational processes of joint awareness and training for Dominican and Haitian fishermen. The two nations held meetings and agreements to establish proper fishing methods and tools. They agreed to refrain from using prohibited and acidic small mesh nets within the Bay of Manzanillo. These efforts have led to significant outcomes, including supporting additional resources and training for Haitian fishermen's associations on responsible fishing practices. However, **the most notable achievement reported was overcoming communication and interaction barriers between Haitian and Dominican fishermen**, who engage in the same economic activity on the border between their countries. This has contributed to the reduction of tensions between the two groups. However, the security situation in Haiti and the resulting violent tension on the border poses a challenge to maintaining sustained relationships between Haitian and Dominican fishermen in dialogue and mutual agreements, and the evaluation team was unable to determine if the Haitian fishermen are still able to engage in dialogue.

IMEM formed and supported community associations through which they trained members in association management, helped establish cooperatives, created a space for dialogue and consensus-building, and empowered the people involved in marine fishing, rice production, and ecotourism. These **associations seem to have helped IMEM achieve its strong results**. IMEM introduced and promoted improved integrated nutrient, water, and residue practices in rice production. Such practices also support the increased protection of mangroves, critical to coastal ecosystems.

In conversations with the evaluation team, the fishermen and rice producers demonstrated what they learned from the IMEM activity, such as a recognition of the harms of the indiscriminate use of chemicals and water, and shared a clear commitment to sustainability through the protection and preservation of natural resources. Their responses aligned with the IMEM final report which noted a significant decrease in the use of toxic chemicals and thus reduced pollution (Radosti 2022). They noted that their participation in the associations has resulted in improved economic benefits by reducing production costs and enhancing the quantity and quality of their fish, crab, and rice.

Rice is a staple food in the Dominican Republic, and **implementing sustainable agricultural practices for its production has benefited the economy**. The Lower Yaque region alone contributes to 30 percent of national rice production. Rice producer associations have acknowledged the economic and environmental benefits of transitioning to sustainable production practices, and rice producers themselves have reported positive effects on soil profitability. There are even expectations of expanding rice production to foreign markets with AgroFrontera's support. The evaluation team found that rice producers are committed to adopting good practices that reduce production costs and improve socioeconomic conditions. For example, trainings about the integration of soil analysis techniques led many rice producers to reduce their fertilizer use and gain a better understanding of their natural environment. Additionally, rice producers were receptive to IMEM's efforts to eliminate polluting practices to contribute to environmental protection.

"The AgroFrontera team has also taught us to analyze the soil to

determine which fertilizer it needs. Sometimes we would throw away a fertilizer the soil already had, applying too much of it. Soil analysis is conducted to determine which fertilizer the soil needs, thus reducing production costs.” –Rice producer association focus group participant

Subquestion 1b. What factors facilitated IMEM’s ability to realize the desired results?

IMEM’s ability to achieve its desired results can be attributed to several factors. **The efforts of sub-grantee AgroFrontera**, an organization that supports sustainable rural development, **were crucial in promoting cross-border collaboration and responsible fishing practices**. Building on the group’s strong engagement with the community, the activity organized meetings, covered expenses for Haitian fishermen’s associations to participate in joint awareness and training processes, and distributed sustainable fishing equipment to support their livelihoods while protecting the environment.

With AgroFrontera’s support, the activity also **collaborated with Haitian environmental authorities**, providing boats equipped with motors to more effectively monitor fishing practices for sustainability. In addition, AgroFrontera trained and sensitized fish buyers to prioritize purchasing fish caught using responsible fishing practices. To promote marketing of sustainably caught fish, the activity brought together several fishermen’s associations to create the Confederation of Fishermen’s Associations.

IMEM worked to encourage fishermen associations to recognize responsible fishing practices and participate in voluntary beach cleaning. The activity also empowered crab catchers to harvest crabs without affecting their reproduction. Furthermore, the activity provided nets for crab catchers to pursue alternative income sources during the closed season, as well as distributed loans to fishermen’s associations that helped support their economic livelihoods.

This community engagement, particularly with the crab catcher association, has yielded significant positive changes. Previously, crab catchers would indiscriminately catch crabs of all sizes and genders for sustenance. However, with the activity’s intervention, including workshops led by a local community member on the AgroFrontera team, the crab catchers gained a deeper understanding of the environmental harm caused by their practices. As a result, sustainable measures, such as refraining from catching females and small crabs, are growing more widespread. This shift in behavior has not only reduced their ecological impact, but has also brought about practical benefits, such as a significant decrease in the distance fishermen need to travel to find an abundant food source. By practicing selective harvesting and avoiding the capture of small crabs and females, fishermen contribute to the faster reproduction of the population and ensure a constant availability of food resources. **According to participants, the project’s teachings and the community’s commitment have led to more responsible and efficient crab catching practices, ultimately improving both environmental conservation and the livelihoods of the crab catchers in San Fernando de Montecristi.**

*“We try to practice environmentally friendly responsible fishing because AgroFrontera has opened our eyes to the fact that ‘EL Morro’ the national park from Manzanillo to Montecristi, is our wetland treasure.”
—San Fernando de Montecristi fishermen’s associations focus group participant*

IMEM also helped recover mangroves in the Dominican Republic as a result of its work with fishermen as well as the activity’s water recanalization measures, with AgroFrontera’s support. By redirecting water from sanitation outflows to the mangroves, the activity restored mangroves and strengthened fish hatcheries. These efforts provided economic benefits to beekeepers and goat breeders. Moreover, the activity disseminated information about sustainable agricultural practices for rice production, initially targeting rice producers’ associations and then extending their efforts to other rice farmers and educational institutions. These practices promote the adoption of eco-friendly techniques to enhance the quality and yield of rice while preserving natural resources.

“Our mangroves were drying up due to dust, heat, and lack of fresh water. We talked to a community member part of the AgroFrontera team and looked for a solution. The solution was to recanalize fresh waterways that carried out sanitation work. There is a honey-producing mangrove, the black mangrove, which has flowers during the flowering season, and bees. We, beekeepers, move the bees to the mangroves. It was not possible because the mangroves were drying up due to salinity. The water began to flow with the canalization, regenerated the mangroves, tilapias arrived abundantly, and the black and red mangroves were reestablished. Goat breeders benefit because the mangroves drop seeds and leave the goats to eat. The mangrove has recovered by 150 percent.” —San Fernando de Montecristi fishermen’s associations focus group participant

Overall, the combination of cross-border collaboration, responsible fishing practices, community engagement and empowerment, and sustainable agricultural practices played a crucial role in IMEM’s ability to achieve its desired results.

“Another benefit for all fishermen who have been volunteers for cleaning the protected area is that we have time to come together to carry out operations to clean the mangroves, sediments, and nets that get trapped in the reefs among the mangroves. We have been volunteers.” —San Fernando de Montecristi fishermen’s associations focus group participant

Subquestion 1c. What challenges hampered the activity’s ability to do so?

Several challenges and barriers hampered the activity's efforts to promote sustainable fishing practices and protect the environment. **In Haiti, the key barriers identified were insecurity and limited resources.** The evaluation team was unable to visit any Haitian sites and could only contact a few Haitian contacts, so our data for the Haiti work is limited. What those stakeholders did report was that even when people could participate in bi-national and local IMEM activities, the external challenges were too severe to increase sustainable fishing practices. For example, fishermen interviewed expressed their inability to counteract the cutting of mangroves for charcoal production. Haitian respondents also noted that there was a lack of government support, including a lack of resources, to sustainable fishing efforts.

In the DR, the team gathered more data on challenges to IMEM's success. **One of the key barriers there is the resistance from the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Environment** to implement measures aimed at eliminating plastic in Montecristi, despite agreements reached through negotiations between various associations, groups, and the Montecristi Municipal Council. This resistance has made it difficult to enforce the law prohibiting plastic use in coastal areas.

Another challenge is the need for more resources for the provincial Ministry of Environment team, which currently depends on AgroFrontera's sponsorship to carry out coastal monitoring efforts. Without government resources, the local team struggles to monitor and prevent illegal fishing activities. The lack of monitoring and governance then limits the functioning and continuity of the co-management councils that monitor protected areas. Finally, the lack of government resources also limits the support available to fishermen to generate alternative incomes. Fishermen have submitted proposals to the government to gain funding to build ponds for fish farming, which could help achieve sustainable fishing. However, they have to date not received government support.

"In the cays [Cayos Siete Hermanos islands, a wildlife refuge on the north coast of the Dominican Republic], part of the protected area I manage, constant monitoring must be carried out. ... [However, our boat] fuel is insufficient to travel inter-daily to the cays and only allows us to go twice a month. That is getting out of control, and the Haitians are there. In the morning, more than 20 Haitian boats engage in illegal fishing." –Representative environmental team focus group participant

Both Haitian and Dominican fishermen in the region struggle with low quality boats.

Inadequate boats not only pose risks to fishermen safety, but also limit their catch and potential earnings by restricting their capacity for extended sea fishing and catching larger fish. Additionally, the absence of necessary supplies and equipment further exacerbates their difficulties. Without access to appropriate tools and gear, the fishermen struggle to optimize their fishing efforts and improve their productivity. As a result, they become reliant on fish markets that provide financial support for their fishing activities. This dependency on external financing, rather than government loans, reinforces their vulnerability and restricts their economic growth and autonomy within the industry.

In the Dominican Republic, ecotourism development is negatively impacted by deficiencies in Montecristi Province's Office of the Environment functioning, such as its lack of budget,

insufficient personnel, inadequate infrastructure, and limited capacity to meet the growing demand for environmental services.

Moreover, **rice producers in the Dominican Republic encounter a challenge in securing sufficient financing from the state**, and instead the private sector provides the majority of funding. However, the private sector is involved in selling unsustainable fertilizers and agrochemicals to producers, creating a potential conflict of interest. This dynamic raises concerns about the objectivity and impartiality of the financing process, as the private sector may prioritize their own products over sustainable agricultural practices and products.

Additionally, **the Ministry of Agriculture is limited in its certification of rice produced through sustainable agroproduction**. When producers lack certification, they have reduced profits and are unable to access premium markets willing to pay higher prices for sustainably produced rice. The dependence on the private sector for financing and the limited certification options highlight the need for greater support and investment from the state to promote sustainable agriculture and ensure fair and unbiased practices in the industry.

“They are private lenders. They finance the harvest; they set the rules of the game. They charge 12 percent interest and up to 20 percent. They have high rates—they put the products at whatever price they want, and buy the rice at lower prices.” –Rice producer association focus group participant

In summary, the challenges and barriers to promoting sustainable fishing practices and protecting the environment include resistance from the Dominican Republic’s Ministry of Environment, lack of resources for monitoring and governance, absence of government support for alternative income for fishermen, limited capacity for ecotourism development, and limited state financing for rice producers.

Subquestion 1d. What unintended outcomes resulted from the implementation of this activity?

As a result of the activity’s efforts to create alternative sources of income and encourage collaboration for sustainable practices, **one of IMEM’s unintended, but positive, outcomes was to generate a community sense of sustainability among beneficiaries**. With AgroFrontera’s support, the activity helped fishermen engage in other income-generating activities, such as ecotourism and beekeeping, to improve their living conditions. By providing technical support and fostering dialogues with government officials, the activity helped the community recognize the harmonious and fluid relationship between responsible fishing and tourist development. This positive outcome emerged due to the program’s emphasis on promoting sustainable practices and engaging community members in the process. IMEM helped foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members for managing their natural resources, which led to the development of new income-generating activities that were more sustainable and less reliant on the overexploitation of marine resources. This unintended

outcome demonstrates the potential for positive impacts beyond the program's original objectives and highlights the importance of community engagement in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

Another unintended positive outcome was to help create a sense of belonging in the community. The activity designed an identification card program to help fishermen with monitoring. The program identified each fisher by name and fishermen's association, providing a method for authorities, such as the Dominican Navy, to determine the fishers were operating legally and sustainably. As a tangible symbol of the activity's support, the identification cards helped create a sense of belonging among the fishermen, including a commitment to sustainable practices. This unintended outcome helped reinforce their commitment to responsible fishing practices and environmental protection.

"People became more interested because they saw the help. Because identification cards were given to the fishermen. They trusted more and therefore became more integrated. They felt there was someone who supported them." –Interview with the Dominican Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture (*Consejo Dominicano de Pesca y Acuicultura*, CODOPESCA)

Subquestion 1.e. How did IMEM involve community members in the implementation, and what resulted from that involvement? Did the involvement address the gaps identified in the [Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program Evaluation](#)?

An evaluation of the Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program, a precursor to IMEM, found a number of gaps that future programming might fill. IMEM was developed, in part, to address one of those findings: "The impact of capacity building and training efforts targeted at fishers and fisher associations is limited at this stage" (Arrivillaga et. al 2018, 7). This learning evaluation specifically investigated whether IMEM's community engagement approach addressed this gap. The evaluation team found that **IMEM's very strong community member involvement was critical to its successes.**

IMEM involved community members in various ways to promote sustainable fishing practices and protect the environment. In particular, **IMEM implementers successfully established strong relationships and actively engaged with the local community in Montecristi to facilitate the development and implementation of project activities.** For example, AgroFrontera strengthened and empowered fishermen's associations and trained members in association management, responsible fishing practices, and voluntary beach cleaning efforts.

Community members' involvement in the program resulted in two positive outcomes. First, the activity contributed to the Montecristi Municipal Council's first-ever law prohibiting plastic in coastal areas. Second, **the activity gained the community's trust and served their needs, leading to increased cooperation and collaboration between various sectors.**

However, several challenges hampered IMEM's ability to involve community members fully. **A significant barrier was the resistance of the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Environment.** Not only did the Ministry refuse to implement Montecristi's municipal law banning ocean plastics, they also refused to sanction some co-management councils which impeded the activity's efforts to engage community

members in decision-making processes and collaborative management of natural resources. **Another major challenge was the lack of resources allocated for monitoring activities**, which hindered the activity's ability to effectively assess the impact of its initiatives. Finally, **the community's limited access to sturdy and reliable boats posed difficulties** in conducting fieldwork and data collection in marine areas. Despite these setbacks, IMEM continued to follow up with the community. It emphasized the importance of collaboration and coordination between authorities in promoting sustainable fishing practices and protecting the environment.

"The AgroFrontera representative from Montecristi, a member of the community is a leader, who has the power to convene and has been a friendly manager for the fishermen. He has been a person who has provided a lot of help and has given boats outboard motors. Robinson represents the province of Montecristi."
–Interview with CODOPESCA

2. BEST PRACTICES

Evaluation Question 2: What did stakeholders identify as the activity's best practices? What contribution did these best practices have to the targeted communities?

IMEM stakeholders identified eight best practices that positively impacted the targeted communities. These included:

1. **Raising awareness among fishermen's associations about responsible fishing practices and their potential economic benefits.** The activity used nature metaphors when communicating its message to foster a strong sense of trust and facilitate meaningful learning experiences with the local community. For example, the team used this approach to share their findings from monitoring the fishing practices in the region, demonstrating the negative impact of harmful fishing practices and educating fishermen on sustainable methods. By drawing parallels between environmental concepts and familiar aspects of nature, the activity communicated complex ideas in a relatable manner. This approach not only captured the community's attention, but also helped them connect with the importance of sustainable practices and the need for environmental conservation. The use of nature metaphors proved to be a powerful tool for building trust, engaging the community and promoting effective learning within the project.

"AgroFrontera gave us material on natural fishing. It teaches us that seabirds eat fish and take only what they need. However, humans go into the sea with trawl nets and trap small fish that have not reproduced, all kinds of fish." –CODOPESCA

2. **Developing binational cooperation activities between Haitian and Dominican fishermen to exchange experiences and promote responsible fishing practices.** With

the support of AgroFrontera's technical team, the activity worked with the Marine Biodiversity Foundation in Haiti to seek solutions to the region's challenges, exploring cooperation mechanisms between Haitian and Dominican fishermen, authorities, and NGOs. The evaluation's focus group of AgroFrontera technical team highlighted the importance of reconciling conflicts between Haitian and Dominican fishermen through dialogue and the exchange of perspectives. Despite the challenges faced in Haiti, the efforts toward binational cooperation activities have been a positive step in promoting responsible fishing practices and protecting the region's environment.

3. **Building a relationship between fishermen's associations and government institutions by creating a follow-up committee.** The committee aimed to unite these groups, with a focus on the provincial Office of Environment, CODOPESCA, and the Office of Tourism, to implement the management plans for protected marine areas in Montecristi. This shared purpose fostered a heightened commitment to environmental protection and a stronger sense of community unity.

"IMEM began at the end of 2018. We had a divided community in the governmental fishing sector. There was no way to bring the director of CODOPESCA together with the director of the [Ministry of the Environment]. Fishermen didn't want to join forces with the Environment Office. The biggest focus was to unite these communities for a single purpose. The way was to implement the management plans for each protected marine area in Montecristi. This involved creating a follow-up committee for each of the areas." –AgroFrontera technical team focus group participant

4. **Providing technical training to government personnel on environment, tourism, marine species, and protection mechanisms to promote governance.** The activity shared valuable knowledge and best practices from institutional involvement through training sessions with government personnel. As a result, technical experts are able to effectively communicate sustainability practices to groups of producers, fostering a positive connection between the government and the community. This collaboration strengthens their shared goal of enhancing sustainable practices in the region, leading to a more cohesive and coordinated effort toward environmental stewardship and resource conservation.

"The training and support from AgroFrontera have been ongoing since the project began. They have included us, put into practice what we learned from AgroFrontera, and brought this conservation program to other areas. We are multipliers because we work with direct producers, and each technician has a group of producers. AgroFrontera has trained us in conservation practices." –Ministry of Agriculture technician from

5. **Providing technical training to personnel from government agencies on the environment, tourism, marine species, and protection mechanisms to ensure the sustainability beyond the life of the program.** Through these training sessions, the activity has played a pivotal role in educating fishermen's associations about the detrimental effects of trawl fishing and indiscriminate fishing practices on the industry's sustainability. In conversations with fishermen, the evaluation team found that the activity helped reduce harmful practices in favor of responsible fishing practices. For example, fishermen in the El Morro area of the Dominican Republic reported prioritizing responsible fishing and actively avoiding indiscriminate fishing practices. Community members reported participating in monitoring and reporting instances of non-compliance. The team found that among those interviewed, responsible fishing practices were ingrained in the cultural fabric of the community.

"If no effort [was] made to regulate the use of harmful instruments, such as irresponsible fishing, today the fisherman would have nothing to look for on our coasts as resources for survival. The fishery would have been decimated. AgroFrontera's intervention has allowed resources to be maintained without fishermen abandoning these fishing activities and other activities within the area." –Manzanillo fishermen's associations focus group participant

6. **Helped fishermen transition to alternative livelihoods.** The activity engaged fishermen as staff in monitoring and protecting marine resources. Instead of spending their time fishing, they received salary and benefits for their protection work. Even when the Ministry of the Environment discontinued paying them for this service, the fishermen continued in their monitoring activities because of their commitment to their roles as monitors for sustainable fishing.

"Using the equipment donated by AgroFrontera, they dedicated themselves to surveillance and protection instead of fishing. In the absence of other institutions like the [Dominican] Navy and the Ministry of the Environment, which should have done the work. A year ago, the Ministry of Environment incorporated fishermen into their institutional protection. ... Many of these employees have not been paid by the Ministry of Environment for six to seven months." (Manzanillo fishermen's associations focus group participant

7. **Increased awareness in the tourism sector about the importance of preserving the marine ecosystem.** With AgroFrontera support, the activity placed signage at different tourist destinations in Montecristi identifying the type of mangroves at different beaches in the area. A

representative from the Dominican Ministry of Tourism shared with the evaluation team that the signage has benefited the province's tourism offerings. For example, at Playa Popa, there is signage about a coral nursery where visitors can kayak and snorkel.

“Responsible fishing has benefited tourism. When taking tourists to the pier, you can see fish of up to a pound, a tourist attraction for visitors. People have learned that they must take care of nature for it to last; they thought nature wouldn't run out.” (Interview with AgroFrontera representatives)

8. **Fostered participatory governance through the implementation of the identification card program.** With support from AgroFrontera, the activity provided fishermen with identification cards that clearly identified them and their respective fishermen's associations. The program had significant benefits for the community: it **recognized** their **access** to the local fisheries and legitimized their participation in the **governance** of the fisheries. Moreover, as noted above, the program promoted engagement and unity among fishermen and crabbers, especially since the AgroFrontera team recruited community members with strong social connections to implement the program. The identification cards enabled the Dominican Navy to easily recognize and acknowledge fishermen's association affiliations, and to confirm they were operating legally. As a result of this program, the Navy identified a total of 1248 fishermen in routine traffic stops when monitoring marine activity, further strengthening the sense of belonging and collective identity within the fishing community.

“One of the achievements that allowed fishermen and crabbers to come together more is that we started an identification card program along the coast. We provided each fisherman with an identification card indicating their [fishermen's] association. For the [Dominican] Navy, finding fishermen on the high seas with their cards helps them recognize that they belonged to an association. The Navy identified 1248 fishermen.” –AgroFrontera technical team focus group participant

Overall, these best practices have contributed to reduced indiscriminate fishing practices, the recognition of the importance of preserving the marine ecosystem, increased integration of fishermen into the supervision and protection of marine resources, and increased awareness of responsible fishing practices.

3. MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE COUNCILS

Evaluation Question 3. Were Management and Governance Councils an effective mechanism for managing marine protected areas? Why or why not? What other factors, if any, facilitated or hindered marine protected area management?

The governance council refers to the group of individuals from the government and the community, responsible for overseeing and guiding the management and monitoring of the project. It serves as a decision-making and advisory entity that provides strategic direction, make decisions, and facilitate collaboration.

With the activity's support in the Dominican Republic, governance councils including fishermen's associations and provincial government representatives of the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Tourism established agreements, dialogues, and joint actions, despite initial resistance. With AgroFrontera support, the activity coordinated these groups in creating monitoring committees for interinstitutional and community coordination and planning. They met often and developed a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis to assess monitoring activities for El Morro National Park. The monitoring committees used a participatory management style based on consultation and dialogue. These spaces facilitated the eradication of conflict in the relationships between the fishing sector and government institutions, particularly the Ministry of Environment and CODOPESCA.

The Management Council grew from the monitoring committees. Members include the provincial director of the Ministry of Environment, the provincial government and the mayor, authorities in charge of CODOPESCA, tour operators, tourism cluster, and all people with incidence. The council provides a voice and vote for all people involved. Overall, **the Management and Governance Councils have facilitated a relationship and dialogue between fishermen and government agencies, promoting participatory governance and cooperation for managing marine protected areas effectively.**

The most important result of the Management Council was the fishermen's identification card program described above. It provided the fishermen with identification cards indicating their fishermen's association. By integrating community members with solid social connections into AgroFrontera's technical team, this intervention displayed the Management Council's commitment to participatory governance while promoting collaboration among fishermen and crabbers.

4. WHOLE SYSTEM IN THE ROOM

Evaluation Question 4. What benefits, if any, did the “whole system in the room” approach to the activity have? Did stakeholders in the activity value it, and if so, why?

IMEM employed a comprehensive “whole system in the room” approach, bringing together key stakeholders to foster collaboration, consensus-building, and the development of effective strategies and practices. This approach involved the Ministry of Environment, CODOPESCA, the Dominican Navy, and fishermen's associations, ensuring that each had a representative to address any issues related to fishing crimes.

This approach had several benefits for IMEM. First, by engaging all actors, it reduced conflicts and eradicated violence between the fishing sector and government institutions and established a dialogue and cooperation between them. Second, stakeholders valued the collective undertaking to promote sustainable fishing practices, protect the environment, and create a platform for exchanging experiences and lessons learned. The Ministry of Environment was motivated to continue supporting such initiatives, and the fishermen's associations were able to come together to work in greater solidarity. The

Governor of Monte Cristi in the Dominican Republic established a more peaceful and productive relationship between the different sectors, leading to improved governance and management of marine protected areas.

Overall, the collaborative operation of the stakeholders positively impacted both the environment and the communities, demonstrating the importance of cooperation in promoting sustainable development.

“We all gathered in a meeting with the governor, fishermen’s associations, the Ministry of the Environment from the Dominican Republic, and CODOPESCA, and jointly developed a way to monitor protected areas. In those sectors, there was a lot of indiscriminate and illegal fishing. The idea of a joint operation emerged: Ministry of Environment, CODOPESCA, the Dominican Navy, and fishermen associations. If we went to sea and found a problem related to fishing crimes, each area had a representative. Changes were made to their fishing sites and surveillance. This motivated the Ministry of Environment to continue supporting.”
–AgroFrontera technical team focus group participant

5. SUSTAINABLE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

Evaluation Question 5. How sustainable are the tools and strategies provided to beneficiaries for their use beyond the life of the activity?

Because IMEM ended just before the evaluation process, it is challenging to determine which tools and strategies are sustainable well beyond the life of the activity. However, at this stage, the evaluation team identified several that will likely contribute to its continued results. To encourage better practices in the long run, **IMEM implementers specifically designed tools and strategies that community members could use beyond the life of the activity, and IMEM developed community-level organizations and built trust with the community.**

For example, the identification card program for fishermen has the potential for sustainability beyond the activity. By providing fishermen with identification cards indicating their fishermen’s association, the program created a sense of organization and order that seems to be continuing beyond the activity’s lifespan. The identification cards help local fishermen develop a strong sense of pride and feeling of belonging to their associations. Furthermore, the Dominican Navy uses the identification cards to recognize fishermen as legitimate actors. As a result, other entities, such as eco-tourism operators and sustainability activists, are more likely to recognize and leverage these groups through their identification cards.

Similarly, the activity’s empowerment of fishermen in protecting the marine ecosystem could lead to sustainable outcomes going forward. In an interview with the evaluation team, the former Provincial

Director of the Environment in Montecristi and current representative of the Montecristi government noted that organized sectors and groups can lead to a change in community-wide attitudes and behaviors, empowering individuals to take ownership in protecting the environment. Local commitment to protection is a well-known indicator of long-term success.

Overall, while the timing of the evaluation makes a definitive determination difficult, **the activity's tools and strategies, such as strengthening community-level organizations, the identification card program for fishermen, and the empowerment of beneficiaries, seem to be continuing beyond the life of the activity.**

“When you have organized sectors and groups, we live in order. We made a call, and those sectors began to change their thinking. Since they saw the Ministry of the Environment as an ally, the flow of information and dialogue began, which was impressive. They became empowered in the protection of the environment.”
—Former Provincial Director of the Ministry of the Environment and current representative of the Montecristi government

6. MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Evaluation Question 6. How did monitoring information inform activity implementation and adaptive management?

Based on the IMEM final report, both the Foundation for Protection of Marine Biodiversity in Haiti and AgroFrontera in the Dominican Republic played active roles in monitoring IMEM's daily activities and collecting relevant data for program indicators. The partners submitted the collected data to the lead implementer, Counterpart International, on a quarterly basis for review, verification, and storage on the activity's SharePoint webpage. Counterpart International's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Manager conducted spot checks on the indicators and uploaded them to the designated USAID spreadsheet. In addition to daily monitoring, Counterpart International's Program Director and Country Representative made quarterly trips to Montecristi to gather data on program activities and engage with partners and beneficiaries in the field. These visits provided an opportunity to discuss outcomes, address challenges, and determine ongoing support for the program. Monthly IMEM program meetings were also held between Counterpart International, the Foundation for Protection of Marine Biodiversity, and AgroFrontera to provide updates, discuss deliverables and timelines, and address any immediate needs or concerns.

This evaluation found that **the monitoring information gathered from these activities has informed the implementation of the activity and enabled adaptive management.** The information collected from monitoring activities, such as identifying the location and extent of illegal fishing activities, has been used to adjust strategies and interventions in real-time to address emerging issues. For example, the joint operation developed by the Ministry of Environment, CODOPESCA, the

Dominican Navy, and fishermen's associations to monitor protected areas was a direct response to the monitoring information that revealed high levels of indiscriminate and illegal fishing in these areas.

In addition, **the monitoring information gathered from the identification card program for fishermen and crabbers has been used to identify and track members of fishermen's associations.** This information has enabled the development of targeted interventions to improve the management and governance of marine protected areas.

Monitoring information has been essential in informing activity implementation and adaptive management, allowing the activity to adjust their strategies and interventions in real time and providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of its interventions.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation has uncovered IMEM's successes and challenges related to multiple research questions. These learnings can apply both to future programming in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, as well as to marine programming globally.

Lesson 1: Empowering local associations, while challenging, can transform community attitudes and behaviors and strengthen marine protections. Rather than targeting individual community members with training in new practices, IMEM maximized impact by working with local sector associations. It leveraged relationships with influential community members to strengthen the community associations. This strategy helps all members benefit, growing skills that can benefit the communities beyond the life of the activity. However, because the activity did not track threat reduction data, it is unclear if the strengthened marine protections resulted in healthier fish populations or other ecosystem improvements.

Recommendation: Focus on building capacities of local community organizations to strengthen marine protections. Build trust with community leaders and influencers. Tie short-term benefits of new behaviors to long-term durable improvements. Track threat reduction and ecosystem health data.

Lesson 2: Establishing co-management committees, which empower local and national government as well as local community members to protect marine areas, dramatically strengthened marine protected area management. These committees acted as consultative and coordinating bodies that brought together key stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and relevant organizations. By involving various stakeholders in decision-making processes, the co-management committees promoted inclusivity, transparency, and shared responsibility in managing marine resources.

Co-management committees facilitated effective communication, collaboration, and coordination among different stakeholders, allowing for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. This helped to build consensus, address conflicts, and make informed decisions regarding the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

The co-management committee also supported adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making. By identifying trends and emerging issues, stakeholders made informed decisions and adjusted management strategies accordingly. However, the co-management committees could not fully overcome the lack of resources available to local agencies for enforcement and monitoring of illegal fishing.

Overall, the establishment of co-management committees fostered a participatory and collaborative approach to marine protected area management, contributing to better conservation outcomes and the long-term sustainability of marine resources.

Recommendation: In future projects, consider replicating the approach of establishing co-management committees. By promoting greater inter-institutional and inter-sectoral articulation between government institutions, civil society associations, and relevant stakeholders, the objective of protecting and preserving marine flora and fauna can be effectively pursued. Regular meetings, workshops, and training programs can serve as platforms for fostering trust, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among these entities. Building strong partnerships and collaborative networks is crucial for aligning efforts, pooling resources, and working toward common goals in marine conservation. However, such bodies cannot be expected to fully overcome insufficient government resources for enforcement and monitoring; future programming should consider how to support or advocate for adequate enforcement funding. Through these coordinated efforts, the sustainability of marine ecosystems can be enhanced, leading to long-term benefits for both the environment and the communities that depend on them.

Lesson 3: Building on Lesson 2, **the model of co-management committees provided a platform for local communities to actively participate in joint monitoring.** One valuable lesson learned from the joint monitoring of marine protected areas is the power of sharing responsibility and collaboration among stakeholders. By involving multiple parties, it promotes collective decision-making, accountability, and effective marine protected management.

Secondly, engaging local communities in the monitoring process empowers them and encourages their active participation in marine protected area management. It elevates their traditional knowledge, practices, and concerns, leading to more contextually relevant and effective management strategies. This sense of ownership and participation enhanced the commitment and engagement of local communities in protecting and preserving their marine ecosystems. This inclusion strengthens community ownership and promotes sustainable use of marine resources.

Collaborative monitoring initiatives also offer opportunities for capacity-building and knowledge sharing. By exchanging skills and expertise among stakeholders, monitoring activities become more effective, contributing to continuous learning and professional development.

Moreover, joint monitoring raises public awareness about the importance of marine protected areas and garners greater support for their conservation. By engaging stakeholders and sharing monitoring results, the broader community becomes more informed and involved in environmental protection efforts.

In summary, the lesson learned is that collaborative and inclusive approaches greatly enhance marine protected area management. Joint monitoring leverages the collective expertise, local knowledge, and

active engagement of stakeholders, leading to more robust data collection, adaptive management, and a shared commitment to the sustainable conservation of marine ecosystems.

Recommendation: To enhance the effectiveness of future projects in marine protected areas, it is recommended to replicate the successful practice of joint monitoring. By replicating this approach, future projects can benefit from community stewardship and collaboration, traditional knowledge, and informed decision-making. Joint monitoring can ultimately contribute to the long-term conservation and sustainable management of marine protected areas.

Lesson 4: Official recognition of fishermen, through an identity card program, promoted responsible fishing practices and enhanced community engagement. This program provided fishermen with identification cards that indicated their fishermen's association. This not only facilitated recognition and cooperation with government institutions, such as the Navy, but it also instilled a sense of belonging and pride within the fishing community. The identification cards served as symbols of unity, promoting collective responsibility for the protection of marine resources.

Recommendation: Future projects aiming to promote responsible fishing practices and community engagement should consider implementing identification card programs or similar when appropriate to the context. Identifying ways that officials can recognize and support good actors is critical to behavior change. In this case, the identification cards built that infrastructure for collaboration and support. Moreover, such systems also foster a sense of belonging and collective responsibility among communities. This strategy enhances recognition and cooperation with government institutions and promotes a shared commitment to the sustainable management of marine resources. Additionally, the identification card program can serve as a powerful symbol of unity and pride within the community.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our interviews with stakeholders, the evaluation team concludes that **IMEM effectively achieved its intended goals and results** as defined by the results framework. The program successfully implemented activities related to improving fisheries management, conserving marine biodiversity, and increasing community participation in natural resource management. The evaluation found that the activity's activities led to several positive outcomes, including increased compliance with fishing regulations, adopting sustainable fishing practices, and creating alternative income sources for fishing communities. IMEM's success in achieving its intended goals validates the hypothesis in its theory of change, which proposes that implementing an integrated approach to the ecosystem and resource management can lead to specific improved conservation outcomes and community livelihoods. However, without threat reduction data, it is not clear that the IMEM activities themselves reduced pressure on the coastal and marine ecosystems they sought to protect.

The evaluation also identified several factors that facilitated IMEM's ability to realize its desired results. One key factor was the activity's emphasis on community participation and engagement. By involving local stakeholders throughout all phases of implementation, from planning to monitoring and evaluation, IMEM helped build trust and ownership in the community. Another facilitating factor was the activity's emphasis on intersectoral and interinstitutional coordination. By bringing together various government

agencies, NGOs, and community-based organizations, the program developed a shared vision and common goals for natural resource management. Finally, the evaluation found that the activity's monitoring and adaptive management approach, which involved regular data collection and analysis, allowed for timely feedback and adjustment of program activities, which contributed to its success.

However, the evaluation also identified several challenges that hampered the activity's ability to achieve its desired results. One major challenge was the continued insecurity in Haiti. Safety concerns and travel restrictions made gathering data from Haitian fishermen difficult, and we were unable to determine how the IMEM activity adapted to the shifting issues in their programming and what results they achieved. In the DR, the lack of local resources was a significant challenge. Monitoring of fisheries is supported by partners, rather than the government, and the local team struggles to enforce fishing laws. Also, without supporting resources, there is a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities for fishermen. Finally, IMEM did not collect threat reduction data and such data could have helped

The evaluation also identified several unintended outcomes resulting from the activity's implementation. These outcomes include the creation of alternative income sources for fishing communities, the development of a new relationship with naval forces, and a feeling of belonging—including sustainability as a part of their identity—produced by the identification cards for fishermen. These unintended outcomes reflect the activity's positive spillover effects and highlight the importance of taking a holistic approach to natural resource management.

Overall, the evaluation of IMEM concludes that the activity effectively achieved its intended goals and results. Its success can be attributed to several facilitating factors, including community participation, intersectoral and interinstitutional coordination, and monitoring and adaptive management. The evaluation also identifies several challenges and unintended outcomes resulting from the program's implementation, which provide valuable lessons for future natural resource management programs.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A. EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the learning evaluation of the Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management Program (IMEM) activity is to produce independent findings, lessons learned, and recommendations that have resulted from U.S. Government assistance. The evaluation includes the results of best practices, success stories, challenges encountered, and their resolution regarding IMEM's performance. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will use the outcomes as appropriate, including applying lessons learned during the design and implementation of similar and future regional marine biodiversity conservation activities in the Caribbean and other regions. IMEM is a cooperative agreement implemented by Counterpart International and managed by the USAID/Caribbean Biodiversity Program. The learning evaluation seeks to answer the following specific learning questions (to be refined with USAID point of contact and research lead):

Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent did IMEM achieve its intended goals and results as defined by the results framework?
 - a. Did the observed achievements validate the hypothesis in the IMEM theory of change?
 - b. What factors facilitated IMEM's ability to realize the desired results?
 - c. What challenges hampered the activity's ability to do so?
 - d. What unintended outcomes resulted from the implementation of this activity?
 - e. How did IMEM involve community members in the implementation, and what resulted from that involvement? Did the involvement address the gaps identified in the [Caribbean Marine Biodiversity Program](#) evaluation?
2. What did stakeholders identify as the activity's best practices? What contribution did these best practices have to the targeted communities?
3. Were Management and Governance Councils an effective mechanism for managing marine protected areas? Why or why not? What other factors, if any, facilitated or hindered marine protected area management?
4. What benefits, if any, did the "whole system in the room" approach to the activity have? Did stakeholders involved in the activity value it, and if so, why?
5. How sustainable are the tools and strategies provided to beneficiaries for their use beyond the life of the activity?
6. How did monitoring information inform activity implementation and adaptive management?

ANNEX B. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaires for Individual Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups

Framing of the Interview

- Write date, time, and location in the interview notes.
- Thank the interviewee for their time.
- Introduce the team doing the interview.
- Describe the purpose of the evaluation.
- Explain the confidentiality, time of the interview, and the voluntary participation.

Confidentiality: The information you provide us will be used in order to identify findings for the evaluation. The names of the people who give us the information will remain in our possession as an independent evaluation team, and we will delete them from the reports, annexes, and databases that we deliver, as well as information on location or activities that could lead to the identification of a particular person. If necessary, we will assign codes for the mention of the interviewees in the documents

Length of Interview: We estimate this session to take about an hour and consist of several questions, and we hope we can contact you again later to validate or complete the information. Make yourself comfortable, and feel free to ask any questions for better clarity.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this evaluation is voluntary, and while your participation was encouraged by IMEM, it is up to you whether or not you want to participate. If you decide not to participate, this will not affect your relationship with IMEM. Do you agree?

Opening Question: This is a general question that everyone answers at the beginning of the interview and/or focus group. This question helps to create trust in the early stages of the session and to get you and the respondent oriented and comfortable. (Challenging and more sensitive questions should be saved until later in the session.)

- For example: Tell us your name and how long you have been a fisherman.

Key Questions

- How are you related to IMEM? What has been your involvement in the project? Specify dates and activities.
- From your perspective, has the project affected economically or culturally the communities relying on marine ecosystems? (Inquire for positive or negative.)
- What do you think have been the most critical governance changes due to this activity?
- What do you think was the main effect that fostering collaboration between both governments had?
- What do you think was the main effect of strengthening participation and adaptive management in the governance of marine protected areas?
- Do you think that sharing best practices on rice, ecotourism, and sustainable fishery had an impact? How?

- What was the influence of the political context (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic) in the activity and its results? (Inquire for positive and negative.)
- What was the influence of the country landscape, specific local partners, or any other external factors in the different results from the activity? (Inquire for positive and negative.)
- Did the activity increase the number of fishers involved in responsible fishing practices? How?
- Describe the communication with the communities, including barriers and facilitating factors.
- What do you think was one of the best practices in terms of:
 - Fostering collaboration between governments.
 - Strengthening participation and adaptive management in the governance of marine protected areas.
 - Sharing best practices for alternative livelihoods (responsible fishing, sustainable rice practices).
- Were Management and Governance Councils an effective mechanism for managing marine protected areas? Why or why not? What other factors, if any, facilitated or hindered marine protected area management? Inquire for:
 - Engagement in the council.
 - Leadership in the council.
 - Political context.
 - Country landscape.
- What benefits, if any, did the whole system in the room activity have? Did stakeholders involved in the activity value it, and if so, why? Inquire for:
 - Most valuable elements of the activity.
 - Recommendations for the activity.
- What do you think were the best tools and strategies, and how would you keep on using them?
- What are the anticipated risks impeding tools and strategies to be sustainable?
- Are there sustained benefits of using the tools and strategies? Inquire for:
 - How dependable are the use of tools and strategies on leadership, country context, or other external/internal factors?
- In your perspective, did the monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans contain the key elements needed to monitor, evaluate and learn? Inquire for:
 - What facilitated or impeded effective monitoring practices?

ANNEX C. LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Field Work in Haiti

To evaluate the different programs of Foundation for Protection of Marine Biodiversity, established in the northern area of Haiti, specifically in the North-East Department and coastal communities in this province, we conducted multiple interviews. After deciding on the interview questions and strategies, the evaluation team conducted interviews from February 10 to February 23, 2023 via telephone with local fishermen, agronomists, beekeepers, and others to collect data through qualitative techniques.

Table 1. Subjects Interviewed in Haiti

Date	Location	Participants	Sector	Total People Interviewed
February 10–February 23, 2023	North-East/ Fort-Liberté	6	Fishing Apiculture Ecotourism Mangrove Restoration	6

Field Work in the Dominican Republic

During the fieldwork in Montecristi from February 6 to February 10, 2023, the evaluation team conducted six focus groups and six interviews, totaling 46 people interviewed, as presented in the previous table. The interviews and focus groups took place in three different municipalities of the Montecristi province: San Fernando de Montecristi (the capital of the province), Las Matas de Santa Cruz (a municipality located in the rice-growing area of the province), and Pepillo Salcedo-Bahía de Manzanillo (a municipality located in the Bay of Manzanillo on the border with Haiti).

The team interviewed the local associations linked to the economic sectors that sub-grantee AgroFrontera works with, including sustainable rice production, responsible and sustainable fishing, and ecotourism, in all municipalities. Therefore, the team held focus groups with rice producer associations in Las Matas de Santa Cruz, fishermen's associations in San Fernando de Montecristi and Pepillo Salcedo-Bahía de Manzanillo, ecotourism associations in San Fernando de Montecristi and Pepillo Salcedo-Bahía de Manzanillo.

The team also interviewed government institutions from each of these sectors, including their provincial representation in the different municipalities, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Tourism. The team interviewed government representatives from the provincial level and the sectors linked to AgroFrontera's work in the indicated municipalities from each of these ministries.

In addition to the interviews and focus groups with the different associations from the various sectors and government representatives, the team also conducted a focus group with the AgroFrontera technical

team. People from the marine fishing and sustainable rice technical teams, their respective managers, and the general management of AgroFrontera participated.

The AgroFrontera team's coordination and mobilization in each municipality allowed the team to achieve the diversity of actors interviewed in the fieldwork through interviews and focus groups.

Table 2. Individuals Interviewed in the Dominican Republic

Date	Location	Participants	Sector	Total
February 6, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	AgroFrontera management	AgroFrontera	1
February 8, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	Provincial Director of the Ministry of Tourism (<i>Director provincial del Ministerio de Turismo</i>)	Ministry of Tourism	1
February 9, 2023	Pepillo Salcedo-Bahía de Manzanillo	Manzanillo EcoAventura	Ecotourism	1
February 9, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	Galleon Divers	Ecotourism	1
February 9, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	Ministry of the Environment (<i>Ministerio de Medioambiente Representante de la gobernadora</i>)	Government—Ministry of the Environment	1
February 7, 2023	Las Matas de Santa Cruz	Technical Office of Dominican Agrarian Institute (Técnico del <i>Instituto Agrario Dominicano</i>)	Government - Department of Agriculture	1
February 10, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	Provincial Director, CODOPESCA Coastal Marine Officer, CODOPESCA	Government - CODOPESCA	2
Total Interviews				7

Table 3. Group Interviews in the Dominican Republic

Date	Location	Participants	Sector	People Interviewed
February 7, 2023	Las Matas de Santa Cruz	Higüero sur Association. United producers Association (Asociación de productores unidos) Américo Regalado Rice Producers Association from Agro Frontera Project: Bajo Yaque del Norte	Rice producer associations affiliated with AgroFrontera	6
February 7, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	Province Director from the Environmental Department for Montecristi Marine Coastal Inspectors from Montecristi Province Managers from the El Morro National Park, Vice Minister of Protected Areas Provincial Government Representative: Responsible for the monitoring of the zone.	Government - Ministry of the Environment	6
February 8, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	Fishing Cooperative Bienvenido Espinal from San Fernando de Montecristi Fishing Association of Caño de Yuti Fishing Association of Marigot Yacht Club of Montecristi Crab Association of Buenos aires Fishing Association APESCOJU from the Conucos of Montecristi Advisor for the Fishermen Cooperative of Bienvenido Espinal	Fishermen's Associations from San Fernando de Montecristi	7

February 8, 2023	San Fernando de Montecristi	GREMONT Kayak's tours Guides and tour operators from Montecristi Ecological Society from Montecristi Parki	Ecotourism in San Fernando de Montecristi	5
February 10, 2023	Las Matas de Santa Cruz	AgroFrontera Technical Team	AgroFrontera	9
February 9, 2023	Pepillo Salcedo-Bahía de Manzanillo	Marine Guardians of the Bar Association Manager for the Protected Mangrove Park from Estero Balsa Association of Independent Workers from Bahía de Manzanillo Park rangers from the Ministry of the Environment Ecotourism guide Council for the Development of Manzanillo (<i>Consejo para el desarrollo de Manzanillo</i>)	Fishermen - Ecotourism and Environment	6
Total				39

ANNEX D. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED AND REFERENCES

- Amalyan, Sevak 2020. *Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management in Northern Hispaniola Quarterly Report*. Arlington, VA: Counterpart International. [Link](#). (Accessed July 3, 2023)
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