Integration of Seafood Certification and Jurisdictional Assurance Models: Streamlining the path towards sustainability in the aquaculture industry

Enabling conditions and drivers to sustainable livelihoods

December 2021

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), together with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Program (SFW), are piloting an improver programme to implement best management practices with the aim of improving farm and zonal management to mitigate critical production risks. Through the ISEAL Innovations project, Integration of Seafood Certification and Jurisdictional Assurance Models, supported by Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), project activities from piloting aquaculture improvement projects had led to a number of valuable lessons in understanding the drivers for sustainable livelihoods.

Work around sustainable aquaculture initiatives is a small, but crowded space. In order to work collaboratively and reduce the burdens on industry, project partners laid out a pathway for identifying and achieving common goals for collective improvement.

The pathway builds on an understanding of the processes driving each organisation’s assessments and evaluations to use the information learned in refining subsequent steps. The steps of the pathway are not novel and are likely to resonate across sectors but investing in trust and relationships to build for the longer-term gains are essential components.

Partner organisations in the project operate at different scales. A first step was to acknowledge this and recognize the opportunities rather than impediments to sharing information across these scales.

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1. Identify efficiency gains

The first critical step in the process was to conduct a deep dive into the requirements and information needs across partner programs. ASC is a voluntary certification scheme setting standards for environmentally and socially responsible aquaculture. SFP and SFW develop involuntary ratings on the environmental performance of aquaculture operations. The study mapped the requirements to untangle the information needs across the schemes. The desired outcomes include reduced assessment times and costs for partner organisations – and thus reduced direct requests to data providers, acquisition of better data, and improved decision-making, and more accurate outputs.

2. Untangle the asks

With an understanding of where there is overlap or alignment between the schemes’ standards content, the next step required a deeper dive into the information or data required for an assessment. Review of data consider details of the meta-data, including characteristics, scales and data sources, relevance of the data to a given requirements and collection methodologies. Once data specific needs were isolated, they were cross referenced to the scale at which each organisation relies on the data for comparison and potential collaboration.

Achievement of these first steps is expected to facilitate greater availability or sharing options for ASC farm-level audit data, greater utilization of ASC farmer knowledge on local production practices and characteristics, and shared data sources and resources at a provincial or national scale.

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**Datapoint characteristics**
- e.g. metrics, time frame, data source, accessibility

**Scales & sources of data**
- e.g. pond, farm, water body

**Relevance & Importance**
- e.g. essential, minor, N/A

**Collection methodologies**
- e.g. direct, active, passive

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Better market information about responsible aquaculture practices at farm and industry level will accelerate demand for, and supply of, certified seafood. This will improve take-up of the programmes and drive positive environmental and social impacts on the ground in line with the SDGs (including biodiversity, climate change, food security, livelihoods).
3. Implement procedures

Operational workstreams across partner organisations rely on access to high quality data. ASC has taken results from partner assessments to inform risk factors that are incorporated into a risk calculator to inform the recommended frequency for on-site verification of improvement for farms engaged in ASC’s Improver Programme. The verification is a critical aspect of the Improver Programme model to ensure credible and trackable improvements are being made.

Conversely, data from ASC certified farms will serve to ground truth and improve aquaculture ratings conducted at higher scales, based on the areas of alignment identified through the mapping study.

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Risk calculator provides guidance for remote and on-site verification action

- Aquaculture specific factors
- ASC sectoral performance factors
- Third-party risk factors

Frequency for remote/on-site verification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1. Species &amp; country</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2. Site size distribution</td>
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<td>C3. Site spatial distribution</td>
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<td>C4. Data availability</td>
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<td>C5. AIP sales</td>
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<td>C6. Deficiency history</td>
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<tr>
<td>C7. No of sites to be reviewed in remote &amp; on-site verifications</td>
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4. Build relationships and Establish pathways

The ASC-Improver Programme (AIP) is a stepwise and transparent pathway to move the aquaculture industry to embrace zonal management by coordinating and driving improvements undertaken at the farm and landscape level. This programme is designed specifically to support improvement in farms that cannot now achieve certification or do not wish to seek for certification but simply improve their performance or practices, through farmer collaboration, partnerships for market access and capacity building for more responsible practices.
The programme bridges the gap between convention production and improved performance under better practices or certification and provides the opportunity for producers to select either end goal. A key objective of the ASC-Imperator Programme is to help producers make small but incremental steps to gradually improve their practices and enable them to reach a level that meets certification performance levels.

The pilot project in Indonesia recognizes that the needs of those producers may be unique and it’s critical to understand their needs to build the trust and relationships for a successful programme. Local consultants Yayasan Sustainaqua Indonesia (YSAI) were selected through an open tender process to conduct a needs assessment and survey local farmers. The goal was to provide an overview of the status of shrimp farming, stakeholders engaged in the region, areas of practice for improvements, farmer priorities and training mechanisms most likely to be successful for the given audiences. The assessment considered the following key questions: What is the current landscape? Who’s engaged? What are the key issues for farmers? Where are the primary challenges?

Fostering relationships and building trust in the new program is just as – or more - important as understanding data needs and requirements. Local consultant implementers convened meetings with potential producer participants, local government and supply chain partners to share information on the programme and listen to their questions and challenges. These conversations have yielded valuable information that will further shape the direction of the ASC-Imperator Programme and empower producers as members of the initiative and stewards of their resources.

For additional information on project related activities: Jill Swasey, jill.swasey@asc-aqua.org
This project was possible thanks to a grant from the ISEAL Innovations Fund, which is supported by:

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO