



## SMALL-SCALE FISHERS' FORUM

# Technological innovations to facilitate efficient SSF value chains and fishing business management

The focus of this workshop was to showcase different types of “bottom-up” technological innovations developed in cooperation with fishers and fish workers and driven by their needs. Two different initiatives were presented: the Abalobi ICT4Fisheries electronic solutions (apps), which provide fishers with a range of options to collect, store, analyse and use data, and the CIHEAM Food4Health project, which provides communities with facilities for producing high-quality fishery products. The workshop was organized by the GFCM in collaboration with LIFE, WWF and CIHEAM. LIFE introduced the session, followed by presentations on the Abalobi technology and the CIHEAM project. Experiences from fishers using the Abalobi app in Europe were also shared.

### Summary of discussions and conclusions

#### **Abalobi – empowering small-scale fishers through data and technology**

Data is required for fisheries management decisions and monitoring, and it is important that all stakeholders in a fisheries management process have access to information, including small-scale fishers and fish workers who need data to be able to participate in decision-making. Fishers also need data to manage their businesses and sell their fish. Though access to information is not always on equal terms, sharing data may help to level the playing field. By recognizing that those who collect the data also own the data, small-scale fishers can engage with decision-makers on equal terms, using the Abalobi and similar mobile eCDT technologies.

[Abalobi](#) (meaning “fisher” in the isiXhosa language) is a South African social enterprise that co-designs technologies with fishers to promote digital and financial inclusion and to enable improved market access and prices for fishers through a specific “Marketplace App” while also allowing them to monitor catch and fish resources through a “Fisher App”. Abalobi promotes participatory fisheries rebuilding initiatives that consider ocean life. With regard to data, Abalobi believes that whoever collects the data owns the data. The Abalobi approach involves working alongside fishers on data logging through an app and providing them with a suite of options for analysing and using the data and a marketing and sales system that also ensures traceability of the product.

Traceability is key to the Abalobi system, as it tells a story about each fish that is sold. However, Abalobi is not all about technology, but also about respect and relationships, including meetings, advocacy and administrative support for advancing fisher organizational development, gender equity and fisheries improvement.

Abalobi built its activities in field pilot cases based on grant funding, but the goal is for the app to be self-sustaining over the long-term. There is global replication and partnerships, including in the Mediterranean, where Abalobi has a partnership with WWF and is working to implement Abalobi in four pilot sites in Albania Croatia, Greece and Italy. Experiences of introducing the Abalobi system to fishers in the Mediterranean show that there are a number of conditions for its success:

- technology (the app) and appropriate usability;

- engagement of fishers;
- market (consumers/restaurants) interest and buy-in;
- logistics, particularly in transporting fish;
- high organizational level of fishers to manage sales etc. in the Abalobi marketplace; and
- staff to manage the apps panels (e.g. staff capacity through the cooperative)

### **Food4Health project – supporting small-to-medium enterprises and improving fishery product quality**

The CIHEAM [Food4Health project](#) promotes sustainable and innovative agri-food and fisheries value chains for small- and medium-sized enterprises in Italy, Montenegro and Albania. It establishes common procedures for the valorization of products and sets up community labs on a pilot basis for the transformation of primary products into healthy, high-quality products as a way of supporting entrepreneurial innovation for the international market.

Currently, this integrated project is testing equipment, carrying out pilot actions to develop recipes and certify quality, training young entrepreneurs and setting up cooperatives. Continuing this work will promote the sharing and adoption of European quality standards and the enhancement of typical and traditional products of the agri-food and fisheries sectors for the benefit of both small-scale fishing communities and consumers.

From the Abalobi and Food4Health experiences, it would appear that systems developed in direct collaboration with small-scale fishers and fish workers are likely to be more successful than arrangements that are top-down. It is important to allow innovations and solutions to continue to evolve and adapt to local contexts through direct engagement with small-scale fisheries stakeholders.