



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	24-014 ref 3739
Project title	Carrots and sticks: incentives to conserve hilsa fish in Myanmar
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Country 1: Republic of the Union of Myanmar (also known as Burma); Country 2: Bangladesh (collaborating country)
Lead organisation	International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
Partner(s)	Department of Fisheries; WorldFish; Network Activities Group (NAG); and Yangon University Zoology Department
Project leader	Annabelle Bladon
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	April 2020 – September 2020; HYR4
Project website/blog/social media	https://www.iied.org/carrots-sticks-incentives-conserve-hilsa-fish-myanmar

Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Output 2. Enhanced understanding of the complex socioeconomics of hilsa fishery in the Ayeyarwady Delta

2.3: The short-term economic cost of hilsa conservation has been estimated as part of the analysis published in a working paper, titled '[Myanmar's artisanal hilsa fisheries. How much are they really worth?](#)'

2.4: The multi-stakeholder workshop that was due to be held in March 2020 has still not been held due to Covid-19 (see Section 2.b for details). In its absence, we have been focusing on other ways for stakeholders to engage with the project:

- We have drafted a whitepaper on the design of incentive-based hilsa management in the Ayeyarwady Region (document available upon request), which contains an overview of our enhanced understanding and recommendations. The document has been shared with key stakeholders for their review and inputs, along with all publications (a list of people and feedback is available upon request). Next, we will share this document for input from regional and Union government officials via virtual means and, if possible, small in-person meetings.
- We have expedited the process of establishing a national hilsa expert working group (see Output 5) that will help us to engage stakeholders with our research.

Finally, WorldFish have been running a telephone survey to assess the evolving impacts of Covid-19 on the availability and price of aquatic foods and production inputs across Myanmar's fish value chain, including hilsa. Surveys were conducted weekly from May to July when they were reduced to monthly, and there are 143 respondents, 29% of which are in the Ayeyarwady Region. Results indicate that while the inability to access inputs and transport was a temporary problem during the first wave lockdown in April-May, the recovery in August has been followed by increased mobility restrictions from September to date. There have also been longer term

and more serious impacts on demand for fish as the Chinese, Thai and European markets have been closed. However, seasonality seems to have had an equally important impact on the hilsa value chain so far, since bad weather and the May-July closed season restrict operations anyway. These findings highlight the extent to which artisanal fishers are affected by limited access to fishing and emphasise the need for regulations to be accompanied by incentives. This will strengthen the relevance of our recommendations when we engage with government.

Output 3. Use and non-use values of hilsa fishery estimated and business case developed

3.1, 3.2 and 3.3: The working paper, titled '[Myanmar's artisanal hilsa fisheries. How much are they really worth?](#)' estimates the total economic value of Myanmar's artisanal hilsa fisheries, including use and non-use values. It includes a cost-benefit analysis which demonstrates the business case for investing in incentive-based management. The working paper did not estimate income elasticity of willingness to accept hilsa conservation because the data were inappropriate for this type of analysis. Instead, we inferred income elasticity in Myanmar on secondary data from Bangladesh.

IIED has also published a policy briefing, titled '[The business case for investing in Myanmar's artisanal hilsa fishery](#)', which clearly outlines the business case for government. A copy of this briefing is available upon request. WorldFish are in the process of translating this into Burmese.

Output 4. Sustainable finance mechanism developed

4.2 & 4.3: The multi-stakeholder workshop that was due to be held in March 2020 has still not been held due to Covid-19 (see Section 2b for details). In the absence of this workshop, the project team has focused on alternative ways of engaging stakeholders. This includes the whitepaper and national hilsa expert group described under Output 2. To maximise reach of the policy briefing titled '[Financing Myanmar's fisheries through fiscal reform](#)', we are also translating this into Burmese.

Output 5. A national hilsa fishery management expert group in place

5.2: We had not planned to launch the expert group until the end of the project in Q4 Y4, alongside the closing workshop. However, since we have been unable to hold the multi-stakeholder workshop planned for March 2020, we have already started the process of inviting key stakeholders to the group and arranging an initial virtual meeting. The group sits within the Myanmar Fisheries Partnership (MFP), which is led by the Department of Fisheries (DoF) and has WorldFish as a Secretariat role. The group is championed by Khin Maung Soe, Senior Consultant for WorldFish and our project's DoF liaison / inland fisheries governance expert. By launching the group at this time, we are confident that stakeholders will still have a channel through which to feedback on our research and take ownership of next steps. Furthermore, since some of the members regularly interact with senior DoF officials, it should help the project engage with them.

We have also established a [Facebook group](#) in tandem with this. Facebook is a platform that WorldFish Myanmar has experience using to engage local fishers and fisher leaders, who may find it difficult to otherwise engage with the expert group while meetings continue to be held virtually.

Capacity-building

The project team has continued to work collaboratively on publications with the goal of transferring skills and knowledge between people and institutions. The newly established national hilsa expert group provides a channel for the project to build capacity in Myanmar for the design and implementation of an incentive scheme. By sharing our knowledge and recommendations with the group, the goal is for those hilsa experts to take ownership of the scheme and support the DoF through the design and implementation process. The project has also established links to other projects and initiatives that provide additional channels to share our research (for example, an event held by WorldFish on 24th October highlighted the need to improve connectivity for a range of migratory species, please see flyer: [World Fish Migration Day](#)). WorldFish encourages a wide range of stakeholders in Myanmar to view the eight main publications delivered by the project to date [here](#).

Partnerships and legacy

Michael Akester recently shared with WorldFish colleagues the latest project publication along with a link to all previous publications, and the response was extremely positive. Philippa Cohen, Research Program Leader, Resilient Small-Scale Fisheries, commented: "The body of work you and the team have developed is incredibly impressive – and the pathways to impact are strong and clear."

We are confident that, despite difficulties resulting from COVID-19, the Ayeyarwady Regional Government and the elected parliamentarians, together with the regional Department of Fisheries (DoF), are willing to take ownership of the incentive scheme.

Comments from stakeholders external to the project have also indicated strong potential for lasting impact and the development of new initiatives that build on our recommendations. For example:

- Jens-Otto Krakstad, a Senior Scientist at the Institute of Marine Research Norway involved in the collaboration on fisheries between Norway and Myanmar (MYANOR-FISH) said that they 'strongly support this initiative and will be able to stand behind the recommendations'. Norad have voiced interest in funding work to modify closed seasons for the offshore hilsa fishery and set up a new Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Ayeyarwady Region – possibilities that are being discussed within the DoF and would help to protect hilsa.
- There has been interest from various members of the MFP in establishing a national Conservation Trust Fund or fisheries research and management fund using revenues from licence fees as taxes, as recommended by the project.
- USAID have raised the possibility of establishing a pilot of the incentive scheme, similar to the ECOFISH project in Bangladesh.

The new national hilsa expert group and Facebook group will enhance the legacy of the project by providing a channel for civil society stakeholders to engage with the project, champion the incentive scheme, and take forward the initiatives mentioned above.

Government engagement

Following the meeting held by WorldFish in March 2020 with Ayeyarwady Regional parliamentarians and DoF in Patheingyi, feedback was very positive, as evidenced by the translated minutes of a subsequent Cabinet meeting held March 13th (document available upon request). The parliament Speaker requested a full proposal, which we will also share for approval from the Regional minister for agriculture, livestock, natural resources and environmental conservation. Covid-19 restrictions have prevented the WorldFish team from travelling to Patheingyi to follow up through in-person meetings, and we do not expect government officials to agree to virtual meetings until after the national elections (which include Regional legislatures) on November 8, 2020. However, by housing the national hilsa expert group within the MFP, it is hoped that participants will bring their government counterparts into virtual discussions (two confirmed for after the November elections). We remain confident that once we secure follow-up meetings, approval and successful introduction of our recommendations at the regional level should pave the way to advance them at Union (central) level.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

It is possible that the upcoming national elections (November 8th) will disrupt activities. In addition to systemic problems and rights abuses, the Government of Myanmar has been criticized for using the pandemic as an excuse for not allowing the normal election observation process to go ahead. Stay-at-home orders have been issued for all of Yangon Region and other parts of the country, effective at 8am on September 21 to date. There is also a curfew in place midnight to 4am. International Election Observers will be mostly absent and the Myanmar Union Election Commission (UEC) has told the local People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE) it would be

barred from elections for “receiving assistance from international organisations without being officially registered”. In the event that election results are disputed, as they were in 2015, there could be a period of uncertainty. Potential demonstrations will be rigorously forbidden ‘due to Covid-19’, which could limit the ability of government officials at both regional and central level to focus on the project’s proposals until early 2021, when it is expected that the situation will normalize.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

In March 2020 we were due to hold a multi-stakeholder workshop in Myanmar, but this was postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions. We have so far been unable to reschedule the workshop for the same reason. We had considered holding it virtually, but WorldFish has experienced resistance from Myanmar nationals and particularly from government staff to participating in such events and meetings virtually – an issue which has been linked to the concept *aarr nar tel*, a social regulator that is used universally in Myanmar to show consideration for other people. It dictates that being polite requires an individual to not risk embarrassing others, and that people of a lower social status, such as youth and work subordinates, must express *aarr nar tel* to those with a higher social status, such as elders and workplace superiors, through respectful speech and behaviour. This makes it difficult for people to participate in large virtual meetings via their own computers outside of the office, where they risk speaking out of turn. When WorldFish has held virtual meetings with government participants, they have gathered to participate in one room and speak through masks into one microphone, making audio very difficult. For these reasons, the team is now organizing a virtual meeting that is expected to be mostly attended by civil society members of the new national hilsa expert group, with some DoF counterparts expected.

We are also looking at alternative and additional means of engaging stakeholders in the project (eg translating our policy briefings into Burmese to maximise their reach, engaging with national media, and producing an animation).

The challenges described above have also interfered with our strategy for policy influence, which relies on holding in-person meetings with regional and central government officials. The incidence of Covid-19 in Myanmar has been increasing and both regional and central governments have become very busy with their response in recent months. Furthermore, restrictions have made it impossible for WorldFish staff to travel to for meetings, as planned. As a minimum, the team will seek approval for the system via virtual meetings with the relevant government officials as soon as this becomes possible. This may limit the extent to which we can co-develop with government a detailed roadmap (strategic plan) for implementation of our proposed fiscal reforms. If restrictions are eased, WorldFish will travel to Patheingyi and Naypyidaw for in-person meetings. However, the delays experienced thus far may make it difficult to spend this year’s budget and fully achieve our Outcome without a project extension.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS:	While the COVID situation was discussed, we feel we need to discuss it further, together with the coming elections.
Formal change request submitted:	Yes (for the COVID situation)
Received confirmation of change acceptance	Yes

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Estimated underspend: £
<p>3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.</p> <p>If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.</p>
<p>4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?</p>
<p>N/A</p>

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also** be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**