

Project Title: Mobilizing Stakeholder Support for the Conservation of Endangered Stingrays at Cape Three Point, Ghana

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Background

This report is a summary of activities that have been commenced as part of our MBZ funded project in Cape Three Point and surrounding communities in the Western Region of Ghana. The project seeks to bring together all stakeholders to develop a solid recovery plan for especially two endangered stingrays; Daisy Stingray (*Fontitrygon margarita*) and Pearl's Stingray (*Fontitrygon margaritella*). *Fontitrygon margarita* is classified as Endangered by IUCN on the basis of a significant decline that is likely to continue as a result of persistent intensive and unregulated fishing pressure. Also, *Fontitrygon margaritella* which is sympatric with *F. margarita* is listed as Data Deficient due to the uncertainty of the catch levels and utilization of this species as well as lack of knowledge of its biology. Apart from overharvesting, these species are faced with threats of pollution from oil exploration and obnoxious fishing practices which compromise habitat quality across the species range.

Specifically, the project will fulfill the following objectives:

- I. Estimate population size and current conservation status of *Fontitrygon margarita* and *F. margaritella* by comparing historical population data with landing site information;
- II. Enhance the capacity of local people to conduct independent systematic surveys to monitor and document population of *F. margarita* and *F. margaritella* at fisheries landing sites;
- III. Educate and distribute educational materials (1,000 flyers, 100 posters and 100 t-shirts) to local people about the plight of elasmobranchs;
- IV. Institute strict traditional conservation governance protocols to reduce the impacts of fisheries practices on population and habitat quality of *F. margarita* and *F. margaritella*

To achieve the above mentioned objectives, we have started the following planned activities, working with local people in two stingray harvesting strongholds (Cape Three Point and Akwidaa) in the last six months:

A. Community Consultative Meetings

In the month of February 2021, the project team organized meetings with various stakeholders (*incl.* Traders Association and the Ahanta West Traditional Council, Fisheries Commission of Ghana, Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council and National Fish Processors) to launch the project in Akwidaa and Cape Three Point communities. During these meetings the stakeholders shared their concerns and recommendations for the project, which were used to shape the planning of successive project activities.



Figure 1: Participants of consultative meetings in Akwidaa and Cape Three Point

B. Training of Volunteers

We collaborated with experts from the Fisheries Commission to train ten (10) local people on how to collect biological data on stingrays (*incl.* species identification, sexual dimorphism among stingrays, weight and length measurements etc). Three (3) of the trainees were recruited as project team members to conduct routine monitoring and data collection at landing sites and fish markets in their communities. We provided volunteers with materials to collect data including measuring board, weighing scales, notebooks, pens and pencils and digital camera.



Figure 2: A training session with volunteers on recording stingray biometric data

C. Focus Group Meetings, Questionnaire and Landing Sites Surveys

We organized focus group meetings with fishermen, fish processors and vendors. We gathered historical data on stingray exploitation in their communities; and the characteristics of the fishery prevailing in project communities based on fishing effort, fishing methods and gear selectivity.

In addition to focus group meetings, we have started administering questionnaires in households to understand the extent of utilization of stingrays particularly *Fontitrygon margarita* and *F. margaritella*. We have also initiated a six-month monitoring of fish landing sites and markets to assess the quantities of *Fontitrygon margarita* and *F. margaritella* harvested to be able to estimate their population size.



Figure 3: Project leader coordinating a focus group meeting with key stakeholders at Akwidaa community centre

D. Awareness Creation

We have started awareness campaigns in Akwidaa and Cape Three Points using community information centers. We educate the fishing communities about the plight of elasmobranchs, harmful effects of poisonous chemicals on the marine ecosystem and human health, and actions to protect stingrays. That is once in every week, we educate local people early in the morning from 5:00am-6:00am and the evenings from 5:00pm-6:00pm when almost all community folks are home. During radio broadcasts, we open sessions where local people call on phone or directly come to information centers to ask questions for answers.



Figure 4: Team member educating local people at community information centre

Next Steps

Looking ahead in the next six months, the following activities are considered to be the most important next steps:

- I. Sustaining surveys in landing sites and fish markets.
- II. Sustaining educational campaigns to ensure the full adoption of sustainable fisheries practices.
- III. Organize stakeholder workshops to draft and ensure the full implementation of Stingrays Conservation Action Plan
- IV. Analyze project findings and develop technical reports to update IUCN and relevant stakeholders about the current conservation status of *Fontitrygon margarita* and *F. margaritella*.
- V. Share project findings with Oil companies operating in Cape Three Point to inform conservation regulations for stingrays and the marine ecosystem