



Resilience in the MAR after COVID-19

Author: Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund)

Introduction

The coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic has brought several challenges to the MAR region, not only because of the lack of medical capacity but also for the economy and the livelihoods of its inhabitants.

A big source of income for the region is tourism, many protected areas depend on the fees that tourists pay to enjoy their natural beauty. In April 2020, the Inter-American Development Bank, estimated that the crisis caused by this pandemic, could generate a loss of up to 17 million formal jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean (Altamirano, Azuara, & González, 2020).

Other sectors such as the fishing industry have also been affected even before the virus arrived to their region, as international buyers stopped consuming their products since early this year. There has been a disruption of the domestic and international supply chains in order to contain the spread of COVID-19. Protecting the stages on the supply chain is fundamental to avoid global and local crises, and protect fish-dependent economies (FAO, 2020b).

Marine and coastal conservation has been impacted in many different ways as social distancing measures have restricted activities such as the operation of surveillance and monitoring programs.

The term resilience can be applied to different situations. In physics to refer to the capacity of a body to return to its original shape when the force changing it has stopped. In the conservation world, it is the environment's ability to adapt and respond to threats and changes. In human psychology it is the universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity. The definition that Resilience+Framework suggests combines perfectly all of these definitions and describes not only what resilience is in COVID-19 times, but also what socio-ecological resilience is: *an ability to anticipate and adapt swiftly and purposefully to shocks or impacts in such a way as to not only survive, but also thrive in an uncertain environment* (Vasquez-Yetter, & Lyons, 2020).

All over the world, international and local organizations are implementing studies, emergency relief programs and sharing information to keep the population informed.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), has dedicated COVID-19 pages on the FAO website. Their first objective is to ensure food security and nutrition for all. They included in their website targeted analysis and solutions across food value chains, sectoral and cross-sectoral policy briefs, advice on planting and harvesting plans.

Regarding to fisheries and aquaculture, they published a summary of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as an addendum to their State of the World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020 report. They established a dedicated COVID-19 Task Force to coordinate their initiatives and to provide coordinated support to measures and interventions addressing the impact of the pandemic on the fisheries and aquaculture. FAO has several documents on their website with information on different initiatives done around the world, FAQs about coronavirus, food export restrictions, among others.

Comunidad y Biodiversidad, A. C. launched a three stage consultation process with fishers from eight states in Mexico to learn about the impacts of the pandemic, the role of the state, distribution of support, the effects on health, local solutions applied by fishers, gender equality, the use of technology, and impact in the environment. Some of the results show that the fisheries in Mexico were affected by COVID-19 since January, as international markets closed and most of their products were exported.

Fundaeco in Guatemala, with support from the United Nations Refugee Agency, is funding a program in

collaboration with the children's advocacy group El Refugio de la Niñez, where they are hiring refugees as park rangers. The Green Jobs initiative was launched in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis and represents also a source of income for refugees that came into Guatemala looking for asylum.

Fundación Mundo Azul in Guatemala has been supporting the communities they work with by raising funds to donate food and face masks to families in vulnerable situation. They have also trained women on how to make face masks so they can sell them and have an extra income. And to secure food access in the future, they are promoting the establishment of family gardens by providing digital training and a startup kit to 100 families.

The Future of Fish team is working with different Latin American countries to promote local consumption of fish, and in Belize, they are working with local fishing cooperatives to assess market options and to prepare their processing plants to be COVID-compliant (Future of Fish, 2020).

What is MAR Fund doing?

MAR Fund reached out to all its grantees to get a better sense of how were or foresaw being impacted and how MAR Fund might be of greatest assistance.

Despite funding limitations and other needs, grantees are not stopping their activities. Most of them asked for a time extension, pushing back start dates or modifying the budget to cover salaries or support the communities they work with.

It has been a learning process for everybody, and it has brought up the need to strengthen the resilience of communities and coastal and marine protected areas. In order to start planning how to be prepared for future emergencies, MAR Fund launched a mailbox on its website to ask partners, strategic allies, and the general public, to participate in brainstorming ideas that could suggest measures that can be considered to strengthen resilience for future events. Most of the ideas that have been shared

have to do with strengthening food security, and finding alternative livelihoods.

Some of the ideas that have been shared in the mailbox are:

- Community resilience projects focused on strengthening food security (family gardens).
- Projects to secure access to potable water.
- Sewing workshops for women as an economic alternative.
- Train fishers on the use of technology so that they can train remotely, and also so that children and young people can continue their education in the event of any another pandemic.
- Productive projects and community tourism.
- Ecosystem restoration implemented by the local communities. Guided by experts and community members.
- Projects to promote citizen science and traditional knowledge.

- Creation of community contingency plans to respond to natural disasters.
- Capacity building in communities on first aid and survival techniques.
- Organize community vigilance.
- Create saving programmes, financial education and strengthening of community micro-enterprises.
- Implement projects to reactivate the water treatment plants in the main watersheds in the MAR..

Some other measures suggested by other organizations to promote strengthening the resilience of communities are:

- Incentivize the domestic market and integrate seafood into the food basket. Organize campaigns for local consumption (COBI, 2020b).
- Expanding governments' purchase of seafood for institutional use (prisons, hospitals, school feeding programmes, etc.) as well as for distribution as food assistance (FAO, 2020a).
- Support the processing of fishery and aquaculture products to increase storage time and facilitate transport to vulnerable communities (Future of Fish, 2020).
- Exploring the possibility of freezing fish productions with fish processing, refrigerating and distribution companies (FAO, 2020b).
- Work on the identification, documentation, analysis and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned (FAO, 2020c).
- Assist small-scale aquaculture farmers to substitute commercial feed with locally manufactured feed (Future of Fish, 2020).
- Create community committees to distribute government support to ensure equity in the distribution (COBI, 2020c).
- Use technology to open new markets (FAO, 2020a).
- Ensure sustainability of programs to be able to continue at basic level during difficult times (COBI, 2020a).
- Work on building adaptive capacity (COBI, 2020a) of communities for example, leadership training, innovation, and problem solving.
- Promote saving clubs within community groups. The club has an established structure; funds are collected during weekly meetings. The fund includes a social fund to support the community (Polo, 2020).
- Community-powered permaculture projects to secure local food sources (Chane, 2018).

This pandemic has brought up the inadequacy of global response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies (United Nations 2020). It has changed how things work in just a few months, and it is challenging us to come out of our comfort zones, to explore new ways of doing things and investing resources, to change some of the priorities for investments and the way to look for alliances and synergies to build a more equal and inclusive society.

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