Highlights

from the Evaluation of FAO's Global Programme in support of the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing


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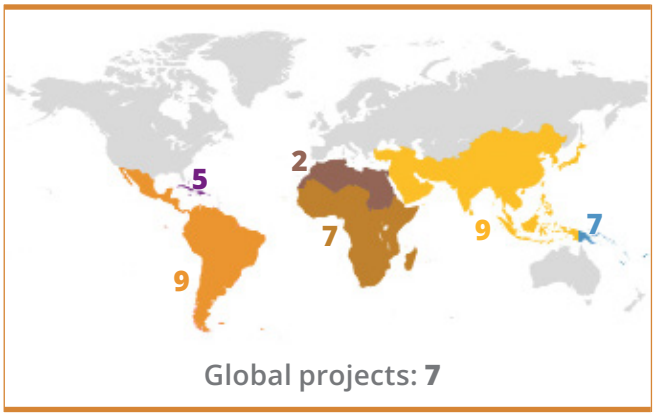
The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) entered into force in June 2016 and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched the PSMA Global Programme in July 2017 (PGM/MUL/2016-2021/PSMA), hereafter referred to as the programme. The programme supports the implementation of the PSMA and complementary instruments, mechanisms and tools to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and provides an umbrella framework for FAO and its development partners to articulate and mobilize coordinated actions.

The programme has three main pillars: i) statutory programme of the PSMA, ii) development of complementary international instruments and tools to combat IUU fishing, iii) capacity development support to countries (awareness raising, technical assistance and training). The programme is in line with the terms of reference for the funding mechanisms of the PSMA, available under Part 6 of the Agreement and constitutes an essential element of the Part 6 Fund.

The programme is led by the Fisheries Global and Regional Processes Team of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division. Between July 2017 and April 2024, the PSMA Global Programme implemented 22 projects across over 50 countries (Figure 1) with funding amounting to almost USD 28 million from the European Union, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Republic of Korea and the United States of America (see Figure 2).

The main objective of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the PSMA Global Programme has achieved its intended results and to consider aspects of the design and implementation that are relevant to decisions about sustaining and/or scaling up the programme. The evaluation took place between October 2024 and March 2025 and relied on various methods, including portfolio analysis, document review, semi-structured interviews with 79 stakeholders and site visits in Ecuador, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia and Panama to collect data from multiple sources and enable triangulation.

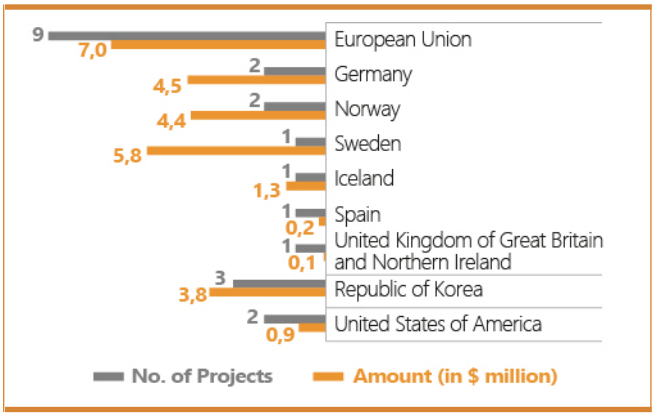
Figure 1 Number of projects supporting various regions



Source: Compiled from PSMA project database and project reports.

Latin America: 9
Caribbean: 5
Near East and North Africa: 2
Sub-Saharan Africa: 7
Asia: 9
Pacific: 7
Global: 7

Figure 2 Number of PSMA projects and financial support, by donor



Source: Based on PSMA project database and project reports.

Results of the PSMA Global Programme

Completed in 50 countries, the gap assessment and the development of the National Strategy and Action Plan are foundational elements of the programme's approach and are carried out before any technical support or training is provided to a country. The programme adopts a participatory approach, engaging stakeholders from various national agencies. This consultative process has enhanced awareness of the importance of implementing the PSMA and supported the development of actions specifically tailored to the countries' needs.

50 countries
gap assessment and National Strategy and Action Plan completed

The programme conducted legal reviews in 30 countries and subsequently provided technical assistance to draft and update legal and regulatory frameworks in 15 of them. This tailored legal technical assistance contributed to strengthening national capacities and creating an enabling environment for PSMA implementation. In some cases, countries were able to revise their legislation or regulations independently, based on the recommendations of the legal reviews, without requiring further support from FAO.

30 countries
legal reviews

15 countries
technical assistance to draft and update legal and regulatory frameworks

Through the programme, FAO trained more than 830 participants from 36 countries on international fisheries law, PSMA inspection and advanced MCS through 12 international and 25 country-specific in-country training courses. In-country training has had tangible results—for example, Panama and Ecuador have strengthened their respective Fisheries Monitoring Centres and enhanced their capacity to analyse vessel movements. Additional training opportunities were launched in September 2024.

> 800 trainees
from
36 countries

The programme's country-specific technical assistance and training provided many countries with the tools and capacities to conduct monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) operations in line with provisions of the PSMA and related international instruments. This also included supporting 17 countries in establishing an inter-agency mechanism for MCS operations. In many cases, such mechanisms did not exist; and where they did, fisheries agencies were often not involved.

The development of PSMA-related international instruments and information exchange systems/platforms contribute to an enabling environment for enhanced implementation of the PSMA provisions. This includes the Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of the Fishing Gear and the Voluntary Guidelines on Transshipment, the Global Information Exchange System, and the Global Record of Fishing Vessels Information Systems. Sixty-nine countries participate in the operational version of the Global Record, reaching 50 percent of the global eligible fleet, and several Parties to the PSMA have begun populating the Global Information Exchange System with data.

The programme has fostered the participation and involvement of coastal developing countries and Small Island Developing States in global/regional meetings and working groups, facilitating exchange within groups and decision-making, including the development of the Bali Strategy in the 2023 Meeting of Parties.

The programme has leveraged funding from Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) projects, resulting in a total of 19 initiatives valued at over USD 4.6 million, most of which have been implemented in Small Island Developing States. Most synergies between the programme and other fisheries projects are associated with TCPs, which have been a key seed investment and entry point in many countries, leading to continuation of work with other projects in several cases.

19 TCP projects
valued at over
USD 4.6 million

Design and implementation: Considerations for sustaining and scaling up the PSMA Global Programme

The programme's structured yet flexible, phased approach provided capacity development support in a way that adapted to the needs of the countries. The programme supported coastal developing countries and Small Island Developing States (both Parties and non-Parties to the PSMA) in strengthening their capacity to implement the provisions of the Agreement, as well as related international instruments, guidelines, regional mechanisms, and tools to combat IUU fishing. In addition, the programme supported the statutory meetings of the PSMA and complementary instruments, including by enabling the participation of experts from eligible countries.

FAO leveraged its strong umbrella inter-agency collaborations/mechanisms with the International Maritime Organization and International Labour Organization at the global level and Memorandums of Understanding with the Pew Charitable Trust, the World Maritime University and the International Maritime Law Institute. Other partnerships with international entities, academia, NGOs and other entities are designed for specific assignments, such as the development and delivery of courses, or the organization of workshops at the global or regional level. Engagement with Regional Fisheries Management Organizations is mostly related to direct involvement in technical regional coordination meetings and cooperation on the use of the PSMA Global Information Exchange System, rather than on capacity development activities.

The programme accomplished an impressive array of activities across dozens of countries, although some projects took longer to complete than originally anticipated. Programme activities often happened simultaneously and were managed by the small team within FAO's PSMA Secretariat. The team is responsible for managing a high number of projects at once (up to 15 at times), which has contributed to challenges in implementation, including delays. Other factors affecting timelines include the need for government endorsement, initial start-up delays, political changes, and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme has a basic system in place to track project implementation, but it lacks a programme-level monitoring system for results-based management and reporting. This gap is explained by the fact that the PSMA has developed progressively over time, and until now has focused on delivering assistance rather than operational supports such as results monitoring. This may have hindered the programme from maximizing learning and adaptive management based on its own successes and shortcomings.

By design, the programme incorporates key elements essential for sustainability, but nonetheless continuity of activities at the country level will vary among countries. The programme focuses on individual capacity building, strengthening institutional structures and frameworks, and improving the enabling environment through updated policy, legislation, and regulations. At the same time, political will, national budget allocations, availability of human resources, and access to infrastructure and equipment are outside the control of the programme and will influence the extent to which activities are continued. Another factor affecting continuity is the availability of donor funding. Furthermore, the interoperability and regular technological updates of the information exchange platforms will be critical to ensuring their continued use by countries. Market access mechanisms that are linked to commercial interests, such as the European Union carding systems, are expected to be key drivers for sustaining the activities and outputs initiated.

The sustainability of the PSMA Secretariat depends on future funding. Except for two FAO staff funded by the regular budget of FAO, all other personnel and activities of the programme and convening of meetings (including Meeting of the Parties of PSMA) depend on donor funding. All the support through the programme will end without donor funding.

Considerations for the future

The programme responds to a pressing need to support coastal developing countries and Small Island Developing States in strengthening capacities and institutions, including national information systems, to be able to implement the PSMA. In addition, new Parties may require more comprehensive support including gap assessments, development of National Strategy and Action Plans, technical assistance, and training on legal aspects and MCS operations.

Moving forward, the PSMA Secretariat and FAO should:

- Enhance the programme's synergies, collaborations and partnerships at the global, regional, and country levels and further foster coherence with other FAO initiatives.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track and capture results at the programme level, including progress against indicators outlined in the programme's logical framework, acknowledging that these indicators may require revision as the PSMA evolves.
- Ensure the programme's continuity and sustainability by diversifying and securing funding sources, and by maintaining an adequately staffed and resourced PSMA Secretariat.

Team composition

This evaluation was managed and quality assured by the FAO Office of Evaluation and conducted with the support of external experts. Nanae Yabuki, evaluation officer, was responsible for managing the evaluation, with the support of Emiel Buffel, evaluation analyst. The evaluation was supervised by Luisa Belli, evaluation officer, and its quality was assured by Clair Null, senior evaluation officer. The FAO Office of Evaluation team worked closely with Hubert Paulmer, senior evaluation consultant, and Viv Fernandes, technical expert on illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries.

Queries

To request additional information about the evaluation, please contact Luisa Belli at luisa.belli@fao.org.

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