RAPID ASSESSMENT OF SEA TURTLE AND MARINE MAMMAL BYCATCH IN ARTISANAL FISHERIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Sea turtle and marine mammal populations worldwide are at risk to incidental mortality in marine fisheries. Management to reduce bycatch is impeded by lack of information on the spatial-temporal distribution of fishing effort, and of how many individuals from different taxa are captured in fishing fleets. Data limitation is particularly problematic for artisanal fisheries in developing countries, where even basic data for the number of fishers, types of gear used, and species impacted are unavailable. However, local knowledge can be an important source of information in such cases and has been increasingly used in resource management and assessment. Project GloBAL (Global Bycatch Assessment of Long-lived species) has developed "rapid bycatch assessment" (RBA) protocols to gather information about fishing effort and bycatch of non-target taxa in data-limited artisanal fisheries. The RBA combines boat-counts in fishing ports or villages, and questionnaires with fishermen, to obtain baseline fishing-effort and bycatch data in these fisheries. The RBA is being tested in ~10 countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. We describe the protocol, challenges and lessons we've learned to improve it, and we present results for RBAs that have been completed thus far. Our goal is to provide a template that can be readily applied to data-limited fisheries, generating much needed estimates that assist country managers to reduce bycatch while enabling sustainable fisheries.

Order: 100 **Abstract ID:** 2681 **Type:** Speed Session **Subject:** Conservation Speed Session