

Mozambique Fisheries Exports: Standards Compliance and the Role of the Regional Standards Programme



Compliance with EU standards for food safety

The fisheries export sector is the mainstay of the Mozambican economy. The industry supports more than 70,000 people and without the valuable foreign exchange it earns, the country would be hard pressed to pay for its imports.

The high quality of Mozambique's fish and seafood –especially its prawns – is internationally recognised, particularly by consumers in the IEU. This market absorbs more than 80% of all Mozambique fish exports and in 2006 an estimated 8,000 tons of Mozambican fish and seafood was sold in Europe. As a least developed country, Mozambique enjoys duty-free access to the EU under the Cotonou Agreement. While trade preferences such as these enhance the overall competitiveness of Mozambique in the EU market, it does not guarantee market access.

This point was driven home in 2005 when an inspection team from the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) of the European Commission visited Mozambique to evaluate the extent to which the country's fishing sector was able to comply with EU standards for food safety. At the conclusion of their visit, the inspection team expressed serious doubts about Mozambique's food safety system and indicated that unless a number of key issues were addressed, they would have no choice but to ban Mozambique fish and seafood from entering the EU. In response to the FVO mission, the Mozambican Fisheries Inspection Institute (INIP) drafted an action plan and the DFID-funded Regional Standards Programme at ComMark provided grant funding to implement this plan. As a result of RSP support, the INIP was able to install a national data management system to better track export certificates, upgrade its laboratories and train the industry on food safety principles, as well as increase the number of fishing ports it was able to service.

In November 2007, the EU returned to Mozambique to gauge the progress the country has made since its last inspection. This mission noted that significant improvements had been made, with more than 90% of the concerns raised during their previous visit having been dealt with.

However, for developing countries, standards compliance is an ongoing challenge as requirements change and escalate. And while Mozambique has retained its right to export to the EU, the next stage in the battle has already begun. INIP's attention must now focus on working with the fishing industry, and in particular the semi-industrial sector, to help them manage food safety better at a firm level. This component has been factored into the Mozambique RSP grant and hopefully the lessons learnt thus far will find resonance in other countries, such as Madagascar, which are also supported by the RSP.