Value Rescue Model

SmartFish’s Value Rescue Model (VRM) is an innovative and collaborative process that works across the seafood value chain to link small-scale fisher cooperatives that adopt or maintain sustainable fishing practices to better-paying markets. By improving quality, processing locally and differentiating their products, fisher groups can gain access to buyers that value sustainability and offer better purchase conditions.

With support from UNDP OIC, SmartFish is piloting, scaling, and replicating the VRM. This ocean innovation will expand to 15 cooperatives, train 300 fishers and value chain workers, implement digital traceability systems, construct or repurpose four processing plants, design and install solar-powered cold chain facilities, raise cooperative revenues by 20%, and build capacities for women to support the cooperatives’ administrative needs and participate in post-harvest activities in more formal settings that comply with food safety standards.

SmartFish aims to change how seafood from small-scale fisheries is produced, processed and sold in Mexico by promoting sustainable fishing practices and transparency in the value chain and enhancing the capacity of small-scale fisher cooperatives.

Innovative and transformational

SmartFish’s Value Rescue Approach is a beacon of hope for small-scale fishers, providing a sustainable financing solution that connects business innovation, seafood market understanding, and environmental and social improvements. The VRM creates new opportunities that leverage fisheries improvements with market intelligence and acts as a “good” intermediary to a higher-paying market that demands sustainability. This innovation is also bringing technological innovations to cooperatives, including Plenumsoft’s NADIR digital traceability system, Iluméxico’s solar power system applied to seafood processing facilities, and the installation of freezing and vacuum-packing capacities in the communities where seafood is caught. SmartFish is proving that financial profitability and growth can be achieved while caring for people and the environment. SmartFish’s Value Rescue Approach can be adopted and adapted in other SIDS and LDCs.

Key achievements so far

⇒ Published the Guidelines for Implementing Value Rescue in Small-Scale Fisheries Manual in English.
⇒ Fifteen (15) cooperatives have tripled the amount of harvested sustainably produced seafood destined for preferential markets since the project started, from 20,000 kilos to 60,000 kilos. Fishers’ earnings increased by 7% to 56%, depending on the species.
⇒ The cooperatives have increased the value of their harvests by processing them locally, guaranteeing quality, safety, and digital traceability through SmartFish’s software partner, Plenumsoft Marina. SmartFish installed Iluméxico’s solar technology into their processing facilities to mitigate the effects of power outages and decrease their reliance on the traditional power grid.
⇒ SmartFish is working with Bitácora Social, a group of anthropologists, to identify opportunities to understand local norms better and foster more equitable inclusion and visibility of women in the value chain.
⇒ Registered four new Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIP) on FisheryProgress.org, demonstrating compliance with the widely recognized certification standards of the Marine Stewardship Council.
⇒ SmartFish continuously works with partners to replicate the VRM in up to 50 cooperatives.

Sustainability beyond OIC

The VRM services are designed to be entirely self-sustainable and do not require philanthropic support. SmartFish’s business advisors assist the cooperatives in comprehending and documenting their production costs so that they can accurately determine the actual cost of implementing best practices and pass these costs on to the buyer. Throughout the collaboration’s appropriation phase, the fishers, cooperative leadership team, and plant personnel continue to adopt self-sustaining best practices without external financial assistance. The cooperatives’ access to premium markets and their relationship with the buyer are designed to ensure compliance with environmental sustainability standards, and the seafood product handling and processing traceability system and best practices are used. SmartFish secured philanthropic funding from foundations in the United States and Mexico for three years (2024-2026) to implement the VRM with fisher cooperatives in the Baja California Peninsula and other regions of Mexico.

| OIC financing | $240,000 |
| Realized additional co-financing | $247,363 |
| Anticipated additional co-financing | $3,382,409 |