# Interim Project Report

We ask all grant recipients to send at least one update during your project. These updates help us to evaluate your progress and are a useful project management tool to keep your project on track and inform us of any changes. You are welcome to send additional project updates as and when you like.

Please fill in and submit this template approximately halfway through your project. This is intended to be a snapshot of your activities so far and does not need to be detailed. Where relevant, any specific details that are included should also be reported in your Final Evaluation Report (i.e. please do not omit key details from the final report just because you have already reported them here).

This Interim Project Report must be sent in **MS Word format (not PDF)** and completed in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email the completed report and accompanying Excel budget to jane@rufford.org.

| **Your Details** | |
|---|---|
| **Full name** | Winnie Atieno Okoth |
| **Project title** | Elasmobranch Stewardship: Community Action for Elasmobranch Conservation (ESCAFE) |
| **Application ID** | 51149-1 |
| **Project start date** | 1st July 2026 |
| **Expected end date or month** | May 2027 |
| **Date of this report** | 2nd November 2026 |

1. **Briefly summarise the activities conducted so far** (c. 500 words or less)

**TEK interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30+ experienced fishers, including older and younger fishers, to document historical changes in shark and ray abundance, species composition, habitats, aggregation areas, seasonality, fishing practices, threats and local perceptions. The interviews are complete.

**Participatory GIS mapping:** Fishers identified historical and current fishing and elasmobranch-use areas, including Banko, Fungu wa Yuu, Boiling and Mambrui Ledge, as well as areas associated with shark/ray occurrence. These locations have been digitised to support comparison of historical and current distributions and inform local management.

**Community barazas:** All the four planned community *Barazas* have been conducted. The session used participatory discussion and Business-as-Usual versus Conservation scenarios to explore how continued pressure on sharks and rays could affect fisheries and livelihoods.

**Conservation communication:** Co-design of two permanent landing-site infographics is underway. The materials use locally relevant visuals to improve shark and ray identification, communicate conservation status and explain threats and stewardship actions.

**BMU gear registry:** Preparatory work for establishing a BMU gear registry has commenced, including discussions with fishers and BMU leadership on documenting surrendered illegal/destructive gears and publicly decommissioning them.

**Key achievements and emerging findings**

TEK from experienced fishers provides evidence of a long-term perceived decline in shark abundance and size, with participants describing sharks as formerly more common and now increasingly rare. One participant recalled catches of approximately 50 sharks when fishing with his father, while another reported catching approximately 40 kg of sharks using *mshipi* in 2017.

Several species were reported to have declined or become locally uncommon. Zambarani and Jehera/tiger shark were described as formerly common but now rarely seen, while hammerheads were described as rare and seasonal. Smaller sharks, including blacktip sharks, were reported among contemporary catches. This may warrant further investigation into recruitment, habitat use and potential

spillover from the adjacent Malindi Marine National Park and Reserve, but the available project data do not yet allow us to establish the cause."

In contrast, participants perceived rays as still relatively abundant, with *Kipungu/Mzee Pungu* (reported locally as manta ray) specifically described as abundant. This difference between perceived shark and ray trends is an important finding that will guide subsequent species-specific conservation messaging and investigation.

Fishers identified Banko, Fungu wa Yuu, Boiling and Mambrui Ledge as important fishing/aggregation areas. They also identified increased fishing pressure, technological changes in fishing gears, trawler activity and disturbance around reefs as perceived drivers of change.

The interviews also documented important knowledge regarding shark use and stewardship. Sharks are consumed and preserved, while fins and other parts may be sold or used locally. Importantly, fishers described circumstances in which sharks are released, particularly large *Mashilingi/whale sharks*, and suggested incentives, tagging and improved engagement with KeFS as mechanisms that could strengthen stewardship. The project has also begun to identify misconceptions and knowledge gaps, including perceptions that some sharks are inherently dangerous.

The participation of both experienced and younger fishers has also created an opportunity to examine intergenerational differences in ecological knowledge and perceptions, while ensuring that project engagement remains inclusive.

2. **Describe any challenges you have faced** (c. 250 words or less)

**TEK interviews:** Recall bias was evident when asking fishers to recall catches and species abundance over several decades. This has been addressed by interviewing fishers with different levels of fishing experience and comparing responses across participants. Limited resources also constrained the number and duration of interviews despite strong interest from fishers. High community interest resulted in a larger fisher turnout than budget and time resources initially accommodated.

**Participatory GIS:** Some fishers had limited experience with maps and spatial referencing. Absence of an ongoing self-monitoring protocol made it difficult for fishers to submit real-time spatial data and photographs during routine fishing

trips. The mapping therefore focused on retrospective community knowledge, with opportunities for more systematic spatial monitoring being explored.

**Community Barazas:** Interest and turnout have been high, but available resources limit the number and scale of community sessions. The project is therefore prioritising participatory approaches that can be integrated into existing BMU and fisheries meetings.

**Infographic co-design:** Translating scientific information on species identification, conservation status and threats into simple, locally understandable visuals has required iterative consultation with fishers and fisheries stakeholders.

**Gear registry:** Discussions are ongoing regarding the practical process for surrendering, documenting and decommissioning illegal gears while ensuring that replacement gears are appropriate to fishers' target species and livelihoods. Fishers showed hesitation in registering gears without immediate access to subsidised replacement options, necessitating close alignment with the upcoming gear transition phase.

3. **Have there been any changes to the project plan? Are there any objectives or activities that you may struggle to achieve in the remaining project timeframe?**

   There has been no fundamental change to the project's objectives, although implementation of the gear-transition component is being refined based on feedback from participating fishers.

   Rather than assuming that provision of alternative gears will automatically result in sustained behaviour change, the project will use the 20 fishers as a pilot cohort of champion fishers to assess the feasibility, acceptability and practical benefits of sustainable gear use. Fishers have highlighted that food and income needs can influence decisions to retain incidentally caught sharks, even when they recognise their conservation importance. Some sentiments: '*I know there are less sharks compared to earlier today but If I catch shark when incidental or intended, I can't return it to the sea because I lack food on the table. If I am given an incentive to conserve sharks, then I can be a better steward*. " Some therefore suggested that incentives and longer-term livelihood benefits could strengthen voluntary stewardship.

The project will consequently document uptake, fisher satisfaction, gear performance and barriers to continued use. If uptake of replacement gears is low, the project will not treat this as a failure but will document the reasons and use the findings to adapt future gear-transition interventions through the BMUs and County fisheries structures.

Fishers also proposed tagging and catch documentation as potential longer-term mechanisms for monitoring shark populations and strengthening incentives for release. These suggestions will be documented as recommendations rather than added as activities that cannot realistically be completed within the current budget and timeframe.

The short project duration means that population-level recovery of sharks and rays cannot reasonably be demonstrated within this grant period. Instead, the project will measure immediate conservation outcomes such as improved knowledge, documented TEK, identification of priority habitats, changes in attitudes, gear-transition uptake and strengthened community stewardship structures.

4. **What are the key activities planned for the coming months?** (c. 250 words or less)

**Complete and install two permanent co-designed infographics** at selected landing sites, focusing on shark and ray identification, conservation importance, threats and practical stewardship actions.

**Train 20 selected fishers as peer educators/champion fishers** on sustainable fishing practices, responsible gear use, bycatch reduction and safe handling/release of sharks and rays.

**Distribute "Know Your Sharks" gear guides** to trained fishers to strengthen species identification and conservation literacy during fishing activities.

**Pilot voluntary gear transition** with the 20 champion fishers through provision of appropriate sustainable gears and documentation of gear uptake, performance, fisher perceptions and barriers to continued use.

**Establish and operationalise the BMU gear registry**, documenting surrendered gears and their decommissioning in collaboration with BMU leadership and fisheries authorities.

**Produce and disseminate the "Save Our Sharks" (SOS) podcast/video**, combining scientific evidence with fisher TEK to communicate changes in shark and ray populations, threats, local knowledge and conservation actions to a wider audience.

**Share project findings through existing JCMA co-management structures**, including BMUs, County Fisheries and KeFS, to support uptake of relevant lessons beyond the project sites.

5. **Have you been in regular contact with your supervisor/mentor? Please provide details.**

   **Yes.** Regular communication has been maintained with the supervisor/mentor through project updates and discussions on implementation progress, emerging findings, methodological considerations and adjustments to activities based on community feedback.

6. **Have you shared any project activities on social media? If so, please include details.**

   **Yes.** Project activities and conservation messages have been shared through the organisation's social media platforms to increase awareness of shark and ray conservation and highlight community participation in the project.

7. **Please use the Excel template provided to complete your interim budget and return this via email along with the Interim Project Report.**

   Note that any large budget changes or reallocation of funds (10% or more of the grant amount) should be communicated to Rufford via email as soon as possible.