

BUILDING IT BOTTOM-UP

Collaborative Management Association formation guide and lessons from Liberia



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The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) are working in partnership on the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project to reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and improve the sustainability of Liberia's fisheries.

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Acronyms

CMA	Collaborative Management Association
EJF	Environmental Justice Foundation
IUU	Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (fishing)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NaFAA	National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority
TURF	Territorial Use Right for Fisheries
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association



Executive summary

Collaborative management (or co-management) for fisheries may be defined as a “relationship between a resource-user group and another organisation or entity (usually a government agency) for fisheries management, in which some degree of responsibility and authority is conferred to both parties.”¹

This approach was adopted in Liberia in 2012 to collaboratively manage the country’s small-scale fisheries, which are threatened by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices, overfishing, and changing climatic conditions. This sector supports the livelihoods of over 75,000 individuals, including fishermen, fish processors, fishmongers, fish traders, boat builders, traditional leaders, transport operators, and marketers.

There are currently eight active Collaborative Management Associations (CMAs) in Liberia. The Grand Cape Mount County Region I, II, & III CMAs, the Montserrado and Bomi CMA, the Margibi County CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA and the Grand Kru County Grand Cess & Sass Town CMAs. The Margibi, Grand Bassa, Grand Kru and Grand Cape Mount County Regions I, II & III CMAs were established by the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project.

The project, which started in December 2019 and concluded in July 2025, was implemented by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) in partnership with the Liberia National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA). The project aimed to reduce illegal fishing and enhance the sustainability of fisheries by expanding and strengthening community CMAs across four coastal counties in Liberia: Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and Grand Kru.

The project began its activities through community engagement and research, examining Liberia’s CMA experience to date to guide the expansion of CMAs in Liberia. Following the establishment of the CMAs, the project supported NaFAA in developing Liberia’s first National CMA Policy and Strategy document² and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with all CMAs to provide an enabling and robust policy framework to strengthen the operations of CMAs in Liberia.

This guide presents the experiences and lessons learned by EJF in the process of establishing CMAs in Liberia. It summarises and details CMA formation activities, including widespread community awareness, sensitisation, and engagement, a formal request to NaFAA to establish a CMA, NaFAA’s approval and support for the CMA formation process, capacity building for conducting leadership elections, and the induction of elected officials into office. Furthermore, the guide highlights both the achievements and challenges associated with establishing CMAs in Liberia. It recommends practical steps and activities that can be adopted to successfully implement CMAs in Liberia, and provides context for establishing co-management structures in other countries.

1. Introduction

Collaborative management, or co-management, is an internationally recognised concept that fosters collaboration between government agencies, fishing communities, and other stakeholders in the sustainable management of fisheries resources. Co-management for fisheries may be defined as a “relationship between a resource-user group and another organisation or entity (usually a government agency) for fisheries management, in which some degree of responsibility and authority is conferred to both parties.”³ This management approach shifts resource management from centralised to decentralised and participatory methods, incorporating multi-level institutions and empowering communities to take an active role in fishery management.

In Liberia, this approach, referred to as Collaborative Management Association (CMA), has been adopted to collaboratively manage the country’s small-scale fisheries (SSF), which are threatened by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices, overfishing, and global heating. The SSF sector involves exploitation by motorised Fanti canoes, as well as motorised and non-motorised Kru canoes operating from the nine coastal counties: Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado, River Cess, Bomi and Sinoe. On average, the SSF sector accounts for between 90% and 95% of the total annual landed catch and employs 15,000 fishermen, as well as 25,000 fishmongers.⁴

There are 4,270 canoes operating within 114 fishing-dependent communities along the coast, where the primary income-generating activities revolve around fishing and its associated activities.⁵ This sector supports the livelihoods of over 75,000 individuals, including fishermen, fish processors, fishmongers, fish traders, boat builders, traditional leaders, transport operators, and marketers.⁶

The first CMA in Liberia was established in 2012 in Grand Cape Mount County under the World Bank-funded West African Regional Fisheries Program in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture’s Bureau of National Fisheries, now known as the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA), and the fishing communities.⁷ NaFAA set up a second CMA in 2019 to cover two counties, Bomi and Montserrado. According to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)⁸ signed between the Grand Cape Mount County CMA and the central government, the formal roles of the CMA included representing members in local fisheries management decision-making, leading community-based enforcement and self-regulation, conducting community-based monitoring and evaluation, and participating in research, data gathering, and analysis.

There are currently eight active CMAs in Liberia: the Grand Cape Mount County Region I, II, & III CMAs, the Montserrado and Bomi CMA, the Margibi County CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA and the Grand Kru County Grand Cess & Sass Town CMAs.

Fishers mending nets in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County.



The European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project established the Margibi County CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA, and the Grand Kru County CMA in 2022, and the Grand Cape Mount County CMA Regions I, II, and III in 2023.

CMAs in Liberia are also responsible for managing the Territorial Use Rights for Fisheries (TURFs) established by the central government. The Grand Cape Mount County CMA manages the TURF declared by the Government of Liberia in 2013 under the Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategies of Liberia.⁹ The TURF extends from the Lofa River, at the boundary between Grand Cape Mount and Bomi counties in the south, to the Mano River, at the boundary between Sierra Leone and Liberia in the north, and covers approximately 80 nautical miles.

The established CMAs have a management structure that includes a General Assembly, a Board of Directors, an Executive Committee and working sub-committees. The members of the Board of Directors are appointed by NaFAA and the CMA Executive Committee. Members of the working sub-committees are appointed by the CMA Executive Committee, while the Executive Committee is elected by the members of the CMA. The CMAs are legitimate organisations that are supported by Section 3.2 of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Management and Development Law of 2019 (the 2019 law)¹⁰ and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategies of Liberia.¹¹ The purpose of the CMA includes exercising rights and responsibilities within a designated area relating to information and decision-making for fisheries conservation, management and sustainable

use. All existing CMAs have legal constitutions and an MoU with the central government through NaFAA. The CMA constitution governs the functions of the CMA, and the MoU dictates the relationship and interaction between the CMAs and NaFAA.

The Communities for Fisheries Project was a European Union-funded project which started in December 2019 and concluded in July 2025. It was implemented by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) in partnership with NaFAA. The project aimed to reduce illegal fishing and enhance the sustainability of fisheries by expanding and strengthening community CMAs across four coastal counties in Liberia: Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and Grand Kru. It created strong and transparent local governance structures for community monitoring and reporting of illegal fishing through the establishment of CMAs, and built the capacity of small-scale fishers to actively engage in decision-making processes. This guide presents the experiences and lessons learned by EJF in the process of establishing CMAs in coastal communities in Liberia. It summarises and details CMA formation activities, including widespread community awareness, sensitisation, and engagement, a formal request to NaFAA to establish a CMA, NaFAA's approval and support for the CMA formation process, capacity building for conducting leadership elections, and the induction of elected officials into office. Furthermore, the guide highlights both the achievements and challenges associated with establishing CMAs in Liberia. It recommends practical steps and activities that can be adopted to successfully implement CMAs in Liberia and provides context for establishing co-management structures in other countries.

Fishers pulling in a canoe returning from fishing in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County.





CMA Monitoring, Control and Surveillance unit preparing for patrol in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.

Box 1. Liberia CMA Factbox

- Chapter 3, Section 3.2 of the 2019 law establishing the Liberia National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority provides for the establishment of CMAs in Liberia
- Liberia currently has eight CMAs covering six of the nine coastal counties
- Seven of the CMAs were established under the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project
- The oldest CMA in Liberia is the Grand Cape Mount County CMA, established in 2012
- The CMAs have constitutions and are recognised by NaFAA and all key fisheries stakeholders in Liberia

1.1 Purpose of the CMA formation guide

The purpose of the guide is to provide practical steps and activities that can be adopted to successfully implement CMAs in Liberia and other countries through sharing achievements, challenges and lessons learned by EJJ during the process of facilitating the establishment of CMAs in Liberia.

The specific objectives of this CMA formation guide are to:

- Equip readers with knowledge on the formation of CMAs in Liberia
- Guide parties interested in establishing CMAs on how to proceed with CMA formation in coastal communities.

2. CMA formation process

2.1 Community awareness and engagement

Box 2. Why is community engagement important?^{12,13}

Community engagement is important because it:

- Helps implementing parties to gain the trust of the community
- Deepens the community's understanding of the CMA process
- Incorporates traditional knowledge and values into CMA formation and implementation
- Promotes community participation, ownership and buy-in to the process
- Saves time and money by addressing community concerns from the onset of the process

Co-management is often a new concept for SSF communities. When introducing the concept into any community, extensive engagement and sensitisation with community members is critical. This should aim to ensure that communities understand the concept of co-management and the role of the CMA, and how it will enhance, rather than undermine, their existing local structures. Communities should be informed about the benefits of co-management in sustaining their shared resources and livelihoods. This awareness stage gains consent and encourages the involvement of the communities, nurturing a sense of ownership of the process, which is key to the successful establishment and sustainability of the CMA. During this phase, trust is built between the implementing parties and the community, with communities providing information on the issues affecting them and gaining an understanding of how the CMA may be able to address them. Communities also bring information on traditional knowledge systems and beliefs to the discussions.

Awareness-raising can be carried out through inception meetings, one-to-one engagements, town hall discussions, and baseline feasibility studies with local leaders and fishing communities. Local leaders are the authorities and representatives of the people.

Community meeting with fishers in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County.



2.2 Fishing community resolution to form a CMA

Therefore, they should be prioritised as their basic understanding of the CMA process is necessary to lay the basis for productive discussion with the communities. To achieve this, it is advisable to host separate explanatory meetings with the local heads to build consensus before meeting with the community as a whole. These preliminary meetings will induce interest and create an understanding that facilitates discussions in further group meetings. Community leadership will then become instrumental in bringing the community together to create further awareness.

Informed by the meetings with the local leaders, it is advisable to prepare a roadmap for generating awareness on the key issues around the formation of CMA. These awareness-raising activities should be carried out in simple language. Where English is used, the use of an interpreter is also important. Challenges to the implementation of awareness-raising activities, such as community market days, should be anticipated at the planning stage and potential mitigation measures and solutions developed. The necessary human, material and logistical resources for the awareness-raising exercises should be made available, supported by an appropriate budget allocation. The plan should consider the number, scope, and duration of awareness-raising activities, travelling conditions and distances to communities, and linguistic and cultural practices of a particular location/county.

The awareness exercises should cover all fishing communities forming part of the CMA. Communities can be clustered according to proximity and congregated at a central location for the engagements. Communities further apart should be visited separately to ensure every fishing community is reached. Gender participation and mainstreaming should be a significant component of the awareness-raising activities. Both fishers and fishmongers, as well as the wider local communities, should actively participate in the awareness exercises. Some can be involved as interpreters, tour guides, disseminators, and custodians of materials, among other possible roles. These activities will ensure that community actions and involvement are not solely dependent on a few voices or people.

The result of the awareness-raising activities and engagements should be hosting a general meeting of all the fishing communities and relevant stakeholders. The leadership of the fishing communities should steer the mass meeting to decide whether or not they want to form a CMA. The consensus of the fishing communities to form a CMA should be clearly expressed in a resolution. When the decision is made through a popular vote to form a CMA, an Interim CMA Formation Committee should be formed to lead the process. The Interim CMA Formation Committee shall comprise a representative nominated by each fishing community. The representatives on the Interim CMA Formation Committee shall then elect the chairperson with the approval of the community leadership at the meeting.

2.3 Interim CMA Formation Committee

The Interim CMA Formation Committee is established as a result of the fishing communities' decision to create a CMA. This Committee, as described above, is a representative group of candidates from each of the fishing communities in the county. The Committee is responsible for managing the CMA formation process, including developing the constitution, election guidelines and electoral committees. It should also be tasked with calling mass meetings to adopt the constitution and election guidelines and criteria, ensuring that the action points agreed upon are implemented, and informing the communities on progress made.

The ensuing CMA formation activities are led by the Committee with support from major stakeholders, namely NaFAA and other institutions involved in facilitating the establishment of the CMAs. The steps in forming the CMAs in the fishing communities may follow one another in a sequential pattern, or the activities may run simultaneously at certain stages. These activities are integral. Each of them may have a distinct outcome and may require different skills, tools, and resources. Some may flow into the next in a sequence or circular way, while others may serve as conditions necessary for the commencement of the next step.

Box 3. Fundamental CMA formation steps and activities:

- Initial community awareness and engagement
- Fishing community resolution to form CMA
- Setting up of the Interim CMA Formation Committee
- Fishing community application to NaFAA to establish a CMA
- NaFAA's approval of the community's request
- Setting up of CMA Constitution Committee
- Setting up of CMA Elections Committee
- Hosting of CMA elections
- Induction of elected CMA officials

Fisher picking his catch from his canoe in Grand Chess, Grand Kru County.



2.4 Engagement and collaboration with NaFAA: fishing communities' application letter to NaFAA to form CMA

NaFAA authorisation is required to establish a CMA in any given fishing community. Any fishing community or stakeholder wishing to form a CMA must seek NaFAA's approval through a written application, as mandated by the 2019 Law.¹⁴ Fishing communities and interested parties aiming to form a CMA should collaborate with NaFAA, adhering to NaFAA's standards and requirements for CMA formation. No CMA is considered formed or legally operational without NaFAA's formal approval.

Before submitting the application to NaFAA, the CMA Formation Committee shall inform the communities about the filing of the application. The fishing communities and their partners must also agree on the plan and purpose of the CMA and hold preliminary discussions with NaFAA to establish the prerequisites and content of the application. NaFAA, as the government arm responsible for CMA formation and regulation, has the authority to supervise the formation of a CMA in collaboration with the target community. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the need to form a CMA remains a community matter and there must first be consensus among the fishing communities before proceeding with this step.

To request NaFAA's approval, a letter of application for CMA formation to NaFAA should be written and signed by the committee members and reviewed by the community leadership. The interim CMA Formation Committee will select a representative to deliver the application to NaFAA's headquarters. The NaFAA Director-General receives the applications for CMA formation from the community representative. The application must justify the establishment of the CMA in accordance with the Fisheries and Aquaculture Development and Management Law of 2019, or its approved amended version, and it must include a description of the fishing communities. The application must bear the collective signatures of the members of the Interim CMA Formation Committee.

2.5 NaFAA's response to the application to establish CMA

The Director General or his or her designee shall receive the communities' application from the Interim CMA Formation Committee. Following NaFAA's consideration of the application, NaFAA shall submit a formal response to the application. NaFAA's response represents its official position on the application. Where NaFAA's response is unfavourable, the communities, through the Interim CMA Formation Committee, shall work with NaFAA to address any issues raised. If NaFAA's response is favourable, the Interim CMA Formation Committee announces to the communities NaFAA's approval to proceed with activities leading to the formation of the CMA.

2.6 Fishing community consideration of NaFAA's response to their application

The Interim CMA Formation Committee, having received NaFAA's response to the fishing communities' request for the formation of a CMA, shall convene a meeting of the fishing communities and stakeholders to present, discuss and determine the course of action on receipt of the letter. If NaFAA raises some questions on the application, the communities shall determine the appropriate actions to address the concerns. Where NaFAA approves the application to form a CMA, the fishing communities, in a resolution, further empower the Interim CMA Formation Committee to proceed with the relevant actions leading to the establishment of a Constitution Committee.



Interim CMA Formation Committee members and EJF staff reviewing ballot sheets in Wedabo, Grand Kru County.

2.7 Establishment of the Constitution Committee

Where the community finds it convenient, the Constitution Committee can be set up at the mass meeting to announce NaFAA's favourable response. Otherwise, the Interim CMA Formation Committee shall call a special meeting of the fishing communities for the establishment of the Constitution Committee. Members of the Constitution Committee shall be nominated by the fishing communities. The Committee shall consist of an odd number, with the chair having the casting vote in the event of a split vote on an issue. Members of the Interim CMA Formation Committee shall not serve on the Constitution Committee to ensure independence and minimise conflicts of interest. To harmonise the constitution of CMAs across the country, a copy of the revised and validated 2023 constitution of the first CMA in Robertsport is given to the Constitution Committee to be used as a guide to draft their constitution (see **Annex 3** for sample CMA constitution). The Constitution Committee shall tailor the constitution to their local context. Following the completion of the draft constitution, the Committee shall submit the draft to the Interim CMA Formation Committee for further action.

2.8 Validation of the draft constitution by NaFAA

The Interim CMA Formation Committee is responsible for building consensus with the Constitution Committee on the provisions of the constitution. Following this, the Interim CMA Formation Committee shall submit the draft constitution to NaFAA for review. On receipt of the fishing communities' draft constitution, NaFAA shall convene a constitution validation meeting with the Interim CMA Formation Committee and other key stakeholders to validate the draft constitution. Following the validation exercise, the Interim CMA Formation Committee shall take the validated constitution to the community.

2.9 Fishing communities' adoption of the validated constitution

The fishing communities shall review and adopt the constitution as the organic law of their CMA at a mass meeting convened by the Interim CMA Formation Committee. Following the adoption of their constitution, an Election Committee shall be constituted to host the elections for the CMA Executive Council.

2.10 Establishment of Election Committee

The Election Committee shall be set up by the interim CMA Formation Committee at the constitution adoption meeting or a dedicated meeting of the fishing communities convened for this purpose. An ad hoc Election Committee of an uneven number of members shall be set up to organise and conduct the CMA leadership election (see Annexe 1 for a sample CMA leadership form). The Election Committee, using the constitution as its guide, shall draw up election guidelines and a timetable and submit these to the Interim CMA Formation Committee for approval. A meeting of the fishing communities shall subsequently be called to review and certify the election guidelines and timetable. The ad hoc Election Committee, upon the approval of the communities, shall then commence the election timetable. The timetable, among other things, shall in a simple and achievable way, spell out the schedule of the following activities:

- Preparation of requisite forms and schedule
- Awareness and voter sensitisation
- Eligibility criteria
- Voter registration and verification timeline
- Candidate application and qualification
- Campaign schedule
- Voting schedule and announcement of results
- Addressing and resolving election complaints, if applicable/relevant
- Official announcement of the result and subsequent induction of elected officials by NaFAA

Once all the election processes are completed, the elected CMA executives are inducted into office. The CMAs can then begin the process of formally registering their members (see Annex 2 for a sample membership form).

3. Enabling legislation

The CMA structure needs to be supported by robust policies and regulations. Working with NaFAA, the fishing communities, and all relevant stakeholders is key to drafting these policies that will guide and support the CMAs' operations. Below are three essential legal documents to adopt to support the CMAs:

- **National CMA policy:** The policy aims to establish a framework within which the various stakeholders in the fishery sector can consult and engage one another in decision-making through active participation via shared roles and responsibilities for managing the resources they depend on. The Policy builds resilience against food crises and provides an avenue for sustainable fisheries management, ensures transparency and good governance to assist in reducing illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, and provides opportunities to include fishers, fishmongers and processors, and other stakeholders in fisheries decision-making processes. The Policy has a broad scope and covers all CMAs established in the country. It was developed by an independent policy expert with guidance from NaFAA.
- **CMA Constitution:** The constitution defines the roles and responsibilities of the CMA and their significance to fisheries management. The constitution should include the CMA's purpose, vision, mission, and specific objectives. It should also outline the CMA's governance structures, core responsibilities, membership, meetings, financial matters, and dispute resolution. Unlike the Policy, the Constitution does not have a broad scope. Each CMA must have a constitution tailored to its structure and operations and applicable only to its members and areas of jurisdiction/TURF.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):** The MoU should be signed between NaFAA and each CMA (see annex 3 for a sample of MoU). It is an agreement between the two parties to collaborate to sustainably manage fisheries by enforcing all regulations and strategies, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities. It should also stipulate the specific responsibilities of each party in terms of capacity building, financing, research, awareness-raising, and community-based monitoring, control and surveillance, among others.

All three of these documents should be reviewed and validated by the relevant stakeholders before adoption to ensure they accurately reflect their views and priorities.

CMA induction ceremony in RobertSPORT, Grand Cape Mount County.



4. Communities for Fisheries experiences: CMA formation in Liberia

The Communities for Fisheries Project, in partnership with NaFAA and the fishing communities, successfully facilitated the establishment of seven CMAs in Liberia: the Margibi CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA, the Grand Cess CMA and the Sass Town CMA in Grand Kru, and the additional three CMAs in Grand Cape Mount County.

Credible leadership elections and induction of elected officials were held in these four counties. EJF also constructed and furnished six office spaces for the CMAs in Margibi, Grand Bassa, Grand Cess, Sass Town, and Grand Cape Mount County Regions II & III. The offices are each powered by a three-kilowatt solar system.

The Communities for Fisheries project has also implemented a number of other activities across the fishing communities. These include capacity building in leadership and communications, monitoring and surveillance of IUU fishing and supporting increased participation of women in local decision-making processes.

EJF has also researched Liberia's CMA experience and published one co-management policy brief¹⁵ and a research report¹⁶ to further promote co-management in Liberia. Both publications document CMA experiences in Liberia and provide valuable information on CMAs in Liberia. The publications also include recommendations to improve the country's CMA experience and enhance sustainable fisheries management in Liberia.

4.1 Increasing women's engagement in co-management through VSLAs

The project also introduced the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) financial management tool to empower women in its targeted communities to participate in decision-making and electoral processes. The VSLA tool was used to organise women and create a platform for them to meet regularly, receive education, and gain awareness on sustainable fisheries management practices. A total of 43 VSLAs were established under the project from 2021 to 2025. During the project, five VSLAs were discontinued, bringing the number of active VSLAs to 38. The project established the VSLAs across 30 communities in its target counties in Liberia. The active VSLAs have approximately 1,075 members, comprising 1,038 women and 37 men.

Importantly, the VSLAs have empowered the women financially and built their confidence and capacity to contest for leadership positions within the CMAs. The VSLAs have collectively saved US\$851,600.68 since 2021. During the CMA elections, women contested for and won key positions, including Vice President, Treasurer, and Auditor. All seven CMAs established by the project have 50-60% representation of women in their Executive Committees.

CMA election campaign activity by women in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County.





CMA Vice-President from Margibi County participating in an event in Monrovia, Montserrado County.

4.2 Development of a co-management policy

To provide an enabling and robust policy framework to strengthen the operations of CMAs in Liberia, the project supported NaFAA in developing Liberia's first National CMA Policy and Strategy document. The policy provides the framework required to promote effective co-management operations in Liberia. The project also liaised with NaFAA and the CMAs to sign an MoU concerning collaboration on the sustainable management of Liberia's SSF, which was developed, revised, and validated by all key fisheries stakeholders. This collaboration includes a focus on the enforcement of relevant fisheries regulations and strategies and ensuring a sustainable source of livelihoods for coastal communities. It clearly outlines the specific responsibilities of each party in terms of capacity building, financing, research, awareness-raising, and community-based monitoring, control and surveillance, among others.

4.3 The clustering approach

CMAs covering many communities are sometimes overwhelmed with disseminating information and coordinating activities across their areas of coverage.¹⁷

¹⁸ To address these challenges, the Communities for Fisheries project used the clustering approach to organise CMAs in counties with many fishing communities. This method was first trialled in Grand Kru County. Two CMAs were established in the major central fishing regions, Sass Town and Grand Cess, with the CMAs covering fishing communities in proximity to these regions to facilitate collaboration, information dissemination, and enhance participatory fisheries governance in the communities.

Due to the proximity of communities to the CMA, this approach also promotes active monitoring of activities in the communities and participatory decision-making processes. It nurtures a sense of ownership and responsibility amongst the communities and promotes the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the CMA.

5. Lessons learned from establishing CMAs

Below are some key lessons learned during EJP's engagements with the fishing communities and stakeholders to establish CMAs and conduct CMA leadership elections in Liberia:

- **Knowledge and recognition of the communities and cultural practices:** In the inception stages, it is important to acquire an insight into, and appreciation of, the fishing communities' structures, customs and practices as well as those of the county authority to facilitate entry and generate interest, participation, and support.
- **Gender mainstreaming:** In the CMA formation process, gender mainstreaming is key to ensuring full, broad-based participation, involvement, and ownership of all sections of the community, particularly women, in sharing leadership roles.
- **Consideration during the activity planning stage:** Identify events or circumstances that might hinder the community's ability to participate in the CMA formation activities. For instance, in the rural parts of Liberia, community market days are set on a particular day of the week. During the market day, practically all other work in the community and nearby communities is suspended except for going to the market to buy or sell. In the case of CMA elections, when planning activities other than widespread awareness-raising, particularly concerning voter registration and voting days, it is important to ensure that these activities do not fall on market days, as communities will be unable to actively participate. Other events to look out for are general meeting days, active fishing seasons, public holidays, or observations of traditional festivals or ceremonies.
- **Host meetings and gatherings where the communities usually meet:** People are more likely to attend events if they happen in places they are familiar with. Also, it is important to partner with groups that have worked in the communities and have high engagement in these communities, as they can make the necessary introductions to the communities and provide connections to key contacts.
- **Provide feedback:** Document each meeting and engagement with stakeholders and provide feedback to the communities, other stakeholders



CMA voting process in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County.

and the project's internal team. Key points to provide feedback on are: major discussions held, conflicting points stemming from those discussions, unanswered or critical questions from the discussions, actions taken as a result of the engagement, and next steps. This keeps everyone informed of the process and promotes the involvement of all stakeholders. It also helps to verify the accuracy of the information collected and creates opportunities for challenges to be holistically addressed.

- **Adapt:** Follow implementation plans closely, but be open and responsive to new ideas and adjustments that may be needed to address challenges that arise as circumstances evolve.
- **Manage expectations:** When engaging communities, it is important to convey accurate and realistic information to avoid communities developing high and unrealistic expectations of the process. Communities should not be promised incentives or development projects/activities that cannot be provided through the establishment of the CMA.
- **Mitigating unexpected barriers:** Unexpected barriers may include conflicts, saboteurs, unresponsiveness of stakeholders, insufficient resources and abrupt changes to plans. These tend to impede the overall progress of the CMA establishment. Some of these barriers, for instance, insufficient resources, can be addressed by adopting inexpensive but effective methods to conduct activities and planning strategically to ensure that each activity achieves its desired goals, to avoid incurring additional costs. For saboteurs⁹ or overbearing participants, they can be engaged separately to understand and address the underlying reasons for their actions and resistance. However, other barriers, such as abrupt changes to plan, (for example, a mandate from NaFAA to halt the CMA formation process or a decision from the community to disengage from the process), can be difficult to navigate and will require rigorous and innovative engagement, negotiations, and if necessary, compromises to be reached.
- **Ethnic politics:** The rural community lifestyle is communal and tribal. This affects their outlook on the political landscape. They campaign and rally their support based on kinship and ethnicity. In the present case, the Kru tribal group tends to gravitate towards the Kru candidate, and the Fanti does the same for the Fanti candidate. The consequence is that the election is heavily divided

on ethnic lines, with instances of conflicts between the different ethnic groupings. This situation needs to be mitigated through continuous dialogue and the inclusion of all ethnic groups residing in the fishing communities forming the CMA. In addition, robust awareness of the essence of unity in the CMA and the danger of the tribal divide is imperative. The fishers need further sensitisation on the need for unity and togetherness in the CMA, as division among themselves on the grounds of lineage undermines the goal and spirit of the CMA.

- **Distances and poor road connectivity:** Road connectivity in the rural part of Liberia is challenging. The majority of the fishing communities, particularly those in the southeastern part of Liberia, are hard to reach. Some of the fishing communities in counties with long coastlines are located far apart, making it difficult and time-consuming to travel between those communities. In the case of the CMA elections, where ballot boxes have to be transferred to the central location for counting, verification, and tabulation after voting ends at the various polling stations, travelling between these communities becomes more challenging with bad road conditions and changing weather patterns. The challenges of poor infrastructure in rural areas need to be considered when setting timelines for the election process, particularly in the final stages of voting, collation of results, and preliminary announcement of results. These conditions not only affect election workers but also impede the ability of candidates to campaign in these communities and hamper the possibility of congregating fishers at a central location (see Section 4.3 on clustering fishing communities).
- **Duration of setting up CMAs:** The CMA formation process will vary from place to place, depending on several factors, including community size, accessibility, and available legislative framework for co-management. EJJF's experience shows that setting up effective CMAs can take between 8 months and a year.

6. Conclusion

This CMA formation guide is a collection of practical actions, experiences, and lessons curated by the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project in establishing seven CMAs in Liberia. It supports interested parties with the requisite understanding to secure broad-based participation, minimise crises and ensure harmonious efforts during CMA formation.

The guide outlines these as the major activities involved in CMA formation: i) initial community awareness-raising and engagement, ii) fishing community resolution to form a CMA, iii) establishment of the Interim CMA Formation Committee, iv) fishing communities' application to NaFAA to establish a CMA, v) NaFAA's approval of the communities' request, vi) establishment of the CMA Constitution Committee, vii) establishment of the CMA Elections Committee viii) hosting of CMA elections, and ix) induction of elected CMA officials.

While the steps outlined are drawn from concrete experiences and set up in a step-by-step way, these prescriptions are not linear nor cast in stone. They can be revised and tailored to fit different contexts as necessary.

The most notable lessons learned during the CMA formation process outlined in the guide include knowledge and recognition of communities and cultural practices, the need for widespread awareness-raising, the importance of gender mainstreaming, and the need to collaborate with NaFAA or the relevant fisheries regulatory body at all levels of the CMA formation.

The guide recommends that CMA formation should not be an imposition on the fishing communities, but instead a concerted effort by the central government, fishing communities, and interested parties to collaboratively manage the fisheries resources.

CMA meeting in Marshall, Margibi County.



ANNEXES

Annex 1 - Election Forms for CMA leadership

Collaborative Management Association (CMA) Candidate's Application Form

Section 1: Personal Information

Name: _____

First Middle Last

Date of Birth: _____

Month Day Year

Cell Phone #: _____ / _____

Address: _____

Town Community

Section 2: Position of Interest (Kindly check your position of interest)

President ☐

Vice President ☐

Secretary
General ☐

Treasurer ☐

Financial
Secretary ☐

Auditor ☐

Section 3: Education

Formal Education ☐ Informal Education ☐

Section 4:

I _____ do hereby attest and confirm that all the information provided by me is factual and genuine to the best of my knowledge.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Section 5: For Official Use Only!

Reviewed By: _____

Date: _____

Attested By: _____

Date: _____

Approved By: _____

Date: _____

Annex 2: Membership form

(Name of Association)
Membership Form
(LOCATION)

Name of Applicant: _____
First / Middle / Last

Date of Birth: _____
Month / Day / Year

Place of Birth: _____
City / County

Place of Residence: _____
Community / Zone/Block # / City

Phone No: _____/_____

Present Occupation:

Fishmonger ☐ Fisherman ☐ Fish Transporter ☐

Number of Dependents:

1-2 ☐ 3 - 4 ☐ 5 & Above ☐

Spouse Name: _____
First / Middle / Last

Emergency contact: _____/_____

Type of Membership:

Full Membership ☐ Associate Membership ☐

Signature of Applicant: _____ Date: _____

Attested By: _____ Approved _____

Recruitment/Mobilisation Chair

President



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

Between the

NATIONAL FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE AUTHORITY

And the

COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION OF [insert county name] COUNTY

I. PARTIES

This document constitutes an agreement between the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) and the Collaborative Management Association (CMA) of **[insert county name]** County, otherwise referred to as Parties.

The CMA comprises *[insert number of communities]* collaborating fishing communities in *[insert county name]*, which have mutually agreed to promote socio-economic development and good governance in the coastal waters of **[insert county name]** of the Republic of Liberia.

II. AUTHORITIES

- A. NaFAA has the authority to enter into this Agreement with the CMA of **[insert county name]** County under Chapter 3, Section 3.15, of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Act and Chapter 3, Section 3.2 of the Fisheries Management and Development Law of Liberia.
- B. The CMA of **[insert county name]** County has the authority to enter into this Agreement under an Authorizing Resolution of the Board of Directors.

III. PURPOSES

The purposes of this Agreement between NaFAA and **[insert county name]** County CMA are:

1. To partner with the Government of Liberia through the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) to sustainably manage the fisheries resources and mobilize the collection of duly legal revenue from the sector;
2. To enforce the Fisheries Regulation, Fisheries Management Plans, Fisheries Management and Development Law of 2019 and Fisheries and Aquaculture Policies and Strategy;
3. To give legal recognition to negotiated responsibilities for sustainable management and good governance of the fisheries resources in the areas under the CMA's jurisdiction;
4. To ensure a sustainable source of livelihood for the coastal communities of **[insert county name]** County; provision of voice and platform for fishing communities' participation in decision making in fisheries administration and governance; and establishment of a framework for coordination, planning and implementation of interventions for socio-economic advancement of the **[insert county name]** fishing communities;
5. To achieve these purposes, this Agreement provides for:
 - i. Cooperation between NaFAA and members of the **[insert county name]** CMA to implement the fisheries co-management plan prepared for the CMA; and
 - ii. Consultations in the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance operations at the community level for enforcement and compliance of the Fisheries Regulations of 2020 and other Fisheries Legal Instruments of the Republic;

IV. BACKGROUND

The Fisheries Management and Development Law of 2019 provides that “Co-Management Fisheries Associations (“Associations”) may be established in accordance with this Act for the purpose of exercising rights and responsibilities within a designated area relating to information and decision-making for fisheries conservation, management and sustainable use.”

Section 3.2 of the Fisheries Management and Development Law of 2019, the Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority is under obligation to establish Co-Management of Fisheries and Aquaculture Association for the purpose of exercising rights and responsibilities with a designated area relating to information and decision-making for fisheries and aquaculture conservation, management and sustainable use;

In 2011, a National Framework and a strategy document for the establishment of Co-Management Associations were prepared for guidance of the Bureau of National Fisheries, now the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, in its work towards promotion of the co-management system.

A constitution and by-laws were drafted as legal instruments for the operation of the Pilot Robertssport CMA, which came into effect by acclamation by the General Assembly the same year. Based on the Pilot project for the establishment of Co-Management Association of Robertssport, NaFAA embarked on a campaign to replicate the CMA in Bomi and Montserrado Counties.

With support from the European Union (EU), NaFAA, through the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), established additional CMAs in Margibi, Grand Bassa and Grand Kru Counties and restructured the Grand Cape Mount County CMA by clustering it into three CMAs (i.e., Region I, II, III).

V. MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF THE FISHERIES RESOURCES CMA AREA:

A. RESPONSIBILITIES OF NaFAA

1. Issuance of national vessel registration numbers and fishing licenses to all canoes;
2. Preparation of a fishery’s co-management plan for the establishment and management of the **[insert county name]** TURF;
3. Formulation of fisheries policies through participatory approaches involving active CMA representation;
4. Development and implementation of capacity building programs, including training and education to the CMA membership and local stakeholders;
5. Resolution of problems and issues beyond the scope of local co-management arrangements, particularly backstopping of local monitoring and surveillance efforts and enabling the provision of law enforcement mechanisms and services;
6. Provision of enabling legislation to authorise and legitimize the right to organize and to make and enforce co-management activities;
7. Provision of the legal recognition and national legitimacy of CMAs;
8. Provision of technical assistance to the CMA, including the application of national fisheries regulatory standards, an appeal mechanism, conflict management, and conducting fisheries-related scientific research;
9. Ensuring accountability of co-management through overseeing local arrangements and dealing with abuses of local authority;
10. Coordination role to maintain a forum for the **[insert county name]** CMA to engage and interact with other local CMAs and co-management partners throughout Liberia;
11. Creation of an enabling environment for donor assistance, especially in the areas of capacity building and micro-credit; and
12. Determination of allocation of management functions.
13. Subject to approval by the Director General, 30% of the processing fees collected will be received by CMA bi-annually from NaFAA

B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF [insert county name] CMA

1. Carving/embossment of vessel registration numbers on all canoes in the CMA area (the [insert number of fishing communities] fishing communities in [insert county name]) for purposes of facilitating monitoring, control and surveillance operations and for management of fishing effort;
2. Collection of fishing license fees, processing fees and registration fees from members through bank deposit, on behalf of NaFAA, and subject to approval by the Director General, a retention of (30% of the processing fees) collected, will be received by CMA bi-annually from NaFAA
3. Participation in research, data gathering, analysis and dissemination of results within the CMA area;
4. Implementation of Community-based Monitoring, Control and Surveillance as well as enforcement and self regulatory activities within the CMA designated area in accordance with the Fisheries Regulations of 2020, the Fisheries Management and Development Law of 2019, and the Fisheries & Aquaculture Policy & Strategy;
5. Implementation of community-based monitoring and evaluation of CMA activities undertaken by the sub-committees, zonal and community representatives;
6. Representation of members in local fisheries management decision-making;
7. Creation of awareness in all the CMA communities for fisheries management and social advancement;
8. Solicitation and cooperation with national and external partners through NaFAA for self-advancement of members in areas to include, but not limited to: capacity building, job creation, income generation, promotion of alternative income generation activities, micro-finance and value addition;
9. Identification of issues and concerns of the [insert county name] fishing communities;
10. Involved in the regular update of vessel entry and exit for fisheries data registry;
11. Mobilization and leadership of co-management activities;
12. Ensure that the Beaches are clean of Waste Management, Good hygiene Practices, and provide education on the negative effects/impacts of using the beach as a public latrine;
13. Participation in the planning, design and implementation of co-management activities; and
14. Advocacy to lobby for changes in or development of national policies and activities, including local infrastructure development; and

VI. CONSULTATION

The NaFAA and the [insert county name] CMA shall consult on an as-needed basis concerning matters related to the management of fisheries resources, which either party believes are suitable for such consultations. Parties agree that they will consult on issues that may include, but not limited to, the application of the Fisheries Law of 2019 and the Regulations of 2020 and any matters that affect livelihoods and resource allocation.

VII. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLANS

The CMA, in collaboration with NaFAA, shall review, update or prepare a new Fisheries Management Plan on a yearly basis, dependent on available information and data gathered on the resources and socio-economics of the fisheries. The revised plan shall be approved by NaFAA, which shall be provided with the relevant inputs used for the revision/modification.

VIII. REGULATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

The NaFAA recognizes the existence of the constitution and by-laws of the [insert county name] CMA, which would be used as a basis for self-regulation and oversight by the Board of Directors through the Director General. The CMA recognizes the authority of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority to enforce the Fisheries Regulations, including any other Fisheries law for the conduct of fisheries operations and the lawful prosecution of fisheries violations.

IX. OTHER PROVISIONS

- A. Nothing herein is intended to conflict with the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority Fisheries Law of 2019, Fisheries Regulation, 2020 and the Fisheries Policy Strategy. If the terms of this Agreement are inconsistent with the Fisheries Management and Development Law of 2019, Fisheries Regulation of 2020 and the Fisheries Policy & Strategy, then those portions of this Agreement which are determined to be inconsistent shall be invalid, but the remaining terms and conditions not affected by the inconsistency shall remain in full force and effect.

At the first opportunity for review of the Agreement, all necessary changes will be accomplished by either an amendment to this Agreement or by a new Agreement, whichever is deemed expedient to the interest of both Parties.

- B. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to contradict the National Co-Management Framework prepared for the establishment of CMAs in the Republic of Liberia.
- C. Should disagreements arise over the provisions of this Agreement, or amendments or revisions thereto, that cannot be resolved at the operating level, the issue(s) of disagreement shall be stated in writing by each Party and presented to the other Party for consideration. If agreement on interpretation cannot be reached within a reasonable time, a special meeting shall be held to resolve the issues. This meeting shall include representatives of NaFAA and the **[insert county name]** CMA Board of Directors.

X. ADOPTION, DURATION AND MODIFICATION

This Agreement will become effective when signed by both Parties and may be amended at any time by written agreement of both Parties. Either Party may terminate this agreement by giving 45 days prior written Notice of Termination to the other Party.

XI. SIGNATORIES

The parties hereto have executed this Agreement as of the last written date below:

National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority

[insert county name] CMA

Director General Date

County Superintendent Date

Deputy Director Gen. /TS Date

President, [insert county name] CMA Date

Witness Date

Witness Date

Annex 3: sample CMA constitution

This file is too long to append directly to this document.

Please see a publicly accessible link here: ejfoundation.org/reports/cma-constitution



CMA executives holding copies of the MoU signed with NaFAA, Monrovia, Montserrat.

Endnotes

- 1 Evans, L., Cherrett, N., and Pems, D. (2011) 'Assessing the impact of fisheries co-management interventions in developing countries: A meta-analysis', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 92, pp.1938–1949, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2011.03.010>.
- 2 NaFAA (2023), Collaborative Management Association (CMA) Policy and strategy for the Republic of Liberia's Fisheries Sector
- 3 *ibid*
- 4 NaFAA (2020) Marine Artisanal Frame Survey.
- 5 *ibid*
- 6 NaFAA (2020) Marine Artisanal Frame Survey.
- 7 Livingstone, O., Anthony, B. P. (2023) 'Documenting fisheries co-management in action: Case of the Grand Cape Mount County Co-Management Association, Liberia', *Marine Policy*, 157, 105844, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2023.105844>.
- 8 Ministry of Agriculture & CMA (2012) Agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture and The Collaborative Management Association of Robertsport and its Environs.
- 9 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategy of Liberia, January 1, 2014, <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lbr160051.pdf>.
- 10 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, An Act to Amend the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority Law by Adding Thereto the Fisheries and Aquaculture Management and Development, 2019, <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/lbr192628.pdf>
- 11 National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategy of Liberia, 2020.
- 12 Armitage, D.R., Plummer, R., Berkes, F., et al. (2009) 'Adaptive Co-Management for Social-Ecological Complexity', *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 2, pp. 95–102, <https://doi.org/10.1890/070089>.
- 13 Livingstone, O., Anthony, B. P. (2023) 'Documenting fisheries co-management in action: Case of the Grand Cape Mount County Co-Management Association, Liberia', *Marine Policy*, 157, 105844, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2023.105844>.
- 14 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, An Act to Amend the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority Law by Adding Thereto the Fisheries and Aquaculture Management and Development, 2019.
- 15 EJF (2022) *Co-management: a tool for delivering legal, inclusive, and sustainable fisheries in Liberia*, <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/co-management-a-tool-for-delivering-legal-inclusive-and-sustainable-fisheries-in-liberia>
- 16 EJF (2023) *Taking stock: Documenting the effectiveness of co-management practice in Liberia*, <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/taking-stock-documenting-the-effectiveness-of-co-management-practice-in-liberia>
- 17 EJF (2023) *Taking stock: Documenting the effectiveness of co-management practice in Liberia*, <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/taking-stock-documenting-the-effectiveness-of-co-management-practice-in-liberia>
- 18 EJF (2022) *Co-management: a tool for delivering legal, inclusive, and sustainable fisheries in Liberia*, <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/co-management-a-tool-for-delivering-legal-inclusive-and-sustainable-fisheries-in-liberia>
- 19 Saboteurs refer to people who deliberately destroy or obstruct something. In public engagements, these people can undermine progress by disrupting meetings, starting negative propaganda about the process, or organising resistant groups to challenge the process.



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