

# COMMUNITIES FOR FISHERIES

## ISSUE BRIEF

Project update: January to June 2024



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### Introduction

The European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project aims to create skilled, capable and effective community co-management associations (CMAs) to secure legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia. Its objective is to reduce illegal fishing and improve the sustainability of fisheries by expanding and strengthening CMAs, creating adequate capacity for community monitoring and reporting of illegal fishing.

This brief summarises the project's activities during the first half of Year Five, January to June 2024.



Bomi CMA Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Committee.

Implemented by



In partnership with



- **No cost extension**

The project was impacted by COVID-19 in Year One, limiting the implementation and achievements of project outputs. To compensate for the lost time, the European Union granted a one-year no-cost extension to ensure the project engages CMAs effectively to enhance sustainability.

- **Community science activity**

In 2023, the project worked with CMAs in Margibi and Grand Bassa counties to organise Community Science teams as one of their core committees responsible for contributing to fisheries data collection in Liberia. The teams also work to improve beaches' sanitary conditions and ocean health and foster volunteerism in the communities. Between February and April 12, 2024, the project expanded this activity to Grand Cape Mount and Grand Kru counties, training five CMA Community Science Committees to collect local fisheries data, conduct shoreline measurements and conduct beach clean-ups in the counties. The project also provided the Committees with rain gear, shovels, rakes, wheelbarrows, and other clean-up equipment to support them in their activities.

The Community Science Committees will provide valuable data that can be used to make informed decisions about fisheries management and support sustainable small-scale fisheries in Liberia.



Grand Cess CMA Community Science Committee recording fish catch.



Grand Cess CMA Community Science Committee cleaning the beach.

## • EU monitoring trip

From March 11 to 14, 2022, EJF and the European Union in Liberia Green Team Lead and Project Manager visited Grand Cess and Sasstown, in Grand Kru County, to meet beneficiaries of the Communities for Fisheries project. On this trip, they learned more about the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), which gave women financial support and the foundation they needed to run for decision-making positions in their communities. The team also heard about the progress of the CMAs, which strengthen local input on managing the fisheries they rely on in Grand Cess and Sasstown.

The EU team appreciated the opportunity to get firsthand information on the project's impact, the fisheries dynamics in the southeast of Liberia, and how EJF can work effectively with parallel donor projects from Conservation International and the World Bank for even greater success. This will directly support sustainable and legal fisheries in Liberia into the future.



European Union Delegation team interacting with Village Savings and Loans Association in Grand Cess.

## • Results-Oriented Monitoring

A European Union Result-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Consultant arrived in Liberia on April 15, 2024, to conduct the project's result-oriented monitoring.

For nine days, the consultant visited six CMAs in Grand Bassa, Margibi, Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado counties. He also spoke with women benefiting from the project's VSLA activity in the counties he visited. He interviewed EJF staff and the project's major stakeholders, including the Liberia Artisanal Fishers Association and NaFAA.

This monitoring enabled the EU to gain first-hand knowledge of the project's impact and use the lessons from implementing it to develop need-driven activities to encourage continuous engagement in, and support of, Liberia's fisheries sector.

Some of the ROM's recommendations were incorporated into the projects' Year 5 Quarter 2-4 actions to promote legal and sustainable co-management in Liberia.



ROM consultant interacting with fishers in Bomi, Grand Cape Mount County.

## • Monitoring, control and surveillance activity

The European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project provided Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) training to the seven established CMAs between April and June 2024. The training was conducted in collaboration with NaFAA and the Liberia National Coast Guard and aimed to equip the associations with the knowledge and skills required to conduct at-sea MCS activities.

The training consisted of a one-day presentation and a two-day at-sea demonstration conducted by the staff of EJF, NaFAA, and the Liberian Coast Guard. The project equipped each committee with life jackets and flashlights to promote safety during patrols. A total of 70 fishers were trained across the four counties in Liberia.

The practical knowledge gained from the training will enable the fishermen to assist the NaFAA in monitoring the Inshore Exclusion Zone, reserved for small-scale fishers. They will ensure fishermen use NaFAA-approved fishing methods and gear, report intrusion by industrial vessels, and conduct rescue missions in case of accidents or if a fisherman gets lost at sea.

Following the training, four rescue missions were held—two in Grand Bassa and two in Grand Cape Mount County Region III, rescuing 13 stranded fishers between April and June.



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MCS trainees in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County.

#### Links to publications covering the training:

- [https://www.liberianobserver.com/farm/eu-funded-project-empowers-more-communities-for-sustainable-fisheries-management/article\\_81dbbca0-275a-11ef-b350-9fd5a0e42aa0.html](https://www.liberianobserver.com/farm/eu-funded-project-empowers-more-communities-for-sustainable-fisheries-management/article_81dbbca0-275a-11ef-b350-9fd5a0e42aa0.html)

#### • Financial Management training

The progress of many civil society and community-based organisations in Liberia has been stalled by weak financial management skills and a need for internal control systems to manage their finances. EJJ confirmed this problem during our scoping exercise to identify the capacity-building needs of the established CMAs under the EU-Funded Communities for Fisheries Project, implemented by EJJ. These issues have limited these CSOs' capacity to source small seed grants or receive direct cash support from donors and partners.

To bridge this gap, the project conducted financial management training for the CMAs in Grand Bassa, Margibi, and Grand Kru counties in 2022 to teach the CMAs about the importance of internal control systems and basic financial management principles, emphasising bookkeeping. During the reporting period, we extended the training to the three CMAs established in Grand Cape Mount County and trained 36 Region I, II & III CMA members.

The Grand Cape Mount County CMA Executive Committees also benefited from strategic planning training, which supported them in crafting their visions, goals, and objectives and developing actions to help them achieve them.

The knowledge gained from these training exercises should be of significant importance to the leaders of the CMAs. It will empower them to establish transparent and accountable financial management and internal control systems. They have also mapped out plans for the next three years to achieve their goals. This will enable them to secure funding for their activities and play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable and legal fisheries in their communities.

## • CMA membership registration drive

The project developed a Kobo Collect platform for CMA members to collect membership data digitally. The Community Mobilisers were trained to roll out the apps in their communities. Grand Bassa County CMA piloted the app's use and registered 300 fishmongers and fishermen.

## • World Oceans Day celebration

EJF and the European Union in Liberia joined the world in celebrating World Oceans Day. This year's theme, "Catalysing action for our ocean and climate," recognised that our ocean keeps our climate stable, absorbing around one-quarter of humanity's CO2 emissions and 90% of the heat generated from excess greenhouse gas emissions. It called for concrete actions to protect our ocean and stabilise our climate.

Our celebration sought to raise awareness of ocean sustainability and amplify our voices in advocating for sustainable ocean management in Liberia. It signified EJF's commitment to promoting a healthy ocean in Liberia and the world. It demonstrated the European Union's commitment to supporting the government and people of Liberia in protecting the ocean and its resources.

The celebration was hosted in the Marshall fishing community with fishers who depend solely on the ocean for their livelihood. We had a grand parade led by the EU Ambassador, Nona Deprez, and an outdoor event graced by officials of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Marshall City Council. The event concluded with a boat race between six canoes, and the European Union and guests awarded the winners medals and life jackets.



Women with placards at the World Ocean Day event in Marshall, Margibi County.

### Links to publications covering the event:

- <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-environmental-justice-foundation-eu-celebrate-world-oceans-day/>
- [https://www.liberianobserver.com/farm/liberia-observes-world-ocean-day/article\\_0c324924-2c82-11ef-8799-9f858745d08a.html](https://www.liberianobserver.com/farm/liberia-observes-world-ocean-day/article_0c324924-2c82-11ef-8799-9f858745d08a.html)



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## • Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security roundtable discussion

Small-scale fishers in Liberia have reported increased threats to their landing sites, citing commercial beach sand mining, the sale of coastal areas, private claims, and coastal erosion as major threats. They brought their complaints to the CMAs, emphasising that if these threats are not addressed, fishers will lose access to landing sites and, subsequently, the resources they depend on for their livelihoods.

In response, the Communities for Fisheries project, funded by the European Union, in partnership with the Liberia National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, organised a two-day roundtable of fisheries stakeholders on securing the tenurial rights of small-scale fishers in Liberia.

The roundtable focused on exploring and discussing how implementing the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)*, *Voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication (SSF guidelines)*, the *2018 Land Reform Act*, and the *2019 Fisheries Act of Liberia* could help to address some of the emerging challenges facing Liberia's small-scale fisheries sector.



CMA film screening at the VGGT event.

At the end of the two-day discussion, participants developed a roadmap for securing fish landing sites in Liberia, following the Liberia land formalisation process used by the Liberian Land Authority (LLA) as a guide. NaFAA and LLA agreed to lead the activity by mapping all landing sites and potential threats and working with significant stakeholders to ensure they are protected so that fishers have continued access to their landing sites. The participants also urged the Government to revise their policies to align with the VGGT and SSF guidelines, promoting greater implementation of legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Liberia co-hosted the event. It convened government agencies, including the Liberia Maritime Authority, Liberia Land Authority, and Ministry of Internal Affairs, representatives of the eight CMAs, the Liberia Artisanal Fishers Association, the National Civil Society Council of Liberia, development partners, including Conservation International and Cerath Development Organisation, and representatives from academia, among others.

The project has developed a Terms of Reference for a consultant to guide the mapping of fish landing sites, smoking spaces, and CMA Territorial Use Rights for Fisheries (TURF) in Liberia.



Liberia Land Authority making a remark at the VGGT meeting.

#### Links to publications covering the event:

- <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/fishery/liberia-environmental-justice-foundation-and-nafaa-conclude-stakeholders-engagement-on-fao-guidelines-for-sustainable-fisheries-and-land-tenure/>
- <https://thenewdawnliberia.com/eu-funded-communities-for-fisheries-project-shares-plans-to-improve-liberias-fisheries-sector/>



## • Steering committee meeting

During the reporting period, the project hosted two Steering Committee meetings to update its major partners and donors on Year 5 quarter 1 and 2 successes and challenges and the targeted actions for the second half of the project's last year. The meetings were facilitated by Cephass Asare, EJF's West Africa Regional Manager and attended by Maria Winnubst from the European Delegation to Liberia, Mr Otis D. Wesseh from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, and key officials of NaFAA, including the Deputy Director General for Technical Services, Mr. William Y. Boeh.

### Link to publication covering the meetings:

- <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=885846856922309&id=100064910078447&set=a.441471101359889&source=48>

## • Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA)

To address the problems of limited financial access and increase women's participation in SSF decision-making processes, the Communities for Fisheries project introduced the VSLA concept to women fishmongers and processors in four coastal counties in Liberia.

The project adopted the VSLA approach because of its credibility and record as a practical and effective financial literacy tool. The activity targeted women to increase their participation in SSF management and community governance structures. It also sought to provide platforms for them to meet regularly and receive capacity-building education and awareness-raising on leadership, financial management and sustainable fisheries management while improving cohesion among women in the communities.

From January to June 2024, the project established an additional three VSLAs in Grand Kru County, bringing the total number of VSLAs to 32, with 960 members.

During this period, the VSLAs generated a total of **LD \$15,277,470 (US\$ 78,945)** from January to June, which serves as loan funds for women to invest in their businesses and household-related activities, such as buying canoes and fishing nets, paying licenses for their husbands, and schoolbooks and school fees for their children.



VSLA meeting in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



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## • Dase app (IUU monitoring)

Following the official launch of the Dase App in 2021, the Communities for Fisheries Project has continued to engage with the fisherfolks in its project communities to install and use the application to combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing.

During this period, the project trained 17 fishermen in Montserrado to conduct IUU fishing monitoring. The project's Community Mobilisers also did a one-on-one follow-up with users. The activity informed EJF of the number of fishers who still have the app and are using it actively and those who no longer have it but are still in our database. The Community Mobilisers also trained and reinstalled the app on the phones of fishers who no longer have the app.

## • Collaborations

The project expanded its network in Liberia and established collaborations with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the Liberia Land Authority to host the VGGT Roundtable discussion and lead the mapping of the fish landing and smoking spaces and CMA TURFs in our project communities.

## • EU day celebration

Participated in the official celebration of the EU Day in Liberia on May 9, 2024. At the event, we presented the work our EU-funded Communities for Fisheries project is doing to promote legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia. We also participated in an exhibition attended by officials of the Government of Liberia, policymakers, international partners, etc.

The event provided a platform to increase the visibility of our work amongst participants and expand our network in Liberia.



European Union Delegation team interacting with Grand Cess CMA President.



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## Lessons learnt:

- Enhanced collaboration is needed between government agencies to secure fish landing and smoking spaces in Liberia.
- Celebration of International Day events improve community awareness of fisheries.
- Increasing awareness of CMA policy, constitution and national fisheries law improves local fisheries governance.
- NaFAA ensuring that parallel donor programmes engage CMAs underscores their legitimacy.
- Creating engagement platforms, such as the VGGT roundtable, provides an avenue for fishers to table their concerns and promote inclusiveness.
- Allowing fishers to lead the formation and elections of CMAs has fostered a sense of community ownership and improved the knowledge base on the CMA formation process.
- Having Community Mobilisers in project communities ensures on-time support for CMAs. This can be replicated by other donor programmes in the fisheries to enhance project delivery efficiency and safe cost-effectiveness.
- A clustering approach to CMA establishment reduces the cost associated with information dissemination and meetings. It fosters community cohesion.



MCS patrol, Grand Kru County.



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