

COMMUNITIES FOR FISHERIES

ISSUE BRIEF

Project update: January to June 2023



Project funded by the European Union

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 ensuring effective reporting of illegal fishing.

This brief summarises the project's activities during the first half of Year Four, January to June 2023.



Implemented by



In partnership with



Highlights

- Two new Collaborative Management Associations established
- 50% representation of women in Collaborative Management Association leadership
- Over US\$100,000 raised by Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs)



Fishmonger voting during CMA election, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County

Village Savings Loans Associations (VSLAs) and women leadership

The VSLAs were established by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) to mobilise women to participate in fisheries management decision-making processes. Since their formation, 23 groups consisting of 30 members each have been organised, trained, and supported through the Communities for Fisheries project. The VSLAs were able to raise more than \$100,000 from January-June 2023 through the contributions of their members.

The VSLA platform empowers women, particularly fishmongers, to compete for leadership positions in various co-management associations by giving them the financial security they need to do so, making a 50% representation of women in fisheries management possible for the first time. Additionally, the money raised helped these women take care of other financial household expenses like buying food, clothing, and mattresses; some managed to roof or complete their homes.

On 7 March 2023, EJF held a women's conference with the theme "Embracing equity: spotlighting women's contribution to fisheries in Liberia" to commemorate International Women's Day. The event was attended by stakeholders in the fisheries sector, including fishmongers, fishers, County Authorities, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Conservation International, the World Bank, Conservation International, Conservation Works, the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA), USAID and the European Union in Liberia. ECOWAS Radio, ELBC, and the Daily Observer covered the event. The women's conference featured a presentation by the FAO on how the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) and Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guideline) can be used as a guide to promoting equity in fisheries. It also included networking sessions to exchange experiences and share best practices, and develop recommendations for policymakers and development partners to support women in Liberia's fisheries. The conference showcased success stories of women in the sector and their impact on their families and communities. An EJF film titled *"Together we are strong: Liberia's fishmongers building fairer fisheries"* was screened to inform participants about how women are getting involved in fisheries management in the communities through the Collaborative Management Associations.



Participants at the International Women's Day conference, Monrovia, Montserrado County

Link to EJF blog post for International Women's Day:

<https://ejfoundation.org/news-media/strong-together-the-women-saving-liberias-fisheries>

Link to "Together we are strong: Liberia's fishmongers building fairer fisheries"

<https://youtu.be/cSJ8nePz6Ww?si=mV-B6mXVqhybqjcS>



VSLA member and Margibi County CMA Vice President speaking at the International Women's Day conference, Monrovia, Montserrado County

DASE app training and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing cases

EJF rolled out training on how to use the DASE app in fishing communities to combat IUU fishing activities in Liberia. The project has trained fishers in the four project counties (Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Kru and Margibi) on installing the app, which allows fishers to report suspected cases of IUU fishing at sea. Between January and June 2023, EJF trained sixty-one fishers to install and use the DASE app to collect evidence of IUU fishing in four coastal counties. Five smartphones were given to the CMAs in Margibi and Grand Bassa to facilitate this. Additionally, protective (waterproof) casings were distributed to fishers using the app for protection when fishing at sea.



DASE app training

Liberia Artisanal Fishers Association (LAFA) capacity building and support

LAFA is the umbrella organisation responsible for fishers in the country. The Communities for Fisheries project continues to support LAFA in building its capacity to effectively support the management of small-scale fisheries, advocate for good fisheries laws, and protect the rights of small-scale fishers. On March 22, 2023, EJF, through the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project, installed a 5-kilowatt off-grid solar system to provide a clean and reliable source of electricity at LAFA's office in Banjor, Virginia. The solar system is helping the association to save about US\$3,600 annually by avoiding the high cost of running a generator. In addition, computers and other office equipment were presented to LAFA to enhance their administrative function and help strengthen advocacy to secure legal, sustainable, and healthy fisheries. Additional capacity-building support to LAFA included revision and amendment of their constitution and the erection of three signboards at strategic locations for visibility and direction.

Link to news article of LAFA solar system:

<https://www.newrepublicliberia.com/ejf-hands-over-cma-policy-strategy-to-nafaa/>

Community science training and awareness

Community science is a participatory approach that helps community members collect, understand, analyse, share information, and take action on issues impacting their community. It was introduced to the project to enhance community participation in fisheries management to support the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority with data collection. As part of the Communities for Fisheries project, EJJ trained fishers and community members to collect data using different scientific instruments, including a salinometer, weight scale, measuring board and tape measure. In March 2023, EJJ conducted Community Science training for 17 persons in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. The training focused on the role of community science committee members and how to use science equipment such as electronic weighing scale, fish ruler, thermometer, salinometer and measuring tape to gather data on different fisheries activities. The equipment was purchased and given to the committee members to manage and monitor various science activities in Grand Bassa County.



Community science training, Tailor, Grand Cape Mount County

Steering Committee meeting

On 23 March 2023, the project convened a Steering Committee meeting for year four at the EJF office in Congo Town. The meeting was attended by Maria Winnubst, Program Officer, European Union (EU); Otis D. Wesseh, Assistant Director of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP)/ Office of the National Authorising Officer; Solomon N. Daryoue, Assistant Director Policy and Investment, NaFAA and chaired by EJF.



Steering Committee members from the European Union, NaFAA, MFDP and EJF at the meeting, Monrovia, Montserrado County

The meeting highlighted achievements and challenges from year three and reviewed activities for year four, quarter one, and the project's proposed work plan.

Key recommendations from the Steering Committee meeting include:

- There should be a field trip to the four project counties before the last steering committee meeting.
- EU suggested that there should be an update on action taken by NaFAA on the suspected IUU fishing activities alerts reported by EJF.

At the end of the Steering Committee Meeting, the work plan for year four was approved, and the report from the previous year was adopted.

Grand Kru Collaborative Management Associations election and induction

One of the primary objectives of the Communities for Fisheries project is to create an effective community collaborative management association (CMA) system to manage sustainable fisheries in Liberia. The project has successfully established two CMAs in Margibi and Grand Bassa counties. To enhance community participation in fisheries management, EJF, NaFAA, and the communities' leaders and fishers in Grand Kru County established two CMAs in Grand Cess and Sass Town.

The establishment of CMAs in Grand Cess and Sass Town began with the formation of an interim CMA leadership to guide the electoral process and an election committee to conduct the election. Both the CMA Formation Committee and the Election Committee comprised six members each. After forming the two committees, EJF and the election committee members started a robust door-to-door awareness-raising campaign in the 10 fishing communities and on radio Grand Cess, informing fishers about the election and the importance of the CMA.



CMA elections awareness at Grand Cess radio, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County

As a result of this awareness raising, 1,232 people registered and participated in the CMA elections in Grand Cess and Sass Town. Fishermen and fishmongers contested six positions: President, Vice President, General Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary and Auditor. The fishermen won three positions: President, General Secretary and Financial Secretary, and the fishmongers won Vice President, Treasurer, and Auditor positions in Grand Cess. For Sass Town CMA, the fishermen won two positions, President and General Secretary, while the fishmongers won four positions, President, Vice President, Financial Secretary, Treasurer and Auditor.



Fishers voting during CMA election, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County

The elections were held on 13 March 2023, and the inductions of the newly elected officials were held on April 4 and 5 in Grand Cess and Sass Town, respectively. A total of seven fishing communities, including Wedabo, New Cess, Grand Cess, Chinakalee, Solokpo, Tugbaklee and Jlatekpor, constitute the Grand Cess CMA, while three fishing communities, Sobobo, Feloklee and Jukwikpo formed the Sass Town CMA.



CMA induction by Grand Kru County Inspector, J. Kambor Weah, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County

European Union communication consultant field visit to Buchanan, Grand Bassa

In May, a communication consultant from the European Union Delegation in Liberia and EJJ visited Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, to speak to beneficiaries of the Communities for Fisheries project. The team met with fishers from Big Fanti Town – one of the largest fishing communities in Grand Bassa - who explained how the project has transformed their lives by:

- Providing training on community science, leadership, management, and reporting IUU fishing using the DASE app.
- Creating the CMA which has ensured community participation in fisheries management.
- Establishing the VSLA, which gives financial freedom to women.



EU Green Team Lead interacting with CMA General Secretary during field mission, Buchanan, Grand Bassa

The delegation engaged with VSLA women who explained how the loan scheme empowers them financially to expand their fish-selling business and compete with men for leadership positions in the CMA.

CMA capacity building

From January to June 2023, EJJ implemented a series of training activities in strategic planning, financial management, co-management coordination, and effective communications. Early in February, 12 CMA executives in Grand and Margibi counties participated in a strategic planning training to strengthen the new leadership's capacity to steer the association's affairs. The financial management training for 24 people, including CMA executives and others, concentrated on internal management and financial reporting. The two training events will empower the CMA leadership to manage the day-to-day affairs and transparently report to fishers.

The last training batch during this period was held in Grand Kru County for the two CMAs in Grand Cess and Sass Town. Executives of the new leadership were trained in leadership, CMA coordination, and effective communication. These training sessions benefited 19 participants from Grand Cess and 12 from Sass Town.

In March, the National CMA policy and strategy document developed with funding from the project was presented to NaFAA by EJJ. The policy details the structure of the CMAs, the responsibilities of NaFAA to the CMAs, the CMA's roles in fisheries management, the financing mechanism and monitoring and evaluation of the policy.

Link to policy presentation:

<https://www.newrepublicliberia.com/ejj-hands-over-cma-policy-strategy-to-nafaa/>



EJJ presenting CMA policy to NaFAA Deputy Director General for Administrations, Monrovia, Montserrado County

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