

COMMUNITIES FOR FISHERIES

ISSUE BRIEF

Project update: January to June 2022

Introduction

The 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 Three, January to June 2022.



CMA meeting, Marshall, Margibi County



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In partnership with



Dase app training:

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

During this period, weekly practice training sessions were held with fishers interested in installing the app on their phones. They learned how to use the app to collect evidence on IUU fishing, specifically taking pictures that capture essential information, like vessels' names and numbers.

Financial literacy training and Village Savings and Loans Associations



VSLA meeting, Marshall, Margibi County

During the first half of 2020, the Communities for Fisheries project conducted 10 additional financial literacy sessions with 351 fishmongers. As a result, they established 10 Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA) in 10 communities in the four implementing counties. The additional VSLAs were formed based on requests made to the project by women from the communities. Their requests showed their interest in the activity and commitment to managing their finances to improve their lives and communities. EJF supported the 10 groups with start-up materials (such as iron cash boxes, passbooks, ledgers, and pens).

One group—the Women of Success of Grassfield/Fanti Town—was established in Robertsport, three groups—the Help Yourself #2 in Togbaklee and the Bagenee and Baibleakwah in Sass-Town fishing community—were established in Grand Kru, three groups—the Eat Some and Keep Some, the Women of Development #1, the Women of Development #2, and the Boyce Town VSLA—were established in Margibi, and two groups—the Fish for Living Saving Club Group 2 and Women of Love—were established in Grand Bassa County.

The establishment of the VSLAs has enabled women to manage their finances and make sound financial investments with loans taken from the associations. The weekly VSLA meetings have also built unity among fishmongers and processors and given them a platform to discuss issues essential to their businesses in the fishing communities.

Leadership and communication training

Between March and June 2022, 10 leadership and communications training events were conducted for 160 fishermen, 339 fishmongers, and 35 CMA leaders and members in Robertsport, Marshall, and Buchanan to take on leadership roles in their various organisations/groups.

The training covered introduction to leadership, types of leaders and leadership, and tenants of a good leader. These topics expanded the participants' knowledge of leadership and the qualities they need to possess as good leaders. The training was an eye-opening event for many participants as it helped them identify their strengths and weaknesses as leaders, determine methods to address their weaknesses and become good leaders in their respective organisations and communities.



Leadership training participants, Buchanan, Grand Bassa County

Fact-finding mission in Tailor, Grand Cape Mount County

In June 2022, the Environmental Justice Foundation, through the Communities for Fisheries project, received a report from Hon. William Y. Boeh, Deputy Director-General for Technical Services of NaFAA, of an alleged incursion and harassment of local fishermen in Tailor by armed Sierra Leonean Navy Officers. Based on this, EJF dispatched a team to Tailor, Grand Cape Mount, to investigate the allegations.

The fact-finding mission in Tailor by EJF produced a report which documented the accounts of the locals regarding the alleged illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in Liberian territorial waters by Sierra Leonean Officers. Consequently, the local fishers' plight, related to the alleged constant incursion into the Liberian EEZ and harassment of small-scale fishers by Sierra Leonean Navy officers in Tailor has been formally communicated to NaFAA (and elevated to the national level) by EJF for remedial action by the requisite national authorities in Liberia.

Communities for Fisheries project Steering Committee monitoring visit

The Steering Committee of the project, along with EJF field staff, conducted a three-day monitoring visit in three of the project counties from June 1-3, 2022. The Steering Committee consists of NaFAA, EU, and Ministry of Finance and Development Planning staff and was accompanied by EJF staff in the field. During the monitoring visit, the Steering Committee visited Marshall, Buchanan, and Robertsport. They met and had discussions with the Village Saving Loan Associations (VSLA), CMA leadership, interim CMA Formation Committee, and fishermen. The objectives of the Steering Committee monitoring visit were to: (i) assess EJF interventions in Marshall, Buchanan, and Robertsport to gain a first-hand understanding of the project's progress, (ii) identify possible gaps and challenges of the Communities for Fisheries project to determine possible interventions needed to bridge any gaps identified, and (iii) inform policy decision at the Steering Committee level on pending activities.

Based on recommendations made by the Steering Committee following their monitoring visit, the Communities for Fisheries project has increased its activities in Marshall, Buchanan, and Robertsport. To bridge the project implementation gaps identified during the monitoring visit, the project organised a two-day training workshop on "the basics of co-management in fisheries, and the roles and responsibilities of the CMA Formation Committee" in Buchanan for members of the committee and local leaders to enhance their knowledge of the co-management process and their expected roles and responsibilities. This training was crucial to enabling the CMA Formation Committee and local leaders to efficiently carry out their roles and duties during the ongoing CMA formation process in Grand Bassa.



Project Steering Committee members interacting with women, Buchanan, Grand Bassa County

Margibi CMA formation

One of the Communities for Fisheries project's objectives is to "promote sustainably managed fisheries driven by co-management associations (CMA) and characterised by good governance and transparency." To achieve this objective, the project and the leadership and people of Margibi County established a vibrant CMA in Margibi County in May 2022.

The CMA formation process began with a team of seven people, with at least one member representing each fishing community. The sole responsibilities of the formation team were to prepare and submit a letter to NaFAA requesting the formation of a CMA in the county, and draft and finalise the CMA elections guidelines and constitution.

Next, the fishing communities of Margibi, with technical support from the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), wrote a formal request to establish the first CMA in the county. The request was written in abidance with the mandate by the Fishery Management Law of NaFAA, which states that all fishing communities with a vested interest in establishing CMAs in Liberia need to write a formal request to NaFAA and follow the relevant procedures as enshrined in section 3.2 of the (2019) act of NaFAA. The letter was written by the CMA formation Chairman of Marshall and signed by all the sea chiefs, women leaders, city mayor, and other relevant stakeholders.

On the 5th of January 2022, the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority approved the fishing communities of Margibi's request to establish the CMA through the Office of its Deputy Director for Technical Services. Upon receiving approval from NaFAA, the project conducted widespread awareness-raising activities in the communities in April to strengthen the capacity of fishmongers to contest for leadership positions in the CMA. Six palaver hut meetings were held across the fishing communities in Lower Margibi. The total number of participants for the six different meetings was 210 persons. The meetings were coupled with door-to-door awareness-raising and radio talk shows. During these activities, emphasis was placed on the significance of the role of women in the fisheries sector, and fishmongers and processors were encouraged to actively participate in the CMA electoral process.

699 persons participated in the voter identification process. The process lasted for five days; it began on the 18th and ended on the 22nd of April 2022. 11 people, six men and five women registered for and contested the six leadership positions:

1. President
2. Vice President
3. General Secretary
4. Treasure
5. Financial Secretary
6. Internal Auditor

The election was held on May 7, 2022. There were 410 voters, 224 women and 177 men, who participated in the election. Three women emerged victorious as co-chair, auditor, and treasurer for the Margibi CMA, while three men emerged victorious as Chairman, General Secretary, and Financial Secretary.

Margibi CMA leadership induction ceremony and commissioning of CMA office

The CMA's leadership was inducted into office on May 13, 2022, in the presence of representatives from the EU, NaFAA, EJF, Margibi County Authorities, and the communities' leadership and members.

During the ceremony, several speeches were made by the EJF, NaFAA & EU delegates, Sea Chiefs, fishmonger heads, elected officials, and other critical stakeholders in the county. While speaking at the ceremony, EU delegate Ms Vera Kellen encouraged elected officials to serve with a deep sense of responsibility and accountability. She further emphasised that sustainable fishery management practice is key to economic growth and prosperity in all fishing communities. Mr Augustine Monoballah, one of the Deputy Directors of NaFAA, also spoke during the program. He stressed the importance of leadership and transparency among elected officials. In addition, he highlighted the essence and relevance of the Co-Management Association in Margibi and stated that NaFAA is willing to support and work with the CMA to co-manage fishery activities in the county.

The induction of the CMA leadership was combined with the commissioning of a newly constructed office facility by the Communities for Fisheries Project for the Margibi fishing communities. The building contains two offices, a conference hall, and a restroom and is located in Fanti Town, on a plot of land provided by the fishing community. It is powered by a 3 KVA solar system supported by a 10 KVA lithium battery.

The CMA formation process was successful, and there is now an active CMA in Margibi County collaborating with NaFAA to manage the fisheries resources in the county transparently.



CMA induction, Marshall, Margibi County

Buchanan CMA formation

In alignment with its objective to form transparent CMAs to sustainably manage fisheries in Liberia, the Communities for Fisheries Project hosted a one-day meeting with fishers on February 26, 2022, in Buchanan city, on the formation of a Grand Bassa County CMA. The meeting was attended by 131 fishers, including 65 fishermen and 66 fishmongers and processors from the two fishing communities in Buchanan. The sea chiefs and city authority were also present at the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the fishers expressed interest in establishing a CMA in Grand Bassa County. The body also organised a 10-person committee comprising five fishermen and five fishmongers and processors to spearhead the CMA formation process.

To strengthen the team and equip them to carry out their tasks efficiently, the project conducted a three-day training for the Interim CMA Formation Committee and local authorities in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. The exercise aimed to educate the committee members and locals on the fundamental importance, roles, and benefits of co-management in fisheries. A total of 18 fishers participated in the training, including eight interim CMA Formation Committee members, two sea chiefs, two leaders of women's groups, five VSLA clubs' leaders, and the Secretary of the Kru fishermen. The training was facilitated by EJF's Technical Officer for Fisheries and Programme Officer.

The Interim CMA Formation Team applied to NaFAA in the presence of the Communities for Fisheries project representative and has received NaFAA's approval to establish a CMA in the county. With support from the project, the team is currently conducting awareness-raising activities in all the fishing communities in Grand Bassa County.

IUU awareness in Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County

The Environmental Justice Foundation, under the Communities for Fisheries Project, in partnership with NaFAA and the Liberia Coast Guard, carried out two days of awareness-raising on IUU and sea safety in Buchanan from April 12-13, 2022. The purpose was to educate fishers on IUU fishing, what it encompasses, and the importance of wearing safety jackets at sea. The awareness team comprised two EJF staff, two NaFAA staff, and two Coast Guard officers. Fishers welcomed the messages and recommended that more awareness-raising be carried out. They also called for more robust punitive measures for people engaging in IUU fishing.

Staff capacity building

The University of Cape Coast Centre for Coastal Management, in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and NaFAA, conducted a five-day training course on Fishery Management and Marine Coastal Resources Management at the Lutheran Church in Liberia Conference Hall on 13th Street, Sinkor. The Communities for Fisheries project sponsored five of its beneficiaries from Marshall, Buchanan, and Robertsport and two of its staff, Augustine Fayiah, Program Officer, and Musu London, Technical Officer for Gender and Community Participation, to participate in the training. At the end of the training, the participants acquired knowledge of fisheries and natural resources management and were certified.



LAFAs and CMA members displaying their course completion certificate



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