

COMMUNITIES FOR FISHERIES

ISSUE BRIEF

Project update: January – July 2025



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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 provides an update on the project's activities implemented during Year Six of the project's second no-cost extension, January to July 2025.



Participants at the project close-out.

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- **Preparation and participation at the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3)**



Panel guest at EJF's beneficial ownership side event at UNOC-3

The project engaged the Presidency and Vice President, H.E. Jeremiah Kpan Koung, through meetings and provided a briefing on the project, highlighting why Liberia should improve its fisheries transparency. This led to Liberia endorsing the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency (the Charter)¹ in full ahead of the UNOC-3 in Nice, France, becoming the fourth country to do so.

The project participated in UNOC3 from June 9 to 13. At a side event organised by EJF on the beneficial ownership of fishing vessels, Liberia publicly reaffirmed its endorsement of the Charter. The Charter comprises a set of low- or no-cost, internationally recognised steps designed to ensure sustainable, legal, and ethical fisheries.

At the event, Honourable Neto Zarzar Lighe Sr., Commissioner, Liberia Maritime Authority, Republic of Liberia, said: "Our resolve to end IUU fishing and bring greater transparency to our ocean governance system remains steadfast. Consistent with this commitment, the government of Liberia proudly endorses the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency at the UNOC-3 side event and takes this opportunity to reaffirm that endorsement."

Liberia also committed to ensuring beneficial ownership information is available and accessible to expose the true beneficiaries of fisheries crime and will work to address Liberia's 2017 pre-identification as a non-cooperating country in the fight against IUU fishing (yellow card).

Link to a news article on endorsing the Charter before UNOC-3:

<https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-vice-president-koung-to-unveil-new-fisheries-transparency-measures-at-un-ocean-conference/>

Link to a news article from UNOC3:

<https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-pledges-action-against-hidden-owners-of-criminal-vessels/>

¹ CFT (2024) *Global Charter for fisheries transparency*, <https://fisheriestransparency.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Coalition-for-Fisheries-Transparency-Global-Charter-2024-EN.pdf>



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Hon. Zarzar Lighe Snr, Liberia Maritime Commissioner, endorsing the Charter at EJF's beneficial ownership side event, UNOC3

• **Preparation of fisheries transparency gap analysis report**

For Liberia to effectively combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, it is essential to enhance fisheries transparency by adopting and implementing the principles outlined in the Charter.

A gap analysis was conducted to evaluate fisheries transparency in Liberia against the principles outlined in the Charter. The gap analysis aims to assist Liberia in moving from commitment to the Charter to implementation, ensuring the positive benefits of fisheries transparency are secured for Liberian livelihoods, food security, and the national economy.

The evaluation found that Liberia fully implements Principles 5 and 6 and partially implements Principles 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10, while Principle 4 remains unimplemented. This suggests that the country needs to intensify its efforts to promote fisheries transparency to combat IUU fishing and protect the livelihoods of local fishers.

To achieve this, EJF recommends that the government of the Republic of Liberia fully implements the principles of the Charter, with a particular focus on: requiring an IMO number as a precondition for registering a fishing vessel; publishing information on fisheries-related infringements and sanctions; requiring operators to submit information on beneficial ownership (the individuals who ultimately profit from a given vessel's activities), including records on the destination of profits from fishing activities, when applying for a licence; making beneficial ownership information publicly available; prohibiting vessels with a foreign controlling interest registering under the Liberian flag; and ensuring that data elements for the traceability of fish products across the supply chain are sufficiently thorough and consistently collected. We also recommend that Liberia ratifies key ILO Conventions, including C188 concerning decent work in fisheries, the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention (P029) and the Convention and Promotional Framework on occupational safety and health (C155 and C187), as well as the IMO Cape Town Agreement on fishing safety.



• Village Savings Loans and Associations (VSLA) update



VSLA meeting in Marshall, Margibi County

The VSLA approach was adopted by the Communities for Fisheries project in 2021 to provide a platform for women to meet regularly and discuss and address issues affecting them in the fisheries sector. It is also a platform where EJF engages with women to educate them on participatory fisheries governance and how women can become key players in community fisheries governance. The VSLAs also offer financial support by functioning as a community bank, enabling women to secure loans, invest in their fishing businesses, and enhance their household income.

The project established 43 VSLAs in Liberia between 2021 and 2025. However, five VSLAs were discontinued, leaving 38 active VSLAs in operation. The VSLAs are present across 30 communities in Grand Bassa, Grand Kru, Grand Cape Mount, and Margibi Counties. The active VSLAs have approximately 1,161 members, comprising 1,124 women and 37 men. From 2021 to June 2025, 42 of the groups have collectively saved US\$905,653.12. They have used these funds to enhance their livelihoods and respond to environmental shocks, such as coastal erosion.

Key lessons learned have been to encourage VSLA leaders to elect leaders who are tolerant and have respect for others to avoid abuse of power, and continuously emphasise the need to abide by the VSLA principles and by-laws to avoid members absconding with loans, having too many members in one VSLA, conflicts or overly long meeting times.



• VSLA Refresher Training

From June 3 to 5, the project conducted a refresher training session and a review of the constitution for all 38 active VSLAs in Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, and Grand Kru counties. This training aimed to clarify misunderstandings regarding the principles of VSLA and to conduct a detailed, word-by-word review of the constitution with each group. The session incorporated new recommended laws and ensured that all members were familiar with the bylaws governing the group. This training is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the VSLAs.



Refresher training in the Buchanan CMA office for VSLA women



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• Preparation of a CMA formation guide

Liberia adopted the co-management approach in 2012 to collaboratively manage the country's small-scale fisheries, which are threatened by IUU fishing practices, overfishing, and changing climatic conditions. 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."²

There are currently eight active CMAs in Liberia: the Grand Cape Mount County Region I, II, & III CMAs, the Montserrado and Bomi CMAs, the Margibi County CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA and 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 CMA Formation Guide presents the experiences and lessons learned by EJJ 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 the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (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.

• Construction of CMA offices

During the reporting period, the project constructed three offices for the Grand Cape Mount County Region II & III CMA in Bomie and Tailor Kru Town, as well as the Sass Town CMA in Grand Kru County.

The offices provide a space for the CMAs to convene, discuss issues affecting their lives and fisheries, and decide on actions to address them. The offices will also make it easier for partners to locate and meet with the CMAs in the communities. Additionally, the structures will provide opportunities for the CMAs to raise funds to implement activities through hall rental and other innovative business ideas.

The project is proud to support the CMAs by providing platforms for them to meet regularly and discuss fisheries issues, as well as promote legal and sustainable fisheries in their communities.

2 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>.





Completed CMA office in Bomie, Cape Mount County

• Steering committee meeting

During the reporting period, the project hosted two Steering Committee meetings to update its key partners and donors on the successes and challenges of Year 6. The Quarter I meeting held in April focused on discussions about the CMAs' activities, the project's fisheries story grants, the construction of CMA offices, and the mapping of CMA TURF and fishers' landing and smoking sites. The second meeting, held in June, covered updates on the CMAs' activities, the Let's Talk Fisheries radio programme, Margibi CMA elections, leadership orientation training, investigative reporting training for journalists, the project's final evaluation, and the completion of CMA offices in Grand Cape Mount County, Regions I and II.

• Fisheries story grant

The project provided story grants to two journalists, Edward Blamo and Tina Mehnepaine, as part of its efforts to increase fisheries reporting in Liberia.

Edward Blamo has published an article on the potential impacts of the Liberian government's new shrimp bottom trawl fishery on local fishers and marine ecosystems.

Bottom trawling is a common fishing method where vessels drag weighted nets and rigid gear along the seabed, capturing everything in their path. Studies have shown that this practice causes long-term damage to seabed habitats, disrupts ecosystem functions, and catches marine life indiscriminately. Despite these risks, NaFAA's new Fisheries Management Plan includes recommendations for expanding an industrial bottom trawl fishery targeting high-value shrimp, priced at US\$80 per kilogram.

Edward's article indicates that local fishers and researchers are sceptical about the potential impacts of this fishery on the marine ecosystem and their livelihoods and recommends that if the plan is implemented, NaFAA should ensure transparency and effective monitoring of shrimp trawlers and other fishing vessels operating in Liberian waters. It also urges the government to manage the shrimp fishery sustainably, which means prioritising government revenues over profits for foreign companies while also considering the livelihoods of artisanal fishers.

Click the link below to read the full story:

<https://news.mongabay.com/2025/03/liberia-to-start-industrial-shrimp-fishing-worrying-artisanal-fishers/amp/>

Tina Mehnepaine's story examined the impact of traditional smoking techniques on women's health and the natural environment. It highlights significant respiratory issues, such as bronchitis, asthma, and eye irritation, as health challenges. This article reveals a growing concern among fishmongers regarding their health, as they feel they have no alternative sources of livelihood beyond the fisheries. The article also revealed that women are cutting down mangroves to smoke fish, leading to the degradation of these vital ecosystems, which support fisheries and protect coastal communities from flooding.

To address these issues, the article recommends that the Liberia National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority and its partners construct modern fish-smoking structures, such as the FAO-Thiaroye Processing Technique (FTT), in local communities. It also suggests encouraging women to smoke fish in open, well-ventilated areas to reduce their exposure to harmful smoke. It also emphasises the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project's VSLA and the World Bank grant scheme as opportunities to empower women to invest in better fish-smoking facilities.

Click the link below to read the full story:

<https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-the-hidden-cost-of-fish-smoking-for-women/>

Inception meeting with the NaFAA's Acting Director-General



EJF team interacting with the Acting Director General, NaFAA

The project officially met with Mr. J. Cyrus Saygbe Sr., the Acting Director-General of NaFAA. The meeting took place at NaFAA's corporate headquarters in Freeport and was attended by members of NaFAA and the project management team.

During the meeting, Mr. Cephas Asare, the West African Regional Manager of the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), provided an overview of EJF's work, along with the organisation's core values and mission. He highlighted the significant achievements of the Communities for Fisheries project over the past five years, including the formation of seven collaborative management associations, 38 Village Savings and Loans Associations across 30 fishing communities, the development of Liberia's Co-Management Policy, improved community surveillance, and enhanced participatory fisheries governance in Liberia.

The Acting Director General expressed interest in EJF's global initiatives and the project's accomplishments. He discussed opportunities to make the collaborative management associations (CMAs) self-sustaining, strengthen Liberia's monitoring, control and surveillance efforts, enhance access to fisheries data, and promote transparency in Liberia's fisheries with the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency. He also indicated NaFAA's willingness to work with the CMAs to foster participatory fisheries governance and assured EJF of a continued partnership to advance sustainable fisheries management in Liberia.

Mapping small-scale fishers' landing and smoking sites, as well as the CMA Territorial Use Rights in Fisheries (TURF) in Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and Grand Kru counties: validation workshop

The project hosted a one-day workshop aimed at validating a report on mapping the landing and smoking sites of small-scale fishers, as well as the CMA Territorial Use Rights in Fisheries (TURF) in Grand Cape Mount, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and Grand Kru counties.

The validated report identified threats to fish landing and smoking spaces, providing a baseline for the NaFAA, the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), the Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia, and other partners to secure fishers' sites in the country. Additionally, it produced CMA TURF maps for effective area-based resource management.

This activity resulted from a two-day roundtable discussion for fisheries stakeholders, which the project held in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation in June 2024. The discussion aimed to find a pathway to address the increasing threats to landing and fish smoking sites, including commercial beach sand mining, the sale of coastal areas, private land claims, and coastal erosion. These threats can lead to fishers losing access to landing sites and, consequently, the fish they depend on for their livelihoods. After the discussions, participants developed a roadmap for securing fish landing sites in Liberia, guided by the LLA's land formalisation process.

At the validation meeting, the consultant presented the key findings and recommendations from the report to stakeholders, including NaFAA and CMA leadership. Participants engaged in discussions about the findings and provided input to improve the report's accuracy and relevance. They also urged NaFAA and its partners to expedite actions to protect fishers' landing sites, emphasising that this is vital for supporting small-scale fisheries and safeguarding food security in Liberia.

The activity aims to encourage NaFAA to safeguard fishers' landing and smoking areas, while also supporting the development of legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.



Margibi CMA elections



Margibi CMA executives taking the oath of office

The Margibi CMA hosted its second general elections on April 26, 2025.

The project established a Margibi CMA in May 2022 as the first of seven CMAs in four counties (Margibi, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, and Grand Kru) in Liberia. This initiative was implemented in partnership with seven fishing communities in Margibi with support from NaFAA.

CMAs are community-based fisheries resource management bodies, established to support the NaFAA at the local level. CMAs ensure that fisheries regulations are followed while also boosting the local economy and enhancing the livelihoods of community members through capacity building, job creation, and good governance in Liberia's small-scale fisheries sector.

The preparatory phase of the CMA election in Margibi commenced in February 2025, during which an ad hoc election committee was established. The ad-hoc committee received training on conducting an inclusive and participatory community-based election in the seven fishing communities of Margibi County, with support from the NaFAA and EJJ.



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After this process, voter registration was launched. Data gathered from the voter registration process were compiled and published for verification — a procedure that lasted two weeks in April, during which over 900 fishers registered to vote.

The names, positions, and fishing communities of the new leadership of the Margibi CMA are:

1. Jack S. Nyenneh, President, Marshall Community
2. Ruth T. Kpan, Vice President, Kparkparkon Community
3. Daniel G Walker, Secretary General, Marshall Community
4. Felecia Howard, Financial Secretary, Marshall Community
5. Mamie Weah, Treasurer, Marshall Community
6. Mabel Vonyee, Auditor, Zorkpeh Town

The leadership was inducted into office on May 14. The project is pleased to have supported this process and looks forward to working with the new leadership to promote legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.

Link to a story on the CMA induction ceremony: <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-new-margibi-cma-leaders-inducted-to-strengthen-fisheries-management/>

Margibi CMA leadership orientation

To support the new CMA leadership with the requisite skills needed to steer the CMA's affairs effectively, the project rolled out a series of training sessions between June 6 and 20. The training included modules of:

- Fisheries collaborative management principles
- Leadership
- Strategic planning
- Communications
- Financial management training

The Co-management and Leadership training emphasised the importance of collaboration between NaFAA and local communities to enhance sustainable fisheries management in Liberia.

The strategic planning training objective was to broaden the CMA's knowledge of strategic planning and teach them to organise and develop long-term plans for the effective operations of the CMA. Learning how to plan effectively will enable the CMA to actively contribute to collaborative and sustainable fisheries management measures, such as implementing closed and open fishing seasons, promoting the use of approved fishing gear, advocating for mangrove conservation at both local and national levels, and empowering them to become key actors in Liberia's fisheries sector.

The communications training covered the different types of communication and identified the appropriate channels CMA can use to communicate with various stakeholders. It also emphasised the importance of communication in fostering a sense of partnership and collaboration, and in supporting the sustainability of the CMA.

The financial management training concentrated on teaching the fundamentals of internal control systems and core financial management principles, with a particular focus on bookkeeping. The knowledge gained from this training is transformative for CMA leadership. It will enable them to establish transparent and accountable financial management, as well as effective internal control systems. This knowledge will help them secure funding for their activities and play a key role in fostering sustainable and legal fisheries within their communities.

Over 33 people, comprising the CMA leadership, sea chiefs, youths, and community leaders, were trained.



Let's Talk Fisheries



EJF staff at the radio studio for Let's Talk Fisheries

During the reporting period, the project hosted another round of its month-long radio programme called “Let’s Talk Fisheries”. The program raised awareness about the Biodiversity Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty and what ratifying it means for Liberia. It also covered Transparency in Liberia’s fisheries. Under this topic, the programme also discussed the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency and how it can be used as a framework for collaboration, justice and sustainability in Liberia’s fisheries sector.

This round of the “Let’s Talk Fisheries” radio programme was broadcast on the ELBC Radio (99.9) Super Morning Show, and by LNTV Liberia LIVE and ELBC Radio 99.9fm on Facebook and YouTube, and was supported by panellists from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NaFAA and EJF.

The project has produced four rounds (16 episodes) of the “Let’s Talk Fisheries” radio program since 2022, which covered various topics related to fisheries, including raising awareness about small-scale fisheries, participatory fisheries management, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, as well as fisheries transparency.

The radio program is part of the project’s goals to enhance understanding of fisheries and bring transparency to the forefront, promoting legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.



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Investigative journalism workshop



Journalists at the investigative journalism training

From May 7 to 8, 2025, the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project hosted a two-day Investigative Journalism workshop for 20 media practitioners from four coastal counties in Liberia.

The workshop aimed to establish strong relationships with the media in Liberia, encouraging transparent and in-depth reporting on the fisheries sector. The workshop provided journalists with relevant information to deepen their understanding of Liberia's fisheries, enhance their investigative reporting skills, increase their interest in fisheries issues, support them in reporting on activities that might undermine the sustainability of Liberia's fisheries, and gain an understanding of the importance of fisheries transparency and how to report on it.

The lead facilitators were Mr. Charles Coffey, former President of the Liberia Press Union Association, Mr. Williams Boeh, Deputy Director for Technical Services at NaFAA, and staff from the Environmental Justice Foundation Liberia and UK teams.

During the workshop, journalists acquired practical knowledge of Liberia's fisheries sector, the Communities for Fisheries project, investigative reporting, technical accuracy, and media ethics. They also learned about the media's crucial role in promoting fishery transparency and engaged in group work to develop story ideas. The workshop also provided a platform for journalists to share their experiences of winning EJF story grants and learn from one another. They then learned about tools they can use to enhance their work and produce credible investigative pieces, as showcased by EJF's staff in London.

This is the third investigative reporting training we have hosted for journalists in Liberia under the project. We are pleased with the feedback and plan to continue engaging journalists to promote transparent and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.

Link to the journalist training story: https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/ejf-trains-journalists-to-strengthen-investigative-reporting-in-liberia-s-fisheries-sector/article_11e376da-4121-4dae-94e6-189e3466995b.html

• Communities for Fisheries close-out

After five years and seven months, the project held its official closing ceremony at the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (EJS) Ministerial Complex on 7 July 2025. The event was attended by over 100 stakeholders, including the European Union, NaFAA, the Liberia Coast Guard, the House Committee on Maritime, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and Mines, FAO, the University of Liberia, fishers, CMAs and VSLAs.

Cephas Asare, EJF's West Africa Regional Manager, in his opening remarks, expressed gratitude to stakeholders for their support and ownership of the project and the European Union for their generous financial support, which helped transform ideas into real change. He reminded them that sustainable fisheries management is an ongoing process, not a one-off event.

The European Union's Head of Corporation, representing the Ambassador, expressed thanks and appreciation for the project's many achievements and reaffirmed their commitment to supporting fisheries in Liberia. The Acting Director General of NaFAA also assured fishers that they will continue to support the CMAs and sustain the good works of the project, including establishing "new CMAs in Maryland County based on the EJF model."

J. Cyrus Saygbe, Sr., Acting Director General of NaFAA, while delivering the keynote address, stated that "this project has not only redefined how we [Liberians] manage our marine resources but has empowered our communities and inspired a national movement toward sustainable fisheries." He mentioned that though the project may be ending, its ripple effects are expected to continue for years to come — through stronger institutions, empowered communities, and a government now recognised as a serious actor in the global Blue Economy.

The representative from the House Committee on Marine Time, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and Mines assured NaFAA and EJF of the Committee's support in facilitating the formulation of fisheries legislation and future projects.

The event ended on a positive note, with VSLAs, CMAs, and others sharing their testimonies and expressing gratitude for the project and their hopes for similar initiatives in the future.



Participants watching the project film during the close-out

Links to the close-out story:

- <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/fishery/liberias-fisheries-project-closes-hailed-as-a-blueprint-for-sustainable-ocean-management/>
- https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/fisheries-initiatives-wins-global-recognition/article_3cd84d4a-74eb-43da-bc43-fdb6de0148be.html

Lessons learnt

- Enhanced collaboration is needed between government agencies to secure fish landing and smoking spaces in Liberia.
- Increased awareness of CMA policy, constitution and national fisheries law is required to improve local fisheries governance.
- Resourcing CMA ensures sustainability and continuity.
- NaFAA ensuring that parallel donor programmes engage CMAs underscores their legitimacy.
- Enhanced collaboration between implementing partners leads to cost-effective operations and a greater impact, ultimately benefiting the communities.
- Having Community Mobilisers in project communities ensures timely support for co-management associations. Other donor programmes in the fisheries can replicate this.
- Journalists play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability in Liberia's fisheries sector.



Strategic planning training for CMAs, Marshall, Margibi County



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