

# COMMUNITIES FOR FISHERIES

## ISSUE BRIEF

Project update: July - December 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 provides an update on the project's activities implemented during the second half of Year Five, July to December 2024.



CMAs holding signed copies of the memorandum of understanding between them and the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority.

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## • Monitoring, control and surveillance activity

The European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project provided the seven CMAs with Monitoring, Control, and surveillance (MCS) training. The training was conducted with the Liberia National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA) and the Liberia National Coast Guard. It 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 the Environmental Justice Foundation (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.

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

During this reporting period, 12 patrols and rescue missions were conducted in the four counties. On some of these missions, the teams rescued eight stranded fishers.



MCS patrol in Grand Cess in Grand Kru County.



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## • Mapping of CMA Territorial Use Rights for Fishing (TURF) and fishers' landing sites and smoking areas.

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 significant threats. They brought their complaints to NaFAA through 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 project hired a consultant to map fish landing and smoking spaces in the four project counties, identify imminent threats to these landing sites, and produce maps of the landing spaces indicating the threatened areas and TURF maps for CMAs. This will provide a baseline for informing NaFAA and other partners on the recommended actions to secure fish landing sites in Liberia.

## • Enterprise development training

During our training monitoring and assessment exercise, we identified that for the seven CMAs established by the project to become more viable and self-sustainable, tailored training in innovative fundraising strategies was required to help them identify local revenue generation sources in their communities to support their work.

To achieve this goal, EJJ engaged a consultant to provide enterprise development and management training for the CMAs. The primary purpose of this training was to equip CMA leadership at all levels with practical skills, enabling them to operate their organisations as business entities. This self-empowerment initiative focuses on helping them acquire new skills and tools that align with effective fisheries governance practices and best management principles. The training is anticipated to significantly enhance their business planning abilities, contributing to the sustainability of CMA operations within their communities and counties.



CMA enterprise development training in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



## • Steering Committee meeting

During the reporting period, the project hosted two Steering Committee meetings to update its major partners and donors on quarters 3 and 4 of year 5 successes and challenges and the targeted actions for 2025. Cephass Asare, EJP's West Africa Regional Manager, facilitated the meetings, which were 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.

Significant discussions centred on the project's no-cost extension from January to July 2025, constructing office spaces for three CMAs, CMAs MCS activities, and mapping CMA TURFs and landing sites. During the meeting, NaFAA also committed to ensuring CMAs are funded and recognised by all fisheries partners. The meeting participants agreed to host further meetings to address concerns raised during these discussions and promote sustainable and legal fisheries in Liberia.



Steering Committee meeting in Monrovia, Montserrado County.

Find a link to a story covering one of the meetings here:

<https://inprofiledailynews.com/eu-funded-communities-for-fisheries-project-to-improve-liberias-fisheries-sector/>

## • Journalist training

The project hosted a two-day Investigative Journalism workshop for 25 media practitioners from 4 coastal counties in Liberia from August 14 to 15. The workshop aimed to establish a strong relationship with the media in Liberia to encourage transparent and in-depth reporting on the fisheries sector. Its specific objectives were to provide journalists with relevant information to deepen their understanding of Liberia's fisheries, enhance their knowledge of investigative reporting, increase their interest in fisheries, and support them in reporting on activities that might undermine the sustainability of Liberia's fisheries and improve transparency.

The lead facilitators were Mr. Charles Coffey, former President of Liberia's Press Union Association, Mr. Williams Boeh, Deputy Director for Technical Services for NaFAA, and staff from EJF's London office.

During the workshop, journalists acquired practical skills, from understanding Liberia's fisheries sector and the Communities for Fisheries project to mastering investigative reporting, technical accuracy, and media ethics. They also learned about the media's crucial role in promoting fisheries transparency and engaged in group work to develop story ideas. The workshop also provided a platform for journalists to share their experiences on winning EJF story grants and learn from each other. They were equipped with tools to enhance their work and produce credible investigative pieces by EJF's staff in London.

According to our respondents, the workshop provided insight into the fisheries sector and essential contacts for reporting on what is happening in Liberia's fisheries sector. Ms. Rosemarie McKeever, from Spoon FM, stated, "This is my first time learning about Liberia's fisheries sector. I have never engaged in the sector, but this training has piqued my interest... I am already thinking about aspects I can cover to improve fisheries reporting.

We are pleased with the feedback and plan to host similar training sessions for more Liberian journalists to promote legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.



Journalist who participated in the training in Monrovia, Montserrado County.

Find a link to a story covering the event here:

<https://laejnet.org/environmental-justice-foundation-host-investigative-journalism-workshop>

## • Let's Talk Fisheries radio programme

From September to October 2024, we hosted the second phase of our month-long radio programme, “Let’s Talk Fisheries.” In this programme, we highlighted the importance of transparency in Liberia’s fisheries sector. This phase focused on the role of transparency in fisheries management and how it promotes legal and sustainable fisheries. We also delved into the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency and how it can be used as a framework for collaboration and justice to benefit sustainable fisheries and small-scale fishers in Liberia.

“Let’s Talk Fisheries” was broadcast every Wednesday at 9 am on the Spoon FM (107.5) Morning Talk show and Spoon TV Live on Facebook and YouTube. The show was supported by panellists from NaFAA, the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), and a journalist who has benefitted from EJF’s fisheries story grant in Liberia. It was a live and interactive talk show that featured calls from listeners where we responded to their questions and concerns.

During the program, callers appreciated the studio guests’ efforts to raise awareness. They requested that more radio programs be held to educate the public about what is happening in Liberia’s fisheries sector.

The program is part of the project’s goals of enhancing understanding of the fisheries and using transparency to promote legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.



Radio panellist discussing fisheries transparency on the Let’s Talk Fisheries programme in Monrovia, Montserrado County.



## • Blue food forum

In September 2024, project members Cephass Asare and Olivia Livingstone presented the Environmental Justice Foundation's (EJF) European Union-funded global toolkit for sustainable fisheries governance at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) FISH4ACP Blue Food Forum in Tanzania.

Drawing on years of EJF experience in Liberia and other parts of the World, the toolkit is a set of proven approaches to enhance fishers' participation in managing the fisheries they rely on. It includes technology for recording and reporting suspected illegal fishing, practical steps for delegating decision-making power to coastal communities through co-management associations, and advice for giving a voice to fishers' associations.

While the crisis in many fisheries is a global problem, it has local and national solutions. This new toolkit shows the way to a healthy future for the global ocean, fisheries, and food security for future generations.



EJF staff engaging visitors at the Blue Food Forum in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

## • Signing of MOU between NaFAA and the CMAs

On October 4, 2024, NaFAA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with eight CMAs in Liberia, including seven established under the Communities for Fisheries project and one established by NaFAA in 2017. Representatives of the European Union Delegation to Liberia, NaFAA, the eight CMAs, and the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project team attended the event.

The MoU was developed, revised, and validated by all key fisheries stakeholders, with support from the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project. It is an agreement between NaFAA and the CMAs to collaborate to sustainably manage Liberia's small-scale fisheries sector. This collaboration includes enforcing all of NaFAA's fisheries regulations and strategies and ensuring a sustainable source of livelihood for coastal communities. The MoU clearly outlines each party's specific responsibilities in capacity building, financing, research, awareness, community-based monitoring, control, and surveillance, among other things.

The MoU adds to the CMA National Policy and Strategy and CMA constitutions to provide enabling and robust legislation to strengthen the operations of CMAs in Liberia.

The signing of the MoU demonstrates Liberia's commitment to promoting participatory fisheries management and working with resource users to promote a legal and sustainable fisheries sector. It is also a vital outcome of our project, which aims to create skilled, capable and effective community CMAs to secure legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia.



Margibi County CMA Vice-President signing the MoU in Monrovia, Montserrado County.

Find a link to a story covering the event here:

<https://frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-nafaa-signs-mou-with-eight-collaborative-management-associations-in-six-coastal-counties/>



## • Gender-Based Violence (GBV) training

From October to November, the project conducted seven rounds of training on GBV in the fisheries sector and EJF's Safeguarding policy in its target counties. The training was held for 175 men and women, including immigration and police officers. This activity aimed to educate fishers on the types of GBV, power dynamics, how these dynamics can facilitate GBV, preventive measures, and referral pathways for victims. The training provided tailored examples of how GBV can occur in fisheries and its impact on vulnerable stakeholder groups, particularly women. The training is part of our efforts to address GBV threats flagged by community members during stakeholder engagements. We also hope it will communicate the project's commitment to ensuring that no one is at risk or harmed because of their association with the project.

By creating awareness of GBV and EJF's Safeguarding policy, we are mitigating the threats faced by fisheries stakeholders, and creating a safe space for them to participate in sustainable and legal fisheries governance in Liberia freely.



EJF staff conducting GBV training for fishers in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



## • Official handover of Grand Cess CMA office

On October 24, 2024, the project turned over a building consisting of two offices, a bathroom, and a hall to the Grand Cess CMA in Grand Kru County. The building is powered by a 5-kilowatt solar system, which provides clean and renewable energy. The Grand Cess CMA was established in April 2023 and covers seven fishing communities in Grand Kru County. The CMA leadership has 50% female representation, with about 800 registered members. Since its establishment, the CMA has worked to conduct monitoring, control and surveillance patrols, deterring illegal fishing and mining in the surrounding rivers and ocean. The CMA also conducts rescue missions and community science activities like beach cleanups.

This is the third office the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project has built in Liberia. The first was built in 2021 for the Margibi CMA in Marshall, and the second in 2023 for the Grand Bassa CMA in Buchanan. The offices provide a space for CMAs to convene, discuss issues affecting them and the fisheries, and decide on actions to address them. The offices also make it easier for partners to locate and meet with the CMAs in the communities. Additionally, the structures provide opportunities for the CMA to raise funds to implement activities through hall rental and other innovative business ideas.



CMA office handover ceremony in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



## • Film trip

A film team comprising five members from EJV travelled to Grand Kru in October 2024 to document the project's milestones and assess its impacts in one of Liberia's remotest counties. This gave the community members who had been instrumental in achieving the project's goals a chance to tell their stories of how the project had impacted their lives and communities. The film team interviewed the CMA leadership and VSLA members and filmed the Community Science and MCS teams and turtle patrollers in action. The documentary will be released in 2025 and will showcase how the European Union-funded Communities for Fisheries project has impacted the lives of artisanal fishers and promoted sustainable and legal fisheries in Liberia.



A film team member preparing to interview an MCS Committee member in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



EJV staff relocating turtle eggs away from poachers, Sasstown, Grand Kru County.



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## • Unlocking opportunities

The project also released a new report titled “Unlocking opportunities: potential alternative and supplementary livelihoods in Liberia’s coastal communities”. The report highlights opportunities to secure sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities in Liberia to alleviate pressure on overexploited fish populations while empowering fishers and fish workers to build resilient futures.

It sheds light on the challenges faced by Liberia’s fisheries sector, which contributes 10% of the country’s GDP and employs more than 51,000 people. It also offers actionable insights into how alternative livelihoods can alleviate poverty and ensure long-term economic and environmental sustainability.

In the report, fishers expressed deep cultural and economic ties to fishing, with many identifying the profession as a source of pride and identity. Nevertheless, 83% of respondents indicated a willingness to explore alternative livelihoods if these options could provide similar or greater financial returns. The most promising alternatives included selling fishing equipment, offering transportation services, and engaging in retail activities. Women fish workers, who represent 60% of Liberia’s fisheries workforce, favoured ventures such as petty trading, tailoring, and farming.

With this report, we are providing practical solutions to reduce dependency on marine resources while offering fishers and fish workers a pathway to financial security. These efforts are essential to protect Liberia’s fish populations and the communities that depend on them.

This is the fourth report published by the project since its inception in 2019.

Find a link to the full report here:

<https://ejfoundation.org/reports/unlocking-opportunities-potential-alternative-and-supplementary-livelihoods-in-liberias-coastal-communities>



Canoe carver at work, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



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## • Supporting CMA formation in Cameroon under the European Union-funded Global Toolkit project

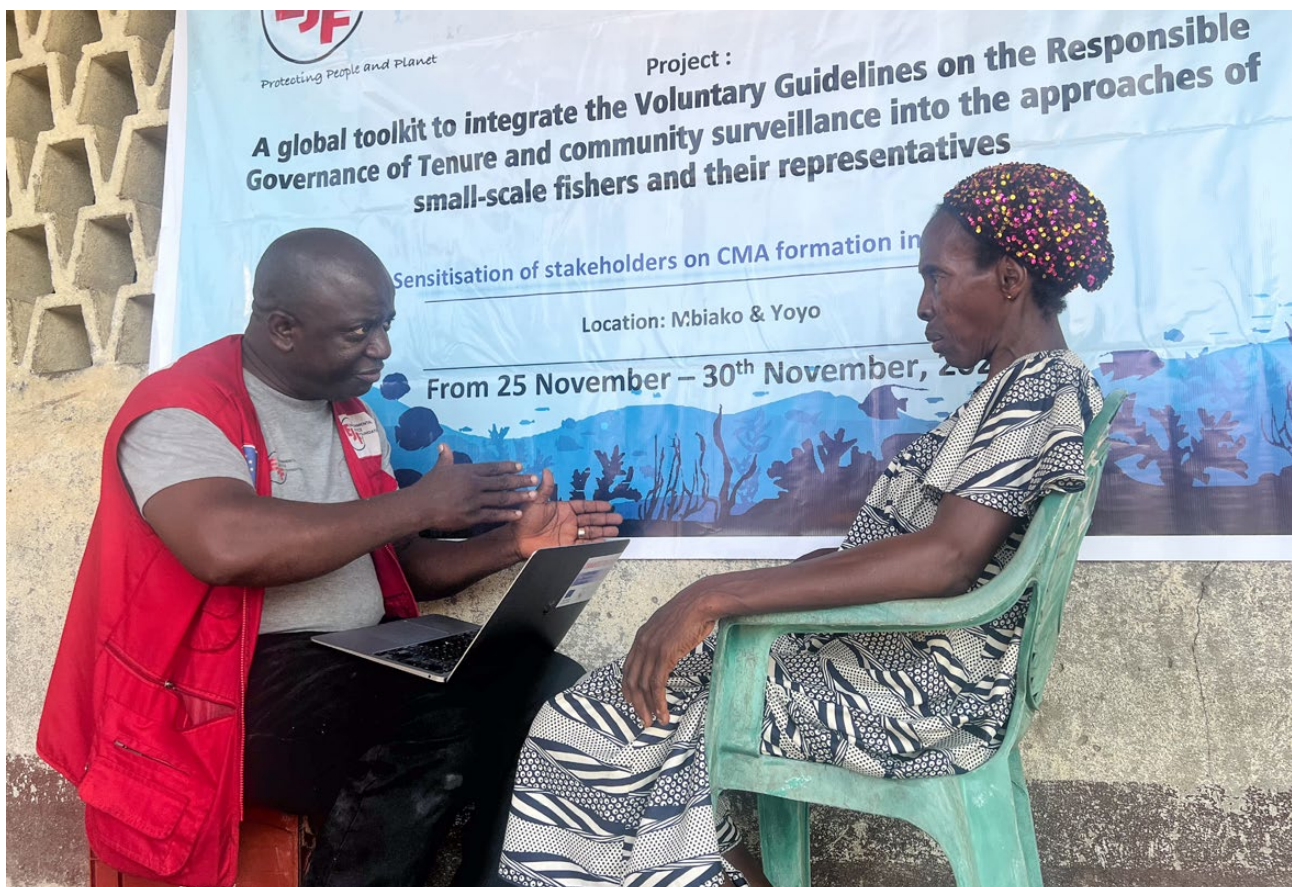
EJF has incorporated lessons from the Communities for Fisheries project into developing a European Union-funded toolkit for participatory fisheries governance, which will be introduced in 15 coastal countries in the Global South.

A project team member travelled to Cameroon in November to support the establishment of the Local Community Management Committee (LCMC) formation process in the Yoyo and Mbiako fishing communities as part of the toolkit's implementation.

The European Union Delegation in Liberia has also recognised the project's impacts and recommends its Village Savings and Loans Association strategy for empowering women be implemented in other European Union-funded fisheries initiatives.

Our heartfelt thanks to the European Union, the collective efforts of Liberia's coastal communities, and NaFAA for leading practical and durable solutions through the Communities for Fisheries project to promote legal and sustainable fisheries in Liberia and beyond.

We will continue documenting good practices, challenges, and lessons learned from the project in our reports to contribute to participatory and legal fisheries management in Liberia and globally.



EJF staff interviewing a fishmonger in Yoyo, Cameroon.

## 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 needed to improve local fisheries governance.
- Resourcing CMAs ensures sustainability and continuity. Hence, NaFAA needs to ensure the funding allocation in the MoU is delivered to the CMAs.
- NaFAA ensuring that parallel donor programmes engage CMAs underscores their legitimacy.
- Enhanced collaboration between implementing partners leads to cost-effective operations and amplified impact, which benefits 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 are instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability in Liberia's fisheries sector. Supporting their work through capacity building and introduction to open-source investigative tools enhances their skills to promote more sustainable fisheries.



Fish landing site, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.





A fisher's catch of the day, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



EJF staff mobilising fishers, Grand Cess, Grand Kru County.



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