

THE COST OF COLLABORATION

Documenting the effectiveness of co-management practice in Liberia



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Abbreviations

ACM: Adaptive Co-Management	IUU: Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (fishing)
ACMA: Adaptive Co-management Associations	KI: Key informant
BNF: Bureau of National Fisheries	KII: Key informant interview
CMA: Collaborative Management Association	LAFAs: Liberia Artisanal Fishermen Association
EJF: Environmental Justice Foundation	MBCMA: Montserrado and Bomi Co-management Association
EU: European Union	MoA: Ministry of Agriculture
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	MoU: Memorandum of Understanding
GDP: Gross Domestic Product	NaFAA: Liberia National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority
IEZ: Inshore Exclusion Zone	SSF: Small-scale fisheries/fishers
INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation	TURF: Territorial Use Rights for Fisheries
IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	WB: World Bank
	WARFP: West African Regional Fisheries Program



Executive summary

Fishermen leaving for a fishing trip in Robertsport

Key findings

The Government of Liberia was solely responsible for the management of small-scale fisheries until 2012, when the country adopted collaborative management as an alternative fisheries management practice. To implement collaborative management, Liberia established the Collaborative Management Association (CMA), which entails sharing responsibilities between resource users and governing bodies, to promote inclusivity and decentralise fisheries management in the country. This report uses the experiences of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA to present the challenges, achievements, and lessons learned from practising co-management in Liberia. The report draws from data collected from structured and semi-structured interviews with employees of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, members of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA, former staff of the West African Regional Fisheries Program, fishermen, fishmongers, and fish processors from 10 of the 15 fishing communities in Grand Cape Mount County and seeks to inform future CMA management in the country. This report also contributes to the data deficit that exists in Liberia's fisheries sector.

The report findings show that co-management as an alternative to centralised fisheries management has not yielded its desired results in Liberia. The key findings are summarised below:

- The major challenges hindering the CMA model from achieving its desired results include a lack of cooperation from the central government, insufficient finances, and poor leadership and decision-making structures.
- The research highlighted the **withdrawal of financial support and a lack of a long-term strategy to secure the sustainability of CMA functions** as the main cause of challenges encountered by the CMAs. Grand Cape Mount County CMA was established by the World Bank West African Regional Fisheries Program (WARFP), which invested significant finances into establishing the CMA and hosting its activities. However, the communities and the central government have been unable to sustain the CMA and its activities since the end of the WARFP and withdrawal of funding.

- The findings indicate that the challenges are also linked to a **lack of trust and ineffective communication strategies** between key stakeholders in the CMAs. This gap has eroded collaboration between the actors and served as a significant barrier to effective co-management.
- The findings presented in the report demonstrate that **improving unity amongst fishers, aiding conflict resolution, combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and leading rescue missions** are positive outcomes that can be achieved through the establishment and operation of functional CMAs in Liberia.
- Key lessons that can be learned from the CMA experience in Liberia include: (i) the importance of the central government's support to the CMA process, (ii) the significance of strong laws and policies to guide the CMAs' operations, (iii) the need to promote sustainability and self-sufficiency, (iv) the need for ongoing reflection and evaluation, (v) the importance of a strategy to effectively engage and manage all communities forming part of the CMA, and (vi) the importance of including women during every stage of the process.

The research recommends that stakeholders take intentional steps to rejuvenate the Grand Cape Mount County and other CMAs, including hosting reconciliatory meetings, conducting widespread community awareness of the CMA process, and implementing general elections. The above lessons should furthermore be integrated into the planning and development of recently established CMAs, to avoid the pitfalls identified in this research.

1. Introduction

IUU fishing is a global maritime issue.¹ IUU fishing – which includes all fishing that contravenes fisheries laws or occurs outside the reach of fisheries laws and regulations – includes activities such as fishing in closed areas or during closed seasons, targeting protected species, using prohibited fishing methods and fishing without a valid licence. These practices threaten ocean ecosystems, deplete marine resources and undermine sustainable fisheries in many regions across the world.²

One region experiencing high levels of IUU fishing is the West Central Gulf of Guinea.³ IUU fishing in this region alone contributes approximately 57% of Africa's annual share of IUU catch,⁴ threatening the livelihoods of around 200 million people dependent on fisheries for income, as well as regional food security (fish accounts for 60% of animal protein intake).⁵ The region's fish production is estimated at 1,293,000 tonnes per year, providing a revenue source for countries through royalties and other fees from licensing of fishing vessels, industry operations and fisheries access agreements.⁶

In Liberia, the most prevalent type of IUU fishing is unauthorised fishing carried out by both registered and unregistered industrial trawlers in Liberia's Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ).⁷ These activities deplete fisheries resources which directly support over 33,000⁸ people working in small-scale fisheries in Liberia, destroy the fishing gear of local small-scale fishers, threaten the food security of the estimated 80% of Liberia's population that depend on fish for essential dietary protein and rob the country's struggling economy of revenues.⁹

The fisheries sector is key to Liberia's economy. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), fisheries contributed 12% of agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 3.2% of national GDP in 2002.¹⁰ In 2020, the artisanal fisheries alone landed 18,086 tonnes of fish worth LD \$2.5 billion (US\$16.04 million).¹¹

Co-management is currently being trialled in Liberia to improve the management of the fisheries sector and to address IUU fishing in Liberia's waters. Co-management 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/or authority is conferred to both parties."¹² Co-management has been experimented with to manage different aspects of small-scale

fisheries in a number of contexts.¹³ It has been used to promote social learning in North America,¹⁴ manage decentralisation of fisheries management and increase fishers' representation in decision-making processes in India and in the Philippines,^{15,16} address IUU fishing in Mauritania and Guinea,¹⁷ and increase sustainability in Ghana's fisheries.¹⁸ Some countries practising co-management have reported tangible positive results since they adopted the approach in their fisheries sectors.^{19,20} However, co-management outcomes have been extremely inconsistent, with some communities reporting positive experiences and others seeing little or no benefits at all.²¹

There are currently four CMAs in Liberia – the Grand Cape Mount County CMA, the Montserrado and Bomi Counties CMA, the Margibi County CMA, and the Grand Bassa County CMA. The first CMA to be established was the Grand Cape Mount County CMA, which was established in 2011 by the West African Regional Fisheries Program (WARFP), funded by the World Bank in collaboration with the Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF), now known as Liberia's National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA). The Montserrado and Bomi Counties CMA was established in 2019 by NaFAA, while the Margibi County CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA, and Grand Kru (Grand Cess and Sass Town) were established in 2022 and 2023 by the Communities for Fisheries Project funded by the European Union, implemented by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) in collaboration with NaFAA. The CMAs were established to decentralise fisheries resource management and make it more inclusive and effective.²²

The CMAs take a direct role in managing the Territorial Use Rights for Fisheries (TURF) declared by the Government of Liberia, as envisaged under Liberia's 2014 Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategy:

“Use co-management institutions for allocation and management of fishing rights, including adaptable participatory monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for the management of the inshore fisheries. Provide the legal framework to support the existence and operations of the locally based participatory management institutions, the declaration of co-management areas (TURFs), co-management agreements, and allocation and utilisation of proceeds of fishing rights.”²³

This report reviews the achievements, challenges, and significant lessons of the first CMA to be established in Liberia – the Grand Cape Mount County CMA. It identifies the main barriers to effective co-management in Liberia and makes recommendations to address the issues identified. The findings are intended to inform options to scale-up the establishment of CMAs to better manage Liberia's coastal and inland fisheries resources, as well as ongoing efforts to improve the effectiveness of the existing CMAs in the country.

Fishermen pulling in their fishing net at sea



2. Liberia's fisheries sector

Liberia has a 570 km coastline and fishing grounds covering 20,000 km², stretching from Grand Cape Mount County in the north to Maryland County in the south.²⁴ The fishing subsector generates 3% of real GDP²⁵ and is organised into three parts: marine fisheries, which include both industrial and small-scale

fisheries, artisanal inland fisheries, and aquaculture, which is still in its infancy. Foreigners dominate the industrial and marine fisheries,²⁶ and locals dominate the inland fishing, mainly undertaken on the country's six major rivers and two lakes.²⁷

Figure 1: Political map of Liberia (<https://ontheworldmap.com/liberia/>)



2.1. Liberia's small-scale fisheries

Liberia's small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector plays a pivotal role in food security and fisheries production in Liberia.^{28,29} The sector is an important source of income for Liberians and other nationals; it employs over 33,000 Liberians³⁰ – 60% of whom are women – who work in fishing, fish processing, and fish mongering, primarily in the country's 114 fishing towns across nine coastal counties.^{31,32} In contrast, the industrial sector employs around 500 people who primarily serve as deckhands on vessels and labourers in cold storage depots or units.³³

The SSF sector is dominated by the Kru, the Fanti who originate from Ghana, and the creole from Senegal. They use canoes of different sizes powered by oars, sails, paddles, and, recently, outboard motors.³⁴ Fishing gear used includes purse seines, beach seines, lines and hooks, and gill nets. The sector targets demersal species, and pelagic species such as sardinella, tuna, billfish, and bonito. Other species groups targeted are barracuda, soles, croakers, sharks, and rays.³⁵

2.2. Small-scale fisheries management

The central government has been solely responsible for the governance of SSF in Liberia since the mid-1950s.³⁶ The institution responsible for SSF was the Ministry of Agriculture's BNF Unit until NaFAA was established in 2017 to assume this responsibility. NaFAA now operates as a fully-fledged independent agency under Liberia's Public Authorities Law.³⁷ Among other functions, NaFAA seeks to provide job opportunities in the fisheries sector, encourage participatory fisheries management, boost sustainable fishing practices and contribute to national GDP and food security.³⁸

A local governance structure that is supported by Liberia's customary law and recognized by the central government also plays a role in fisheries management in the communities. These structures were provided for in the country's fisheries regulation and are meant to sustain and preserve SSF. The structures exist at the community level and are led by tribal chiefs who are assisted by 'Sea Chiefs' from the different tribal groups in the community. These tribal chiefs and Sea Chiefs are tasked with coordinating the activities of small-scale fishers in the communities.³⁹

Another body that contributes to the management of fisheries in Liberia is the Liberia Artisanal Fishermen Association (LAFA). This group was formed in 2009 as a representative organisation of small-scale fishers in Liberia. They are also an advocacy body that protects the interest of small-scale fishers.

2.3. Co-management as a form of small-scale fisheries management in Liberia

Despite significant contributions to the country's economy, the SSF sector in Liberia is significantly hampered by a number of challenges. Some general roadblocks challenging SSF include: a lack of funding, limited market access, inadequate technology to increase fish quality and add value to the products, poor infrastructure at the landing sites, unskilled labour, insufficient infrastructure for processing and preserving fishery products, limited adoption of new fishing technologies and high electricity costs.⁴⁰ Currently, all fishing gear used in the SSF sector is imported from neighbouring countries.⁴¹ These challenges are compounded by the combined threats of over-exploitation, habitat degradation, pollution and illegal fishing activities.⁴² Additionally, the SSF sector is often overlooked by the central government, viewing fishers as "reckless custodians" of fisheries resources who are blamed for over-exploitation and its corollary effects on fisheries

resources.⁴³ These challenges have made small-scale fishers some of the most "destitute socio-economic groups" in the country.⁴⁴

To address some of these fisheries management challenges, in 2011, with support from the World Bank's WARFP, the Liberian government introduced a co-management strategy.

As described above, Liberia currently has six co-management associations: the Grand Cape Mount County CMA, the Montserrado and Bomi Counties CMA, the Margibi County CMA, the Grand Bassa County CMA and the Sassa Town and Grand Cess CMA in Grand Kru.

3. Methodology

Relevant documents and available data on fisheries co-management in Liberia were reviewed to understand the current state of CMAs in Liberia. Primary data collection consisted of structured and semi-structured interviews.

The study focused on the collection of data from the Grand Cape Mount County CMA as it is the oldest and most organised CMA in Liberia. Members of this CMA have been practising co-management for 12 years and could provide more information on the challenges and achievements of CMAs in Liberia compared to other CMAs still in their nascent stages. The legal and policy instruments that guided and enabled the formation of the CMAs, and now regulate their activities, were also analysed to supplement information received from interviews.

3.1. Interviews

A total of 38 structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted as follows:

3.1.1. Structured Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Sixteen KII were conducted. This mainly involved research participants from government institutions (regional and national) responsible for fisheries management and policy making, the CMA leadership, and non-governmental (local and international) institutions who are stakeholders in the Grand Cape Mount County CMA process.

3.1.2. Informal interviews

Twenty participants for these informal, semi-structured interviews were drawn from 10 of the 15 fishing communities covered by the Grand Cape Mount County CMA. These participants were primarily fishermen, fish processors, and fishmongers registered with the Grand Cape Mount County CMA. Poor road conditions, exacerbated by the rainy season, meant that 6 of the 20 participants were interviewed by phone, and 5 of the 15 communities were not reachable.

The data collected from the interviews were coded and compared against data gathered from the archival research for verification purposes. The categories in which the findings are presented were identified and created during the data analysis.

3.2. Coding of participants

For the purposes of attributing statements to respondents in this report, the different categories of respondents were assigned codes, made up of the acronyms of their category and a number to ensure confidentiality. The numbers were randomly attached to the acronyms and did not indicate positions or roles. Participants from the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority were coded as NaFAA-1, NaFAA-2, NaFAA-3, and NaFAA-4, etc., participants from the CMA leadership were coded as CMA-1, CMA-2, CMA-3, CMA-4, etc., participants who fall under the international stakeholders' category were coded as IS-1, IS-2, IS-3, IS-4, and participants from the fishing communities were coded as CM-1, CM-2, CM-3, CM-4, etc.

4. Case study: The Grand Cape Mount County CMA

The Grand Cape Mount CMA was registered with the Liberia Business Registry as a 'Not-for-Profit' corporation⁴⁵ with an Article of Incorporation that supported its establishment and gave the CMA the right to act as an independent corporation. This approach was used to give the CMA a legal backing as there was no provision in earlier fisheries laws and regulations^{46,47,48} for managing fisheries resources through co-management.

The Grand Cape Mount County CMA was established to meet a pre-defined objective: to manage the then proposed TURF that was later declared by the Government of Liberia in 2013 under Liberia's Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategy. The TURF extends from the coastline community of Fomba Town Beach (northwest) to Kru Town Taylor (northeast) of the Grand Cape Mount County.⁴⁹ The CMA was also responsible for ensuring "...transparent and efficient monitoring of prosecution processes and the imposition of and collection of fines/penalties, as well as follow up [of] infractions."⁵⁰

The Grand Cape Mount County CMA was established as a pilot project that was intended to develop as the responsibility of communities in managing fisheries resources became more advanced. Experience gained from the CMA was envisaged to inform the establishment of further TURFs and CMAs. The Grand Cape Mount County CMA now oversees the 15 fishing communities (communities involved in both marine and inland fishing) in Grand Cape Mount County and has a membership of over 1,500 people.⁵¹ The communities are divided into three zones for management purposes. The CMA is led by local community members who are elected every three years and a board of directors who are appointed every four years.

According to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)⁵² signed between the Grand Cape Mount County CMA and the central government, the cooperative partnership between the Government of Liberia and the CMA delegated formal roles and responsibilities to both parties to manage marine resources in Grand Cape Mount County.

5. Findings

5.1. The achievements of co-management in Liberia

Though Liberia's co-management experience began in 2011, the experience has not been adequately documented. A particular data gap exists on the progress and setbacks of practising co-management in Liberia. This part of the report presents the achievements and challenges associated with the establishment of CMAs in the country, using the Grand Cape Mount County CMA as a case study. This is based on data gathered from structured and semi-structured interviews held with stakeholders of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA and a review of the available literature.

5.1.1. The establishment of the CMA

Establishing the Grand Cape Mount County CMA was seen as a major achievement by the research participants. Liberia's fishing communities are dominated by people of different ethnic groups with different fishing gear and methods. Conflicts between the various tribes have arisen concerning ownership of community lands, access to landing sites, acceptable fishing practices and legitimacy. Establishing co-management necessitated a reconciliation between the parties and a commitment to work together to manage the shared resources. This commitment, despite their differences, is considered a major achievement of the CMA.

The formation of the CMA has enabled the collection of fisheries-related information to address key data gaps in fisheries management. Data collected includes the names of fishers, numbers of canoes and fishing vessels operating in their TURFS (providing a measure of the capacity used to harvest the resources), the catch being harvested, and fishing grounds. Collecting data on vessels and their target species also informs fisheries managers on the types of species being fully exploited and over-exploited and the fishing methods being employed.⁵³

5.1.2. Addressing IUU fishing

Another achievement is the instrumental role played by the CMA in combating IUU fishing in their TURF. The Grand Cape Mount County CMA has actively led monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) in their TURF and has reported cases of IUU fishing involving both industrial vessels and local fishermen. The CMA

has also been effective in penalising local fishermen who have been caught engaging in IUU fishing in their TURF. According to a staff member at NaFAA:

“Monitoring and surveillance is one of the biggest achievements of the CMA. They play a leading role in helping to fight IUU in the country, through them, we were able to track a lot of trawlers down, and enforce the regulations on these trawlers.”

(NaFAA-3)

MCS is carried out by the MCS committee, one of the six CMA core committees, and other volunteers. Members of the committee who go out fishing use their trips to monitor IUU fishing activities and record evidence using their phones and tablets. The evidence is then submitted to the CMA's Executive Council. The Council fines local fishermen engaged in IUU fishing practices and forwards information on industrial vessels to NaFAA to take the necessary action. Following the introduction of the Dase App to capture and report evidence of IUU fishing, under the Communities for Fisheries project being implemented by EJF⁵⁴, additional fishers have volunteered to join the CMA's MCS team. According to a staff member of the Communities for Fisheries project, more than 30 fishermen in Robertsport have the application installed on their phones and have been trained on how to use it to collect evidence of IUU fishing.

5.1.3. Rescue missions

The CMA leads and funds search and rescue teams to go out looking for fishers who get lost at sea during fishing expeditions. When fishers go missing, their families or friends inform the CMA which responds by providing fuel for outboard engines, manpower, and supplies to facilitate the search missions. 89% of respondents mentioned this as a key achievement of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA. From 2012 to 2022, the Robertsport CMA conducted around 15 rescue missions. In June 2020, the MCS team rescued five fishermen whose fishing canoe capsized at the estuary. The fishermen went fishing during the night and their canoe capsized while they were returning to the Robertsport Fish Landing Cluster's landing site. The MCS team was alerted by another fisherman who watched the accident occur while on his way out fishing. The CMA provided the fuel and canoe for the search and rescue mission.



Fishermen preparing for a rescue mission

5.1.4. Conflict resolution

The Grand Cape Mount County CMA resolves conflicts arising between the different fishing groups. Respondents reported that the conflicts stemming from competition between the Fanti and the Kru have reduced because of the CMA's involvement. As in other contexts, the CMA resolves conflicts by facilitating conversations and choosing the best course of action to address the issue.⁵⁵ Conflict resolution is conducted through a forum held at the CMA office or in the communities. The forum brings together the complainant and accused, the Sea Chiefs and town chiefs of the communities concerned, and the CMA grievance and ethics committee to resolve registered complaints. Parties found guilty are usually fined with an amount agreed upon through consensus. By resolving conflicts, the CMAs play a central role in managing access to resources, while maintaining social interactions that are critical in preventing division in the communities.⁵⁶

5.2. The challenges of co-management in Liberia

The major challenge faced by the Grand Cape Mount County CMA in Liberia can be referred to as “instrumental co-management.”⁵⁷ This occurs when government institutions perceive co-management primarily as a means of achieving their management objectives rather than treating the CMAs as a partner or decision-maker. This was evident through complaints from participants that the CMA is no longer involved in decision-making processes but is only called upon to implement the decisions after NaFAA has made them. These challenges, if not resolved, can severely undermine the independence and democracy of the CMAs and deliver the opposite of what CMA seeks to achieve – a relapse towards the top-down (command-and-control) approach to fisheries management.

5.2.1. Commitment and cooperation from the central government

The findings of this research identified the need for greater commitment, political will and cooperation from the central government if the Grand Cape Mount County CMA is to function as originally intended. According to one KI:

“If NaFAA does not make CMA central to its management of fisheries and provide the necessary support, training, financial support, etc, then the entire CMA process is not made functional.”

(IP-2)

In practice, devolution of power to communities through the CMA has been slow. Perceived interference from NaFAA has been reported across all CMA activities and has created CMAs that are heavily reliant on the central government. According to a former staff of WARFP:

“[The] CMA is just here to say yes to NaFAA when NaFAA calls from Monrovia... I think that the only reason why they are dealing with the CMA is that they are organised in the communities and that makes them kind of useful to them.”

(IP-1)

The extent of this perceived interference has led some community members to believe that the CMA has been replaced by NaFAA or is only an implementing appendage of NaFAA. A Sea Chief from one of the fishing communities, while describing changes in the CMA over time, said:

“When the CMA was here, we were working fine with them, but since NaFAA took over, we are not understanding anything again.”

(CM-20)

This challenge has persisted since around 2017 for the Grand Cape Mount County CMA.

5.2.2. Ownership and management of the fish landing cluster in Robertsport

In Robertsport, there have been misunderstandings between the central government and the local community regarding the management of the fish landing cluster constructed under the WARFP. During

interviews with the community members and KIs who were instrumental in forming the CMA, it became apparent that the plan under the WARFP project was for the CMA to manage the Robertsport fish landing facilities, to raise revenue to support its activities:

“The principal form of revenue was to be, the leases and the structures provided by the infrastructure... it was accepted that the community would take some time to build up their skills and their management processes to ensure that they got proper revenues from the facilities that they were managing.”

(IP-2)

The members of the CMA are cognisant of this, and as a result they are claiming ownership of the facility:

“Initially, before this project started, it was said that CMA will have a certain portion of the benefits from here, the county will have a certain portion, and the national government will have a portion...From the onset, that is what was in our minds. So, even if NaFAA is not here, CMA is still in charge of this place.”

(CMA-6)



Fishermen changing centre at the Robertsport Fish Landing Cluster

However, a staff member of NaFAA explained that this is not the case and the members of the CMA have misunderstood the management plan for the facility:

“But I know, down the line, they misunderstood that they were the ones who were going to manage it, they have told me that before, that it was built for them to manage it, but they do not have the skills to manage it. They do not even have the resources to manage it.”

(NaFAA-7)

Based on a review of the relevant documents, this research confirmed that the management of the cluster is the prerogative of the CMA and the Grand Cape Mount county's authorities and not NaFAA. Only the county's authorities and the CMA can divest authority to NaFAA or to other private entities to manage the cluster, while the CMA has the option to join the management plan or not. This is clarified in the enterprise development plan for the facility:

“While the landing site cluster will be part of the Robertsport CMA infrastructure, the authority/mandate to charge/levy and collect market tolls/fees is by ordinance the prerogative of the Robertsport County Authorities. Therefore, for the landing site cluster to be managed as a self-financing enterprise, it will require an arrangement for the county authorities to consent to divest authority and accept a revenue-sharing system whereby profits after expenses will be shared based upon agreed ratios at specified time intervals (quarterly, half-yearly or even yearly basis) between the managers of the facility and the county authorities. However, options exist to the CMA itself, the custodians of the property (the landing site cluster), either will agree to join the revenue sharing system above or grant the use of the landing cluster to the management/firm/entrepreneur on lease basis in which case it will reap its dividends once on yearly basis.”⁵⁸

5.2.3. Financial challenges/lack of funding

The major sources of revenue for the Grand Cape Mount County CMA are: (i) dues paid by members, (ii) money raised from the fish landing cluster, and (iii) a 10% remittance on licence payments, canoe registration fees, and seasonal fishers' fees paid to the national authority.

However, these payments are no longer being made to the CMA, and this has affected their ability to operate efficiently. The communities gave two reasons for which they do not pay dues to the CMA. Firstly, they are not seeing the benefits of the dues they have paid. This stems from their frustration and disappointment in how the CMA has turned out – as observed in other contexts, when co-management is first implemented, there are often high hopes for real empowerment and participation from the communities but, in practice, it may become business as usual rather than an exercise in institutional reform.⁵⁹ The second is a lack of accountability concerning dues paid. The CMA has not been transparent with communities regarding the funds being raised and how they have been used, and this has created mistrust between communities and the CMA.

Money raised from the landing cluster remains the only stable source of income for the Grand Cape Mount County CMA. According to one of the local managers of the cluster, this income has been raised in the following ways:

“We have certain areas there that we could generate funds from. The landing sites where the canoes come and berth, they gave a certain amount of money, where we have the smoke sheds, women pay to dry the fish and we generate funds from there, and we have some of the facilities that are out for lease, like the school and the stores...and the money was used to compensate staff managing the facility, and fund activities like rescue missions.”

(CMA-3)

The remaining sources of income as stipulated above under (iii) are no longer generating funds for the CMA. According to the MoU between the CMA and the government, NaFAA is supposed to remit 10% of the total fishing licence and registration fees collected by the CMAs in their TURFs.⁶⁰ However, there has been no remittance from the central government to the Grand Cape Mount County CMA since 2017.

5.2.4. Reliance on donor support

The establishment of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA under a donor-funded project (in this case, the World Bank) created a number of issues which undermined the sustainability of the project:

- During the project, the central government committed to devolve power to the CMA, incentivised by the provision of economic and development support. However, it appears that this commitment only lasted for the duration of the project and ceased after funding was withdrawn.
- Local participation was also driven by economic incentives provided – including training and per-diems for meetings – rather than by a desire to contribute to the purpose of the CMA. Community enthusiasm was therefore short-lived and ended after economic incentives were no longer provided.
- The project did not establish effective structures to ensure the generation of revenues to support the long-term functioning of the CMA.
- Implementation plans for the CMA were drawn up by experts from the donor agency – some of whom visited the project site only twice per year – and community members were only belatedly included in the consultation process. This undermined the sustainability of the project.

These shortcomings undermined the sustainability of the project from its nascent stage and set it up for challenges that have resulted in its current inefficiency.

5.2.5. Information dissemination

According to respondents, there is currently no organised flow of information from the Grand Cape Mount County CMA leadership to the communities. The communities outside of Robertsport – the county’s capital where the CMA is based – complained that the CMA does not inform them of any activity or engagement. A fishmonger from Fali who used to serve on the CMA representative council said that:

“We do not know anything. We can’t get any information from them, they are not calling us on meetings, what is happening, what is not happening, we do not know anything about it. We are just sitting down here.”

(CMA-7)

Community members complained that they only see or hear from the leadership of the CMA if the communities call them to resolve issues in the communities, or when the CMA leadership goes to collect money for ID cards or canoe licence fees.

The CMA leadership claimed that they do not share information because they are currently not making decisions as a body. According to the leaders interviewed, when decisions are made or when they receive information from NaFAA, they usually have an executive council meeting (the executive council only has three active members currently) to discuss the information received. They then share the information with the zonal coordinators who are responsible for circulating the information in their different zones, which each consist of five communities. However, the zonal coordinators are not resourced or able to travel to the communities to relay the information, and so the information often does not reach the people in the communities. This has left those in some communities feeling excluded from the CMA process. In an interview with one of the zonal coordinators, he explained that:

“It is hard to go from community to community with information. I do not receive transportation or any help. So sometimes, I just call some people in the communities to share the information.”

(CMA-8)

5.2.6. Decision-making

The highest decision-making body in the Grand Cape Mount County CMA is the general assembly.⁶¹ This general assembly brings together all members of the CMA in the 15 collaborating communities and was hosted annually in December until 2014. The assembly functions are to review and approve CMA work plans, annual budgets, and proposed projects for implementation.⁶²

Alongside the general assembly is the Board of Directors. Members of this board are supposed to serve for four years and meet three times a year.⁶³ However, the current board members were appointed in 2014 and do not meet regularly. The appointment and endorsement of the board’s members is supposed to be done at the general assembly, along with an amendment to the constitution if necessary.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, because the general assembly has not been meeting, new board members have not been

appointed or endorsed since 2014 and there has been no amendment to the constitution since then. According to the constitution, when a decision is made at the general assembly, it is to be passed over to the board for revision and approval. Once the board approves, it is communicated to the executive committee that runs the day-to-day activities of the CMA to oversee the implementation of the decision. The executive will then share the information with the zonal coordinators, the representative council members and the working committees – membership recruitment, business, community science, MCS, planning, and conflict resolution – for implementation in the communities.

As the general assembly has not been convened since 2014, according to the members of the CMA, all decisions have been taken by the executive committee and communicated with the communities. They reported that they resolved to make decisions this way because the general assembly is very cost-intensive. The budget for the last general assembly, which was only a one-day event, was approximately \$25,000 and was funded by the WARFP. The current leadership of the CMA said that on two different occasions, they tried to reduce the cost and host a general assembly, but they **“just cannot cover the cost associated with hosting the assembly.”** (CMA-3)

Currently, the CMA is not making decisions as a body. All the decisions being implemented in the TURF are made by NaFAA. However, the CMA leadership feel excluded from these decision-making processes and because of this exclusion, they do not view the process as collaborative. A member of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA leadership complained that:

“Everything has been coming from the top to the bottom...they are missing the mark of the establishment of the CMA.”

(CMA-6)

While discussing this, a member of staff from the CMA said that:

“Everything comes from Monrovia these days and you won’t say anything against them, if you say it, it is a big problem. Even for example, when they increased the taxes, we made a series of attempts to meet some of the managerial staff at NaFAA to talk and see if they could reduce it but they did not listen to us.”

(CMA-3)

Fishmongers and processors in a meeting on the beach



5.2.7. Insufficient efforts to engage women in the communities

The core committee that was formed to set up the Grand Cape Mount County CMA was composed of two women who actively contributed to the successful establishment of the CMA. Additionally, one of those women ascended to the Vice Presidency after the CMA had its first elections. Nevertheless, the lack of active participation by women in the CMA remains a challenge. Respondents suggested this is because most women in fishing communities lack access to formal education, and many do not have experience in this type of leadership or decision-making. Another reason flagged was a lack of time due to the intensive nature of their work as fishmongers and fish processors.

5.2.8. Leadership structure

The Grand Cape Mount County CMA has not had elections since 2017 – according to respondents, this is due to an inability to raise funds to support the activity. Its current leaders have served in their positions for five consecutive years, even though the CMA constitution explicitly states that leaders “shall serve for not more than three (3) years.”⁶⁵ The need to hold elections was highlighted as a priority for several respondents. Currently, only three out of the seven members of the executive council are active, meaning the leadership structure is fragile. The current leadership admitted that this is a challenge. According to one council member:

“The leadership should not have been in power for all this time, this means that it is not democracy and we are preaching democracy that no leader should go above 2 terms, because other leaders need to come in.”

(CMA-3)

Another key point flagged by community members is that the leadership of the CMA has been in the hands of few people. For example, the current co-chair was the first CMA president, and the secretary-general has been in that position since the CMA’s first elections. Another respondent noted that elections should be held regularly so that the members of the CMA can circulate through the senior management positions and can all have the chance to take on leadership roles.

According to respondents, the Communities for Fisheries project tried to resolve the issue by hosting the CMA general election in 2021, but NaFAA halted the process. Respondents from NaFAA stated that the election was halted to conduct an audit on the current CMA leadership.

6. Lessons learned from the CMA experience in Liberia

The Grand Cape Mount County CMA was intended to be a pilot project from which lessons would be acquired and used in replicating CMAs in other communities, and so this section of this report outlines the lessons learned from this CMA that can be applied to others.

- **Cooperation from the central government in the CMA process:**

Before forming a CMA, it is vital to ensure that the central government is willing to support the institution and share power and responsibilities through a consultative and collaborative approach. A KI who was instrumental in forming the CMA succinctly summarised this lesson when he said:

“The Robertsport experience has been a value in other countries in that respect, we have been able to show that despite investment in big infrastructures, in people, in systems, in landing sites, in fuel supplies, in clean fish processing activities, in cool stores, in ice making, in all of the things communities need to scale up the value they can take from fisheries, if there is no political support, it is all wasted.”

(IP-2)

- **Adoption of strong and binding policies that ensure compliance and implementation:**

The effectiveness of the CMA hinges on strong and binding policies that ensure accountability of both the central government and community participants of the CMA. Research participants concluded that NaFAA has not shown enough commitment to the MoU with the CMA because it is not binding, and the MoU also gives the central government the authority to act against the MoU if necessary.⁶⁶

- **Implementation of development projects that the communities can manage themselves:**

Development projects that can be managed in the absence of donors or external support are of key importance. A case in point is the huge facility built under the WARFP, especially the cold storage which is costly to maintain. The intention behind the construction of the cold storage facility was to address community need for one, and rightly recognised that for the CMA to be self-sufficient,

this type of investment was needed to guarantee a flow of income to the communities. However, due to the size of the facility, maintaining it has become a burden on the CMA instead of the help it was intended to be. Communities are now not using the facility and it cannot serve its purpose. This has resulted in the Grand Cape Mount County CMA's high dependence on external funding.

- **Reduction in the geographical scope of the CMA to allow for effective communication:**

The CMA leadership complained that some of their challenges, specifically regarding information dissemination, stems from the number of communities that form part of the CMA. As an institution beset with financial and logistical difficulties, meeting its purpose and serving all the fishing communities within its jurisdiction is a serious challenge. For the CMA to effectively communicate and engage with fishers, the geographical scope of the CMA should be reduced so that it is not burdensome. Alternatively, the necessary financial support should be provided for the CMA and its leaders, including the zonal coordinators, to be able to engage with all the communities under their jurisdiction.

- **Encouraging CMAs to be independent and proactive in raising funds:**

This includes teaching CMA leaders to create linkages with external institutions, conduct needs assessments, write project proposals, and implement activities

independently. To enable this, a section of the MoU (Count 8 of the Responsibilities of the CMA) which limits the CMA to soliciting funds only through NaFAA,⁶⁷ would need to be amended. This would allow the CMA to raise funds independently, control their finances with oversight from NaFAA, and determine the kinds of projects they want to implement based on the needs of the communities.

- **Awareness-raising should be a continuous process:**

The success of CMAs centres around behavioural change which takes time. There is a need to continually create awareness in the communities to ensure that community members are constantly reminded of the roles and responsibilities of the CMA. CMAs cover many communities, hence the need for consistent awareness-raising and engagement to ensure that they are up to speed with the CMA rules and regulations and are included in decision-making and implementation processes.

- **Organising activities tailored around the needs of key stakeholders:**

Lastly, organising separate engagement activities for fishermen and fishmongers/processors was crucial, as they have different needs and require different capacity-building initiatives. The different engagements should target gaps in participation, leadership, roles in fisheries management and livelihood opportunities. This can promote women's participation in the CMA process.

Fante fishing community in Robertsport



7. Conclusions and recommendations

The challenges faced by the Grand Cape Mount County CMA in Liberia originate from how it was established, as well as the ongoing lack of support from the central government. These issues have manifested as other challenges hampering the progress of the CMAs. This highlights the importance of exercising caution when initiating CMA processes and ensuring that they are tailored to meet the community's needs and can be sustained by the community. It also highlights that CMA projects should be implemented with sustainability plans to ensure their continuity.

Engendering and maintaining the central government's support throughout the CMA process is fundamental. Liberia's government must be committed

to devolving authority to local communities, and local communities should strive to maintain the central government's trust by being transparent and accountable. The central government also needs to recognise and respect the roles of local communities in the fisheries management process and the importance of equity among the different CMA actors.

Additionally, mediating institutions with plans to establish and promote CMAs in Liberia should ensure that the central government and local communities' commitments to the CMA process are grounded in the objective of promoting sustainable fisheries management, and not on the financial or developmental benefits they receive from these institutions.

Fishermen preparing net for a fishing trip along the Lake Piso



The achievements of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA show that the CMA model has the potential to achieve its goals and meaningfully contribute to the management of fisheries in Liberia.

However, harnessing this potential requires the empowerment of the communities, commitment from these communities and the central government, and the full support of the central government and all other stakeholders.

Rejuvenating the Grand Cape Mount CMA in Liberia requires action now. It also requires the collaboration and commitment of all stakeholders. Therefore, we recommend that the following measures be taken to achieve this. Where relevant, these measures can be used as mandatory requirements in future CMA processes:

- NaFAA and the CMA should convene a general reconciliatory meeting of all major stakeholders of the Grand Cape Mount County CMA to plan a way forward and renew the commitment of the stakeholders. Grievances and complaints should also be expressed in the meetings, as well as lessons learned over the past years. Gaps that have been noted and their instigating factors should also be discussed. Some of the major outcomes of the meeting could be a comprehensive work plan for the CMA, a revised MoU with the national government, a management plan for the facility, and the renewed commitment of all stakeholders to work towards the effective operations of the CMA.
- The CMA's leadership should conduct regular community awareness raising. Most communities that form part of the CMA are not actively involved in its activities. This stems from misconceptions about how the CMA is being operated and the benefits they are supposed to accrue from the CMA. Therefore, there needs to be general awareness raising of what the CMA is, why it was established and the roles of the communities in the process. This awareness raising also needs to reassure the communities that the CMA is now committed to promoting transparency and accountability to regain their trust. The awareness raising should be extensive and be led by members of the communities and the central government.
- The CMA and its stakeholders should host the essential general assembly. It can promote trust and collaboration in the Grand Cape Mount County CMA in several ways. However, its organisation should be changed. The following steps would reduce the cost associated with hosting the general assembly, thereby making it feasible for the CMA and its stakeholders to host it regularly:
 - Participants should be limited to the leaders of the CMA – the board members, executive committee, representative council, zonal coordinators, central government, other stakeholders like NGOs and donor agencies in the fisheries sector, representatives from the county authority and the leaders of the host community.
 - This assembly should be held annually and rotated to communities outside of Robertsport. This would promote decentralisation and participation from all communities.
 - The central government and the leadership of the CMA should commit to fund this activity. This is important to ensure the continuity of the event in the absence of donors.
- The CMA and its stakeholders should conduct a general election. Conducting a general election has been recognised as an urgent need and a catalyst for revamping the Grand Cape Mount County CMA and should be prioritised. NaFAA should release the audit report preventing the electoral process, and any necessary corollary actions should be taken so that the general elections can be held.
- NaFAA should assign a financial officer to the CMA's team to collect revenues and ensure that this is done transparently. This financial officer can be an observer on the revenue collection team during the collections and be responsible for reporting the money collected to NaFAA and ensuring that the CMA receives its percentage of the funds.
- NaFAA should lead the development of a national CMA policy. This national policy needs to be participatory and clear on the roles of the CMA, where their authority starts and where it ends, where NaFAA's authority begins and ends, and where they coincide. This policy should be a legal document that binds all stakeholders to uphold their responsibilities in the CMA process.

- NaFAA and other stakeholders supporting the establishment of CMAs should ensure that all new CMAs are established in accordance with Section 3.15 of the Act establishing Liberia's National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, which gives legal backing to CMAs without the need for an article of incorporation. The MoU signed with CMAs should be clear on the roles and responsibilities of NaFAA and the CMA, and the financial commitment of NaFAA to CMA operations. This would promote collaboration with the central government and mitigate future misunderstandings of perceived interference.
- CMAs should independently take on initiatives to show their independence and responsibility. The cleaning of beaches and landing sites are some of the activities that the CMA should implement without external support. This would help to convince their partners that they are independent and innovative. The CMAs should also develop other means of raising money, like applying for grants and developing sustainable business strategies. However, it is vital to note that accountability will be critical to any revenue-generating activity that the CMAs undertake, as this is a value that will convince other actors to provide support.
- CMAs should be hosted in facilities that solely belong to the community. Communities should have the full authority to manage these facilities and use revenues raised from them for their operations. They can submit financial reports to government and local leaders, but the management of the site should be within their remit.
- NaFAA and the CMA should consider using the cluster approach to reduce their geographical coverage and the number of communities forming the CMA. The Grand Cape Mount County CMA already has three zones each with five communities based on proximity. This should form the basis of new CMAs in Grand Cape Mount County. If the number of participating communities were reduced, there would be a higher chance of everyone feeling part of the CMA. This would include greater opportunities for community members to participate in the CMA leadership and be part of the six core committees.





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