



# LESSONS LEARNT

*Study Tour to Three CMAs*



*Insights for Strengthening Local-Level  
Fisheries Governance*

January 2026



# Background & Context

Liberia's fisheries sector plays an important role in supporting livelihoods, food security, and local economic development, particularly within coastal communities. Small-scale fisheries provide employment for thousands of fisherfolk while also serving as a critical source of protein for many households. However, the sector faces a range of governance challenges, including weak local management structures, conflicts among resource users, and limited participation of communities in decision-making processes.

To address these challenges, the Government of Liberia, through the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA), has promoted the establishment of Collaborative Management Associations (CMAs). CMAs are partnerships between coastal communities and NaFAA (the regulator) to jointly manage fisheries resources and strengthen local participation in fisheries governance.

Despite the progress made in establishing CMAs across the country, there remain

valuable lessons to be learned from the experiences of existing associations. Understanding how these CMAs operate, the challenges they face, and the practices that contribute to their effectiveness is essential for improving future CMA formation processes and ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Under the Liberia Fisheries Governance Project (LFGP), efforts have been undertaken, in collaboration with NaFAA and other stakeholders, to support the establishment of a CMA in Sinoe County. These efforts have created awareness on the CMA concept, built consensus among fisherfolk and local actors, and led to the election of an Interim Committee (IC). The IC is intended to steer the CMA formation process.

Within this context, a study tour was organized to selected CMAs across Liberia to document their experiences and draw lessons that can inform the establishment of one in Sinoe County.





## Objectives of the Study Tour

The study tour was organized to provide the IC and the LFGP team with the opportunity to learn directly from existing CMAs.

Specifically, the study tour aimed to

- Generate insights to guide the formation of the new CMA
- Understand the governance structures and operational models being employed for effective fisheries governance
- Identify tested approaches in ensuring sustainability

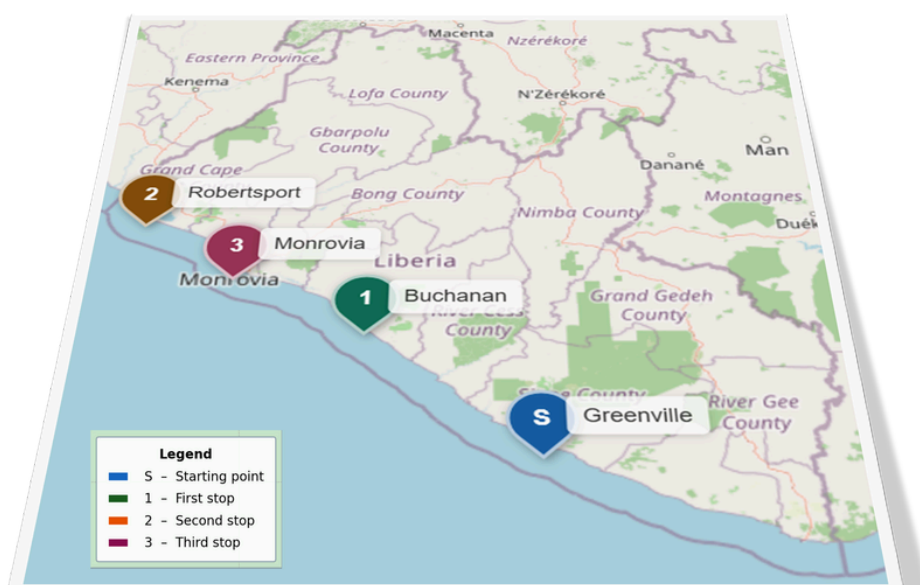
By engaging directly with CMA leaders, fisherfolk, and other local stakeholders, the study tour allowed for experience sharing and peer learning on collaborative fisheries management.

## Study Tour Overview

The study tour took place from December 16–18, 2025, with the visiting team making stops in Buchanan, Robertsport, and New Kru Town in Monrovia. CMAs visited were the

- Grand Bassa CMA
- Grand Cape Mount Zone I CMA
- Montserrado-Bomi CMA

The tour brought together a range of key actors involved in fisheries governance and community engagement. Individuals engaged during the visits included CMA executives and members and county-level officials of the NaFAA.



Engagements during the tour were conducted through a combination of peer dialogue, transect walks, and direct observations. Dialogue with these key actors facilitated experience sharing. The transect walks (to the landing beaches) further allowed participants to observe how CMAs engage with fishing communities and resource users

## Lessons Learnt

The study tour generated several important lessons that could inform the establishment and sustainability of new CMAs. These insights highlight practical governance arrangements, inclusive participation strategies, and institutional considerations necessary for effective fisheries co-management.

### ***1. Local Representation Strengthens CMA Presence***

A key lesson from the existing CMAs is the importance of ensuring representation at every landing beach. Having designated representatives at each landing site allows the CMA to maintain a strong presence within fishing communities and facilitates effective communication between fisherfolk, CMA leadership, and NaFAA. These representatives also serve as important channels for monitoring fisheries activities and relaying information to the relevant authorities.

### ***2. Integrating Existing Local Leadership Enhances Legitimacy***

Existing local governance roles—such as fishing chiefs and fish chairladies—remain highly influential within fishing communities. Successful CMAs have therefore integrated these local leadership roles into their governance structures rather than replacing them. This approach reinforces community trust, strengthens the legitimacy of the CMA, and secures the CMA's presence (within the localities). However, where these local leaders contest and win CMA executive positions, they are required to relinquish their previous roles.



### ***3. Inclusive Participation Promotes Ownership and Cohesion***

Inclusivity emerged as a critical success factor for functional CMAs. Women's participation is actively encouraged, with the CMAs maintaining 30–50% representation of women in executive roles. The associations have reserved specific leadership positions for women to ensure meaningful participation.

Equally important is the integration of settler fisherfolk communities. Allowing these groups to participate fully in decision-making processes and compete for leadership positions helps reduce tensions and promotes cooperation among resource users. It was highlighted that CMA processes have significantly reduced the incidence of conflicts between local and migrant fisherfolk.

### ***4. Flexible Electoral Systems Improve Governance***

The study tour revealed that different electoral approaches can be used depending on the local context, available resources, and logistical considerations. While some CMAs have conducted elections across all communities to ensure direct participation by members, this approach can be resource-intensive. Other CMAs have successfully adopted the “delegate” or “electoral college” system, where communities elect representatives who then vote for executive leaders. Regardless of the method chosen, the approach must be accepted by the CMA's General Assembly.

### ***5. Transparent Formation Processes Build Credibility***

A transparent and well-structured formation process is essential to establishing a credible CMA. One key practice is the dissolution of the Interim Committee once the Election Committee is constituted. The IC members are free to contest for executive roles and dissolving the committee (prior to elections) averts any form of incumbency advantage. Additionally, Election Committee members are barred from contesting leadership positions to maintain neutrality and fairness in the electoral process.





## **6. Institutional Support and Political Backing Are Essential**

The involvement of local government authorities, particularly the County Administration, can significantly strengthen the legitimacy of a newly formed CMA. Their participation signals political recognition and support, which can help the association function more effectively within the broader governance framework.

Similarly, CMAs rely on guidance and institutional support from NaFAA, including the use of an approved CMA constitution template that can be adapted to suit local contexts.

## **7. Effective Financial Management Systems Are Necessary**

Establishing formal financial systems is an important administrative requirement for CMAs. The associations maintain bank accounts in both Liberian Dollars (LRD) and United States Dollars (USD) to receive and manage funds. Opening these accounts requires formal authorization from NaFAA, underscoring the need for close coordination between CMAs and the national fisheries authority.



## **8. Immediate Member Benefits Encourage Participation**

Providing tangible benefits to members helps sustain participation and commitment to the CMA. These benefits include access to community-based financial mechanisms such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), conflict resolution services, and welfare support for members. Such incentives strengthen solidarity among fisherfolk and reinforce the value of collective action.



## ***9. Sustainable Financing Remains a Major Concern***

Despite existing provisions that allocate 30% of canoe registration fees to CMAs, the associations reported that these funds have not yet been disbursed. This situation highlights ongoing challenges related to financial sustainability and institutional coordination.

Moreover, CMAs argue that basing the allocation solely on canoe registration fees is insufficient. The canoe registration fees form just a fraction of the licensing fees collected as revenue by NaFAA. Thirty percent of this fraction (canoe registration) renders the amount intended for the CMA operations inadequate. Consequently, there is growing advocacy intent for a revised revenue-sharing framework, where 30% of licensing fees (instead of canoe registration fees) be allocated to CMAs.

## ***10. CMAs Play a Critical Role in Conflict Resolution and Resource Governance***

The CMAs have demonstrated strong capacity to mediate disputes among fisherfolk and strengthen cooperation among diverse resource users. With some associations, law enforcement authorities, such as the local police commander, are included in conflict management committees, which enhances the credibility and enforceability of dispute resolution mechanisms.

In addition, CMAs recognize the importance of upholding traditional fisheries regulations and incorporating them into their governing documents. Provisions related to environmental management and beach sanitation were viewed as essential elements of CMA constitutions. Thus, promoting responsible resource stewardship.

# Conclusion

The study tour provided valuable insights into the functioning of CMAs in Liberia and highlighted the important role these institutions play in strengthening the co-management of fisheries resources. The experiences and lessons gathered from these existing CMAs emphasize the importance of inclusive governance, strong institutional partnerships, and transparent management systems.

As stakeholders seek to rollout out the CMA model in Sinoe County, applying these lessons will be essential for ensuring that the newly established CMA is effective, legitimate, and sustainable. By building on the experiences of existing CMAs, stakeholders can strengthen collaborative fisheries governance and contribute to the long-term resilience of coastal livelihoods.

## About the LFGP

The Liberia Fisheries Government Project (LFGP) is a 3-year sustainable fisheries initiative that targets the coastal landscape of Sinoe County, Liberia. The project aims to improve good governance, democracy, and accountability in the target landscape. This goal is to be achieved through enhanced capacities and performance of local civil society organizations (CSOs) and media actors in safeguarding the rights and livelihoods of fisherfolk.

The specific objectives of the project are

- Organizational strengthening of CSOs and media institutions, as entities for good governance,
- Promotion of the Co-Management Association (CMA) approach,
- Enhancing women, youth, and marginalized persons' participation in the coastal economy, and
- Advocacy on sustainable governance and fisherfolk rights

The project is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by CERATH Development Organization, together with Conservation Alliance. LFGP runs from January 2024–December 2026.



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