



POLICY BRIEF //

ENHANCING CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOOD BENEFITS IN LIBERIA'S RURAL FISHING COMMUNITIES

November 2023

CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL



01/ KEY MESSAGES

ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF // This policy brief outlines best practices in addressing the key challenges facing rural fishing communities from Sinoe and Rivercess Counties in Liberia that policy makers can utilize as they update Liberia’s National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan (NBSAP) following the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in December 2022. Best practices to enhance communities’ business practices, improve their living conditions, and address the impact of climate change on fisheries include governance flexibility, stakeholder engagement, gender and youth inclusion, social protection, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods for fishing communities. By integrating these suggested policy actions into the NBSAP update process, Liberia can advance the conservation of its rich biodiversity as well as the well-being and prosperity of the communities intimately connected to its natural resources. The key messages are as follows:

- 1 Governance flexibility:** Advocate for adaptive governance structures nationally and regionally to respond quickly to changes in the use and availability of fish resources.
- 2 Stakeholder engagement:** Actively include community leaders and other key stakeholders in the process of creating policies, encouraging a collaborative approach to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered, and local knowledge is recognized as valuable in shaping effective and inclusive policies.
- 3 Gender and youth inclusion:** Design policies that consider the unique responsibilities, requirements, and abilities of men, women, and youth in fisheries, actively advocate for equal opportunities between genders, and involve youth in decision-making regarding biodiversity and fisheries management.
- 4 Social protection:** Promote the involvement of fishing communities in programs that provide social protection, create a safety net to assist vulnerable groups within the fisheries sector, and ensure these efforts are coordinated with larger national strategies addressing poverty and food insecurity.
- 5 Sustainable livelihoods:** Diversify livelihood opportunities for fishing communities by exploring alternative income sources such as aquaculture, ecotourism, and fish farming inputs, with an emphasis on promoting sustainable economic activities that contribute to both environmental conservation and community well-being.



02/ INTRODUCTION

Liberia's fishing sector is vital for ensuring food security in both coastal and inland communities, meeting **65%** of the country's animal protein needs. It is also critical for supporting livelihoods and contributes approximately **3.2%** to Liberia's GDP. However, the fishing sector is particularly vulnerable due to the significant impacts of climate change and harmful practices on the ecosystems which support fish.¹

Climate change impacts on Liberia's coastal communities include increased flooding, coastal erosion, storm surges, rising sea levels and the resulting ecosystem degradation – all with negative effects on human health, fisheries and the development of coastal communities. In addition, Liberia is one of the African countries most affected by marine pollution,² due to poor waste management practices, oil spills, and illegal fishing activities. More than **60%** of the country's coastal waters are contaminated by various forms of pollutants, including oil and chemical spills.³ This has significant implications for marine biodiversity and consequently the fishing industry.

Supporting Liberia's fishing communities impacts a substantial portion of Liberia's population, as **58%** of the country's **5.2 million** inhabitants reside approximately 60 kilometers from the sea. Rural fishing communities, such as those in Sinoe and Rivercess Counties in Liberia, are looking to transform their fishing practices and well-being by strengthening their

ability and confidence to make decisions that directly impact their livelihoods, healthcare and safety practices associated with fishing.

The three most urgent needs for the people in these fishing communities are:

- ① Improving the methods used when fishing;
- ② Acquiring improved equipment and fishing techniques for better catches; and
- ③ Adhering to sustainable practices.

In addition to enhancing fishing capabilities and improving fishing practices, attention must be given to addressing issues related to waste management and disposal within the communities of Sinoe and Rivercess counties. Waste management is a shared concern among the community members of these counties, and prioritizing and addressing these needs are vital for advancing living conditions and development.

Addressing these needs involves providing fishermen with the necessary knowledge and tools, such as up-to-date fishing vessels, gear and fishing nets to discourage harmful and unsustainable practices like the use of dynamite, which contributes to the depletion of fish populations. Efforts taken to address these needs contribute to several GBF targets, including 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11.

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¹ Climate Risk Profile: Liberia (2021): The World Bank Group. Available at: https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/15917-WB_Liberia%20Country%20Profile-WEB%20%281%29.pdf

² According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

³ According to a study conducted by the Liberia Maritime Authority in 2019.

03/ SUPPORTING POLICY ACTION

GOVERNANCE FLEXIBILITY

There is a need for flexibility and adaptability in agreements and management approaches at national and regional levels, particularly in response to rapid changes in fishing practices and fish resources (including species shifts, distribution, productivity, and seasonality).

An example of flexibility in governance is the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Liberia. This agreement is designed to foster responsible fisheries, ensuring the long-term conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. Key components of this partnership include defining the conditions under which European Union vessels can engage in fishing activities in the Liberian fishing zone; promoting economic, financial, technical, and scientific cooperation in the fisheries sector to promote sustainable fishing; encouraging partnerships to develop economic activities in the fishing sector that are in the common interest; and facilitating surveillance measures to ensure that the conditions of the agreement are complied with and are effective, particularly in overcoming illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Complementing these efforts, Liberia's National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Strategy of 2014 emphasizes sustainable management of fisheries resources, the development of aquaculture to meet local fish demand and exports, the strengthening of institutional, human, and financial capabilities, and the enhancement of value addition, marketing, and fish trade for improved foreign exchange and employment opportunities.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Policy makers should facilitate the active participation of community champions and key stakeholders in the creation of climate adaptation policies and plans to ensure that they are effective and complement the strategies already in place within the local community. Stakeholder engagement involves a systematic process of identifying, analyzing,

planning, and implementing actions to influence stakeholders, particularly fishermen. This approach requires mapping out stakeholders, assigning roles, recognizing their influence, and utilizing methods of effective collaboration.

GENDER AND YOUTH

It is essential to integrate gender considerations into adaptation measures and policies, recognizing and leveraging the distinct skill sets and roles of men, women, and youth in fisheries.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

It is important to involve fishing communities in social protection schemes to create a strong safety net for the fisheries sector.

A previous initiative successfully laid the foundation for a basic national safety net delivery system, offering support to households facing extreme poverty and food insecurity in Liberia. Implemented by the Ministry of Gender, this initiative directly benefited **10,000** households across Bomi, Maryland, Grand Kru, and River Gee counties. It also contributed to the development of a national safety net delivery system, incorporating features for efficient eligibility screening, payment delivery, reconciliation, grievance handling, and monitoring and evaluation. The lessons learned from this model will be valuable for future initiatives in similar contexts.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

It is important to encourage fishing communities to explore various income-generating alternatives beyond traditional fishing practices, such as aquaculture and ecotourism, to increase their income and climate resilience. Before pursuing new livelihood options, fishing groups should carefully assess market demand, feasibility, and available resources. Seeking support from local government agencies, NGOs, or industry experts can provide valuable assistance and guidance in exploring and establishing additional livelihoods.

Fish farming, or aquaculture, allows for the controlled and consistent raising of profitable fish species with high market demand. Additionally, fishing groups can explore producing and selling essential fish farming inputs like fish feed, fingerlings, or fish seedlings. Fishing groups can also offer training programs and workshops to educate aspiring fishermen, where they can share their knowledge and expertise in fishing techniques,

fish farming, seafood processing, or boat handling. Fishing communities located in an area with natural attractions such as marine reserves, coral reefs, and/or unique coastal landscapes, such as the Cestos and Timbo in Rivercess county, have the potential to cultivate ecotourism activities. These can include guided fishing tours, snorkeling, diving trips, or boat tours, offering visitors an opportunity to experience the local environment.

04/ CONCLUSION

This policy brief outlines the importance of governance flexibility, stakeholder engagement, gender and youth inclusion, social protection, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods for fishing communities. Integrating these policy actions Liberia's revised NBSAP can help conserve biodiversity while improving the well-being of communities who rely on natural resources – important contributions to the achievement of the GBF.

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