May 2025
Number 19

Accountability Working Paper

Upwelling: Fishers Organizing for their Rights and Sustainable Fisheries

Lessons from Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Taiwan, and Thailand

Judy Gearhart and Connor Moynihan

FISHERIES GOVERNANCE PROJECT

GLOBAL LABOR JUSTICE

ACCOUNTABILITY RESEARCH CENTER

About Accountability Research Center (ARC)

The Accountability Research Center (ARC) is based in the School of International Service at American University. ARC bridges research and frontline perspectives to learn from ideas, institutions, and actors advancing strategies to improve transparency, participation, and accountability. For more, see www.accountabilityresearch.org.

About the Fisheries Governance Project (FGP)

FGP is a funder-practitioner collaboration working together to build a shared understanding of issues and solutions at the intersection of improved fisheries governance and advancements in labor rights. They center their approach on international treaties, improved market action, and enforcement and victim protection.

About Global Labor Justice (GLJ)

GLJ is a strategy hub that supports transnational collaboration among worker and migrant organizations to expand labor rights and new forms of bargaining on global value chains and international labor migration corridors.

About ARC Publications

ARC publications serve as a platform for accountability strategists and researchers to share their experiences and insights with diverse readers and potential allies across issue areas and sectors. These publications frame distinctive local and national initiatives in terms that engage with the broader debates in the transparency, participation, and accountability field. For more, see www.accountabilityresearch.org/publications.

Rights and Permissions

Please cite this work as follows: Gearhart, Judy, and Connor Moynihan, 2025. "Upwelling: Fishers Organizing for their Rights and Sustainable Fisheries." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 19. http://doi.org/10.57912/28616345

Cover photo: A fisher from APROISPELA pulls in his net, Ayangue, Santa Elena, Ecuador.

Photo credit: Gustavo Crespo

Contents

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible by the Fisheries Governance Project (FGP) and with additional funding from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation. We wish to thank FGP collaborators for their early encouragement and support in conceptualizing the report: Shaochi Chiu, Sarah Hogan, Johanna Lee, Meredith Lopuch, Sarah Mount, and Max Schmid. We also wish to thank several individuals who provided critical feedback along the way, including Karen Brock, Jonathan Fox, Jon Hartough, Rossen Karatchev, Chris Williams, and Roisai Wongsuban. We are also deeply grateful to the individuals who reviewed the final draft: Rainer Braun, Elena Finkbeiner, Michele Ford, and Peter Vandergeest. Finally, we wish to thank the individuals and organizations who collaborated on each of the country reports, as listed below.

Country	Research collaborator/s
Ecuador	Tito Feyner Navia (independent consultant)
Ghana	Eric Atsiatorme and the team at Friends of the Nation – Ghana
Indonesia	Mohamed Abdi Suhufan and the team at Destructive Fishing Watch, and Azizah Hapsari (independent consultant)
Mexico	CONMECOOP (Ricardo Romero, Jose Luis Carillo, and Lorena Ortiz)
Taiwan	Johanna Lee and the team at Global Labor Justice
Thailand	Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL), led by Tola Moeun and Thehoya Dy; and Yasasipa Suksai (independent consultant)

About the Authors

Judy Gearhart has advocated for workers' rights in global supply chains since the 1990s when she started as an organizer in Mexico. She leads ARC's program on worker rights and corporate accountability and teaches classes on human rights in the global economy at American University and Columbia University. Gearhart previously served as the executive director at the International Labor Rights Forum (now Global Labor Justice) where she helped launch the Seafood Working Group.

Connor Moynihan is an ARC researcher working on human rights and accountability in fisheries. He has worked in community organizing and environmental justice in the US and Paraguay. He holds a master's degree in natural resources and sustainable development from American University's School of International Service.

Acronyms

ARC	Accountability Research Center
ASOSALAN	Asociación de Pescadores-Buzo de Salango (Association of Fishers and Divers of Salango)
C 188	ILO Convention 188 Work in Fishing
CBA	collective bargaining agreement
CENTRAL	Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights
CONACOOP	Confederación Nacional de Cooperativas Pesqueras (National Federation of Fishing Cooperatives)
CONAPESCA	Comisión Nacional de Acuacultura y Pesca (National Council for Aquaculture and Fish)
CONMECOOP	Confederación Mexicana de Cooperativas Pesqueras y Acuícolas (Mexican Confederation of Fishing and Aquaculture Cooperatives)
CBP	United States Customs and Border Protection
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
DWF	distant water fleet
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EJF	Environmental Justice Foundation
EU	European Union
FA	Fisheries Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FENACOPEC	Federación Nacional de Cooperativas Pesqueras del Ecuador (National Federation of Fishing Cooperatives of Ecuador)
FGP	Fisheries Governance Project
FiTI	Fisheries Transparency Initiative
FOC	flag of convenience
FOSPI	Indonesian Seafarers' Gathering Forum
FRN	Fisher Rights Network
GAWU	General Agricultural Workers Union of Ghana

GNCFC	Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council
IEZ	Inshore Exclusive Zone
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITF	International Transport Workers Federation
IUU	illegal, unregulated, and unreported
KMFU	Keelung Migrant Fishermen's Union
MMAF	Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fishing, Indonesia
MOL	Ministry of Labor, Taiwan
MoM	Ministry of Manpower, Indonesia
MoT	Ministry of Transportation, Indonesia
MT	metric tonne
MWRN	Migrant Worker Rights Network
MWSC	Migrant Worker Solidarity Committee
NFAT	National Fishers Association of Thailand
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NUSPAW	National Union of Seafarers, Ports, and Allied Workers
PIPO	port-in, port-out
PMFU	Pingtung Migrant Fishermen's Union
PSMA	Port State Measures Agreement
SAKTI-SULUT	Serikat Awak Kapal Perikanan Bersatu, Sulawesi Utara (United Fishing Crew Union of North Sulawesi)
SBMI	Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union)
SPPI	Serikat Pekerja Perikanan Indonesia (Indonesian Fisheries Workers' Union)
TNC	transnational corporation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WRO	Withhold Release Order
YMFU	Yilan Migrant Fishermen's Union

Summary

Fishers face increased risks to their lives and livelihoods. Climate change and overfishing are sending fishers out to sea for longer periods of time or at distances beyond the capacity of their vessels. In response, fishers are pursuing new strategies to organize, build power, and defend their rights.

This paper presents lessons from fisher organizing in diverse sectors. It aligns with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 188 (C 188) on Work in Fishing, which defines fishers as all those working in marine capture, from artisanal fisherfolk to workers on the distant water fleet (DWF). The research reviews organizing trends in six countries and identifies common challenges and factors contributing to fisher organizing. In all six countries—Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Taiwan, and Thailand—new organizing initiatives have recently emerged.

This research considers a range of dynamics that affect fisher organizing and their ability to access information, seek remedy, and influence policy outcomes. It provides insights from interviews with organizers and other fishery experts. The findings highlight areas where more work and strategizing are needed to build stronger and more influential fisher organizations. These should also inform international and national advocates for fisher rights and environmental justice. Findings include:

- The growing number of unions and worker organizations that have formed over the past ten years are building momentum but need greater cohesion. Many still need to strengthen their internal structures, grow their membership, and unite with peer organizations to hold governments and employers accountable.

- A lack of policy coherence creates challenges for protecting fisher rights, as ministries of labor, fishing, and transportation struggle to coordinate. Failure to remedy this dysfunction adds to fishers' distrust of government and facilitates already entrenched opposition to fisher organizing.

- Additional resources make a critical difference to incubate organizing in sectors previously unorganized, particularly in a context where companies pay consultants and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to 'hear' worker voice. However, these resources can also create divisions among member-based organizations and must be managed carefully.

- Fisher organizers may be stretched between leveraging international campaigns, navigating national politics, advancing solutions with local government, and bargaining with employers. International allies need to build campaigns around fisher organizations' priorities.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and purpose

Overfishing and fisher rights abuse are highly correlated in both coastal and distant water fishing, but many initiatives to address these issues have lacked the meaningful participation of fishers and their organizations. Fisher organizations, which mainly take the form of trade unions and cooperatives, have a unique role to play in representing fishers and strengthening their sense of agency. These organizations are essential to enabling worker voice and influence in both rights-focused and ocean stewardship initiatives.

The title of this report uses *upwelling*—nature's process for bringing nutrients up from the ocean's depths—as a metaphor for fishers raising their voices up to improve seafood industry practices.

Evidence has shown the importance of worker voice in advancing equality, racial and gender equity, good jobs, and healthier and safer workplaces, as well as how workers acting collectively can reduce child and forced labor (Fischer-Daly and Anner 2023). A growing number of environmental and social justice advocates now seek to close these gaps in stakeholder engagement and identify strategies that more effectively connect worker voice to solutions in the seafood industry.

This report draws on one such collaboration, the Fisheries Governance Project (FGP), a funder-practitioner initiative working at the nexus of human rights abuses and illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing. In consultation with other FGP participants, the research identified six countries where fisher organizing is dynamic or in transition. This led to a focus on industrial fisher organizing in Indonesia, Taiwan, and Thailand, and artisanal fisher organizing in Ecuador, Ghana, and Mexico. The research considers the different ways fishers are organizing and how greater information flows and more robust engagement of fisher organizers can improve government and employer accountability.

Fishers participating in training on occupational safety and health, Central Java province, Indonesia.

Credit: ILO Asia Pacific (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Given that worker movements are fluid and organizing efforts are still evolving in this sector, this study captures new or emblematic examples of organizing approaches in each country. More than half of the organizations featured below formed in the last ten years. In Indonesia, Taiwan, and Thailand, increased attention to forced labor has brought a surge in funding and technical support for union organizing and outreach to migrant fishers, particularly on the industrial fleet. This support creates both opportunities and challenges to build unity and gain influence. In Ecuador, Ghana, and Mexico, trade union organizing has lagged due to intimidation and discrimination against organizers, while artisanal fisher organizing has been strong, with new organizations building on and challenging old strategies.

The goal is to support the sharing of strategies between fisher organizations and to inform international and national organizations that seek to support fisher-led organizations. The research scope is limited to marine capture fisheries, covering examples of organizing trends in industrial and distant water fishing as well as artisanal and coastal fishing.[1] Although some interviewees brought forward worker issues in aquaculture and seafood processing, where women often make up most of the workforce, these sectors merit additional research, particularly to deepen understanding of women-led organizing in seafood.

Egregious human rights abuses and decimated fish stocks have heightened government and seafood buyers' drive to engage fisher organizations. This dovetails with new laws and policies emphasizing the importance of locally led development and stakeholder engagement. The European Union's (EU's) Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) places significant emphasis on the importance of stakeholder engagement for assessing human rights risks in corporate supply chains. Additionally, as more countries adopt the ILO's Work in Fishing Convention (C 188), governments are engaging in tripartite dialogue on how they regulate working conditions in fishing, a sector often excluded or treated differently under national and international laws (Guelker 2023).

The challenge to effective fisher participation stems both from policymakers failing to seek fisher input and fishers not having the collective power to make their demands heard. First, the urgent need to save fisheries in collapse and aid fishers subject to forced labor has required rapid program development, often limiting implementers' ability to seek meaningful input. Second, fisher organizations lack the resources and time to demand access to information and build collective support for their proposals to government and business actors. Strong fisher-led organizations can change this dynamic.

A growing number of fisher organizations, including trade unions, fisher associations, and cooperatives, seek to influence the policies and laws affecting their communities. This surge in organizing has been enabled by a mix of inputs, including outside funding, returning survivors of forced labor seeking to support others, and the impact of climate change raising the stakes for fishers to make their needs heard. These are just some of the factors contributing to fisher organizing, which will be further elaborated below.

1.2 Analytic approach

This paper uses a human rights lens to understand fisher organizing by examining power dynamics, systemic inequalities, and the potential for discrimination that may limit fishers' ability to secure their rights. It covers both industrial and small-scale capture fisheries because some fishers have worked across small-scale, industrial, and distant water fishing. Also, government fishery policies must consider both sectors, sometimes having to mediate tensions between them.

This report takes as a point of departure the idea that strong constituency-based organizations are essential for holding both employers and governments accountable. It is thus important to consider how worker organizations, particularly democratic trade unions and cooperatives, create a sense of strength among their members. Both union

and cooperative leaders emphasized how they help their members seek remedy or gain skills through training, advocate for government accountability, and create a sense of belonging and desire to stand up for each other.

In their 2023 analysis of emerging trade unions in Indonesia, Ford, Hasbiyalloh, and Palmer (2024) refer to three sets of activities, namely services, advocacy, and organizing. This third aspect of union work, organizing, is essential for building a base of power from which the organization can engage government and industry. The strength of all constituency-based organizations lies in their ability to grow and be financed by members who benefit from their services and become loyal to the organization and their fellow members. This builds financial independence and the ability to negotiate better contracts with employers or buyers and to influence policy decisions. However, this is challenging for organizations whose members struggle with debt, subsistence incomes, or migration status.

Overall, there is a lack of literature focused on documenting fisher organizing efforts and their proposals for advancing fishers' rights in the global South. Notably, there is extensive analysis of small-scale fisher organizing related to better engaging them in fishery management (Kalikoski et al. 2019; Jentoft and Chuenpagdee 2022) and how they are building power through transnational networks (Mills 2021). In industrial fishing, however, there were few examples of fisher organizing to study in Southeast Asia prior to the media exposés in 2014 (Vandergeest 2018) while fisher unions continue to face repression in Ecuador, Mexico, and to a lesser extent in Ghana.

A few country-specific studies have begun to fill this gap. Authors are shedding light on organizing among industrial fishers in Indonesia and Taiwan (Ford, Hasbiyalloh, and Palmer 2024; Parhusip 2023). And in Mexico, there are several initiatives and corresponding analysis on how fishers organize, albeit mainly in the context of improving common-pool resource governance (Basurto et al. 2020).

In a broader review of literature on fishers' rights, there was extensive documentation of forced labor and egregious human rights abuses in industrial fishing produced by the UN and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) like the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), Global Labor Justice (GLJ), and Greenpeace in the early 2010s. This was followed by journalist exposés (Associated Press 2015; Urbina 2015). Building on those, several authors have assessed strategies to protect labor rights at sea (Garcia Lozano et al. 2022; Kadfak 2024; Vandergeest, Marschke, and MacDonnell 2021). A growing number of papers analyze the challenges of corporate accountability (Decker Sparks et al. 2022; Finkbeiner et al. 2024; Gearhart 2023; Nakamura 2024; Williams and Decker Sparks 2023) and the prospects for worker-driven social responsibility (WSR) (Decker Sparks et al. 2022; Finkbeiner et al. 2024; Williams and Decker Sparks 2023). By focusing on how fishers use organizing to secure their rights, this paper aims to understand how fishers organize and build leadership. Without strong national fisher unions, even the best-intentioned WSR agreement risks failure.

Following a summary of the research approach, this report presents a brief overview of the fisher organizations featured in each country. It then presents individual country briefs which outline the industry context, legal challenges to organizing, and the organizing activities of featured fisher organizations. The country briefs draw on more detailed country reports, which will be made available separately online. The fourth section of the report analyzes the findings, drawing out the roadblocks to organizing, the factors that help foster fisher organizing, and the role of international campaigns. Finally, the authors highlight where more attention is needed to further strengthen fisher organizations.

2. Methodology

This paper draws on consultations with international experts and more than 100 field interviews with fishers, fisher rights advocates, and environmental experts. Although some government representatives were interviewed and corporate interventions analyzed, the focus was on fisher organizations and those supporting their work. The six countries were chosen because they each offer distinct or new trends in fisher organizing. Each case study has been developed and coauthored with local experts. The country reports document the economic and political context, current trends in fisher organizing, and the challenges fishers face in seeking meaningful participation in the development of solutions that protect their rights, livelihoods, and the fisheries on which they depend.

The research approach for each country included a desk review and networking interviews to identify those organizations working at the intersection of fishers' rights and environmental fishery management. The desk research was followed by multiweek trips to the field conducting semistructured interviews with fisher organizations, NGOs, and government representatives. In five of the countries, the Accountability Research Center (ARC) worked with local organizations or consultants active in fisher communities, who conducted follow-up interviews as needed. They are listed in the acknowledgements above. GLJ led the research with partners in Taiwan.

For each country, the team conducted semistructured interviews during field visits and video calls. Based on these broad consultations, the team identified leading fisher organizations from which to learn more about their strategies and challenges. The core questions began with an inquiry into the origins of key fisher organizations and what factors help strengthen their organizations. Other questions included: How do they engage government and how do governments enable or hinder fisher participation in developing solutions or negotiating better terms with employers? What role can fisher organizations play in mitigating IUU or driving sustainable fishery management? What are their organizing and advocacy strategies, the challenges they face, and their proposals for improving government monitoring and fishers' access to remedy?

Fishers in Elmina, Ghana prepare their gear for night fishing.

Credit: Judy Gearhart

3. Trends in Fisher Organizing by Country

3.1 Summary of organizations

The initiatives featured here include examples of diverse forms of fisher organizing. Indonesia, Taiwan, and Thailand present new approaches to union organizing in industrial fishing, particularly given the need to address the legal constraints migrant fishers face. Seven of the nine unions featured below from these three countries are led by migrant fishers or former migrant fishers. They primarily focus on helping fishers process grievances, advocating for laws that facilitate fishers' access to remedy, and in the case of Indonesia, provide pre-departure training. These organizations identified as unions during interviews and emphasized the importance of solidarity and movement building, but few have negotiated collective bargaining agreements with employers.

In Ecuador, Ghana, and Mexico, there is significant constituency-based organizing among artisanal fishers through cooperatives and associations. In Mexico and Ecuador, the confederations and federations of cooperatives bring together artisanal and semi-industrial fishers and engage the government on national fishery policies affecting all fishers. In Ghana, some artisanal fisher organizers voiced concerns that the government favors the export-oriented trawlers because they pay taxes and generate export income, unlike the artisanal fishers.

A fisher working in the port, Taiwan.

Credit: Environmental Justice Foundation

Despite the different scales of the workforces, fisher organizations in both the artisanal and industrial sectors aim to build their membership base and influence the local and national government policies that directly impact their livelihoods and welfare. The main differences occur in communications and timing. For fishers returning to port regularly and for artisanal fishers, much of the outreach is done at port or in fisher communities, whereas connecting with fishers on the distant water fleet (DWF) is more sporadic due to the lack of Wi-Fi access at sea and challenges migrant fishers face in accessing port services, as described below.

3.1.1 Organizing migrant fishers on the industrial fleet

The surge in union organizing on the industrial fleet has come on the heels of scandals revealing egregious abuses of fishers who were stranded at sea for years—some more than a decade—and others who were beaten and even murdered for protesting the conditions. Many migrant fishers fell between the cracks—neither covered by the seafarers' union agreements nor supported by land-based unions (Guelker 2023). Of the nine organizations referenced in Box 1 on industrial sector organizing, only the Migrant Worker Rights Network (MWRN) was organizing migrant workers in the seafood sector prior to 2013, and their focus was mainly on seafood processing, not marine capture.

Organizing migrant fishers is particularly challenging; it is difficult to engage them, and many lack access to port services. In Thailand, where migrant fishers come into port regularly, many are unable to disembark because the captain retains their identity documents and may report them to the authorities as undocumented migrants if they leave (FRN and Gearhart 2024). DWF fishers often sign two-year contracts and may be at sea the entire time. Several of the Indonesian unions have representatives in other countries, but fishers are often not allowed or do not have the paperwork to disembark if their ship comes into port. This further limits their ability to access port services or communicate with union representatives. While having a union presence is still important, many DWF fishers only engage union representatives during pre-departure training or when they are in crisis and need support to file a grievance.

As noted above, unions play multiple roles in their defense of workers' rights. These unions organize workers who have little to no organizing experience, so they start by engaging around fishers' needs. Many organizers said they started with service-focused activities such as providing training, which is required before departure, or by helping fishers process grievances for injury or unpaid wages. This creates some overlap with NGOs that also provide outreach to migrant workers needing to process grievances.

Several activities that set unions apart from NGOs include solidarity networks built through labor protests and collective action; negotiating contracts with employers; self-financing through members' dues; general assemblies; and the election of leaders. Yet many of the unions that organize migrant fishers have yet to negotiate with employers. Their members are often afraid to protest in public, too indebted to pay dues, or unable to join general assembly meetings because they are at sea for years at a time. Additionally, many fishers on the DWF are not contracted by the vessel owners directly, but by the recruitment agency in their home country (Liu et al. 2024). This curtails fishers' ability to bargain collectively with the captain or vessel owners.

These limitations explain why the unions focus on supporting fishers' grievances. This support is something that NGOs are often as capable of providing, if not more so, particularly when they receive outside funding. This creates a conundrum wherein NGOs are filling an urgent need, but also serving a function that is a core part of unions' outreach and trust building with their base. Although fishers seeking remedy need this kind of support, it is important to delineate between technical support organizations and the unique role membership-based organizations like unions and cooperatives play in representing worker voice. These organizations are designed to provide longer term support, going beyond incident-specific interventions to build community solidarity and peer support networks. Because they are building a base of collective power to influence government and employers, their structures are broader and more sustainable and accessible to all workers in the sector.

Box 1. Unions and Worker Organizations in Industrial Fishing

Indonesia

Fisher unions in Indonesia are taking on different forms. The Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union (Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia, SBMI) is the largest migrant worker organization. Formed by returned domestic workers in 2003, SBMI began organizing and advocating for migrant fishers in 2014, but does not seek to negotiate with employers. The Indonesian Fisheries Workers' Union (Serikat Pekerja Perikanan Indonesia, SPPI) provides training to fishers before departure and has signed three-way contracts with recruitment agencies and vessel owners in Taiwan. The third union featured is the United Fishing Crew Union of North Sulawesi (Serikat Awak Kapal Perikanan Berstu-Sulawesi Utara, SAKTI-SULUT), which is organizing in the port of Bitung in North Sulawesi. SAKTI-SULUT's port-based organizing has led it to engage both migrant fishers and fishers on the domestic fleet, as well as the wives of fishers in the seafood processing industry. Together with other unions, it is engaging employers and government officials in tripartite dialogue to advocate for a higher minimum wage in Bitung City, but has yet to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with employers. There are several other unions organizing fishers in Indonesia, but SBMI, SPPI, and SAKTI-SULUT provide examples of three different outreach strategies—community based, training based, and port based, respectively.

Taiwan

Over the past two decades, migrant fishers' unions have been established in various ports in Taiwan to support migrant fishers, mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia. The Yilan Migrant Fishermen's Union (YMFU) was founded by a Taiwanese national, while the Keelung Migrant Fishermen's Union (KMFU) and the Pingtung Migrant Fishermen's Union (PMFU) were founded by Indonesian migrants in Taiwan. The PMFU was established by the Indonesian Seafarers' Gathering Forum (FOSPI), a mutual support organization that had already done successful organizing among fishers, such as securing resources to build a mosque near the port. The unions engage in advocacy for policy reforms and provide a mix of services to fishers, ranging from cultural activities to support for fishers seeking remedy. They have joined coalitions to advocate for migrant fishers' rights and put forward demands to the Taiwanese government and employers to support initiatives—a prime example is the Wi-Fi Now for Fishers' Rights at Sea campaign led by FOSPI.

Thailand

Fishing crews on the Thai fleet are primarily Burmese and Cambodian migrants, yet migrant workers in Thailand do not have the right to form or lead their own trade unions. Nevertheless, migrant worker-led organizations have aligned with the trade unions and use worker committees to negotiate with employers over working conditions and contract terms, an approach pioneered by MWRN (Kyaw and Gearhart 2024). In 2022, some MWRN members separated to create the Migrant Worker Solidarity Committee (MWSC), which is housed by the Labor Rights Foundation in Thailand. Like MWRN, they also seek to organize workplaces, hold elections, and charge annual dues, but their main focus is on helping members pursue grievance processes. Both are mainly organizing workers in seafood processing and other land-based production. In 2018, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) launched the Fisher Rights Network (FRN) to assist migrant fishers to organize and collectively bargain for improvements on their vessels, and advocate for policy reform throughout the Thai fishing sector. Although FRN negotiations with employers are led by migrant fishers without official trade union protection, they have grown steadily, now representing over 5,000 Burmese and Cambodian fishers through active FRN chapters in five Thai port locations (Ranong, Chumphon and Kuraburi on the Myanmar border; Songkhla in the deep south; and Trat on the Cambodian border).

3.1.2 Artisanal fishers organizing to gain influence

Artisanal fisher organizations are embedded in their local communities and often serve as a leading social organization advocating for community needs, demanding things like medical clinics or better roads and supporting local youth activities. They may also be the first line of defense against illegal activities on the water, particularly when they engage in comanagement or self-governance of their shared resources. Their organized presence can act as a deterrent and their members can help signal when illegal activities occur. Unfortunately, many artisanal and coastal fishers expressed frustration with the lack of attention their government pays to their issues, with some noting that governments may prioritize the needs of the more lucrative and financially powerful industrial fishers. In all three countries summarized in Box 2, artisanal fishers noted having struggled with environmental restrictions they were not consulted on.

Box 2. Cooperatives and Associations in Artisanal Fishing

Ecuador

The National Federation of Artisanal Fisher Cooperatives (FENACOPEC), is the largest fisher organization in Ecuador, representing close to 48,000 artisanal fishers. Given its size and well-known leader, FENACOPEC often serves as the main voice for fishers. There are several other, smaller fisher organizations such as the Association of Fishers and Divers of Salango (ASOSALAN), which advocates for their fishing methods to be recognized. Throughout the artisanal sector, fishers fear for their safety and are asking for greater government protection. Although some retired fishers have organized a union to pursue back pay, there are no unions in the sector due to factors such as severe repression of unions in Ecuador and legal roadblocks.

Ghana

Fisher organizing in Ghana is in a major state of transition, with several new forms emerging. The Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC) was founded in 1993, pulling together chief fishermen from landing beaches along the coast. The historically powerful role of chief fisherman is losing authority due to political and environmental factors, which has created openings for new organizations (Nunoo et al. 2015; Nyavor et al. 2023). In parallel, chief fishmongers, the elected leaders of the women fish processors, are also losing authority as declining fish stocks erode their ability to influence prices (EJF 2019). Some of these organizations are openly challenging the inherited leadership structures. There are two trade unions—National Union of Teamsters and General Workers (NUTGW) and the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU)—organizing artisanal fishers, an effort that may in some places challenge the previously accepted family-like structures that governed working relations in the sector. The National Union of Seafarers, Ports, and Allied Workers (NUSPAW) organizes fishers on the industrial trawlers, but captains often discriminate against or refuse to hire their members.

Mexico

Cooperatives have a long history in Mexico, dating back to the revolution. Many Mexican fishers are organized into cooperatives, in part due to policies that put them in charge of local fishing permits, which reserve access to certain types of fishing rights and species. Policy changes since the 1990s, however, extended permits to nonaffiliated fishers (Bennett 2017). Permitting through the cooperatives has had its pros and cons. Some cooperatives formed mainly to get the permits. Yet cooperatives have been key to securing fisher support for sustainability measures. There are two confederations which represent a mix of artisanal and industrial fishers, depending on the local fishing communities they represent. The National Confederation of Fisheries Cooperatives (CONACOOP) was founded in 1994, and they represent fisher cooperatives in 14 coastal states. The Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives (CONMECOOP) was formed in 2014 with the goal of building a national presence; they now represent cooperatives in 15 of Mexico's 17 coastal states. CONMECOOP actively seeks to engage in organizational strengthening programs that engage fishers in fishery management and conservation measures. Trade unions on Mexico's industrial fleet have not gained traction.

In both the industrial and artisanal fishing sectors, membership-based organizations are seeking allies in the NGO community. Both environmental NGOs and anti-human trafficking groups have brought technical expertise and support. Yet these alliances can be challenging when agendas partially overlap but are not fully aligned, or when modes of operating differ. NGOs draw credibility from their legal or scientific analysis, whereas trade unions and cooperatives are political actors, which need to determine priorities based on members' needs. This can often mean membership-based organizations have to shift agendas to respond to members in crisis. It also means they may be excluded from certain spaces. For example, when employers or government representatives feel threatened, they may prefer to engage with NGOs instead of unions.

Enabling fisher-led solutions and supporting the participation of fisher organizations in policy-setting discussions requires a deeper understanding of the economic and political constraints they face and a recognition of the ways they evolve. The country summaries that follow are a snapshot in time, which help illustrate the varied approaches to organizing, nearly all of which will evolve as challenges and opportunities arise.

3.2 Indonesia

3.2.1 Industry overview

Indonesia has one of the world's largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), but it was only in 2014 that the Indonesian government sought to take control of its fisheries and expelled foreign vessels from fishing its waters. During President Joko Widodo's two terms in office (2014–24), the Indonesian government improved its capacity to police its waters and strengthen its maritime fishing sector. Additional measures taken during Widodo's tenure included ratifying the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), banning transshipment, and becoming the first country to share its Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data with Global Fishing Watch (GFW), albeit with a 72-hour delay (CEA Consulting 2018). Since the turn of the century Indonesia's fishery products have doubled in value, from US$1.43 billion in 1999 to US$3.07 billion in 2019. Yet the country has lost ground to competitors in its share of the global fish trade, declining from 4.11 percent to 2.75 percent, despite the sector having grown by 200 percent during that same period. Indonesia is the world's second largest fish producer after China and the government has continued to raise investments for port infrastructure. Nevertheless, the country is struggling to implement a proposed quota-based plan for fishery management (Gokkon 2023a).

More than a million Indonesians work in marine capture fisheries, but fishers on industrial vessels struggle to secure their rights both at home and abroad. Although estimates vary significantly, some researchers have estimated as many as 250,000 fishers were abroad between 2013 and 2015 (IOJI 2022) and at least one set of data analysis shows Indonesians account for the largest number of forced labor victims in fishing (Bukharin 2020). Conditions on Indonesian-flagged, industrial vessels are also perilous. They earn six to eight times less than those who survive on the DWF. They are also subject to forced labor and risk death (Mochtar et al. 2023).

3.2.2 Policy trends and roadblocks

Several policy dynamics affect organizing among Indonesian fishers in the industrial sector, including in the protections for migrant fishers going abroad, regulations of labor abuses on the Indonesian fleet, and the government's efforts to be competitive internationally.

Migration policy incoherence. Since 2013, Indonesia has struggled with conflicting regulations and a lack of coordination between the main agencies overseeing migrant fisher contracting: the Ministry of Transportation (MoT) and the Ministry of Manpower (MoM). In 2024, however, the specialized agency responsible for migrant workers (previously called BP2MI) was elevated to become the Ministry of Migrant Worker Protection. Advocates hope the new ministry will consolidate the regulation of recruitment agencies. A recent ruling by Indonesia's constitutional court confirmed the importance of providing all migrant workers, including land based, fishers,

SBMI and Jaringan Buruh Migran (JBM) give input on the revision of Law 18/2017 on the protection of Indonesia migrant workers, 2025.

Credit: SBMI team

and seafarers, with the same protection at every stage of migration (IOJI 2024). The MoT will continue to have a role to play, however, given their presence at ports and the fact that many recruitment agencies have already signed three-way collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) with vessel owners and trade unions that were approved by the MoT. Notably, the requirement that recruitment agencies must sign CBAs with unions in order to send fishers abroad on the DWF creates a perverse incentive for CBAs that are not negotiated with the vessel owners, who hire the captains who will manage the fishers (Liu et al. 2024).

Policy contradictions in domestic fisher protections. There are also conflicting guidelines for regulating fishers' rights on the domestic fleet. For example, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fishing (MMAF) allows for 91 work hours per week (Regulation 27/2021) while the MoM's guidelines define a 40-hour week and stipulate rest days and maximum overtime (Arif 2023). In Manado, where there is an interministerial inspection group, the labor inspectors interviewed commented that the main complaints from workers include a lack of health and safety protections, difficulties in changing jobs, and a lack of clarity on how to define working hours and rest time while at sea (interviews in Manado, December 2022). Interviews with fishers reveal even more egregious abuses, including price gouging, debt bondage, and beatings (Mochtar 2023).

Lack of port-based protections. The country is still reviewing the potential adoption of C 188 on work in fishing. If C 188 were adopted, its implementation calls for a process that could improve the interministerial coordination and require safety improvements to the Indonesian fleet. However, Indonesia's ratification of the PSMA in 2016 has rendered minimal progress. Only four of its 2,459 ports were implementing it as of mid-2023 (Gokkon 2023b). The government has, however, announced a new effort to bring more ports into compliance (Gokkon 2023b). Advocates of C 188 might strengthen their case if they can highlight synergies in implementing both treaties, potentially building on the lessons from interministerial inspections in Manado.

Recently, a group of NGOs and fisher unions came together to form a coalition to advocate for C 188, a process that could both advance the Convention and strengthen collaboration across the growing number of fisher organizations.

3.2.3 Fisher organizing

Indonesian fishers have benefited from a surge in direct and indirect external funding over the past eight to ten years. The Safe Seas Project, funded by the US Department of Labor, the ILO's Ship to Shore Rights Project, and the Freedom Fund are examples of programs that have provided support, including pre-departure training for migrant fishers, assistance with legal cases, and organizational capacity building. Beneficiaries have included NGOs as well as trade unions.

Although all three organizations profiled in Table 1 are registered as trade unions, none engage in direct collective bargaining with their members' employers. However, the leaders of each organization spoke about their outreach and organizing work with fishers, the diverse services they provide, and advocacy work with other trade unions.

Table 1. Fisher Organizations, Indonesia

	SAKTI-SULUT, founded 2021	Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI), founded 2003	Serikat Pekerja Perikanan Indonesia (SPPI), founded 2013
Members	1,400 fishers and fish processors	40 branches in 107 villages, includes all migrant workers	Estimated 10,000 migrant fishers trained as of 2023
Types of services	Pre-departure training; support with grievances (secured payments); health care	Complaint processing and tracking; community building; consumer cooperatives	Pre-departure training; complaint management
Advocacy	For a wage board through a local tripartite process	For a change in migrant fisher regulations (22/2022); for ILO C 188	For ILO C 188
Negotiations and dues	Dues charged, which also include a fee for health care; participating in social dialogue about the local minimum wage, but no direct negotiations with employers yet	No dues or fees, but their branches contribute funds through consumer coops called SBMI-Marts; they have not sought to negotiate with employers	Training fees; signed 3-way CBAs with recruiting agencies and the vessel owners represented by those agencies
Leadership	Chairman and founder: Arnon Hiburong, with 3 others	Chairman Hariyanto Suwarno; 4-year term; max. 3 terms allowed	Chairman and founder: Ilyas Achdiento Pangestu

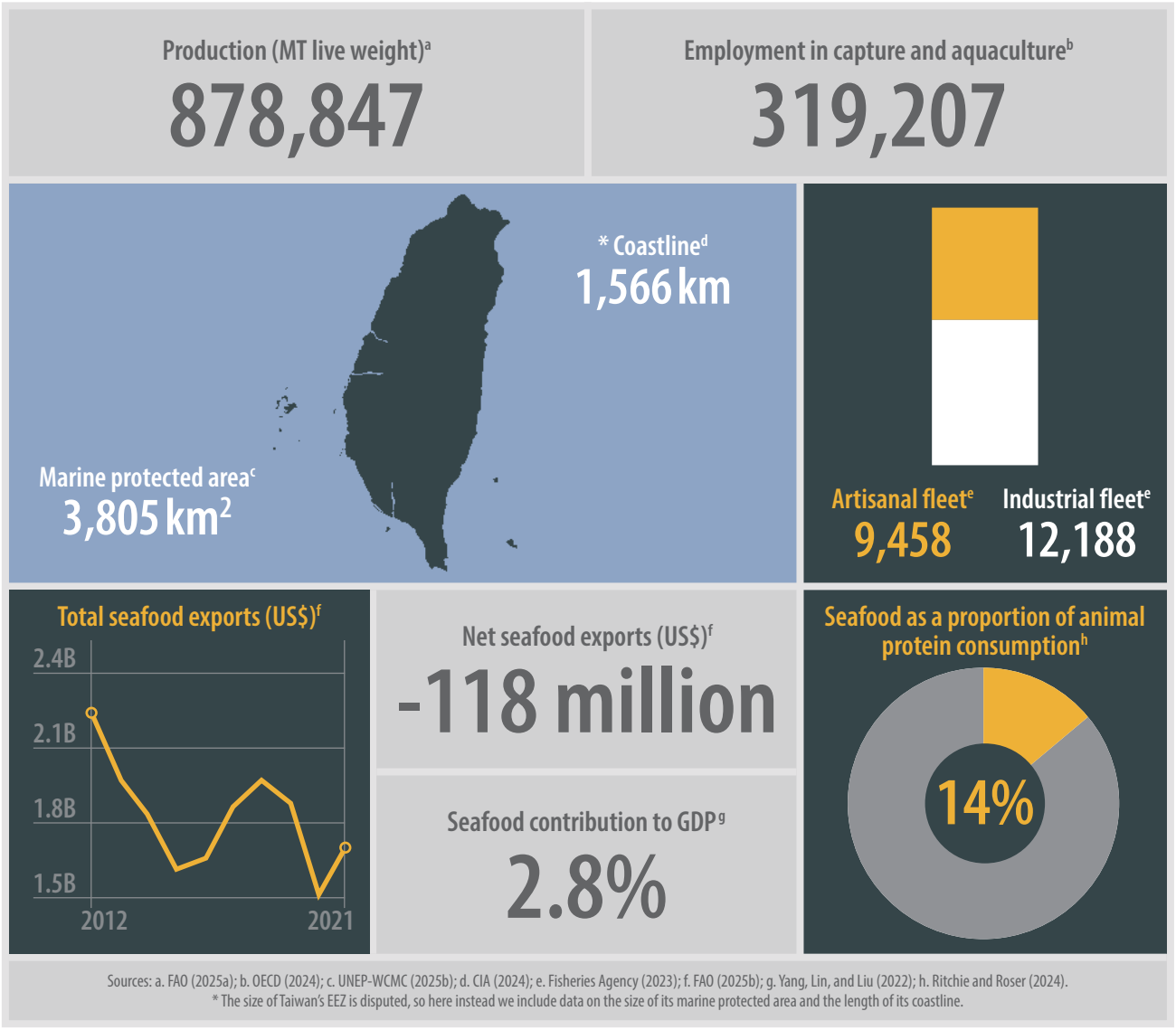
Migrant fisher organizing in Indonesia is expanding both in response to fisher demands for required training and to seek remedy when they are injured or if their wages are stolen. Unions and supporting NGOs have also received outside funding from private foundations, bilateral government donors, and multilateral agencies to combat human trafficking at sea and support organizing.

Each union is pursuing a slightly different strategy to build its base. SAKTI-SULUT organizes locally, at port, to engage migrant fishers, domestic fishers, and now also the wives of fishers who are working in local seafood processing. It is using a local tripartite process to try to negotiate an increase in fishers' wages but has yet to negotiate a CBA with an employer. SBMI is a registered trade union that operates more like a social movement. Founded by migrant domestic workers, SBMI now supports all migrant workers; it has established branch offices in 40 locations and has a presence in 107 villages across Indonesia (Suwarno, Fritzner, and Gearhart 2024). It supports fishers' complaint filings and has built a strong advocacy capacity. Its leaders emphasize the solidarity it has built among members, but it has not sought to negotiate CBAs (Suwarno, Fritzner, and Gearhart 2024). SPPI has established a training center in West Java where it provides pre-departure training and helps process the complaints of fishers who become members. SPPI's approach to a three-way CBA signed with vessel owners and recruitment agencies has followed the format that seafarer unions use in signing CBAs that are then validated by the MoT.

3.2.4 Paths forward

Given the distinct approaches these unions take in supporting and representing fishers, it may be challenging to align their organizing in a way that builds a broader base of power and their ability to challenge employers. For that to be possible, they need both strong democratic structures and the capacity to represent fishers vis-à-vis employers. This is difficult given how little communication there is with migrant fishers, who they only see during pre-departure training or when they return and need support with a grievance. Currently, they come together around specific advocacy goals, such as the recent advocacy for Indonesia to ratify ILO C 188. Several unions have expressed interest in affiliation with the ITF. This could be a good pathway for unions to strengthen their internal structures and ability to negotiate with employers.

3.3 Taiwan



Sources: a. FAO (2025a); b. OECD (2024); c. UNEP-WCMC (2025b); d. CIA (2024); e. Fisheries Agency (2023); f. FAO (2025b); g. Yang, Lin, and Liu (2022); h. Ritchie and Roser (2024).
* The size of Taiwan's EEZ is disputed, so here instead we include data on the size of its marine protected area and the length of its coastline.

3.3.1 Industry overview

Taiwan's fleet of approximately 21,646 vessels includes the second largest DWF fleet in the world (approximately 1,100 vessels) after China (Fisheries Agency 2023). This count includes Taiwanese-owned vessels flying flags of convenience (FOCs), which officials report at approximately 200 but others estimate to be three times that (Chiang and Rogovin 2020; EJF 2020). The total workforce in capture fisheries is 305,868 people. Migrants contribute 62 percent of the labor to the DWF fleet and 13 percent to coastal and offshore fisheries (Fisheries Agency 2023).

3.3.2 Policy trends and roadblocks

High risks of IUU fishing and labor abuses in Taiwan's DWF sector resulted in a yellow card from the EU in 2015 and significant pressure from US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) beginning in 2019. After the government worked to "reform its fisheries legal framework, implement new control tools and improve the traceability of marine

fisheries products," (Karmenu Vella in European Commission 2019), the EU Commission lifted the yellow card in 2019, and CBP modified Withhold Release Orders (WROs) against two Taiwanese-flagged vessels in 2020 and 2024. In recent years, Taiwan has responded to international pressure to combat IUU fishing and forced labor in its fleet by enacting or amending regulations and committing to domesticate international agreements, including ILO C 188 and the PSMA.

The implementation of these improvements, however, has lagged. Taiwan has yet to domesticate and implement ILO C 188 or the PSMA. In addition, while its Action Plan for Fisheries and Human Rights includes several key provisions such as improved inspections, subsidies for Wi-Fi, and other labor, health, and safety measures, the policies and their implementation remain extremely inadequate in guaranteeing migrant fishers' rights, as they fail to address the following systemic vulnerabilities of migrant fishers.

Exclusion from labor protections. Taiwan considers migrant fishers working in the DWF sector to be overseas employees, placing them administratively under the aegis of the Fisheries Agency (FA) rather than the Ministry of Labor (MOL). This effectively excludes them from national labor laws, affording them fewer protections (Liu et al. 2024). For example, their minimum wage is only two-thirds the national minimum wage; there are looser limits on working hours; and there are weaker insurance and labor inspection policies and enforcement.

Tied visa regime. Taiwan has a tied visa regime for migrant workers, in which migrant fishers in distant water fishing, as well as coastal and offshore fishing, are recruited as temporary workers and obtain visas that are contingent on their employment. This means that if a vessel owner terminates a fisher's contract—for example, as a reprisal for complaining about conditions on board vessels—then the fisher will be immediately deported upon arrival at port. It also hinders migrant fishers from changing employers and transferring vessels once hired. Instead, typically, fishers who seek to change vessels must terminate their contract, return to their home country, and undergo the recruitment process again, including repaying recruitment fees. This system inhibits many fishers from speaking out about labor abuses or leaving an exploitative workplace.

FOSPI-PMFU's 18th anniversary celebration, 2025.

Credit: Johanna Lee

Recruitment-related debt. Despite the intent of Taiwan's Action Plan on Fisheries and Human Rights to ensure wages are paid directly to the crew, most fishers continue to be paid through recruitment agencies (Liu et al. 2024). This allows recruitment agencies to deduct fishers' salaries to pay back recruitment-related costs and onboard expenses, trapping fishers in a cycle of debt.

Barriers to organizing. Legal and practical barriers continue to make it difficult for migrant fishers to organize and seek remedy when their rights are at risk or have been violated. Although Taiwan's Labor Relations Act has granted migrant workers the right to form and lead their own unions since 2011, migrants have faced challenges in exercising their freedom of association due to difficult legal requirements and practical barriers such as isolation, language barriers, and financial constraints.

3.3.3 Fisher organizing

There are three professional unions organizing migrant fishers located in three different locations in Taiwan. Table 2 provides a high-level overview of each organization, including their distinct services and advocacy goals.

Table 2. Fisher Organizations, Taiwan

	Yilan Migrant Fishermen's Union (YMFU), founded 2013	Keelung Migrant Fishermen's Union (KMFU), founded 2021	Pingtung County Migrant Fishermen's Union, formed by the Indonesian Seafarers' Gathering Forum (FOSPI-PMFU), founded 2022
Members	106 members, majority Indonesian, minority Filipino	About 200 members	2,300 members, Indonesian DWF fishers
Types of services	Donations and supplies to fishers; rights education; documentation of cases of fisher rights violations	Outreach to high schools teaching about Indonesian culture and migrant fisher abuses; support during labor disputes	Social network (13 regional hometown associations); cultural activities; provides temporary shelter at port
Advocacy	For personal protective equipment; a ban on FOCs; closing the overseas employee loophole	Will negotiate with labor department	FOSPI got a mosque built near the port in 2018; leaders in Wi-Fi Now for Fishers' Rights at Sea; Taiwan-Indonesia bilateral labor migration agreement; minimum wage increase for migrant DWF fishers
Negotiations and dues	No dues; Secretary-General accompanies government in fishery labor inspections	No dues; will negotiate with recruitment agents and employers	Collects dues and seeks to negotiate with employers
Leadership	Li Hua (Allison) Lee, Cofounder and Secretary-General	Mei Hua Lee, Secretary-General	Achmad Mudzakir, Chairman

In response to their organizing efforts, union leaders and members have experienced retaliation, such as defamation lawsuits brought by employers and labor brokers, attempts to interfere with the union's dependence, and intimidation of fishers who speak out about conditions on vessels. In the face of these challenges, migrant fishers in Taiwan have persisted to organize and build power with the hopes of negotiating with employers to reach a collective bargaining agreement and an enforceable supply chain agreement. They also started collaborating with unions in Indonesia to advocate for a bilateral labor migration agreement between Indonesia and Taiwan that safeguards the rights of migrant fishers.

3.3.4 Paths forward

Since 2023, the Wi-Fi Now for Fishers' Rights at Sea campaign, led by FOSPI/PMFU and its US and Taiwanese allies, has been advocating that the Taiwanese government mandate Wi-Fi on Taiwanese DWF vessels. In addition to allowing workers to communicate with their families, ensuring timely salary payments and supporting their social connections and mental health, access to Wi-Fi at sea is crucial for enabling fishers to exercise their freedom of association. It empowers them to organize and strengthens unions' ability to collectively bargain on behalf of their members. The campaign has specified five criteria to ensure it is accessible and effective in upholding fishers' rights:

1. The Wi-Fi regulation must be mandatory, instead of voluntary, and include penalties for non-compliance.

2. Vessel owners must commit to respecting fishers' fundamental labor rights.

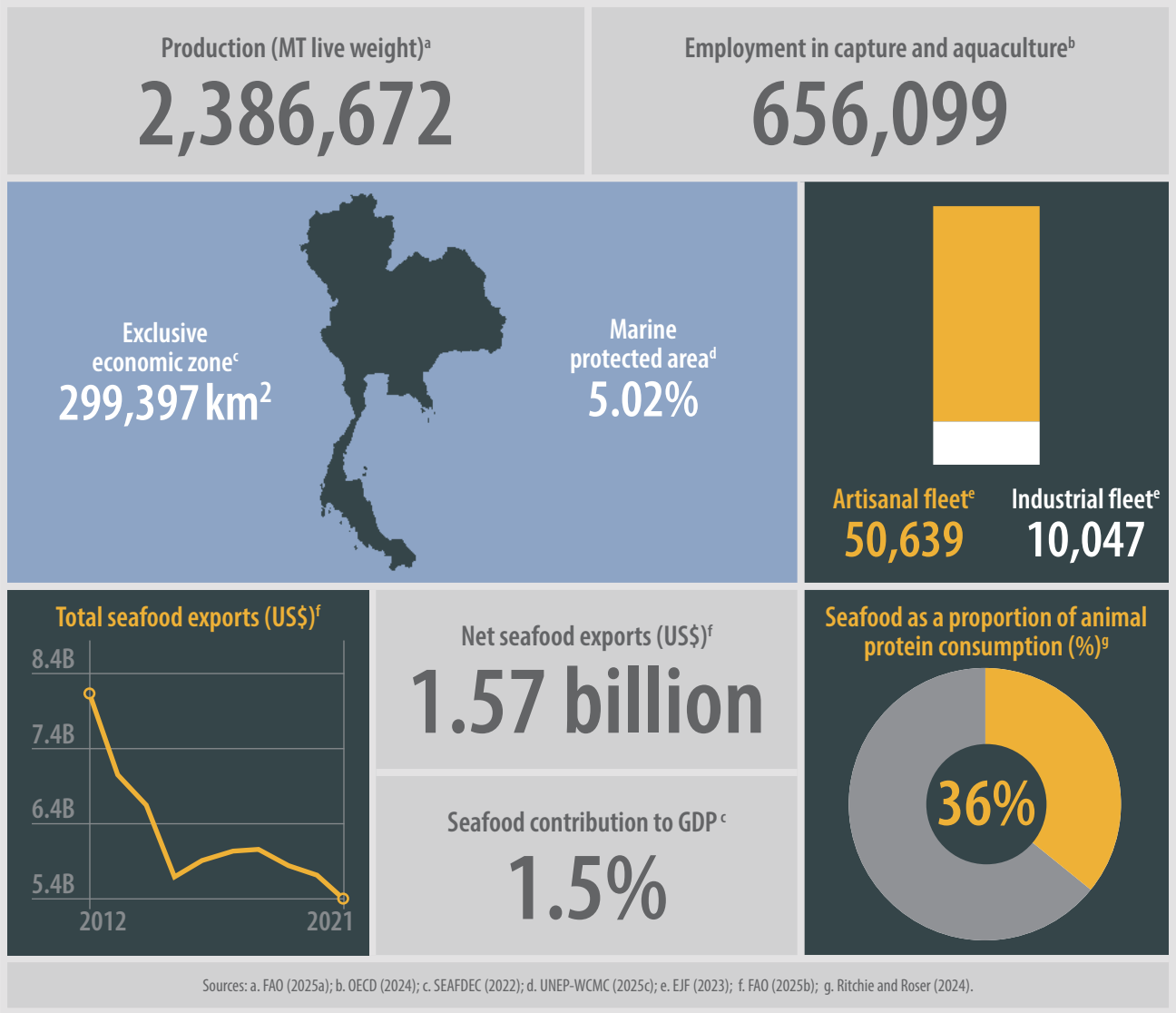
3. Guidelines on reasonable access to Wi-Fi must be developed to ensure that Wi-Fi is free and accessible for all fishers.

4. A conflict resolution process must be developed on board the vessel, which is codesigned and coenforced with the fishers' union, and will allow complaints to be remedied in real time.

5. Enforcement should be strengthened through interagency action.

The campaign aims to use these criteria as the basis for an enforceable supply chain agreement between FOSPI, Taiwanese vessel owners, and US brands/retailers that source seafood from Taiwan. Furthermore, as part of the Coalition for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Fishers in Taiwanese Fishing Vessels, which brings together Taiwanese and Indonesia-based unions, FOSPI has brought demands—which include respect for fishers' fundamental labor rights, freedom of association, access to Wi-Fi, protections against retaliation, grievance handling, collective bargaining agreements, fair pay, and the employer pays principle—to the Taiwanese and Indonesian governments as they negotiate a bilateral labor migration agreement on migrant fishers' rights.

3.4 Thailand



3.4.1 Industry overview

Thailand was the third largest seafood exporter in the world in 2013 (McDowell and Mason 2015), but the value of Thai exports of fish and fishery products have since fallen, leaving them the sixth largest in 2019 (Thammachote and Inthisang Trochim 2023). The country is home to two of the world's ten largest seafood producing companies, Thai Union and CP Foods, but some analysts argue the fishing industry is sunsetting due to a lack of investments and upgrades in the fleet.[2] This undoubtedly affects the profit margins of the vessel owners. Fishers may bear the brunt of this and vessel owners have been pushing back against regulatory reforms (EJF 2023).

Following significant trade and diplomatic pressure from the US and EU, Thailand made policy reforms between 2015 and 2019 to address the high rates of forced labor and human trafficking on its fishing fleet and pervasive IUU violations. Reforms included reduced time at sea, prohibitions on transshipment at sea, the ratification of C 188, and the creation of a vessel inspection program. Unfortunately, the implementation of social safeguards has ranged

from inconsistent to ineffective, and although fishery governance has improved, depleted fish stocks were just beginning to show improvement (EJF 2023). Despite the tenuous implementation, environmental justice and fisher rights advocates are now fighting to maintain the reforms, in the face of significant pushback from the vessel owners, which are represented by the National Fishers Association of Thailand (NFAT).

3.4.2 Policy trends and roadblocks

The Thai seafood industry employs a majority of migrant workers from Myanmar and Cambodia, and their rights are central to the trade pressure on Thailand. Although the past decade brought some improvements and openings for fisher organizing, many of these migrants still arrive having to pay down the fees their employers paid to brokers to process their papers. This and other unplanned expenses keep them indebted to their employers. Even as recruitment agencies in Cambodia, for example, claim they no longer charge fees to workers, fishers note that employers in Thailand still deduct those fees from their wages after they arrive.[3] What's possibly worse is the embedded nature of certain practices, which indicate high levels of forced labor risks among migrant fishers and roadblocks to improving protection.

Policy incoherence. Two laws that are critical to the implementation of ILO C 188 are the 2019 Labor Protection in Fishing Work Act (B.E. 2562) and the 2022 Ministerial Regulation concerning Labour Protection in Sea Fishery Work (B.E.2565). The Migrant Working Group of Thailand reported that the two laws create redundancy and offer differing requirements on issues such as accommodation and food, the powers and duties of inspectors, and whether the skipper is an employer or employee (MWG 2023).

Weak enforcement. There are now 30 port-in, port-out (PIPO) inspection stations in Thailand, which have over time improved their interpreter services and developed a multidisciplinary inspection team. ILO C 188 has enabled dialogue about PIPO inspections, but fisher organizers were outraged

Pheaktra, a volunteer organizer with CENTRAL, helps a fisher clean her nets.

Credit: Judy Gearhart

when the government reported that PIPO inspectors only found 20 labor law violations out of the 55,818 fishing vessel inspections conducted at port, and only one labor violation during the 842 at-sea inspections in 2020 (Hartough and Gearhart 2024).

Lack of access to port services increases risks. Even for migrant fishers in Thailand who have the proper documentation, they are still tied to their boats at port. Members of the FRN report that when they arrive at the PIPO station, inspectors take a picture of them holding their identity papers, but then the captain collects those again once the inspection is complete. If they go too far into town and the captain is suspicious, he may report them to the authorities, which puts them at risk for being picked up without working papers and fined, imprisoned, or deported without pay (FRN and Gearhart 2024).

Debt bondage. Thailand's reliance on cheap labor means there are many pathways for migrant fishers to secure working papers after arrival. In Cambodia, where the government has banned migrant fisher visas and recruitment agencies are seen as slow and expensive, many fishers opt to migrate informally and secure working papers through their employers upon arrival. As a result, many employers deduct the recruitment fees and other expenses after fishers are hired, meaning that many fishers on the Thai fleet remain in debt bondage.

Repression and fear of organizing. Thai law makes union organizing very difficult. There is a lag between registering a union (only ten workers needed) and securing the right to collective bargaining (20 percent of workforce needed), during which time the first members are vulnerable to being fired. Additionally, worker categories in the law indicate that subcontractors can't organize with permanent workers and migrants can't lead or form their own unions. The limits on migrants organizing is especially problematic in fishing, where there are rarely any Thai nationals among the crew. These challenges, combined with the prevalence of debt bondage, make growing an independent and self-sustaining union movement challenging.

Fear of deportation and arrest. Many migrant workers who receive working papers through their employer face deportation if fired, but that fear is amplified by Thailand's recent commitment to its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbors. Migrant fishers' main countries of origin— Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—all engage in transnational repression, demanding that Thailand repatriate individuals at their request who will be detained upon arrival (Freedom House 2022). Even for fishers who are not active political dissidents, there is a pervasive fear that can inhibit fishers from speaking out or joining an organization.

3.4.3 Fisher organizing

Despite the still persistent and comprehensive threats that migrant fishers face in Thailand, migrants are organizing and aligning with trade unions. In contrast to fishers organizing in Indonesia, fishers and seafood processing workers in Thailand are not able to secure legal recognition as trade unions. Nevertheless, they have actively sought to engage in collective representation and bargaining with employers, though this does not give representatives the same protection union representatives have against reprisals. As a result, some groups like the MWSC have increased their focus on securing remedy for fishers.

Table 3. **Fisher Organizations, Thailand**

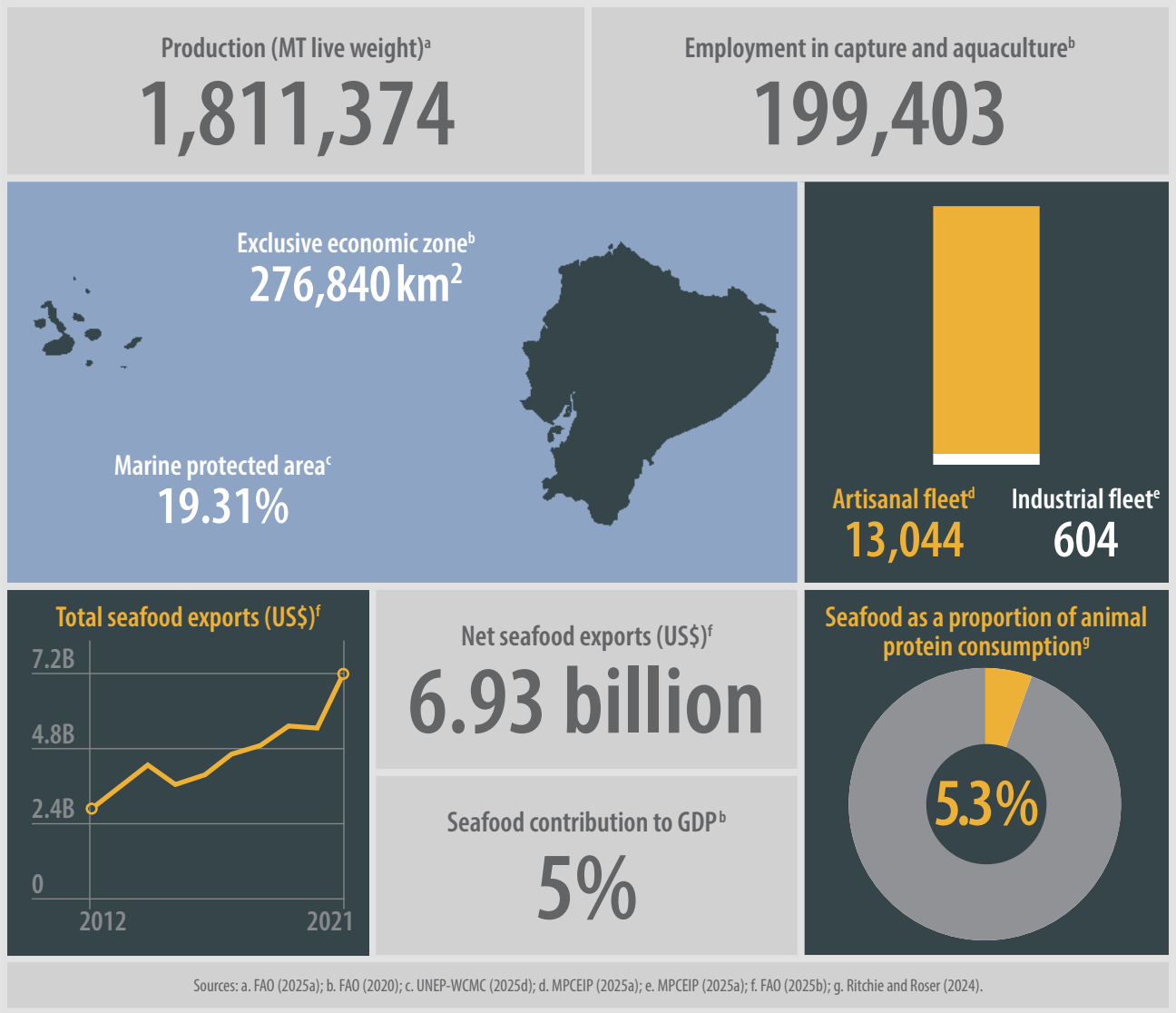
	Migrant Worker Rights Network (MWRN), founded 2009	Migrant Worker Solidarity Committee (MWSC), founded 2022	Fisher Rights Network (FRN), founded 2018
Members	About 1,200 members, mostly in seafood processing sector	618 members, mostly in seafood processing sector (24 fishers)	4,000 members in 3 Thai ports
Types of services	Computer and language training; legal aid; education	Legal aid; capacity building; crisis intervention; peer network building	First aid training and kits; grievance support; capacity building
Advocacy	Advocate with buyers; historically aligned with Thai trade unions	Aligned with, support Thai trade unions	Affiliated with ITF; aligned with Thai trade unions
Negotiations and dues	No dues. Negotiate with brands about working conditions and recruitment costs, through welfare committees	Dues 400 Baht per year. Negotiate better terms through welfare committees	No dues. Negotiate with vessel captains/owners to improve conditions and contract terms
Leadership	Sein Htay, President	Lwin Moe Aung, President	Leaders elected in each port location

3.4.4 Paths forward

Given how Thailand was pressured into ratifying ILO C 188 as a response to global attention to egregious abuses on its fleet, the planning and implementation process did not establish a robust social dialogue space, like the one that has preceded Ghana's ratification of the Convention. Such a process has potential to improve and sustain support for the implementation of C 188. NFAT's resistance to the reforms that helped bring Thailand into compliance with C 188 and the PSMA may indicate the need to double back and reinvest in a longer strategy of base building and facilitated dialogue.

Additionally, international brands and retailers, as well as Thailand's very large seafood exporting companies, have not been transparent about their efforts to support reforms. They have publicly stated support for greater protections for migrant fishers, but there is no public information to indicate that they have financed the changes vessel owners have had to make. Notably there is also no business reason for them to do so, given that most exports are going through processing companies and aquaculture. In short, transnational corporations (TNCs) with supply chain ties to Thailand have an interest in the country's reputation and compliance with international norms, but it is the (primarily) domestic fishing industry that has had to finance most of the reforms.

3.5 Ecuador



3.5.1 Industry overview

Ecuador is one of the most important fishing nations in Latin America. It captures 4 percent of the world's tuna (FAO 2020) and processes 500,000 tons, around double what it captures itself (Monterey Bay Aquarium and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership 2022). It has become the world's largest exporter of (mostly farmed) shrimp, following the rapid rise of its aquaculture sector (Molinari 2023). The sector has received more than US$550 million in financing from the International Financial Corporation (IFC) and other international financial institutions, raising complaints about unfair competition, noted by Mexican fishers interviewed, and documented by US shrimp producers (Southern Shrimp Alliance 2023).

With a fleet of 20,000 vessels and directly employing almost 600,000 people, the sector generates 5 percent of the country's GDP (FAO 2020). Despite its economic importance, marine animals only constitute 5.6 percent of the average Ecuadoran's animal protein consumption. The body that regulates fisheries is the Subsecretary of Fisheries

Resources, which is housed within the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Production, Investment, and Fisheries, another indication of the industry's importance to the country's export income. The Ministry of Labor is responsible for inspecting ships for labor conditions, but programs run by the US Department of Labor, the ILO, and ITF found low capacity to do so (ILAB 2024). The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition is responsible for marine reserves.

Ecuador's struggles with IUU have drawn international attention, including a yellow card from the EU in 2019. Fishers report declining fish stocks and longer trips out to sea due to overfishing, especially encroachment from Chinese flagged vessels. In addition, the US has partnered with NGOs and Ecuador to tackle the illegal shark trade (American University CLALS and InSight Crime 2022). The sharp rise of organized crime in Ecuador has also had a negative impact on the sector; fishers are increasingly victims of murder and robberies at sea. Additionally, with organized crime often comes government corruption, which further alienates fishers from accessing legal remedy. Fishers also lack adequate coverage under social security and are fighting to protect their access to fisheries. Ecuador has ratified the PSMA and is a participant in the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), which are efforts to respond to international environmental goals.

ASOSALAN team at Salango, Manabí, Ecuador.

Credit: Gustavo Crespo

3.5.2 Policy trends and roadblocks

Government in Ecuador is trending further right. Since leftwing populist Rafael Correa's last term in 2017, the presidency has been transferred to pro-business Lenín Moreno, then former World Bank economist Guillermo Lasso, and currently to Daniel Noboa, the heir of Ecuador's richest man. The US Department of State's 2023 report found several anti-labor practices, including the targeting of union leaders and a lack of enforcement in informal sectors (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2023). Fishers fighting for their rights and well-being are focused on the five following areas:

Physical security. IUU and the rise of organized crime put fishers at risk. Ecuador's dollarized economy and its location between Colombia and Peru make it a prime location for drug trafficking. Fisher organizations have documented a rise in attacks at sea, which often end in strandings or death. In addition, IUU and organized crime raise the risks of human trafficking and forced labor. Remedy is difficult to pursue due to the court system's rules about which jurisdiction can hear which cases, as well as fear of retaliation.

Social security. When sick or injured, fishers are often unable to access the national health care system due to logistics. The system, while affordable, is often seen as too time-consuming to participate in. For example, fishers report that dues must be paid monthly in person, often at locations outside of their communities. In addition, the facilities that accept the coverage are far from fishers' homes. They either purchase private insurance or go without.

Access rights. Overfishing pushes fishers to take longer trips further out to sea. The 2020 Fisheries Law designates the first eight nautical miles off the coast as the Inshore Exclusive Zone (IEZ) for artisanal fishers. Incursions by the industrial sector and the lack of enforcement by the government inspired fisher leaders to seek additional protections. In March 2023, former president Lasso declared the IEZ a marine reserve (Ministerio del Ambiente, Agua, y Transición Ecológica 2023). Some fishers hope that additional funds for monitoring, surveillance, and control could be brought to bear in policing the zone. Others fear an additional layer of unfunded bureaucracy that will make life more difficult for legitimate fishers and do nothing to dissuade illegitimate ones. Fishers at the local level have had some success improving relations with the parks services, but more dialogue is needed.

Policy incoherence. Fishers in Ecuador are frustrated by the institutions that are meant to regulate the fishing sector. This is especially the case where there is institutional overlap between ministries, such as in marine reserves. The government's intention to treat artisanal fishers' waters as a marine reserve only heightens fishers' anxiety that they will be subject to two separately coordinated regimes (the Subsecretary of Fisheries and the Ministry of the Environment). Some fishers showed interest in a unified, one-stop-shop ministry for fisheries while others believed greater communication and breaking down siloes between ministries would be more helpful.

Fear and intimidation of unions. Organizing Ecuador's industrial sector is difficult due to the country's long-standing hostility towards organized labor. Although the Ministry of Labor has a clear mandate to inspect labor conditions on vessels at port, they have weak capacity and limited access to ports (ILAB 2024). Structural barriers within the law exist, such as the requirement that unions have at least 30 members and the maximum number of fishers on industrial boats being capped at 21. While some smaller fisher associations do exist, such as the Marineros de Atún, they are hampered their employers' unchecked, anti-union actions.

3.5.3 Fisher organizing

The following table, focused on organizing artisanal fishers in Ecuador, includes the largest organization of fishers as well as an example of a small, independent group.

Table 4. Fisher Organizations, Ecuador

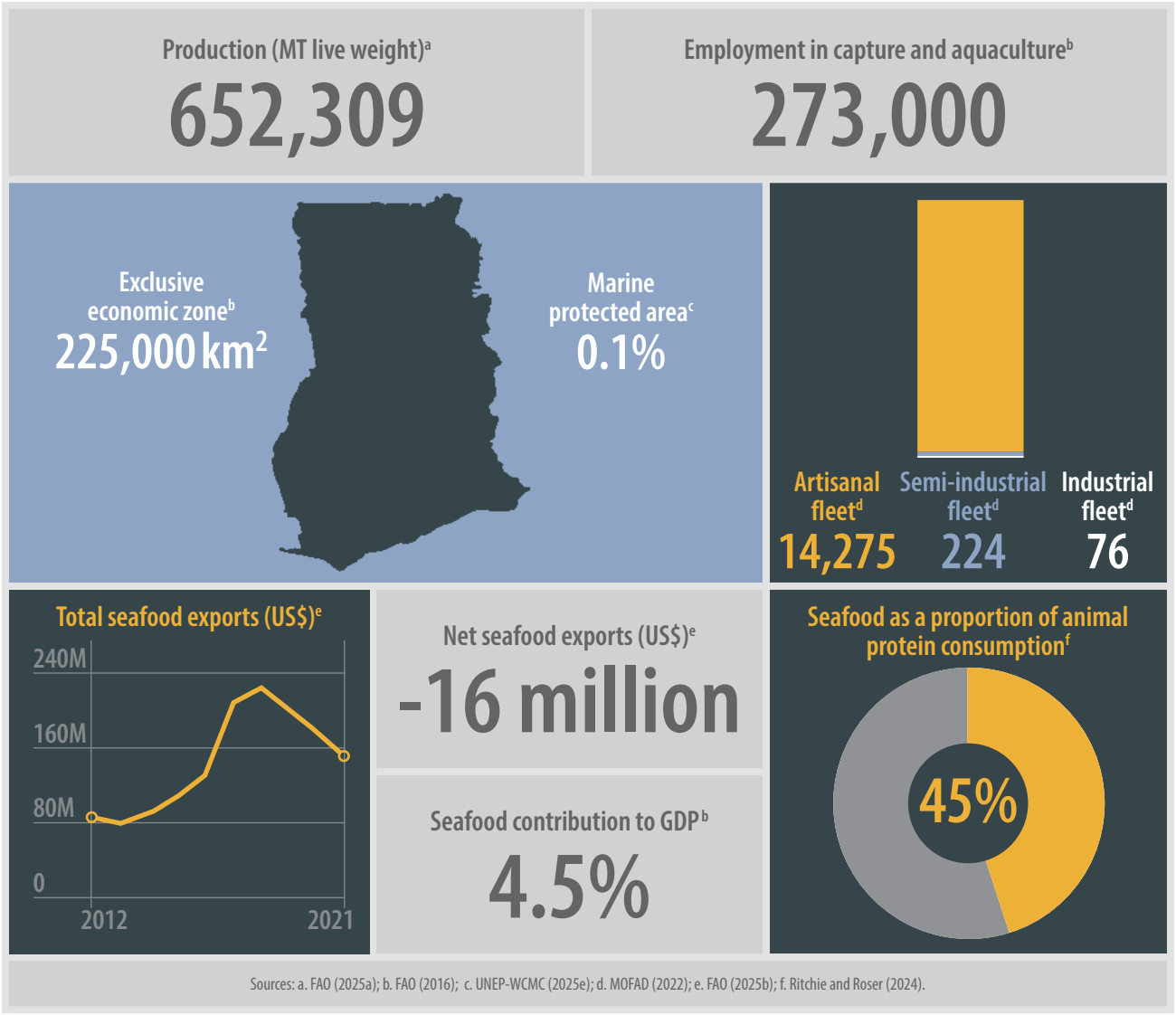
	National Federation of Artisanal Fisher Cooperatives (FENACOPEC), founded1986	The Association of Fishers and Divers of Salango (ASOSALAN), founded 2016
Members	Represents close to 48,000 artisanal fishers	20
Types of services	Donations and supplies to fishers; rights education; documentation of cases of fisher rights violations; operates exclusive fuel stations for members	Commercialization, including value added; market connections to upscale restaurants
Advocacy	Physical security; economic rights; social rights; recognition for fisher issues; better government enforcement	Recognition of fishing method; normalization of relations with national parks; better government enforcement
Negotiations and dues	Member cooperatives pay dues to Federation	Members pay dues
Leadership	Gabriela Cruz, President	Ruben Baque, President

3.5.4 Paths forward

Ecuador's regulations, and especially enforcement, need strengthening and renewed effort. Ecuador ratified the Maritime Labor Convention in 2024, but conversations around ILO C 188 are nascent at best. Superficial responses to international pressure are not enough to improve life on the water for fishers. For the artisanal sector, fishers face physical insecurity, which will only worsen as unchecked overfishing pushes them further from shore. In the industrial sector, real action must be taken against companies, both foreign and domestic, that engage in union busting and abuses such as the denial of benefits for injured or retired workers. Better institutional coordination could help inspections improve their effectiveness.

The rise of organized crime and right-wing governments dampens hope that enforcement authorities will be strengthened in ways that enforce laws evenly and allow fishers to thrive. Although fishers expressed frustration with environmentally-focused initiatives, they continue to participate. This highlights the importance of better integrating fisher issues into environmentally-focused discussions and policy making considerations.

3.6 Ghana



Sources: a. FAO (2025a); b. FAO (2016); c. UNEP-WCMC (2025e); d. MOFAD (2022); e. FAO (2025b); f. Ritchie and Roser (2024).

3.6.1 Industry overview

Ghana's fish stocks plummeted over the last two decades, falling by about 80 percent since 1996 (Sarpong 2023). Ghana's per capita fish consumption is one of the highest in Africa; fish account for 41 percent of their animal-based protein (Ritchie and Roser 2024). Ghana is a net importer of seafood; 46 percent of the seafood they eat is imported despite the fact that they eat 75–80 percent of the fish caught nationally (Asiedu, Iddrisu, and Failler 2023). Across capture, aquaculture, and processing, the sector supports 720,000 jobs. The fishing sector has deep, traditional roots in the country, with chief fishermen and fishmongers (roles divided by gender) still deeply relevant to the sector's day-to-day operations (EJF 2019; Nunoo et al. 2015; Osei et al. 2024). Seafood's importance to Ghana's diet and culture led the nation to become a net importer of seafood and for fishers to increase their efforts to sustain Ghanaian's appetite for fish.

Ghana's fleet of over 12,000 vessels surpasses estimates of its sustainable capacity. Scholars indicate that a more appropriate number would be 9,000–10,000 canoes. Regulators are preoccupied with the transition of some fishers

away from seafood, although there are significant hurdles to doing so. The fleet includes bottom trawling vessels, of which several local analysts estimated 90 percent are owned by Chinese parent companies, even though they are technically registered to Ghanaians because foreign-owned vessels are not allowed to fish in Ghana's EEZ. Union organizers who worked on Ghana's industrial trawlers reported poor working conditions and inequities aboard these ships, particularly with regards to the way the captains and bosuns (usually Chinese) treated the Ghanaian crew members. Anti-union practices limit the effect of organizing because captains refuse to hire fishers who have been known to be union members.

3.6.2 Policy trends and roadblocks

Ghana received a yellow card from the EU in 2013, but its efforts to develop a plan of action to combat IUU led to the card being lifted in 2015. The EU carded Ghana again in 2021 after finding anti-IUU enforcement lacking; this card was still open in 2024 (European Commission 2021). Ghana's primary policies to address overcapacity are a moratorium on new fishing licenses and a closed season (although President Mahama, elected in December 2024, announced an exemption for artisanal fishers). In the industrial sector, standards such as changing the kinds of allowed nets had little effect on overfishing. The ILO was able to broker agreements between employers in the industrial sector and worker representatives through their 8.7 Accelerator Lab, which helped secure buy-in from all sectors and Ghana's ratification of C 188.

Artisanal fishing in Ghana.

Credit: Environmental Justice Foundation

Illegal bycatch. The past decade has seen new efforts to combat a form of transshipment called *saiko*. The practice involves trawlers selling their bycatch (the small fish intended for canoe fishers) to canoe owners, who then sell them in their local markets. A ban on *saiko* may have stopped canoe owners from landing these fish, but it appears the trawlers are either landing those fish or discarding them, which is worse for the artisanal fishers. As mentioned earlier, the government is also implementing policies meant to restrict fishing in the artisanal sector.

Participation and just transition planning. Fishers understand the need to address the collapse of fish stocks, but they take issue with the conventional, top-down approach to regulations in the sector. First, fishers feel left out of the conversation. The Co-Management Policy, which brings fisher organizations into conversations about the sector, only started implementation in 2023, but more restrictive fishery management policies were put in place before then. Second, there is scant assistance for fishers and fish processors who are negatively affected by this policy. For example, fishers were given a single sack of rice and some oil, which they say is inadequate to hold them over for the two months of the closed season. Environmental reform advocates highlighted the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Alternative Livelihoods Program as a way to mitigate the negative social effects of the restrictions. Yet the program targets youth, offering little to the adult fishers that are displaced. The lack of assistance undermines fisher organizations, encouraging resistance and noncompliance.

Informality and changing traditions. The artisanal sector's traditional roots face challenges in the modern era. For example, the roles of fishing chief and market queen, while traditionally quite powerful, are becoming politicized, which interferes with their ability to effect change (Apetorgbor 2018). This politicization may also be affecting the governance of fuel subsidies. These changes, along with disagreements on strategy, have splintered the artisanal sector. Some note that the lack of formality in the artisanal sector, which means fishers pay little in taxes, generates less attention from the government. Organizations like the GNCFC are promoting efforts to formalize the sector, registering both canoe owners and their employees. While formalization may come with taxes, their leaders believe this will increase their ability to be heard by the government.

Challenging traditional social contracts. Fishing arrangements in the artisanal sector are built on trust, not contracts, and this can make change difficult. Fish processors (women) will finance fishers (men) to go out on the promise of their catch. However, in the context of low supply, fishers will either resort to destructive fishing practices like chemicals or dynamite, or might simply sell their catch at a different landing beach for a higher price and tell their financiers they caught nothing. Development banks and some NGOs have put effort into organizing fish processors to improve their financial health. Teaching how to recognize fish caught with chemicals or dynamite helps women bring a better, healthier product to market. It was unclear however, that the women earn more for this fish, while it was clear that women risk breaking trust with fishers if they reject their fish too many times.

Beneficial ownership. A major problem is the foreign ownership of many trawlers in the Ghanaian fleet. In addition to this practice being illegal under the Fisheries Act, the presence of what are essentially silent partners creates significant accountability problems in the sector. For example, the Alliance 8.7 Accelerator Lab brought together actors from government, labor, and business to negotiate for better conditions. However, due to their illicit nature, these silent partners were absent from the table.

Lack of local control. Vessel captains are typically foreigners who are hired by and answer to investors, making it impossible for Ghanaian nationals who make up the crew on the trawlers to rise through the ranks. The legal loophole through which this practice is achieved can often leave a fishing company owner in a cycle of debt, sending the majority of profits to investors and ensuring the foreign owners' control.

3.6.3 Fisher organizing

The table below highlights the mix of associations and trade unions in the sector. These include canoe owner associations, a union of canoe owners, crew, and processors, and one union organizing fishing crew on the industrial fleet. Most fish processors are represented by separate, women-led organizations not listed here.

Table 5. Fisher Organizations, Ghana

	Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC), founded 1993	Canoe and Fishing Gear Owners Association of Ghana (CaFGOAG), founded 2021	National Union of Teamsters and General Workers (NUTEG), founded 2007	National Union of Seafarers, Ports, and Allied Workers (NUSPAW), founded 2017	General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU founded 1959
Members	120,000	2,200	2,321	1,532	23,000 (in multiple sectors)
Types of services	Education; capacity building for chief fishermen	Education of members; negotiating improvements to pay structure	Education of members	Tri-partite negotiations for better wages	Community monitoring program; education; advocacy
Advocacy	C 188; enforcement of fishery management; increased supply of fuel	C 188	C 188; social security; health; and safety	C 188; decent work in fishing; improved recruitment practices; better and more labor inspections	C 188; child labor-free zones in Lake Volta region
Negotiation and dues	Beginning to collect dues ~US$12 yearly per member, ~US$8 registration per canoe	US$7.50–22.50 per year (depending on position within organization)	Some members pay dues	Not collecting dues to union busting	Dues collected
Leadership	Nana Jojo Solomon, President	Nana Kweigyah, President	Desmond Sackey, General Secretary	Michael Angmor, General Secretary	Andy Tagoe, General Secretary

3.6.4 Paths forward

Ghana is taking promising steps to improve fisher livelihoods and protect the environment. The Co-Management Policy, while in its infancy, speaks to the government's willingness to involve fishers in decision-making. The ILO 8.7 Accelerator Lab has facilitated social dialogue that increased wages for fishers on Ghana's industrial fleet.

A major challenge to continuing this work is capacity. Ghana currently relies on outside funding from the US, EJF, or ILO for the resources to fund the Co-Management Policy, capacity building for organizing, and social assistance and transition. Should that funding run out, fishers are concerned that regulators will return to business as usual. In addition, more work remains in the industrial sector to better involve worker organizations and root out the illegal practices of beneficial ownership.

3.7 Mexico

3.7.1 Industry overview

Mexico has the world's thirteenth largest EEZ, but it was not until the 1980s that it sought to protect it as its own. The fights that ensued combined with neoliberal reforms in the 1990s that withdrew support for artisanal fisher organizations and fueled the overexploitation of Mexico's fisheries (Bennett 2017). The US Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 exerted the US's EEZ sovereignty, but added an exception for highly migratory tuna, which allowed US vessels to continue fishing for tuna in Mexico's waters.[4] In the 1980s Mexico retaliated by sending shrimp vessels into US waters. The US retaliation for that nearly closed Mexico's tuna operations, and decades of US embargoes alleging Mexican tuna fishers did not take adequate measures to protect the dolphins ensued (Rosendahl 1984). Today, Mexico is the world's fifth largest producer of canned tuna but none of it is for export (FAO 2024).

Mexico has received significant attention from US ocean conservation initiatives. The country now has the largest number of fishery improvement projects (FIPs), according to the International Sustainable Seafood Foundation (ISSF). Since the 1990s, dozens of projects have sought to improve Mexico's fishery management practices, but only

recently have those initiatives begun to invest in strengthening fisher organizations (Basurto et al. 2020). There are now several initiatives designed to support fisher communities and strengthen fisher organizations.

3.7.2 Policy trends and roadblocks

Mexico's fishery policies have gone through several phases, from state interventions to support for fishers to free market strategies that withdrew support and opened the sector to new competition. Cooperatives have played a key role in organizing and connecting fishing communities to influence government policies and secure member benefits such as fishing permits and gear subsidies, but that changed in the 1980s. Trade embargoes required fishers to invest in new gear while state support was shrinking. The 1994 Federal Fisheries Law further undermined the cooperatives by eliminating their exclusive access to valuable species (Bennett 2017). A new Law on Cooperative Societies was also issued in 1994, which enabled cooperatives to form with only five members, further fracturing social cohesion in the sector.

As NAFTA came into force in late 1994, pressure increased for Mexico to withdraw state interventions in the economy and increase openings for private sector investments. The result was the sector's over financialization and the depletion of fish stocks (Bennett 2017). As international and national environmental organizations sought to advance more sustainable fishery management, they have increasingly found allies among cooperatives, which can play a key role in disseminating better fishing practices and managing shared resources (Basurto et al. 2020).

Leaders from the 41 federations of cooperatives that make up CONMECOOP gather for a group photo in the port of La Paz, Mexico, May 2024.

Credit: Judy Gearhart

During the administration of President Lopez Obrador, fishers seeking strategic support found their priorities subsumed as the main support initiative became the Bienpesca program, which gives all registered fishers 7,200 pesos per year.[5] Fisher organizers interviewed saw this as a poor substitute for the strategic support the industry needs. President Claudia Sheinbaum has promised to increase the Bienpesca subsidy, and fisher organizers report being encouraged by recent appointments in her administration and opportunities for dialogue. To that end, fisher cooperatives have identified several areas for reform:

Transparency and social dialogue. Mexican law established the National Council for Fish and Aquaculture (CONAPESCA) and corresponding state level agencies, which are responsible for ensuring fishers are heard and their concerns addressed through an ongoing social dialogue process. This process has been neglected during the past six years.

Inspection and monitoring. Fishers estimate up to 40 percent of fishing is done in a clandestine manner, violating fishing permits and the efforts often led by the cooperatives to implement more responsible fishery management policies. The result has been fishers financing and conducting the monitoring of activities in their fishing grounds, such that if arrests are needed, they have to pay for the gas and provide the boat to take representatives from CONAPESCA and the Navy to the scene of the violation.

Violence on the water. In the Caribbean Sea, the Pacific, and Gulf of Mexico fishers and their communities are affected by drug and human trafficking operations. The fact that they are not protected by government authorities, and have to pay for their own monitoring operations, leaves fishers vulnerable to extortion and other forms of violence along the coast.

Policy incoherence. Fishery management is largely done through a permitting system for fishers. Reforms to the Cooperatives Law in the 1980s have made this process less systematic and easier to abuse, weakening the role of the cooperatives in distributing permits. Fishers are seeking a full and ongoing review of the permitting system that is more closely tied to sustainable fishery management.

Lack of research. Because the permitting system is not well managed and government monitoring weak, there is a lack of systematic data about the state of Mexican fisheries and the number and size of vessels active on the water and the type of gear they use.

Financing. Fishers are struggling to compete internationally, given the lack of government infrastructure support and the fact that other countries are subsidizing fishers' fuel and gear.

3.7.3 Fisher organizing

Cooperatives have a deep history in Mexico dating back to the revolution, and fishing cooperatives have played a key role in managing and distributing usage rights, a role that has been undermined by subsequent policy reforms. Mexican fishers are organized into 300 cooperatives representing approximately 30,000 fishers, ranging from artisanal cooperatives of scuba divers to larger cooperatives of semi-industrial fishers (Garcia Lozano et al. 2023). Notably, cooperatives range in size and form, with some only having five members who are all in the same family to others that are more community based (Frawley, Finkbeiner, and Crowder 2019).

Cooperative leaders interviewed noted that they often struggle to keep fishers selling their catch through the cooperative, which charges a small fee to help finance its administrative structures. As cooperatives lost ground in their ability to advance pro-fisher policies, it has become more challenging to maintain their strength. Many

cooperatives have sought support from environmental groups to advance programs that can improve fish stocks and help draw members together behind a common cause.

The cooperatives come together in regional federations and national confederations, which are responsible for supporting and advocating for government policies that better serve their members. Two national confederations of cooperatives provide an overview of efforts to advance stronger economic and social protection for fishers. CONACOOP, the National Confederation of Fisheries Cooperatives, was founded in 1994 and currently represents 638 cooperatives with nearly 33,000 members in 14 states. CONMECOOP, the Mexican Confederation of Fishers and Fish Farmers, was founded in 2014 with members in 11 states; they now have 41 member federations in 15 of Mexico's 17 coastal states, which includes 550 cooperatives and their 35,000 members. Table 6 provides a snapshot of the two confederations and the number of affiliated federations of cooperatives.

Table 6. Fisher Organizations, Mexico

	Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives (CONMECOOP), founded 2014	National Confederation of Fisheries Cooperatives (CONACOOP), founded 1994
Members	41 federations in 15 states, 35,000 members	42 federations in 14 states, 33,000 members
Types of services	Support cooperatives in securing and managing fishing permits or concessions; peer exchanges on strategies (e.g. fishery monitoring); connect cooperatives to technical support programs.	Support cooperatives in securing and managing fishing permits or concessions; peer exchanges on strategies (e.g. fishery monitoring)
Advocacy	Advocate for support for fishery industry in production and commercialization	
Negotiations and dues	Fishers sell through the cooperatives, which generate fees; cooperatives pay dues to the confederations	
Leadership	Jose Luis Carillo Gallaz, President	Aureliamo Aldama Rivera, President

3.7.4 The path ahead

Mexican artisanal fishers have long struggled with environmental initiatives, particularly those securing federal rules to create no-fishing seasons. These efforts at fishery management have been top down and rigid, especially when ordered from the federal government as opposed to state governments. Often implemented with little fisher input, these measures created animosity between some fishers and environmental organizations. CONMECOOP has sought to embrace and leverage some of the more adaptive environmental initiatives, seeing the development of marine protected areas, no-take zones, and no-fishing seasons as points of coordination. Programs that invest more in fisher leadership and combine marine conservation with measures to improve fishers' earnings and welfare will go a long way towards improving relations and establishing more effective programs.

4. What Enables and Disables Fisher Organizing?

This report has sought to identify how fisher organizations build strength and influence government and corporate policies. It starts with the assumption that this requires improved government information flows and more effective pathways to remedy that enable fishers to negotiate with employers and other corporate actors. Yet in each of the six countries, fishers face challenges that indicate a lack of information flows, the need for greater government engagement initiatives, and an overall lack of TNC connections to fisher rights organizations. Although both the challenges and factors that motivate fisher organizing play out differently in each country, there are some common themes that should be considered in efforts to strengthen fisher participation in policymaking and program implementation.

4.1 Challenges to organizing

Despite the difference in scale, there are similarities in the types of challenges fisher organizers confront; three of the four highlighted here affect both artisanal and industrial fishing. These include policy incoherence and the lack of enforcement of fisher protections; isolation and an inability to seek help while at sea; lack of access to services while at port; and for migrant fishers, a lack of transparency around vessel ownership and recruitment agencies' responsibilities.

Repression of organizing rights and policy incoherence. In each country fishers face a mix of legal restrictions on their rights to organize and policy contradictions that undermine protections of their rights and welfare. Indonesian migrants, who make up a large portion of migrant fishers on the DWF, often fall between the cracks in government protections, as illustrated by the jurisdictional disputes between the Ministries of Labor and Transportation, mentioned above. The country also has conflicting laws governing wages and rest periods for fishers on the domestic fleet (Mochtar et al. 2023). In Taiwan, tied visa regimes bind migrants to the employers where their recruitment agency signed them on to work. Additionally, fishers on the DWF are classified as 'working overseas' and are covered by the Fisheries Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture rather than Ministry of Labor, further limiting organizing protections. Thailand has sought to create coherence between ministries by conducting joint inspections at port and on the water, but these inspections have been ineffective, and the government rejected the unions' offer of technical support. The lack of prosecutions combines with a law that prohibits migrant fishers from forming their own unions, indicating a deeper resistance to fisher organizing rights.

For artisanal fishers, many expressed frustrations that their government does not prioritize their issues. In Ghana the prohibition of *saiko*, or the transshipment of industrial trawlers' bycatch, has led trawlers to land or sometimes dump the small pelagic fish meant to be the domain of canoe fishers and face no repercussions for doing so. In Mexico and Ecuador, fishery policies regulate artisanal fishing, but organized fishers must often police their own fishing grounds. Mexican artisanal fishers report having to pay the gas and supply the boat so that government agents can detain violators. These challenges are often exacerbated by active animosity towards trade unions or pressure to restrict rather than protect artisanal fishers.

Isolation and an inability to signal for help. Both coastal fishers and those on the DWF experience isolation and life-threatening dangers at sea while often having no ability to signal for help. For coastal fishers, being stranded at sea can result in dehydration, heat stroke, or in vessels being capsized by storms. Poor food and water supply during lengthy fishing trips can result in malnutrition that is also deadly. These risks could be significantly

mitigated if fishers were able to communicate while at sea or the national coast guard played a greater role in policing the waters.

Fishers on the DWF are routinely unable to communicate with their family or union while at sea for months and years at a time, leaving them no way to seek help if they are sick, malnourished, or abused physically. Given that fishers on the DWF take tremendous risks to support their families, being cut off is a significant hardship. Despite widespread support for the Wi-Fi Now for Fishers' Rights at Sea campaign and feasibility analysis for how connectivity can be enabled (Lee and Gill 2023), uptake remains slow. Communication at sea is also a challenge for coastal fishers, requiring their organizations to expend scant resources to organize search and rescue operations when fishers' motors are stolen, or families report fishers have gone missing.

A lack of access to services at port. When fishers on the DWF come into port, they often remain limited in their ability to connect with unions or other support organizations. Many migrant fishers do not have the proper working papers to go beyond the immediate vicinity of their vessel (Hiburong and Gearhart 2024). Even migrants who do have the correct documentation to go beyond the port struggle. For example, fishers the FRN is organizing in Thailand may be forced by their captain to hand back their identity papers once port inspections are finished, particularly if the captain suspects them of organizing (FRN and Gearhart 2024). For artisanal fisher organizations, the issue of port services is also challenging. In Mexico, for example, past federal governments invested in fishing infrastructure to facilitate storage and processing, but the programs were not always well utilized and support for these facilities has been withdrawn.[6] Today, Mexican fisher cooperatives compete with larger operations seeking to buy their members' catch. This practice makes it difficult for the cooperatives to help manage fisheries sustainably and monitor illegal activity.

Fishermen coming in, Puerto Lopez, Ecuador.

Credit: Chris Feser (CC BY 2.0)

Lack of transparency around vessel ownership and recruitment agencies. This is a problem that is particular to migrant fishers on the industrial fleet, especially the DWF. The lack of transparency around vessel ownership and the recruitment agencies responsible for a fisher's contract make it difficult for unions to secure remedy for their members and even negotiate a CBA. Many vessel owners maintain a plausible disassociation from their vessels through beneficial ownership structures (Brush and Utermohlen 2022), which allows vessels to claim bankruptcy when worker remedy becomes costly. Many fishers on the DWF are contracted and paid directly by the recruitment agency in their home country (Liu et al. 2024), which can add to jurisdictional challenges when the recruitment agency is governed by one country and the vessel by another. Additionally, recruitment agencies have been known to deny commitments, and some have even closed or moved their offices, making it difficult for returning fishers to file for backpay. Although fighting for remedy is only a fraction of a union's central role, all the unions interviewed emphasized their work supporting fishers' grievances. It can be very hard to build a movement and long-term strategies when securing remedy is so time consuming.

These challenges make the work of fisher organizations more difficult and distract from the time they could spend negotiating with employers, advocating for better wages and working conditions, and educating their members about ways to support responsible fishery management.

4.2 Factors contributing to fisher organizing

There are several factors that help motivate fisher organizing, which play out in both international and national forms of leverage. Most fisher organizations focus on national, provincial, or municipal policies, because that is what is compelling for their members. International campaigns may draw attention to an issue or increase pressure on the government or employers to make reforms, but this usually only comes into play if an international actor is involved. When asked about their organizational strategies, fisher organizers mostly talked about getting national and local government agencies to enforce the law. To a lesser degree, they talked about how they engage employers and buyers. Only SBMI in Indonesia, which works closely with Greenpeace, and the unions in Taiwan are working on campaigns that target TNCs.

4.2.1 National and local factors that help strengthen fisher organizing

Three factors figure prominently in how fisher organizers talk about their motivation to build a stronger collective. These relate to the need for both physical and financial security, the ways they and others identify as fishers and value a sense of belonging created by their organization, and the resources available to finance the organization's activities.

Increased awareness of human insecurity. Fishers have long known the dangers they face on the water, but there is now more information available about accidents and fatalities at sea. As communications have improved, the number of organizations paying attention to fishers' rights has increased, as has fishers' willingness to seek out support organizations. Given the lack of information prior to ten years ago, it's not clear there has been an increase in the incidence of death and injury among fishers as much as documentation and awareness about these incidences have increased.

In industrial fishing, the media exposés of forced labor and killings at sea shocked the world and prompted a growth in anti-human trafficking NGOs working in the sector. Although many of the issues were reported previously by the ILO and NGOs, the media drew new connections to TNCs and northern retailers and increased international attention and funding (Gearhart 2023). It also brought a surge in union organizing. In Indonesia, the migrant worker union founded in 2003, SBMI, started to build their fisher organizing efforts in 2014, after they began to advocate

for 74 migrant fishers who had been stranded in South Africa. Many of the original 74 are still active within SBMI's networks (Suwarno, Fritzner, and Gearhart 2024). In Thailand, the ITF began organizing in the seafood sector, and MWRN's organizing rose in prominence after multiple scandals involving the Thai fleet were revealed between 2013 and 2015. Seafood buyers like CP Foods and Thai Union engaged MWRN and spoke publicly about workplace agreements signed by processing facilities in their supply chain. Although the agreements mainly covered workers in seafood processing, MWRN's approach to working around legal limitations on migrant workers' ability to organize set important precedents. Several forced labor cases have plagued the Taiwanese fleet, including WROs against Taiwanese vessels (CBP 2024), helping to grow the number of advocates in Taiwan supporting migrant fishers in distress.

In the artisanal sector, fisher organizing has increased since the FAO published the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines, which emphasized the importance of including small-scale fisher organizations in fishery comanagement initiatives. Yet in speaking with fishers about their concerns and motivations, many referred to how they are organizing to address human security issues. Small-scale fishers have long risked fatality from capsizing and drowning, but these perils have multiplied as storms become more intense and depleted fish stocks require fishers to go further out to sea. Additionally, Mexican and Ecuadoran fishers report criminal activities and violence on the water and a lack of government monitoring. These dangers have prompted fishers to join or build an organized support network able to mobilize rescue operations. Food and livelihood security are also motivating new organizing in Ghana, where the population relies heavily on seafood as a protein source and tens of thousands of canoe fishers and fish processors earn subsistence incomes. Any threat to their earnings is a significant motivator to organize and influence government policies.

Culture and identity. Although culture and identity are somewhat intangible characteristics, they were cited as important to building unity. This was particularly prevalent among artisanal fishers in Latin America and Africa, who see fishing as a way of life. In Ghana, the oldest canoe fisher organization, the GNCFC, has been led by chief fishermen who identify as such even if they are barely or no longer actively fishing. Thus, artisanal fishers may be motivated to join an organization not only to defend their livelihoods, but also to sustain a way of life that is generational and that they describe as a part of their cultural heritage.

Even beyond the deep-seated culture of coastal communities, however, interviews with organizers revealed how organizing feeds a sense of belonging among fishers. This manifests in fishers taking risks to support others and to ask others for help (Hartough and Gearhart 2024). The sense of identity was also something that SAKTI-SULUT and SBMI signaled, both of which rely on their network of former migrant fishers to reach out and support prospective migrant fishers. In Taiwan, FOSPI started as a network of hometown clubs, which helped fishers make meaningful connections and served as an important basis for forming a union (PMFU) and articulating fishers' demands for Wi-Fi at sea.

Resources. Having adequate time and resources are critical to building solid fisher organizations, but funds can be hard to raise when the majority of fishers are earning subsistence wages or living in debt bondage. Most of the migrant fisher unions interviewed reported that they do not charge dues, which is particularly difficult if fishers are not receiving their wages on a regular basis, a common occurrence on the DWF. Several unions reported they seek to raise funds through other means, such as SBMI's consumer cooperatives or SPPI's training fees. Even SAKTI-SULUT, which does charge regular dues, has paired the dues with an amount that goes to financing medical coverage (Hiburong and Gearhart 2024).

The importance of having a dues structure is evident to organizers with the ITF, which has a strong network of affiliated unions among seafarers where jobs are more formally structured and collective bargaining defines wages. Union organizing in fishing surged in Thailand when the ITF decided to invest resources in organizing migrant fishers, a group that was largely seen as an unorganizable workforce (Hartough and Gearhart 2024). As the ITF's work with the FRN has gained traction, they have also secured resources from the ILO to support and expand their

Women members of the Guadalupe Fishery Cooperative and CONMECOOP.

Credit: Judy Gearhart

outreach within Thailand and into Indonesia. Unlike smaller organizations, however, the ITF can avoid becoming dependent on outside funding because of its size and the support of its members. To succeed, national fisher organizations will need to build self-financing, self-sustaining, democratic structures that enable them to sustain support for and secure the trust of their members.

Artisanal fisher organizers also mentioned the importance of outside funding and self-financing strategies. The strongest cooperatives in Mexico are those that work with high-end product such as shrimp and lobster, particularly in northwest Mexico. Better organized cooperatives are more likely to ensure their members sell their fish through the cooperative, thus contributing funds to enable the cooperative to establish their offices and provide the support services their members need. Thus, when the product has low earning margins, fishers struggle to turn down even minimally better offers.[7] Cooperatives in Mexico have built alliances with NGOs around themes of improved capacity, promoting legislation, resource management, and cooperativism. In the case of CONMECOOP, this has enabled their members to access support in the areas where they need it. This has become an important collaboration strategy for both NGOs and participating cooperatives. CONMECOOP, for example, sees it as a means to strengthen their members' organizational structures, which can also improve their self-financing capacity. It is important to highlight, however, that once the experts finish training, these initiatives still require the artisanal fishers to invest their own resources. Cooperatives participate in the inspection and control of their territories and in protected areas like fish refuges through the creation of community inspection and surveillance, which coordinate with the relevant authorities.[8] As noted, fishers often need to finance the gas and organize the fishers to do this work.

Additional resources are needed to support organizing among indebted or subsistence fishers. Yet outside funding for fisher organizing also risks creating financial dependencies or compromising the independence of these constituency-based organizations. To be sure, there is a risk of funding falling off precipitously, but that seems to be a weak argument for not extending funding to these groups. The bigger concern is if outside funding causes a shift in priorities, away from fishers' immediate demands. Finally, there is the concern that outside funding can create competition between constituency-based groups, making it more difficult to build a united movement. Some interviewees suggested funding should be managed transparently and not amount to more than a quarter of an organization's budget. In short, constituency-based groups can benefit from outside funding, but they need to manage it strategically.

4.2.2 How can the international community support organizing?

Most of the fisher organizations interviewed describe their strategies in terms of their efforts to get their governments to reform and/or enforce the law. So, what role can international campaigns play in strengthening fisher organizations? Three strategies—trade pressure, corporate campaigns, and shared advocacy—have been used to varying degrees of success. Key to effective reforms, however, is whether local fisher organizations are involved in demanding and monitoring their implementation. This is more likely when reforms result from co-constructed campaigns and shared advocacy.

Trade-related pressure on exporting countries helps advance policy reforms, such as those summarized in Table 7, which illustrates how trade pressure often coincides with treaty ratification. One example is how the EU carding system, which issues a yellow warning card and then a red card to trigger trade sanctions that can limit access to the EU market, incentivizes reforms to prevent IUU. Other examples include the US Trafficking in Persons Report, which ranks countries' efforts to stop human trafficking, and Section 307 of the US Tariff Act, which authorizes the CBP to issue a WRO to stop the import of goods produced with forced labor, as it did for four Taiwanese vessels.

Trade pressure is powerful, but may also have unintended consequences if not accompanied by robust social dialogue and local actors able to hold government and employers accountable. Thailand and Ghana provide contrasting examples.

- **Thailand.** Multiple EU and US trade policies were used to pressure Thailand to enact reforms in the mid-2010s, including ratification of the PSMA and ILO C 188, and the establishment of the PIPO inspection stations. Unfortunately, implementation of these reforms has been weak, and vessel owners are pushing to repeal some of them (EJF 2023).

- **Ghana.** Faced with its second yellow card, the Ghanaian government moved quickly to ban the trade in bycatch (*saiko*) and to tighten controls on both trawlers and canoe fishers. Some fishers and vessel owners have criticized the new regulations, and several artisanal fishers interviewed criticized the lack of consultations prior to the ruling. However, there are two initiatives that may help ease these tensions if they can be sustained. Fishers have been participating in a USAID-sponsored initiative in fishery comanagement, and the country recently joined FiTI, which should improve transparency and dialogue in the sector. Moreover, the ILO has facilitated a social dialogue process to evaluate C 188, which resulted in its recent ratification. It is too soon to tell, but fisher organizers were enthusiastic about C 188 and there is hope that social dialogue, if continued, has potential to improve or sustain implementation. As this report goes to press, Ghana's newly elected President John Mahama has begun to reverse some policies, including an exemption for artisanal fishers from the closed fishing season.

Table 7. Key Treaties and External Pressure

Country	ILO C 188	PSMA	Trade pressure
Ecuador	–	Ratified 2019	EU yellow card 2019–present
Ghana	Ratified August 2024	Ratified 2016	EU yellow card: 2013–15; 2021–present
Indonesia	Reviewing	Ratified 2016	–
Mexico	–	Ratified 2023	Multiple embargoes on tuna and shrimp
Taiwan	Implementing in principle	Implementing in principle	EU yellow card 2015–19; Tariff Act (4 WROs)
Thailand	Ratified January 2019	Ratified 2016	EU yellow card: April 2015–Jan 2019; US preferential trade status withdrawn 2019

International market pressure can be an important tool, and most global buyers and retailers have publicly committed to upholding ILO core conventions on the rights to organize and bargain collectively. Additionally, new mandatory due diligence laws in Europe are increasing pressure on TNCs to identify and mitigate the risks of forced labor in their supply chains. Yet international market incentives from buyers and retailers affect fisher organizing in each country slightly differently depending on the importance of the country's seafood exports and engagement with the international community.

In high-profile industrial sectors like Thailand and Taiwan, fisher organizations have been able to leverage the pressure on market actors to advance industry reforms. In Thailand, industry formed the Seafood Task Force in response to international campaigns, with leadership from retailers like Costco and Walmart and large seafood producers like Thai Union and CP Foods. They made statements encouraging pro-fisher policy reforms yet did not provide financing (beyond some pilot exercises) to help vessel owners make improvements, and vessel owners are now pushing back. In Taiwan, the international campaign for Wi-Fi on the DWF has been led by fisher groups in Taiwan and has taken an integrated approach that engages government policy reforms, while also making demands on vessel owners and retailers. This is an example of a shared advocacy campaign. It started with the demands from fisher organizations and then defined national level policy advocacy goals and pressure for TNCs to act.

Beyond Thailand and Taiwan, however, international market pressure plays even less of a role. In the other four countries, international seafood buyers and retailers are more removed from fishers and their organizations. Mexico and Indonesia provide two very distinct examples of how the opacity of seafood supply chains make it difficult to leverage international market pressure to support fisher organizing.

- **In Mexico**, major certifiers like Fair Trade and Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) are present and 37 fishery improvement projects dot the coast (García-Rodríguez et al. 2024). These initiatives help encourage better fishing practices, but few enable fisher cooperatives to negotiate directly with the end buyers and retailers.[9] The projects have improved fish stocks, but fishers often bear the cost of implementation (López-Ercilla et al. 2024).

- **In Indonesia**, fisher unions are working to better regulate Indonesian recruitment agencies but have limited engagement with the direct employers. The Indonesian recruitment agency connects fishers to international recruitment agencies, which then assign fishers to an international vessel (Palmer, Ford, and Hasbiyalloh 2023). Fishers say they often don't know until the last days which flag they will port out under. The lack of transparency in recruitment combined with the lack of transparency in the seafood supply chain makes it difficult to hold buyers and retailers accountable.

International advocacy campaigns can play an important role in connecting fisher organizations with trade or market leverage. Yet the lessons summarized above highlight the limitations of these approaches and the need to balance them with on-the-ground organizing. Shared advocacy campaigns can be co-constructed so that national fisher organizations are able to work towards a unified agenda that helps build a seafood worker movement. Ideally these start from national fisher organizations' advocacy priorities and then plug into international campaigns. As mentioned above, the Wi-Fi Now for Fishers' Rights at Sea campaign combines TNC targets with national policy advocacy. In Ghana, the ILO-facilitated dialogue around C 188 could help fisher organizations build unity and strengthen the effectiveness of any related reforms. In Indonesia, a new advocacy campaign for C 188 is underway, bringing together two international NGOs and seven NGOs and trade unions from Indonesia. Based on C 188 Article 7, a key part of advancing Indonesia's review and potential ratification of C 188 will be determining how relevant government agencies coordinate, which could help address the lack of coordination between ministries. A co-constructed campaign for C 188 could increase support for fisher unions' leadership in engagement with government and employer representatives.

Fishers working on board, Thailand.

Credit: Environmental Justice Foundation

5. Conclusion

There are four major points to highlight, which could help shape more sustainable strategies for strengthening fisher organizations. These points are drafted with a goal of supporting the formation of fisher-led organizations and their ability to build power and influence government policy and employers.

5.1 A global movement for fishers is needed

In all the countries reviewed there are new organizing initiatives. Whether they are associations, cooperatives, or trade unions, all are seeking to advocate for fishers' rights and welfare. An important next step for most of these organizations is to grow their numbers, both their direct members and by building unity with other worker organizations. This is particularly true for trade unions when they seek to negotiate with employers. The strength of trade unions really begins to solidify when they have multiple workplaces organized and can build on peer organizations' wins to push forward higher industry standards. Strength also comes from the number of workers aligned in their demands for government and industry reform, which speaks to the value of building alliances across the industry. The ITF's Global Justice for Fishers Campaign has been an important development in the sector, as was seen in their organizing with the FRN in Thailand, and emerging initiatives in Ecuador, Ghana, and Indonesia. As a global union federation, the ITF recognizes the need for national regional and global unity and industry standards.

Campaigns supported by international actors can help encourage greater unity and collaboration among fisher organizations, such as those helping rally fisher organizations to advocate for the adoption and implementation of ILO C 188. However, this needs to be accompanied by a sustained support strategy that also enables national fisher organizations to put forward their own priorities and identify how the international treaty campaign will help advance their broader agenda. When governments are pushed too hard and too fast by outside actors to ratify an international treaty, there is a risk that ratification will be more about virtue signaling than embedded reforms. In these cases, the implementation and transposition of the treaty into national law and policy will often stall or be ineffective. In the case of ILO C 188, the Convention requires the ratifying government to identify the coordinating and responsible party within the government (C 188, Article 7). For this to happen, there needs to be a tripartite review process through which the government systematically analyzes and plans for how to implement the Convention. Where a robust social dialogue is established prior to ratification, there is greater potential to use it to resolve differences as implementation moves forward. A more united movement of fisher organizations will help influence this process.

5.2 Policy incoherence further undermines fisher organizing

The lack of policy coherence identified in each country creates an interministerial blame game, and proposed solutions have included elaborate interagency inspections. Integrated inspections have the potential to improve both fishery management and fisher protections and increase the Ministry of Labor's oversight in the sector. Yet these initiatives risk creating ineffective bureaucracies while obfuscating the lack of protection for migrant fishers to organize and bargain collectively. For government protections to work, fisher organizations need to be strong and able to bring cases forward. Yet the more policy incoherence makes that process difficult to navigate, the greater the burden is on resource-strapped worker organizations.

The lack of policy coherence plays out at national and local levels in cases where it is unclear which set of working hours or wages should be required, or which ministry is responsible for monitoring compliance or processing worker grievances. Thailand and Indonesia have sought to address some of this conflict by organizing joint inspections, bringing together representatives from the ministries of labor, transportation, or fishing. Yet in Thailand, which is several years into the effort, the number of workplace violations found for the number of inspections conducted give reason to doubt the effectiveness of these inspections. The ITF, which has a global network of ship inspectors, negotiated with support from the ILO Ship to Shore Program to join some of the Thai inspections, but after just a few the Thai inspectors stopped, claiming they needed to seek vessel owners' permission (Hartough and Gearhart 2024). This rejection further undermines fishers' trust in government, particularly given Thailand's limitations on their rights to organize.

This lack of coordination also plays out at the international level, where contradictions arise between key treaties like the FAO's PSMA and the ILO's C 188. The PSMA (Article 9) calls for a vessel to be turned away from port if the Ministry of Fishing suspects it was engaged in IUU, while the implementation of C 188 would be more effective if suspicious vessels are brought in for inspection by experts from the Ministry of Labor. International actors need to help mitigate how failure to address these inconsistencies perpetuates the complex and related impediments to fisher organizing.

5.3 Strengthening fisher leadership requires resources

Independent, constituency-based organizations are the best way for fishers to build their collective voice, but this requires having the time and support systems needed to consult members and identify shared positions. Fishers earning subsistence wages or trapped in debt bondage struggle to finance these activities. Outside resources can play an important role as unions seek to become established, but they need to be managed in a way that contributes to and does not undermine base building or the ability of constituency-based organizations to make themselves heard.

Three issues outside actors need to consider when supporting or engaging fisher organizations include the risk of creating dependencies, the need to avoid shortcuts to worker voice, and the importance of co-constructing campaigns that build from fisher organizations' priorities. Funding strategies must avoid creating financial dependencies and ensure fisher organizations

Don Melesio, President of the Guadalupe Fishery Cooperative, Oaxaca, Mexico paddles through the mangroves they are helping to preserve.

Credit: Judy Gearhart

have a long-term plan for establishing a self-financing mechanism and a solid membership base that builds south-south solidarity, not only north-south solidarity. Funders must also look skeptically at organizations that claim to gather or represent worker voice through survey approaches or other means that don't represent a membership base. Finally, international and national NGO campaigns must consider how to co-construct campaigns that incorporate the ongoing priorities of fisher organizations and trade unions. When campaigns are suggested from the outside or are not effectively co-constructed, they risk distracting worker leaders from the day-to-day base building and strategizing they need to do with their members. The Wi-Fi Now for Fishers' Rights at Sea campaign is a good example of an internationally supported campaign that originated from fisher organizers' priorities.

5.4 International market and trade tools have produced mixed results

As much as international campaigns that put trade pressure on an exporting country can be a powerful trigger for reform, that pressure cannot sustain effective implementation once the campaign is done. Ensuring the continued uptake of reforms requires local fisher organizations to continually test and utilize the mechanisms intended to protect fishers' rights and welfare. Moreover, the lack of supply chain transparency in the seafood industry and challenges with traceability make it difficult to build effective consumer campaigns. This is compounded by a lack of transparency around fisher contracts, particularly migrant fishers hired by recruitment agencies. These challenges indicate the need for long-term accompaniment and a network of support from international actors. More importantly it speaks to the need to prioritize the strengthening of national fisher organizations and seafood worker movements that can build power and advance fisher-led solutions at national, regional, and international levels.

Notes

1 This report uses artisanal and coastal fishing interchangeably to discuss small, (often) owner-operated endeavors, covering a range of fishing activities, from scuba divers, to the smallest artisanal fishers, to coastal fishers, which may include semi-industrial vessels. It also uses industrial fishing and distant water fishing (DWF) interchangeably to highlight how unions are organizing those workforces, although the challenges can be more complicated in DWF, as vessels cross into international waters and multiple legal jurisdictions.

2 Roisai Wongsuban, interview by the author, June 11, 2024.

3 Interviews with Cambodian migrant fishers in Chonburi, Thailand, August 2024.

4 This exception also then allowed US tuna long-liners to hire non-US nationals without having to uphold US labor law because they were working 'outside' US waters.

5 About US$350 in December 2024.

6 Jose Luis Carrillo and Lorena Ortiz (CONMECOOP leaders), interview by the author, December 10, 2024.

7 Amy Hudson Weaver, interview by the author, November 21, 2024.

8 Jose Luis Carillo, interview by the author, October 18, 2024.

9 There are some exceptions, mainly among well-organized cooperatives in Baja California, which also fish high-priced species.

Bibliography

American University CLALS (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies) and InSight Crime. 2022. "IUU Fishing Crimes in Latin America and the Caribbean." American University. *CLALS Working Paper* 39. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4200724.

Apetorgbor, Socrates. 2018. *Fisher-2-Fisher Consultation Initiative with GNCFC and NAFPTA*. US Agency for International Development/Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project. Narragansett, RI: Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island. https://www.crc.uri.edu/download/GH2014_COM085_CRC_FIN508.pdf

Arif, Muhamad. 2023. "Empat Tahun Kebijakan Maritim Jokowi: Ocean for Sale." Destructive Fishing Watch Indonesia, November 1. https://dfw.or.id/empat-tahun-kebijakan-maritim-jokowi-ocean-for-sale/.

Asiedu, Berchie, Seidu Iddrisu, and Pierre Failler. 2023. "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow's Fish Consumption: Analysis of Present and Prospective Fish Consumption in Ghana by 2030." *Cogent Food & Agriculture* 9 (1): 2224603. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311932.2023.2224603.

Associated Press. 2015. "AP Investigation: Slaves May Have Caught the Fish You Bought." March 25. https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/seafood-from-slaves/2015/ap-investigation-slaves-may-have-caught-the-fish-you-bought/.

Basurto, Xavier, Abigail Bennett, Emilie Lindkvist, and Maja Schlüter. 2020. "Governing the Commons beyond Harvesting: An Empirical Illustration from Fishing." *PLOS ONE* 15 (4): e0231575. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0231575.

Bennett, Abigail. 2017. "The Influence of Neoliberalization on the Success and Failure of Fishing Cooperatives in Contemporary Small-Scale Fishing Communities: A Case Study from Yucatán, Mexico." *Marine Policy* 80 (June): 96–106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2016.06.024.

Brush, Austin, and Mary Utermohlen. 2022. *Net Worth: How the Chinese Government & US Stock Investors Are Funding the Illegal Activities of a Major Chinese Fishery Company*. Washington, DC: C4ADS https://c4ads.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NetWorth-Report.pdf.

Bukharin, Irina. 2020. "Who Can Combat Forced Labor at Sea?" C4ADS, February 20. https://c4ads.org/commentary/forced-labor-at-sea/.

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. 2023. *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ecuador*. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Washington, DC: US Department of State. https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/ecuador/.

CBP (US Customs and Border Protection). 2024. "Withhold Release Orders and Findings Dashboard." December 5. https://www.cbp.gov/trade/forced-labor/withhold-release-orders-and-findings.

CEA (California Environmental Associates) Consulting. 2018. *Trends in Marine Resources and Fisheries Management in Indonesia: A 2018 Review*. San Francisco: CEA Consulting. https://www.ceaconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/Indonesia-Report-2018_Executive-Summary-compressed.pdf.

Chiang, Mina, and Kimberly Rogovin. 2020. "Labor Abuse in Taiwan's Seafood Industry & Local Advocacy for Reform." Global Labor Justice–International Labor Rights Forum. *Briefing Paper*. https://laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/Labor-Abuse-in-Taiwan-Seafood-Industry-Local-Advocacy-for-Reform.pdf.

CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). 2024. "The World Factbook 2024." https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/taiwan/#geography.

CONAPESCA (Comisión Nacional de Acuacultura y Pesca). 2023. *Anuario Estadístico de Acuacultura y Pesca 2023*. Mazatlán: CONAPESCA, Government of Mexico. https://nube.conapesca.gob.mx/sites/cona/dgppe/2023/ANUARIO_ESTADISTICO_DE_ACUACULTURA_Y_PESCA_2023.pdf.

Decker Sparks, Jessica L., Lee Matthews, Daniel Cárdenas, and Chris Williams. 2022. "Worker-Less Social Responsibility: How the Proliferation of Voluntary Labour Governance Tools in Seafood Marginalise the Workers they Claim to Protect." *Marine Policy* 139 (May):105044. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105044.

EJF (Environmental Justice Foundation). 2019. Gender Analysis: Ghana's Artisanal Fisheries. London: EJF. https://ejfoundation.org/reports/gender-analysis-ghanas-artisanal-fisheries-2019.

EJF. 2020. *Illegal Fishing and Human Rights Abuses in the Taiwanese Fishing Fleet*. London: EJF. https://ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/EJF-Taiwanese-vessels-briefing-public-final.pdf.

EJF. 2023. *High and Dry: A Policy Briefing on the Future of Thai Fisheries*. London: EJF. https://ejfoundation.org/reports/high-and-dry-a-policy-briefing-on-the-future-of-thai-fisheries.

European Commission. 2019. "Illegal fishing: EU lifts Taiwan's yellow card following reforms." Press Release, June 26. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_3397.

European Commission. 2021. "Fighting against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing: Commission Notifies the Republic of Ghana with a Yellow Card." Press Release, June 1. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2745.

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2016. "Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles: Ghana, 2016." Country Profile Fact Sheet. https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/facp/gha?lang=en.

FAO. 2020. "Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles: Ecuador, 2020." Country Profile Fact Sheet. https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/facp/ecu?lang=en.

FAO. 2024. "Fishery and Aquaculture Country Profiles: Mexico, 2023." Country Profile Fact Sheets. https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/facp/mex?lang=en.

FAO. 2025a. "Global Production." Fisheries and Aquaculture. https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/collection/global_production?lang=en.

FAO. 2025b. "Global Aquatic Trade Statistics." Fisheries and Aquaculture. https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/collection/global_commodity_prod.

Finkbeiner, Elena M., Christopher Giordano, Juno Fitzpatrick, Ashley Apel, Cecilia Blasco, Kathryn H. Dalton, Juan Carlos Jerí, et al. 2024. "Insights from a Community of Practice: Integrating Human Rights in Fisheries Improvement." *Marine Policy* 163 (May):106100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2024.106100.

Fischer-Daly, Matthew, and Mark Anner. *Worker Voice: A Literature Review*. Prepared for the US Department of Labor. University Park, PA: Center for Global Worker Rights, Pennsylvania State University. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/Worker-Voice-Literature-Review-3-6-24.pdf.

Fisheries Agency. 2023. "Fishery Statistics Annual Report for the 112th Year of the Republic of China." https://www.fa.gov.tw/view.php?theme=FS_AR&subtheme=&id=26.

Ford, Michele, Benni Hasbiyalloh, and Wayne Palmer. 2024. "Labour Rights in Indonesia's Seafood Sector." London: Freedom Fund. https://www.freedomfund.org/news/labour-rights-indonesia-seafood/.

Frawley, Timothy H., Elena M. Finkbeiner, and Larry B. Crowder. 2019. "Environmental and Institutional Degradation in the Globalized Economy: Lessons from Small-Scale Fisheries in the Gulf of California." Ecology and Society 24 (1): 7. https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10693-240107.

Freedom House. 2022. "Thailand: Transnational Repression Host Country Case Study." https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/thailand.

FRN (Fishers' Rights Network) and Judy Gearhart. 2024. "S2E2: Nguyen, Lin, and Hok: Organizers with the Fishers' Rights Network." *Labor Link Podcast*, March 28. https://www.laborlinkpodcast.org/s2e2-mario-nguyen-and-lin-organizers-with-the-fishers-rights-network/.

Garcia Lozano, Alejandro, Crisol Méndez-Medina, Xavier Basurto, and María Tercero Tovar. 2023. "Problemáticas: Multi-scalar, Affective and Performative Politics of Collective Action among Fishing Cooperatives in Mexico." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 41 (7): 1263–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231194426.

Garcia Lozano, Alejandro J., Jessica L. Decker Sparks, Davina P. Durgana, Courtney M. Farthing, Juno Fitzpatrick, Birgitte Krough-Poulsen, Gavin McDonald, Sara McDonald, Yoshitaka Ota, and Nicole Sarto. 2022. "Decent Work in Fisheries: Current Trends and Key Considerations for Future Research and Policy." *Marine Policy* 136 (February):104922. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104922.

Gearhart, Judy. 2023. "Building Worker Power in Global Supply Chains: Lessons from Apparel, Cocoa, and Seafood." *Accountability Working Paper* 15. Accountability Research Center. https://doi.org/10.57912/23931795.

Gokkon, Basten. 2023a. "Indonesia Delays Enforcement of Widely Panned Fisheries Policy." Mongabay, December 17. https://news.mongabay.com/2023/12/indonesa-fisheries-quota-policy-sustainable-ministry-small-fishers/.

Gokkon, Basten. 2023b. "Indonesia Eyes Enrolling More Ports in Fight against Illegal Fishing." Mongabay, June 1. https://news.mongabay.com/2023/06/indonesia-fisheries-ports-psma-iuu-illegal-fishing-sustainability/.

Guelker, Daphne. 2023. "Fishers and Seafarers in International Law: Really So Different?" *Marine Policy* 148 (February):105473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105473.

Hartough, Jon, and Judy Gearhart. 2024. "S2E1: Jon Hartough, Southeast Asia Regional Coordinator of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)." *Labor Link Podcast*, February 28. https://www.laborlinkpodcast.org/s2e1-jon-hartough-southeast-asia-regional-coordinator-of-the-international-transport-workers-fed/.

Hiburong, Arnon, and Judy Gearhart. 2024. "S2E5: Arnon Hiburong, SAKTI-SULUT." *Labor Link Podcast*, December 4. https://www.laborlinkpodcast.org/s2e5-arnon-hiburong-sakti-sulut/.

ILAB (Bureau of International Labor Affairs). 2024. "Success Stories: Strengthening Decent Work in the Fishing Sector in South America." US Department of Labor, November 21. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/success-stories/strengthening-decent-work-fishing-sector-south-america.

IOJI (Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative). 2022. "The Vicious Cycle of Working at Sea: A Strenuous Journey of Indonesian Migrant Fishers." Jakarta: IOJI. https://oceanjusticeinitiative.org/main/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Siaran-Pers-IOJI-Penangkapan-Kapal-Run-Zeng-03-20_05_2024.pdf.

IOJI. 2024. "Constitutional Court: Migrant Seafarers Are Indonesian Migrant Workers." Press Release, December 3. https://oceanjusticeinitiative.org/en/press-release-constitutional-court-migrant-seafarers-are-indonesian-migrant-workers/.

Jentoft, Svein, and Ratana Chuenpagdee. 2022. "Blue Justice in Three Governance Orders." In B*lue Justice: Small-Scale Fisheries in a Sustainable Ocean Economy*, edited by Svein Jentoft, Ratana Chuenpagdee, Alicia Bugeja Said, and Moenieba Isaacs, 17–32. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89624-9_2.

Kadfak, Alin. 2024. "The Labor Governance Frontier in Fisheries: A Critical Review and Future Outlook." *Society & Natural Resources* 37 (12): 1710–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2024.2411689.

Kalikoski, Daniela C., Svein Jentoft, Patrick McConney, and Susana Siar. 2019. "Empowering Small-Scale Fishers to Eradicate Rural Poverty." *Maritime Studies* 18 (August): 121–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-018-0112-x.

Kyaw, Aung, and Judy Gearhart. 2024. "S1E4: Aung Kyaw, Co-founder of Thailand's Migrant Worker Rights Network." *Labor Link Podcast*, February 28. https://empathymedialab.podbean.com/e/the-labor-link-aung-kyaw-co-founder-of-thailand-s-migrant-worker-rights-network/.

Lee, Johanna, and Sahiba Gill. 2023. "Wi-Fi for Fishers' Fundamental Labor Rights." Global Labor Justice. *Briefing Paper 3*. https://laborrights.org/publications/briefing-paper-no-3-wi-fi-fishers%E2%80%99-fundamental-labor-rights.

Liu, Wen-Hong, Po-Chih Hung, Peter Vandergeest, Azmath Jaleel, Bruno Ciceri, and Chih-Cheng Lin. 2024. "Protecting Migrant Labor Rights in the Distant-Water Fisheries Sector: A Comparative Analysis of the Legal Framework of Three Major Fishing Nations in Eastern Asia." *Reviews in Fisheries Science & Aquaculture* (December): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/23308249.2024.2436415.

López-Ercilla, Inés, Lorena Rocha-Tejeda, Stuart Fulton, Maria José Espinosa-Romero, Jorge Torre, and Francisco J. Fernández Rivera-Melo. 2024. "Who Pays for Sustainability in the Small-Scale Fisheries in the Global South?" *Ecological Economics* 226 (December):108350. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2024.108350.

McDowell, Robin, and Margie Mason. 2015. "The World's Third-Largest Seafood Exporter Has a Slavery Problem." Business Insider, February 26. https://www.businessinsider.com/the-worlds-third-largest-seafood-exporter-has-a-slavery-problem-2015-2.

Migiro, Geoffrey. 2018. "Countries with the Largest Exclusive Economic Zones." WorldAtlas, June 29. https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-largest-exclusive-economic-zones.html.

Mills, Elyse N. 2021. "The Politics of Transnational Fishers' Movements." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 50 (2): 665–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2021.1975271.

Ministerio del Ambiente, Agua y Transición Ecológica. 2023. "El Presidente Guillermo Lasso anuncia la creación de las primeras 8 millas marítimas del Ecuador como Reserva Marina a lo largo del perfil costero continental." Bulletin 27, March 2. https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/el-presidente-guillermo-lasso-anuncia-la-creacion-de-las-primeras-8-millas-maritimas-del-ecuador-como-reserva-marina-a-lo-largo-del-perfil-costero-continental/.

MoFAD (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development). 2022. "National Fisheries Management Plan." Accra: Government of Ghana. https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC223697.

MPCEIP (Ministerio de Produccion Comericio Exterior, Inversiones, y Pesca). 2025a. "Registro Nacional de Embarcaciones Artesanales." https://srp.produccion.gob.ec/registro-nacional-de-embarcaciones/registro-nacional-de-embarcaciones-artesanales/.

MPCEIP. 2025b. "Registro Nacional de Embarcaciones Industriales." https://srp.produccion.gob.ec/registro-nacional-de-embarcaciones/registro-nacional-de-embarcaciones-industirales-nuevo/.

MMAF (Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fishing). 2023. "Data dan Statistik (database)." Republic of Indonesia. https://portaldata.kkp.go.id/portals/data-statistik/jumlah_kapal/tbl-statis/d/54.

Mochtar, Zulficar, Mohamad Abdi Suhufan, Felicia Estrelita Nugroho, and Miftachul Choir. 2023. "The Precarity at the Sea: The Experience of the Domestic Fishery Vessel Workers in Indonesia." *Journal of Human Rights and Peace Studies* 9 (2): 158–85. https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/HRPS/article/view/272112.

Molinari, Christian. 2023. "2022 Was a Year of Contradictions for Ecuador's Shrimp Sector." SeafoodSource, February 27. https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/premium/aquaculture/2022-was-a-year-of-contradictions-for-ecuador-s-shrimp-sector.

Monterey Bay Aquarium and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership. 2022. *Tropical Tuna Social Risk Profile: Forced Labor, Human Trafficking, and Hazardous Child Labor Risks Ecuador, Fishing and Production*. Seafood Social Risk Tool V2. Monterey, CA: Monterey Bay Aquarium Foundation. https://www.seafoodwatch.org/globalassets/sfw/pdf/projects/ssrt/risk-profiles/tropical-tuna/published/seafood-watch-tropical-tuna-ssrt-risk-profile-ecuador-2022.pdf.

MWG (Migrant Working Group). 2023. *Report on the Review of Compliance of Thailand's Labor Protection Laws in Fishing Worker with ILO Convention No.188 on Worker in Fishing*. MWG. https://mwgthailand.org/en/press/1689209928.

Nakamura, Katrina. 2024. "Is Tuna Ecolabeling Causing Fishers More Harm than Good?" *npj Ocean Sustainability* 3 (39). https://www.nature.com/articles/s44183-024-00074-6.

Nunoo, F.K.E., B. Asiedu, J. Olauson, and G. Intsiful. 2015. "Achieving Sustainable Fisheries Management: A Critical Look at Traditional Fisheries Management in the Marine Artisanal Fisheries of Ghana, West Africa." *Journal of Energy and Natural Resource Management* 2 (1). https://jenrm.uenr.edu.gh/index.php/uenrjournal/article/view/67.

Nyavor, Samuel, Sandra Amposah, Victor Owusu, and Kwame John Boateng. 2023. "Compensation Payment for Fisherfolk during Closed-Season Fishing: Lessons from Small-Scale Fisherfolk in Ghana." *Cogent Social Sciences* 9 (2): 2282502. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2282502.

OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). 2024. "Employment in Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Processing." OECD Data Explorer, March 8. https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?fs[0]=Topic%2C1%7CAgriculture%20and%20fisheries%23AGR%23%7CFisheries%20and%20aquaculture%23AGR_FSA%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&bp=true&snb=6&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_FISH_EMP%40DF_FISH_EMPL&df[ag]=OECD.TAD.

Osei, Awura-Abena Amoah, Seth Etuah, Isaac Abunyuwah, Nicholas Oppong Mensah, Robert Aidoo, and Simon Cudjoe Fialor. 2024. "Nature and Performance of Smoked Marine Fish Markets: Evidence from Ghana." *Cogent Food & Agriculture* 10 (1): 2367376. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311932.2024.2367376.

Palmer, Wayne, Michele Ford, and Benni Hasbiyalloh. 2023. "Regulating Recruitment and Contracting of Migrant Fishers from Indonesia." *Asian and Pacific Migration* Journal 32 (3): 452–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/01171968231210760.

Parhusip, Jonathan. 2023. "Emerging Port Infrastructure and Advocacy Networks for Migrant Fishers in Taiwan." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 32 (2): 371–83. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/01171968231191468.

Ritchie, Hannah, and Max Roser. 2024. "Fish and Overfishing." OurWorldinData.org. https://ourworldindata.org/fish-and-overfishing.

Rosendahl, Roger W. 1984. "The Development of Mexican Fisheries and Its Effect on United States–Mexican Relations." *UCLA Pacific Basin Law Journal* 3 (1–2). https://doi.org/10.5070/P831-2021911.

Sarpong, Gideon. 2023. "Empty Nets: Unveiling the Dark Reality Behind Ghana's 'People's Fish' Collapse." Pulitzer Center, November 27. https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/empty-nets-unveiling-dark-reality-behind-ghanas-peoples-fish-collapse.

SEAFDEC. 2022. "Fisheries Country Profile: Thailand." December 9. http://www.seafdec.org/fisheries-country-profile-thailand-2022/.

Siahaan, Mona. 2024. "Indonesia: Fisheries Contribution to GDP." Statista, January 22. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1083946/indonesia-fisheries-contribution-to-gdp/.

Southern Shrimp Alliance. 2023. "A Crisis of Our Own Making: U.S.-Backed Development Funding of Foreign Shrimp Aquaculture Is Substantially Injuring the American Shrimp Industry." September 6. https://shrimpalliance.com/southern-shrimp-alliance-report-details-how-international-development-funding-has-crashed-the-world-shrimp-market/.

Suwarno, Hariyanto, Charli Fritzner, and Judy Gearhart. 2024. "S2E4: Hariyanto Suwarno (Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union) and Charli Fritzner (Greenpeace USA)." *Labor Link* Podcast, July 8. https://www.laborlinkpodcast.org/s2e4-hariyanto-suwarno-serikat-buruh-migran-indonesia-sbmi-and-charli-fritzner-greenpeace-usa/.

Thammachote, Pasakorn, and Jirapa Inthisang Trochim. 2023. "Thailand Seafood Trade Flow and Its Challenges." Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy, Research, Capacity and Influence, June 21. https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/thailand-seafood-trade-flow-and-its-challenges.

Urbina, Ian. 2015. "The Outlaw Ocean." New York Times, July 25. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/24/world/the-outlaw-ocean.html.

UNEP-WCMC (United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre). 2025a. "Protected Area Profile for Indonesia from the World Database on Protected Areas." https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/IDN.

UNEP-WCMC. 2025b. "Protected Area Profile for Taiwan, Province of China from the World Database on Protected Areas." https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/TWN.

UNEP-WCMC. 2025c. "Protected Area Profile for Thailand from the World Database on Protected Areas." https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/THA.

UNEP-WCMC. 2025d. "Protected Area Profile for Ecuador from the World Database on Protected Areas." https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/ECU.

UNEP-WCMC. 2025e. "Protected Area Profile for Ghana from the World Database on Protected Areas." https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/GHA.

UNEP-WCMC. 2025f. "Protected Area Profile for Mexico from the World Database on Protected Areas." https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/MEX.

Vandergeest, Peter. 2018. "Law and Lawlessness in Industrial Fishing: Frontiers in Regulating Labour Relations in Asia." *International Social Science Journal* 68 (229–30): 325–41. https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12195.

Vandergeest, Peter, Melissa Marschke, and Mallory MacDonnell. 2021. "Seafarers in Fishing: A Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Marine Policy* 134 (December): 104796. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104796.

Williams, Chris, and Jessica L. Decker Sparks. 2023. "Fishery Improvement Projects: A Voluntary, Corporate 'Tool' Not Fit for the Purpose of Mitigating Labour Abuses and Guaranteeing Labour Rights for Workers." *Marine Policy* 147 (January): 105340. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105340.

Yang, Tsung-Yu, Hsing-Chun Lin, and Wen-Hong Liu. 2022. "The Fishery Value Chain Analysis in Taiwan." *Fishes* 7 (3): 114. https://doi.org/10.3390/fishes7030114.

Latest ARC Publications

Working Papers

- Parra Bayona, Mauricio. 2024. "Tejiendo vínculos entre autoprotección y protección colectiva: la experiencia de ACADESAN en Colombia." Accountability Research Center. Accountability Working Paper 18.
- Fox, Jonathan, Brendan Halloran, Alta Fölscher, and Rosie McGee. 2024. "Disentangling Government Responses: How Do We Know When Accountability Work Is Gaining Traction?" Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 17.
- Abhishek, Shriyuta, and Samir Garg. 2023. "Community Health Workers as Rights Defenders: Exploring the Collective Identity of the Mitanins of Chhattisgarh, India." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 16.
- Gearhart, Judy. 2023. "Building Worker Power in Global Supply Chains: Lessons from Apparel, Cocoa, and Seafood." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 15.
- Shukla, Abhay, Shweta Marathe, Deepali Yakkundi, Trupti Malti, and Jonathan Fox. 2023. "Activating Spaces, Scaling Up Voices: Community-Based Monitoring and Planning of Health Services in Maharashtra, India." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 14.
- Gearhart, Judy. 2023. "Local Voices, Global Action: Transnational Organizing in Apparel Supply Chains." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 13.
- Gebremedhin, Abrehet. 2023. "Moving on Up: Multilevel Monitoring and Advocacy for Health Rights." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Working Paper* 12.

Accountability Notes

- Freeman, Scott, Lani Inverarity, and Megan Pearson. 2024. "After the Agreement: Implementing Remedy for Displacement in Northern Haiti." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note* 14.
- Parra Bayona, Mauricio, Elizabeth Barco Moreno, and Jonathan Fox. 2024. "Collective Protection for Communities and Rights Defenders at Risk: Lessons from Grassroots Advocacy in Colombia." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note* 13.
- Fox, Jonathan, and Carlos García Jiménez. 2023. "Farmer Movement Oversight and New Approaches to Government Agriculture Programs in Mexico." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note* 12.
- Quiñones Mendoza, Helmer Eduardo. 2022. "The Ethnic Chapter of Colombia's Peace Agreement Five Years On: An Independent Assessment." Accountability Research Center. *Accountability Note* 11.

See all publications at http://accountabilityresearch.org/publications/

ACCOUNTABILITY RESEARCH CENTER

American University
School of International Service
4400 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20016
www.accountabilityresearch.org