

FISHER LEARNING EXCHANGE REPORT

ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND FISHER ORGANIZING INITIATIVES IN GHANA



21-24 JULY – 2025

Cover Photo: A Group photo of participants at the Fisher Learning Exchange

Credit: Event Coordinator-Eric Mawuko Atsiatorme

Authors: Eric Mawuko Atsiatorme and Dorcas Akosua Agbesi

For more information contact:
American University
School of International Service
4400 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20016
www.accountabilityresearch.org

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	5
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	6
1.0 Executive Summary	7
1.1 Context and relevance	7
1.2 Purpose	7
1.3 Highlights of the FLE.....	8
1.4 Key outcomes.....	9
2.0 Background and Objectives	10
3.0 Workshop Session Summaries	12
3.1 Keynote Address by Honorable Mrs. Emelia Arthur	12
3.2 Presentation and discussions on international trends in fisher organizing and advocacy	12
3.3 Panel discussions on Ghana's Success in Co-Management Approaches	17
3.3.1 Evolution and Progress of Co-Management	17
3.4 Panel discussion, question and answer session: International Organizing Experiences and Knowledge Sharing.....	19
3.4.1 International Organizing Experiences and Knowledge Sharing	19
3.4.2 Panel discussions on Strengthening Fisher Organizations for Sustainable Impact	21
3.4.3 Anchoring the Movement: A History of Fisher Organizations	21
3.4.4 The Challenge of Organizing: Between Passion and Practicality.....	22
3.4.5 Navigating Internal Conflicts and Misconceptions	22
3.4.6 Women in Fisheries: Voices Rising	23
3.4.7 Strategies That Work: Building Trust and Impact.....	23
3.4.8 From Organizing to Influence: Policy and Engagement	23
3.4.9 Conclusion: Organizing as a Pathway to Justice	24
3.5 Presentation on Understanding the Capacity of Women's Organizations to Contribute to Fisheries Management Solutions	24
3.5.1 Panel discussions on Empowering Women in the Fisheries Sector.....	24
3.5.2 Rising Tides: Stories of Success	25
3.5.3 Organizing for Power and Protection	25
3.5.4 Confronting Harsh Realities	26
3.5.5 Charting the Way Forward.....	26

3.6 Breakout session and reporting on Labor rights in fisheries and promising solutions	27
3.6.1 Purpose and Effectiveness	27
3.6.2 Representation and Communication: Amplifying Voices and Building Identity	28
3.6.3 Funding and Transparency: Sustaining Work with Integrity	28
3.6.4 Conflict and Resolution: Managing Disputes Proactively and Equitably .	29
3.6.5 Accessibility and Inclusion: Reaching Every Voice in the Value Chain ...	30
3.7 Communique	30
4.0 Conclusions.....	31
5.0 Recommendations	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Annex 1: Copy of the Concept Note and Agenda	34
Annex 2: Text of the Communique	39

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture delivering the keynote address.	8
Figure 2: A Photo of the Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Honourable Mrs. Emelia Arthur delivering her keynote address.	12
Figure 3: A photo collage of Professor Judy Gearhart discussing the findings of the Upwelling paper on fisher and fish worker organizing at the FLE, Accra, Ghana.	13
Figure 4: A collage photo of the Panel discussion on advancing labour rights.	16
Figure 5: A collage photo of Participants contributing to the panel discussion on the successes and challenges of co-management implementation in Ghana.	18
Figure 6: On Screen: President Jose Luis Carrillo Galaz - Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives (CONMECOOP) Sharing his experiences in fisher and fish worker organizing.	20
Figure 7: Professor Judy Gearhart sharing insight on how fishers and fish workers are organizing around the world for better working conditions.	21
Figure 8: A photo of Panel discussing pathways for fishers organizing towards sustainable small-scale fisheries.	22
Figure 9: A photo of the President of CAOPA sharing some of her experiences in juggling between her leadership role and as a fish processor.	23
Figure 10: Dr. Angela Lamptey shares her thoughts on the need for inclusive strategies as engine for transformation in artisanal fisheries.	24
Figure 11: A photo of the NAFPTA President Mrs. Regina Solomon, and other panellists sharing experiences and success stories on women organizing.	25
Figure 12: A photo of Ms. Ellen Vroom a descaler from the Western Region shares some harsh realities that confronts descalers in the artisanal small-scale fisheries.	26
Figure 13: A flip chart showing some solutions proposed by participants during the breakout session.	27
Figure 14: A photo of group discussing strategies for amplifying voices and building identity.	28
Figure 15: A photo of participants at the breakout session brainstorming on solutions for funding and transparency.	29
Figure 16: A photo of a group presenting their findings on solutions to address funding challenges of fisher and fish worker organizing	30
Figure 17: A photo of a group presenting their findings on solutions to managing conflicts and resolutions among fisher and fish worker organizing.	30
Figure 1: A group discusses the content and wording of the communique.	32

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARC	Accountability Research Centre
CONMECOOP	Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives
CaFGOAG	Canoe and Gear Owner Association of Ghana
CAOPA	African Confederation of Professional Organizations of Artisanal Fisheries
EJF	Environmental Justice Foundation
FDA	Food and Drugs Authority
FLE	Fisher Learning Exchange
FGP	Fishery Governance Project
FENACOPEC	National Federation of Artisanal Fisher Cooperatives of Ecuador
FiTI	Fisheries Transparency Initiative
GAWU	General Agricultural Workers Union of the Trades Union Congress
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFRA	Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity
GMA	Ghana Maritime Authority
GNCFC	Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council
GITA	Ghana Industrial Trawler Owners Association
GSA	Ghana Standards Authority
GFL	Ghana Federation of Labour
ILO	International Labour Organization Convention
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated
LaBEC	Landing Beach Enforcement Committees
NAFPTA	National Fish Processors and Traders Association
NAFAG	National Fisheries Association of Ghana
NCCE	National Commission for Civic Education
NUSPAW	National Union of Seamen, Ports, and Allied Workers of the Trades Union Congress (TUC)
NUTEG	National Union of Teamsters and General Workers
PSMA	Port State Measures Agreement
SPCC	Small Pelagic Collaborative Management Committee
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
STC	Scientific and Technical Committee of the Fisheries Commission
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Context and relevance

Ghana's fisheries sector stands at a critical crossroads. With fish stocks rapidly depleting, coastal communities face escalating threats to food security, livelihoods, and ecological resilience. Artisanal and small-scale fishers and fish workers are disproportionately affected, underscoring the urgent need to reimagine fisheries governance. There is a pressing imperative to build consensus around labour and resource management frameworks that protect marine ecosystems while centring the wellbeing of the communities who depend on them.

Against this backdrop, the Accountability Research Centre (ARC) of American University, on 22-24 July 2025 convened a two-day Fisher Learning Exchange (FLE) in Ghana, bringing together fisher and fish worker organizations from across the country to explore how they are supporting their members and advancing sustainable fisheries management. What makes the Ghanaian experience especially compelling is not only the severity of the crisis, but the pace and creativity of the response. Labor unions and fisher associations are forging new alliances to support fishers and fish workers; women-led organizations are stepping into leadership roles; both artisanal and industrial actors are engaging with the ILO Convention 188 on work in fishing; and the government is demonstrating a commitment to open dialogue and co-management. Together, these efforts signal a transformative moment where crisis is catalysing innovation, solidarity, and systemic change.

This initiative was made possible through a partnership with the Fishery Governance Project (FGP), a funder-practitioner coalition committed to advancing shared understandings and solutions at the intersection of improved fisheries governance and labour rights. The FGP grounds its approach in the adoption and implementation of key international treaties, enhanced corporate duties, improving fisher empowerment while increasing accountability, and remedy, and deterrence for labour abuse and harvesting violations in the fisheries sector.

The FLE drew a diverse group of stakeholders, including fisher and fish workers and organizers, labour union representatives, government officials, civil society advocates, and international experts. Together, they examined pathways for strengthening inclusive governance and advancing equity in the sector hinged on four core thematic areas namely: the international treaties and national policies affecting the sector; Ghana's efforts to embed participatory practices in fishery management; fishers' and fish workers' organizing; and the solutions and improvements needed to strengthen fisher and fish worker livelihoods and influence in the sector.

1.2 Purpose

A central objective of the FLE was to identify actionable strategies that enable fisher and fish worker organizations including those led by women to strengthen their leadership, amplify their voices, and expand their influence within decision-making spaces. What set this convening apart was its deliberate convergence of grassroots fisher associations and organized labour unions, creating a rare and vital space for cross-movement dialogue. Through participatory discussions, the FLE focused on strengthening leadership, advocacy, and organizational capacity across these

groups. The aim was clear: to equip fisher and fish worker organizations with the tools and alliances needed to actively shape the policies that govern their labour, livelihoods, and coastal communities.

Equally vital was the opportunity to learn the organizing and advocacy strategies used by fisher associations globally. Participants drew inspiration from the experiences of Latin American cooperatives, whose success in influencing policy and securing fisher welfare offered valuable lessons. These case studies provided a deeper understanding of how solidarity, democratic governance, and long-term advocacy can be harnessed to transform fisheries governance from the ground up. The two-day FLE served as a vibrant platform for collaborative learning, advocacy, and strategy sharing among diverse stakeholders committed to strengthening fisheries governance in Ghana and beyond. Designed with intention and inclusivity, the event offered a dynamic mix of presentations, panel discussions, and breakout sessions, all structured to spark dialogue, elevate emerging voices, and explore practical pathways for advancing fisher rights and co-management approaches.

The FLE opened with a keynote address by the Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture Honourable Mrs. Emilia Arthur. In her address, the Minister reiterated the government's commitment to pursue a participatory approach to fish workers management, one that also considers the voices of women fish workers and the important role they play in the sector.



Figure 2: The Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture delivering the keynote address.

The FLE featured sessions that explored international trends in fisher organizing and advocacy, anchoring local experiences within a broader global movement. These insights laid the foundation for cross-pollination of ideas, showcasing how collective action and policy influence have been achieved in other contexts especially in Latin America through cooperative models and solidarity networks. Highlights of the Fisher learning exchange included the sharing with participants key insights from a six-country study report, "[Upwelling: Fishers Organizing for their Rights and Sustainable Fisheries](#)". The report documents how fisher communities are organizing for their rights and driving locally led innovations to sustain both their livelihoods and marine resources. The findings of the report sparked rich conversations around policy, practice, and power in Ghana's fisheries landscape.

1.3 Highlights of the FLE

A key highlight was the discussion of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 188 (C188) on work in fishing and its intersection with the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA). Panellists examined how labour rights frameworks can be effectively integrated into fisheries governance, pointing to urgent opportunities for Ghana to elevate decent work standards and address exploitation within the sector. The ILO has facilitated an innovative, tripartite conversation in

Ghana around ILO C 188, engaging both artisanal and industrial fishers and vessel owners throughout the process leading to Ghana's ratification of the convention in 2024.

Building on international perspectives, participants delved into Ghana's co-management journey, its successes, challenges, and innovations. Panel discussions highlighted the role of community actors, traditional authorities, and government agencies in shaping inclusive governance. These reflections reinforced the need for transparent, accountable structures that balance ecological sustainability with social equity.

Also, central to the exchange was a focus on the capacity and influence of fisher organizations, something that is essential to making fish workers co-management effective. Discussions examined tools for building leadership, improving internal governance, and amplifying advocacy. Strategies emphasized how fisher groups particularly those led by women can mobilize around common goals and secure policy gains that reflect their lived realities and aspirations.

Additionally, a dedicated presentation and discussion spotlighted the status of women's organizing in fisheries, exploring success stories and opportunities to further strengthen participation and effectiveness in serving members. The session highlighted women's engagement as a cornerstone of resilient, community driven fisheries governance.

1.4 Key outcomes

Throughout the two days, participants shared experiences, questioned assumptions, and identified actionable priorities. The diversity of thematic areas allowed for nuanced reflection and collective planning, reinforcing the importance of fisher and fish worker organizing, and dialogue in shaping equitable and sustainable futures for fishing communities.

During the final sessions of the FLE, participants engaged in a collaborative reflection on how to strengthen fisher associations, exploring pathways to make them more purpose-driven, inclusive, and impactful in advancing the rights and resilience of fishing communities and their participation in fishery management. This culminated in the development of a [communiqué](#), expressing the need for and their commitment to continued collaboration. They also agreed to continue the dialogue and establish ongoing communications.

Additionally, the discussions yielded a rich set of discussions and actionable recommendations across five thematic areas: organizational effectiveness, representation and communication, funding transparency, conflict resolution, and inclusive engagement.

On **organizational effectiveness**, participants underscored that successful fisher organizations thrive on a shared mission, collective vision, and inclusive systems. Strengthening effectiveness demands participatory decision-making, democratic governance structures with clear constitutional provisions, and financial transparency. Regular, open meetings were seen as essential for building trust and promoting engagement. To ensure sustainability, they also advocated expanding fundraising strategies beyond dues, embracing proposals, partnerships, and community-driven contributions.

Regarding **representation and communication**, participants stressed that credible representation and communication require thorough documentation, member training, grassroots engagement, strategic visibility, regular briefings, and mentorship. These should all be anchored in core values of transparency, discipline, and equitable treatment to foster trust and solidarity across fisher associations.

Also, focused on **financial sustainability and integrity**, participants emphasized that sustaining the work with integrity required prompt payment of membership dues, diversified funding, inclusive budgeting, and transparent reporting. Strong governance frameworks and open communication ensure financial systems remain credible, participatory, and aligned with regulatory standards.

During the dialogue on **conflict and resolution** within fisher associations, marginalization was identified as a key driver of conflict. Solutions included strengthening conflict resolution committees, fostering collaboration across associations to manage external disputes, and organizing quarterly inter-association meetings to promote cohesion and shared purpose.

In the discussions on **accessibility and inclusion** across fisheries value chains, participants stressed that inclusive engagement required mapping value chains, promoting peer learning, aligning outreach with community rhythms, leveraging strategic partnerships, and using existing structures such as Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) as well as landing beach information centres to reach marginalized voices and share relevant resources.

At the heart of the FLE was a commitment to fostering inclusive and effective fisheries governance. Participants discussed how to strengthen collaborative management approaches that safeguard the rights and livelihoods of fishers across Ghana's coastal communities. There was a shared determination to explore practical tools and frameworks that not only enable the sustainable use of marine resources but also centre dignity and equity in fisheries decision-making.

The set of solutions proposed by the participants reflected the collective wisdom and lived experience of fisherfolk and organizers committed to strengthening organizational capacity, deepening accountability, championing inclusion, promoting decent work, and sustaining Ghana's fisheries.

2.0 Background and Objectives

The Accountability Research Centre (ARC) of American University, in collaboration with the Fishery Governance Project (FGP), convened a two-day Fisher Learning Exchange (FLE) in Ghana, bringing together fisher and fish worker organizations to critically examine how they support their members and promote sustainable fisheries management. The event drew on ARC's research and mission to support membership-based organizations in their efforts to build power and influence policy outcomes. The convening formed part of FGP's broader mandate, a funder-practitioner partnership committed to deepening collective understanding of the intersections between fisheries governance and labour rights. Rooted in

international legal frameworks, market accountability, and enforcement-based protection, the FGP centres its approach on tangible improvements in fisher livelihoods and organizational resilience.

Anchored by the findings of a six-country study on fisher-led organizing and rights-based approaches to sustainability, the FLE created a vibrant space for dialogue, reflection, and co-creation. The exchange united key stakeholders including government representatives, union leaders, fisher organizations, labour experts, and international advocates to share practices, compare contexts, and develop collaborative strategies toward a more equitable and transparent fisheries sector in Ghana.

Framed around four core themes, the event explored:

- The role of international treaties and national policies in shaping fisheries governance;
- Ghana's efforts to institutionalize participatory management approaches;
- Organizing strategies of fishers and fish workers, including women-led groups;
- Concrete solutions to strengthen fisher livelihoods, advocacy capacity, and influence in policy spaces.

Across both days, participants delved into successful co-management models, labour rights protections such as ILO Convention 188 on work in fishing, and accountability initiatives like the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI). During the evening prior to the FLE, the organizers convened a pre-meeting with women leaders and fish workers to brief them on the meeting goals and encourage their participation during the following two days. Each day the participants built momentum: Day One focused on governance foundations, organizational capacity, and labour rights. Day Two spotlighted the leadership of women in the sector and laid the groundwork for future joint action.

Through interactive presentations, panel dialogues, breakout sessions, and networking opportunities, the learning exchange advanced three key objectives:

1. To strengthen collaborative fisheries management and fisher rights protections;
2. To identify effective strategies for empowering fisher organizations especially those led by women;
3. To learn from global organizing practices that promote fisher welfare and influence policymaking (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the concept note and agenda).

The workshop sessions and discussions helped to advance understanding of sustainable management principles, strengthen stakeholder networks, identify actionable plans for improved governance of fish worker organizations, increase organizational capacity particularly among women, and reinforce pathways for transparency and accountability across Ghana's fisheries sector.

3.0 Workshop Session Summaries

3.1 Keynote Address by Honourable Mrs. Emelia Arthur

The FLE opened with the keynote address delivered by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Honourable Mrs. Emelia Arthur. In her address, the Minister reaffirmed her unwavering commitment to fostering a sustainable and inclusive fisheries sector. She emphasized the sector's pivotal role in Ghana's economic development, highlighting its contributions to employment, GDP, and food security.

However, she also acknowledged the threat posed by Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, which undermines sustainability efforts and results in significant economic losses. To combat this, the government has enacted the new Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill, a landmark legislation designed to strengthen regulatory compliance and prioritize the welfare of Ghana's fisherfolk.

According to the Minister, the Bill stands as a testament to the government's dedication to building a resilient, equitable fisheries and aquaculture sector. Honourable Mrs. Arthur expressed her enthusiasm for collaborating with all stakeholders to ensure the long-term sustainability of Ghana's fisheries, underscoring the shared vision championed by President John Dramani Mahama and Vice President Prof. Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman.

3.2 Presentation and discussions on international trends in fisher organizing and advocacy

The minister's speech was followed by a presentation by Professor Judy Gearhart and Connor Moynihan on the findings of "[Upwelling: Fishers Organizing for their Rights and Sustainable Fisheries.](#)" The report, produced by the Accountability Research Centre (ARC) in collaboration with the Fisheries Governance Project (FGP), documents fisher organizing in Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Taiwan, and Thailand. The findings illustrate how across diverse coastlines and communities; small-scale and industrial fishers are no longer waiting to be invited into decision-making spaces. Increasingly, artisanal fishers are claiming credit for their long history of fish workers management, and they are organizing, mobilizing, and asserting their rights to go beyond environmental or government consultations towards rights-based advocacy and co-ownership of the fish workers management



Figure 3: A Photo of the Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Honourable Mrs. Emelia Arthur delivering her keynote address.

process. What was once viewed as peripheral participation has grown into a strategic movement, grounded in international labour and environmental norms and anchored in lived experience.

According to the findings in *Upwelling*, both artisanal fishers and migrant fishers on the industrial fleets are increasingly framing their demands within a human rights-based lens. They are calling for decent work conditions, the freedom to organize and bargain collectively, access to



Figure 3: A photo collage of Professor Judy Gearhart discussing the findings of the *Upwelling* paper on fisher and fish worker organizing at the FLE, Accra, Ghana.

social protection and legal remedies, and recognition of their traditional knowledge and territorial rights. This is in part encouraged by ILO C 188 which frames the rights of workers in fishing and also the extensive abuses of fishers' rights and welfare that have been documented over the past decade. This approach is more than a rhetorical choice. It is a tactical one. By engaging global instruments such as the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C188), the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), and the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), fisher organizations are asserting their relevance in policy spaces that were once inaccessible or opaque. These instruments are not just technical frameworks, but they are leverage points for grassroots actors to demand accountability, labour protection, and transparency across the fisheries value chain.

ILO C 188: In Ghana, for example, fisher associations have begun working with government agencies and labour departments to implement C188, following its ratification in August 2024. A validation and training workshop held in Prampram in early 2025 brought together fishers, labour inspectors, and regulators to operationalize Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) aligned with C188 provisions including safe staffing, contracts, medical care, and social protection. This marks a significant shift: fishers are no longer passive recipients of policy but active contributors to its design and enforcement.

PSMA: Similarly, the PSMA is a binding international agreement to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing that has opened new avenues for fisher organizations to advocate for port-level enforcement and transparency. By aligning with PSMA protocols, they are pushing for stronger inspection regimes and safeguards that protect both marine resources and labour rights.

FiTI: Through the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), fisher groups are also engaging in national dialogues around data disclosure, licensing, and revenue flows. FiTI's emphasis on public access to fisheries information has

empowered civil society actors to demand clarity on who benefits from marine resources and under what terms.

Together, these engagements signal a strategic shift: fisher organizations are not only building alliances with labour unions and regulators but also leveraging international frameworks to reshape domestic governance.

In her presentation, Professor Gearhart intimated that the value of this transformation is illustrated through localized efforts around the world. She noted that in Ghana, fisher associations are seeking to improve how they engage fishers and fish workers and that the Ghanaian government has been a leader in their efforts to engage fisher and fish worker organizations in co-management frameworks. She also noted that some fisher associations in Ghana are beginning to look at the role of women in their organizations, a trend also emerging in other countries towards more gender-responsive governance within artisanal fisher organizations and increased support for women's efforts to lead and advocate for change. In Mexico, some fisher cooperatives have even led efforts to stop destructive fishing practices, forming coalitions with environmental organizations to safeguard marine ecosystems. Fisher cooperatives in both Mexico and Ecuador have promoted sustainable harvesting practices and are seeking to negotiate fairer market conditions. In Indonesia, Thailand, and Taiwan, migrant fishers are organizing and joining unions in growing numbers. Although many face extreme exploitation and there is a lack of protection for organizers, they have formed transnational alliances to challenge forced labour and push for legal reforms.

Overall, the "Upwelling" report captures this energy best in conclusion when it summarizes how a global movement for fishers is needed and is already underway. In that spirit, fishers are no longer passive stakeholders. They are protagonists redefining governance, resisting injustice, and revitalizing the social contract between communities and the state. Their advocacy is not just about fish, it is about fairness. This approach has direct implications for Ghana's and other country's small scale fisher associations as it obliges them to look at strengthening their representation of both fishing crew and vessel owners, as well as those who work in fish transport and processing.

A diverse group of participants offered thoughtful reflections and recommendations in response to two guiding questions: *What makes organizing difficult?* and *What are the essential ingredients of a strong fisher-led organization?* Their contributions underscored the critical importance of trust and collaboration between organizers and fishers. This conversation also stimulated a discussion between the union and the fisher association representatives participating, with some fisher association leaders acknowledging the need to improve how they represent not only the vessel owners, but also the crew. It was clear from the discussion that the sector has long been organized along traditional and somewhat informal structures, which are now shifting. One participant noted that the increased engagement of the unions can help the sector formalize and strengthen the representation of all workers involved, whether they are vessel owners, captains, crew, or fish processors.

Participants emphasized that organizing efforts often falter when fishers perceive organizers as untrustworthy or disconnected from their realities. This lack of trust can lead to resistance from fisher employers, who may block organizers from engaging directly with fishers. As a result, organizers are compelled to first convince the employers, which then risks shifting the organizing process into a top-down dynamic that undermines grassroots empowerment.

Conversely, a strong worker organization is rooted in member ownership and active participation.

When fishers see themselves as co-

creators of the organization, they are more likely to invest in its growth and sustainability. As one participant aptly put it, "Members are the power base, not guns." This sentiment reflects a broader call for bottom-up organizing that does not simply see fishers as being there to serve the organization, but rather encourages organizing that centres fisher voices, builds mutual trust, and fosters collective strength.

Reflections: The panel discussion illuminated the multifaceted nature of decent work in fishing, from legal frameworks and institutional leadership to industry practices and fisher empowerment. Ghana's ratification of ILO C188 marks a critical step, but its full realization depends on sustained collaboration, transparency, and a shared commitment to justice. As one panelist aptly put it: "sustainability is not just about maximizing profits from the sea, it is about maximizing benefits for the people who depend on it."

3.3 Panel discussions on Implementing ILO Convention 188 (C 188): Advancing Labor Rights and Coordinating with PSMA

A pivotal panel discussion on "Implementing ILO Convention 188 (C188): Advancing Labor Rights and Coordinating with the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA)" was moderated by Awudu Enusah, representing the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA) and serving as Chair of the Tripartite Committee responsible for overseeing the national implementation of ILO C188.

The panel featured distinguished contributors whose work spans international labour standards, fisheries governance, union representation, and industrial fleet management. These included: Emmanuel Kwame Mensah formerly of ILO, Papa Yaw Atobrah of the Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity (GFRA), Michael Angmor of the National Union of Seamen, Ports, and Allied Workers (NUSPAW), of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Kate Ansah of the Ghana Industrial Trawler Owners Association (GITA).

The Panellists' discussions emphasized a significant paradigm shift in Ghana's fisheries from prioritizing fish stocks to centring on the rights, welfare, and dignity of fishers. This shift, according to the panellist, aligns with the spirit of ILO C188, which defines a "fisher" broadly (Article 1E) as anyone working on commercial fishing vessels. As Ghana's fisheries sector continues to play a vital role in national GDP growth, there is growing recognition of the urgent need to centre the rights and welfare of fishers as well as the fish they catch. Historically, maritime law

offered fishers only peripheral protections, treating them more as accessories to economic output than as key actors with rights. Ghana's ratification of ILO C 188 in August 2024 marks a decisive shift in this narrative and the country has considered how C188 will guide work in fishing in both the artisanal and industrial sectors. Designed specifically with fishers in mind, C188 places them at the heart of labour and welfare standards. One panellist echoed a powerful sentiment: "When you lose the fisher, you lose the fish". This simple yet profound phrase captured the human-centred urgency now guiding efforts to ensure vessel owners are more accountable to fishing crew.

The dialogue also laid bare the stark realities of fisher working conditions, poor service environments, dangerous recruitment practices, and systemic neglect. Participants called for an overhaul of crew welfare systems, standardized contracts, and safer working conditions. The high-risk nature of fishing, compounded by profit-driven industrial dynamics, has long sidelined the voices and rights of the very people who sustain the industry.

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing emerged as another critical issue, provocatively described as "precision exploitation" a practice by which technical efficiency masks ecological harm and ethical violations. Panellists rejected the notion that economics alone can uphold integrity in the sector. Instead, they called for ethical recruitment and strict oversight mechanisms to ensure that labour standards are upheld and IUU practices curbed.

The Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA) stood out for its proactive and strategic leadership in implementing C188 even before formal ratification. Its approach, grounded in "no conformity, no work at sea," has introduced rigorous pre-departure protocols, bank account requirements for fishers, and non-negotiable penalties for violations. By setting up a tripartite committee of government, employers, and workers, GMA has reinforced its commitment to collaborative governance and long-term reforms, including targeted capacity-building across coastal regions.

Complementing these institutional efforts, the Labour Commission shared key milestones that advance decent work in fishing. These include mandatory contracts before deployment, measures to weed out unqualified recruits, and specialized training for Labour Commission officers unfamiliar with the sector. The Commission is also finalizing a Standard Operating Procedure and working towards a unified



Figure 4: A collage photo of the Panel discussion on advancing labor rights.

contract template to address informal and inconsistent agreements along Ghana's coast.

The industrial fishing sector, especially trawler owners, have moved from scepticism to cautious optimism and have begun to see the value of protecting fishers. An MoU with NUSPAW now guarantees a 75% salary increase for fishers, underscoring a growing belief that well-paid workers lead to better catches and stronger business performance. ILO C188 is no longer viewed merely as a compliance tool; it is increasingly embraced as a framework for ethical and economic sustainability.

Still, challenges persist. Many artisanal fishers continue to misunderstand formalization viewing measures like canoe registration, licensing, or digital tracking not as tools for empowerment, but as precursors to increased government control and inevitable taxation. Standardizing industrial practices remains expensive, collaboration between semi-industrial and artisanal fisheries is more essential than ever. Government supervision of the trawling sector has increased, but achieving meaningful inclusion requires engaging artisanal and semi-industrial players as well. Encouraging signs of progress abound. Compliance among industrial trawlers is rising, driven by intensified enforcement from the Fisheries Commission. The grounding of non-compliant vessels has sent a decisive signal, and accountability is no longer optional as regulatory breaches carry real consequences. Additionally, GMA's investment in onboard cook training, strict pre-departure checklists, and financial transparency initiatives are beginning to shift sectoral culture. The path to fully integrating C188 will be a long one, but Ghana's early strides suggest that both state and industry actors are firmly committing to a future where fishers are protected, respected, and empowered.

3.3 Panel discussions on Ghana's Success in Co-Management Approaches

The second panel discussion centred on "Ghana's Success in Co-Management Approaches," offering a rich exploration of participatory governance in the fisheries sector. The session was moderated by Gideon Sarpong of the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), whose facilitation guided a dynamic exchange on the achievements, challenges, and future directions of co-management in Ghana.

The panel featured a diverse group of experts and practitioners whose work spans policy advisory, community leadership, scientific oversight, and regional representation. These included Socrates Segbor, the Policy Advisor and Country Director of GFRA, Kenneth Arthur, the Chairman of the National Co-Management Committee, Dr. Angela Lamptey, Chairperson of the Scientific and Technical Committee (STC), Vance Kwaku Adedze, Volta Region Spokesperson, Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC)

3.3.1 Evolution and Progress of Co-Management

Ghana's fish workers co-management initiative, which began with modest roots in 2020 and was formally endorsed by the Ministry of Fisheries in 2021, has since grown into a multi-tiered governance framework. Today, it operates at the national, regional, and community levels, and is formally recognized in the Fisheries Act 2025 (Act 1146). This institutional recognition signals a significant shift in how fisheries governance is perceived and practiced.

Panellists celebrated key milestones, including the expansion from three pilot communities funded by the World Bank to over 100 landing beaches under the USAID-funded GFRA initiative. This scale-up, while ambitious, underscored the importance of gradual, community-rooted growth. Researchers have also become integral to the process, ensuring that scientific insights are translated into practice with fishers and government

through inter-learning platforms.

However, it was intimated that beneath these achievements lie persistent challenges. At the national level, Scientific and Technical Committees often struggle to convene due to logistical constraints. Fisher associations continue to express concerns about being excluded from decision-making processes, though verifying these claims remains difficult.

Administrative bottlenecks continue to undermine the effectiveness of community-level governance structures such as the Landing Beach Enforcement Committees (LaBECs) and the regional-level Small Pelagic Collaborative Management Committees (SPCCs). Although these bodies are formally established, their operationalization remains limited, with many existing only on paper. Additionally, weak coordination between committees is a persistent issue, often improving only when external partners step in to facilitate collaboration. Compounding these challenges, most fisher associations lack the financial resources to support member participation in regional-level engagements, further hindering inclusive representation and decision-making.

In response, communities have begun to innovate. WhatsApp groups and voice notes are bridging communication gaps, while proposals for regular grassroots visits such as the Fisher to Fisher (F2F) dialogues aim to replace top-down approaches. Funding models are being reimagined across all levels, national, regional, and community to ensure sustainability. Transparency and trust have emerged as central themes, with calls to eliminate middlemen including political actors who obstruct access to resources and to engage the National Commission for Civic



Figure 5: A collage photo of Participants contributing to the panel discussion on the successes and challenges of co-management implementation in Ghana.

Education (NCCE) and community radio for informal public education. Even social media platforms like WhatsApp are being used creatively to mobilize and inform fishers.

Institutional reforms were also on the table. Panellists advocated for restructuring fisher associations to improve internal communication and mandate clarity. They proposed placing LABEC and SPCC on the government payroll to ensure continuity and sustainability. The whistleblower system, currently viewed as ineffective and untrustworthy, was flagged for urgent review.

A particularly poignant moment came when a Member of the Council of State (The Council of State is a constitutionally recognized institution in Ghana that advises government) Her Excellency Cynthia Komley Adjetey addressed the long-standing conflict between artisanal fishers and industrial trawlers. She intimated that artisanal fishers have consistently accused industrial trawlers of degrading marine ecosystems and engaging in illegal fishing practices. The fisher associations expressed a strong commitment to ending Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing on the condition that trawlers are removed from their fishing grounds. Encouragingly, recent reports indicate that licenses for approximately four (4) trawlers have been suspended due to repeated IUU violations. This enforcement action may signal a tentative shift in the long-standing tensions between artisanal and industrial fleets, offering a glimmer of hope for more equitable and sustainable fisheries governance.

As the session ended, one message rang clear: co-management is no longer a theoretical concept. It is a living, evolving structure rooted in both national policy and community practice. Its future, however, depends on adequate funding, inclusive engagement, trust-building, and the resolution of artisanal-industrial tensions. The call to action was unmistakable: ensure that governance structures truly serve those they were built to empower.

3.4 Panel discussion, question and answer session: International Organizing Experiences and Knowledge Sharing

3.4.1 International Organizing Experiences and Knowledge Sharing

In this session, representatives of national federations of cooperatives from Mexico and Ecuador joined the conference by Zoom. They were represented by their elected presidents. Mr. Jose Luis Carillo represented the Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives (CONMECOOP). Ms. Gabriela Cruz represented the National Federation of Artisanal Fisher Cooperatives (FENECOPEC). Through translation, they shared their experiences organizing fishers in the artisanal sector. Both organizations were featured in the *Upwelling* report and were interested to hear about the co-management and association models in Ghana. The conversation, facilitated by Professor Gearhart, covered four major themes: organizational structures, advocacy, capacity building, and promoting women's participation.

The presidents shared their perspectives on organizing strategies of cooperatives. They shared their strategies for attracting more members and improving member participation, how they determine leadership, and how they run engagement with their members. Both organizations have regional structures, and they hold annual meetings with locally elected leaders. For example, CONMECOOP recently convened its annual meeting, which brought together the elected officers from their 41 member federations, which represent more than 35,000 fishers in 15 of Mexico's 17 coastal states.



Figure 6: On Screen: President Jose Luis Carrillo Galaz - Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives (CONMECOOP) Sharing his experiences in fisher and fish worker organizing.

Both organizations emphasized the importance of their advocacy work to advance public policies that protect fisheries and fishers' livelihoods and welfare. Ms. Cruz shared how she combines her work to build personal relationships and to develop constructive proposals with FENECOPEC's ability to mobilize protests in the streets when necessary. In Mexico, a country with the world's fifteenth largest coastline, the process of building power and influence happens at both the state and national level. To that end, CONMECOOP has developed strong relations with some of the state and municipal governments, particularly around issues of fishery management, including such issues as the definition of no take zones and the length of the closed season. In some places CONMECOOP members have proposed extensions to the closed season because they see the benefits – they catch more fish for the same amount of effort.

In both Mexico and Ecuador, organized fishers struggle with illegality on the water. This includes IUU fishing as well as other criminal activity. To this end, they have established their own monitoring committees. In Mexico, these committees often signal to the authorities when and where IUU is happening and needs to be stopped and often have had to provide transport to the government authorities to detain the perpetrators. In Ecuador, FENECOPEC has tracked the increasing number of fishers who have had their motors stolen at sea and the number of fishers who have been murdered or have disappeared.

In many ways, the monitoring committees are an example of how the cooperatives are continuously building capacity and strengthening new leaders. These committees have helped to pull members together around a common goal – the profitability of their fish workers – while also providing pathways for new leaders to emerge. A key piece of this capacity building is anchored in the administration of the cooperatives. Mr. Carillo explained how fishers sell their fish through the



Figure 7: Professor Judy Gearhart sharing insight on how fishers and fish workers are organizing around the world for better working conditions.

cooperative and the cooperative receives a small part of those earnings. In this way, the cooperatives are providing a service to fishers and the fisher in exchange help finance and strengthen the cooperative.

Unfortunately, this model is often challenged by private sector actors seeking to buy fish directly from fishers, a practice that undercuts the cooperative and its ability to support responsible fish workers management practices.

Finally, both Presidents noted their efforts to continuously strengthen new leaders within the cooperatives. This includes both youth leaders and women leaders. Notably, in Latin America, some women fish and there are a few women-led cooperatives emerging. Moreover, participants in the room were impressed with President Cruz's methods of motivating women in a sector dominated by men.

3.4.2 Panel discussions on Strengthening Fisher Organizations for Sustainable Impact

In a vibrant exchange of ideas and lived experiences, this panel included seasoned organizers and fisher representatives from the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC), Canoe and Gear Owner Association of Ghana (CaFGOAG), the National Union of Teamsters and General Workers (NUTEG), and the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU). The four representatives reflected on the evolving landscape of fisher organizations in Ghana. The discussion, rich with historical insight and practical wisdom, centred on one pressing question: *What does it truly take to organize fishers for sustainable impact?* The session was moderated by Matilda Adjagba of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

3.4.3 Anchoring the Movement: A History of Fisher Organizations

The conversation opened with a look back at the formation of the GNCFC established in 1982 to represent artisanal fishers. GNCFC has long served as a bridge between

fishing communities and government institutions. Its credibility and deep roots in traditional authority have earned it recognition and influence, a testament that when fishers organize, they become too powerful to ignore.

Other associations have since emerged to reflect the diversity within the sector. CaFGOAG for instance, brings together canoe and gear owners from Volta, Central, Western, and Greater Accra, including some who are women, some crew members, and others who do not go to sea. On the other hand, NUTEG, an affiliate of Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL) is the only trade union organizing in the artisanal marine fisheries sector while GAWU champions the rights of fishers as workers around Lake Volta. Both assert that organizing is not just strategic, it is a right.

3.4.4 The Challenge of Organizing: Between Passion and Practicality

Panellists were candid about the difficulties of organizing fishers.

"They are only interested in the fish," one speaker noted, highlighting the singular focus of many fishers



Figure 8: A photo of the panel discussing pathways for fishers organizing toward sustainable small-scale fisheries.

on their daily catch. Organizing requires passion, zeal, and confidence, qualities that must be matched by practical support. Mobilizing large communities demands funding, trust, and a deep respect for fisher hierarchies.

Yet, fishers are not difficult to organize. Their unity at sea can translate into solidarity on land if approached with integrity. Past experiences of extortion and broken promises have made many wary, therefore, organizers must be trustworthy and transparent. Respecting the work fishers do, and the structures they operate within, is key.

3.4.5 Navigating Internal Conflicts and Misconceptions

The panel did not shy away from the internal tensions that complicate organizing. Conflicts often arise between canoe owners, captains, and crew, especially when owners also go to sea. Divergent views between active fishers and non-fishing owners can fracture unity. Some fishers expect associations to shield them from consequences when they engage in illegal practices, such as fishing during the closed season. Others are reluctant to attend meetings unless financially motivated. Payment of dues remains a persistent issue, and political interference where politicians offer money or resources can undermine the independence of fisher groups. Geographical barriers also make it difficult to reach fishers in remote

communities, and the freedom to exit associations at will has contributed to fragmentation.

3.4.6 Women in Fisheries: Voices Rising

The discussion turned to the unique challenges faced by women in the sector. Many women are both canoe owners and processors, juggling multiple roles.

They often have too much work to be able to join meetings and may feel intimidated in mixed-gender spaces. To address this, NAFPT, and CAOPA have



Figure 9: A photo of the President of CAOPA sharing some of her experiences in juggling between her leadership role and as a fish processor.

created

separate women's groups and WhatsApp platforms to foster engagement.

Women are particularly drawn to groups that offer access to capital and loans. They are articulate about their needs and eager to trade, but they want to see tangible benefits before committing their time. Their voices, once sidelined, are now shaping the future of fisher organizing.

3.4.7 Strategies That Work: Building Trust and Impact

Effective organizing, the panel agreed, begins with trust. Organizers that respect fisher hierarchies, appreciate their labour, and demonstrate a genuine passion for collective action have found greater success. Fishers are more likely to engage when they see clear benefits whether it is access to decision-makers, policy influence, or financial support. One speaker captured the ethos of the movement with a memorable phrase: "Seek ye first the kingdom of organizing, and all other things shall be added."

3.4.8 From Organizing to Influence: Policy and Engagement

Organized fisher groups are now shaping policy. Sensitization to ILO Convention C188 has been well received, and fishers are increasingly aware of their rights. The push for the implementation of the Co-Management policy has borne fruit, with fisher representatives now sitting on decision-making boards. The president of the National Fisheries Association of Ghana (NAFAG) and of GNCFC was himself an artisanal fisher, and he now represents artisanal fishers on the Fisheries Commission Board, demonstrating the increasing influence of grassroots leadership.

Reflections: During the Q&A session, participants raised critical questions. How can associations represent both employers and employees? What legal frameworks—like the sections 81 and 97 on freedom of association and collective bargaining in Ghana's Labour Act of 2003 (Act 651)—can guide formalization? These questions point to a future of deeper reflection and strategic action.

The GNCFC's longevity has made it a trusted partner for the government. Its "fisher-to-fisher" policy approach ensures that solutions are grounded in community realities. But panellists warned that a divided front invites political interference. To counter this, the panellists proposed quarterly meetings among all organizations including fisher organizations to build unity and foster healthy competition.

3.4.9 Conclusion: Organizing as a Pathway to Justice

The panel concluded with a shared understanding: organizing fishers is not just about structure, it is about dignity, voice, and sustainable livelihoods. With trust, passion, and inclusive strategies, fisher organizations can become engines of fishers and fish workers, women and men alike will be central to shaping a just and resilient future.

3.5 Presentation on Understanding the Capacity of Women's Organizations to Contribute to Fisheries Management Solutions

The presentation was the outcome of a forthcoming study commissioned by the Fisheries Governance Project, as part of stakeholder engagement to support inclusive



Figure 10: Dr. Angela Lamptey shares her thoughts on the need for inclusive strategies as engine for transformation in artisanal fisheries.

fisheries governance in Ghana. It provides a critical assessment of how Ghanaian women within the fisheries value chain are organizing to assert their voice, improve labour conditions, and influence sector governance. It offers a deep analysis of women's roles across harvesting, processing, trading, and support services, highlighting the diversity of their contributions and the systemic vulnerabilities they face. Drawing on field interviews, institutional engagement, and case studies of associations, the report evaluates the structure and functionality of women's groups, their effectiveness in advocacy, and their inclusion in decision-making spaces.

3.5.1 Panel discussions on Empowering Women in the Fisheries Sector

The panel discussion on the critical role of women in fisheries, strategies for participation and leadership and success stories. This discussion brought together leaders from women's associations such as National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA), African Confederation of Professional Organizations of Artisanal Fisheries (CAOPA), the Fisheries Commission (FC) and Odo Headporters association, an emerging association for headporters in Half Assini to reflect on progress made since the women associations were formed in 2015 with NAFPTA, challenges faced, and the pathway forward. The conversation centred on celebrating

successes, recognizing all players in the value chain, confronting injustices faced by the most vulnerable, and identifying practical solutions to ensure no group is left behind.

3.5.2 *Rising Tides: Stories of Success*

The President of NAFPTA Mrs. Regina Solomon spoke with pride about how far her organization had come. Today, thanks to decentralization, NAFPTA has presence in all four coastal regions of Ghana and beyond. Communication flows more easily, and regional

representatives now carry the torch, ensuring that information reaches every fishing community.

She shared how NAFPTA motivates its members by partnering with the



government (e.g. the FC, Ghana Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) and Ghana Standards Authority (GSA) to audit and award Safe Fish Certificates to processors who adopt food safety practices in fish processing. These certificates are not just symbols of recognition, they are part of efforts to promote the production and consumption of safe fish. A monitoring system ensures that training translates into practice, with best-practice checklists posted at processing facilities for easy reference.

Figure 11: A photo of the NAFPTA President Mrs. Regina Solomon, and other panelists sharing experiences and success stories on women organizing.

Financial literacy has also become a cornerstone of the association's work. Women are taught to keep records, calculate profits and losses, and manage loans wisely. Mrs. Solomon observed that women were currently excluded from the implementation of ILO C188 that is geared towards promoting decent work in the fishing sector. The Secretary of CAOPA Ms. Lydia Tettegah echoed similar sentiments. She described how CAOPA regularly advocates on best fishing practices and promotes hygienic fish handling during processing, and cares not just for the fish, but for the women and their families. Training sessions discourage the use of harmful chemicals in fish processing and promote safe, sustainable methods. CAOPA also provides financial support, partnering with financial institutions to offer loans with flexible repayment plans to help women grow their businesses.

3.5.3 *Organizing for Power and Protection*

The panellists agreed that organizing women is no longer optional; it is essential. They emphasized that every group in the sector deserves representation, floating the idea of "Operation Leave No One Behind." However, organizing is not just about mitigating external threats since some of the injustices women face come from within their own ranks such as poor working conditions for some workers. Building capacity through training, education, and support is key to giving women including

the most vulnerable the bargaining power they need. The panel observed that Associations are collaborating with partners to offer supplemental livelihood training to help women during closed fishing seasons. They also provide health education, ensuring that women can care for themselves and their families year-round. These efforts are not just about survival; they are about dignity.

3.5.4 Confronting Harsh Realities

Despite the notable progress, deep inequities continue to shape the sector. The tone of the discussion shifted as two young participants

from the Western Region, a descaler and a head porter, shared firsthand accounts of hardship and exclusion within their



Figure 12: A photo showing Ms. Ellen Vroom the President of Descalers Association, sharing her experiences and challenges that descalers face in their line of work.

communities.

Their testimonies brought urgency and emotional depth to the conversation, reminding stakeholders of the lived realities behind policy gaps and the pressing need for inclusive reform. According to the descaler, she earns GHS 40 for descaling 1000 pieces of fish with no protective gear, under harsh weather conditions. Head porters, often young women, are paid GHS4 to carry loads meant for four men over long distances to processing sheds.

There are other workers like the “hustlers” and the “helper” processors who work under the fish mommies and fish mongers main. These women are unorganized, unprotected, and largely invisible in policy discussions. Yet, the sector’s contribution to Ghana’s GDP as highlighted in the 2025 mid-year budget shows its potential.

3.5.5 Charting the Way Forward

The panellists did not just diagnose problems they proposed solutions. Labour standards must be regularized to prevent exploitation. Abuse and unfair treatment must be addressed head-on. The value chain must be expanded to include all groups, whether formally recognized or not. There was a shared frustration with the status quo. Too many workshops and conferences have ended with promises and unimplemented actions. The time for action is now. Accountability must be collective. Everyone, government, associations, communities must commit to implementing the change they want to see.

The panel closed with a shared commitment to advance the role of all women in fisheries. Women in fisheries are not just contributors, they are leaders, innovators, and change-makers. By organizing, educating, and advocating, they are reshaping the sector from the ground up. The message was clear: *real change begins when everyone is seen, heard, and valued.*

Reflections: Women in fisheries are not just participants. Their stories, struggles, and successes are shaping the future of the sector. How can they be supported in building a more just and inclusive system one where no one is left behind?

3.6 Breakout session and reporting on Labor rights in fisheries and promising solutions

Certain key themes emerged out of the various panel discussions over the two days on the gaps and prospects for organizing fishers. These were discussed in breakout sessions by participants to secure shared understanding and buy-in, leading to the development of a communique (Appendix 2)

3.6.1 Purpose and Effectiveness

Participants emphasized that successful fisher organizations must begin with a clearly defined mission and shared vision. This sense of common purpose where members believe in the vision and align their interests is foundational for long-term impact. It was further emphasized that effective fisher associations are built not just on good intentions but on deliberate, inclusive, and transparent systems.

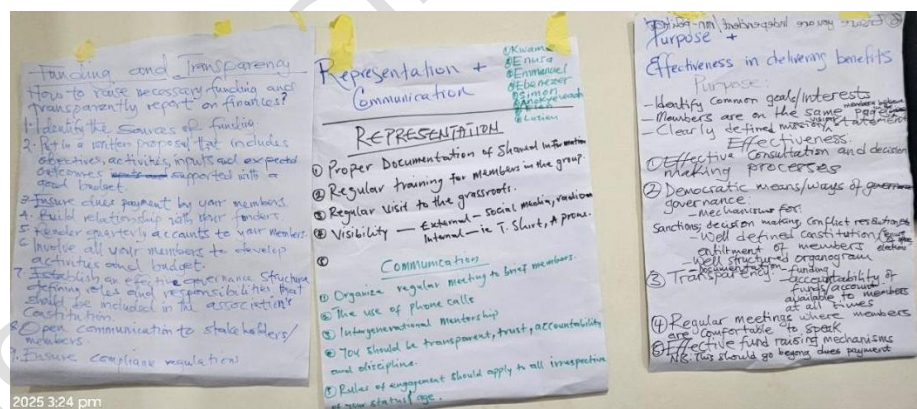


Figure 13: A flip chart showing some solutions proposed by participants during the breakout session.

Also, the participants agreed that strengthening organizational effectiveness required cultivating a participatory culture where decisions reflect the collective voice of members. They called for inclusive consultation practices and decision-making frameworks that promote fairness and unity.

Equally vital, they highlighted the importance of democratic governance, advocating for constitutions that clearly define tenure, election procedures, and member entitlements. Such structures, they said, provide stability and legitimacy while fostering accountability.

Additionally, financial transparency emerged as a cornerstone of trust. Members must have regular access to financial records, they urged, with systems that allow for open tracking of funds and expenditures. Regular meetings should not only serve administrative purposes but also become platforms for open dialogue, idea-sharing,

and relationship-building. Finally, the participants encouraged moving beyond dues as the sole funding source. Exploring diverse fundraising approaches, tailored proposals, partnerships, and value-based contributions was seen as crucial to sustaining long-term operations and community impact.

3.6.2 Representation and Communication: Amplifying Voices and Building Identity

On the issue of representation and communication, participants underscored that strong representation within fisher associations was vital to cultivating credibility, unity, and member trust. It was emphasized that documentation should go beyond record-keeping but also it should preserve shared knowledge and collective decisions as a source of organizational memory. This, coupled with ongoing training and capacity building, was seen as essential for empowering members and

equipping them to navigate both internal governance and external engagement.

A consistent presence at the grassroots level through regular visits and check-ins was highlighted as a means of reinforcing solidarity and

ensuring inclusive participation. To elevate visibility, participants proposed a dual strategy: externally through radio and social media to reach wider audiences, and internally through recognizable branding, such as T-shirts and aprons, which foster a shared identity.

Effective communication, they argued, depends on frequent briefings, active phone engagement, and intergenerational mentorship to bridge gaps and foster leadership succession. Above all, participants insisted that principles such as transparency, accountability, discipline, and equitable rule enforcement must be upheld regardless of age or status to strengthen internal cohesion and trust.

3.6.3 Funding and Transparency: Sustaining Work with Integrity

In a session focused on financial sustainability and integrity, participants emphasized that funding should not only support organizational goals but also reflect the values of transparency and accountability. The conversation centred on building resilient financial systems that foster member ownership and institutional trust.



Figure 14 A photo of group discussing strategies for amplifying voices and building identity.

To address funding constraints, they proposed seeking out a range of funding sources local, national, and international and crafting proposals with clear intentions and measurable outcomes. Internal mechanisms were also key: collecting dues on time, strengthening



Figure 15: A photo of participants at the breakout session brainstorming on solutions for funding and transparency.

ties with existing funders, and providing quarterly financial reports to members to maintain transparency. Participants agreed that budgeting and planning should be inclusive, with all members actively involved in shaping how resources are used. To reinforce accountability, they recommended embedding governance structures and role definitions into organizational constitutions. Open communication and compliance with regulatory frameworks were seen as non-negotiable pillars of financial integrity.

3.6.4 Conflict and Resolution: Managing Disputes Proactively and Equitably

During the report out on conflict and resolution within fisher associations, participants spoke candidly about how marginalization, whether by gender, age, or social status can fracture solidarity and breed internal disputes. Recognizing that unresolved tension threatens organizational cohesion, they called for more proactive and inclusive approaches to dispute management. A central recommendation was to



Figure 16: A photo of a group presenting their findings on solutions to address funding challenges of fisher and fish worker organizing

strengthen conflict resolution committees. This meant not only training committee members in mediation and negotiation skills but also positioning these committees as trusted, accessible structures for resolving grievances fairly. Participants also urged associations to look beyond their internal boundaries. They envisioned collaborative efforts across organizations as key to resolving external conflicts whether around access to resources or policy implementation. Building shared purpose and acknowledging each group's unique contributions were seen as foundations for this collective approach.

To make this vision tangible, quarterly inter-association meetings were proposed. These gatherings would serve as safe spaces for dialogue, healing, and strategic coordination, ensuring that disputes do not fester but rather become opportunities for growth and unity.

3.6.5 Accessibility and Inclusion: Reaching Every Voice in the Value Chain

In the discussions on accessibility and inclusion across fisheries value chains, participants

stressed the importance of creating spaces where every voice from fishers to processors is heard and valued. They



Figure 17: A photo of a group presenting their findings on solutions to managing conflicts and resolutions among fisher and fish worker organizing

emphasized that meaningful engagement must begin with mapping the value chain to locate vulnerable groups and influential actors, ensuring that no one is left behind in decision-making or service delivery.

Peer-to-peer learning emerged as a powerful tool for bridging knowledge gaps, with participants advocating for organic, experience-based interactions among stakeholders. Sensitization campaigns, they noted, must be community-specific tailored to align with fishing seasons, local customs, and cultural rhythms so they truly resonate. Partnerships were seen as critical to amplifying impact. Collaborating with development agencies and peer associations could offer targeted support to marginalized groups and expand access to resources. Participants also highlighted the need for accessible information hubs such as centres at landing beaches to disseminate updates, materials, and opportunities in real time.

3.7 Communique

At the end of the learning exchange, participants sought to express their shared commitment to advocating for workers' rights and sustainable fisheries to identify common challenges and the strategies needed to achieve their goals. To do this, they issued a communique to reflect their collective resolve to work together to support a vision of fisheries and aquaculture management that is inclusive and strong, in the interest of promoting food security, decent jobs, labour standards, and economic growth. Participants emphasized that a shared vision, one that centres inclusivity across fisher and fish worker organizations, is essential to both sustaining fish workers resources and unlocking the sector's full economic potential. Achieving this vision, they noted, requires ongoing dialogue within the sector and with key actors such as the state, alongside targeted capacity-building and

organizational strengthening to have the potential to engage with relevant stakeholders responsible for the sector and to advocate for fisher's wellbeing. The Ghana Fisher Learning Exchange Forum (GFLEF), the name participants chose to represent their unified platform, acknowledged the critical role of the seafood industry in Ghana's economy and underscored the urgent need for responsible stewardship of marine resources.

To this end, the GFLEF agreed to strengthen their organizations and members' capacity to effectively represent and address their needs, establish inclusivity,



Figure 18: A group discusses the content and wording of the communique.

participate in identifying shared goals, engage among themselves and relevant stakeholders and also to monitor the progress on implementation of the ILO C188 and provide a shadow report to the ILO when necessary.

The [full communique](#) can be found in Annex 2.

4.0 Conclusions

The FLE marked a pivotal advance in the pursuit of participatory and accountable fisheries governance in Ghana. Grounded in inclusive dialogue and collaborative planning, the gathering brought together a diverse constellation of stakeholders, fisher organizations, women processors, government agencies, civil society actors, and community leaders to collectively deepen their understanding of sustainable fisheries management principles and global best practices. This shared learning laid a robust foundation for building more resilient, equitable coastal communities rooted in stewardship and transparency.

Beyond knowledge exchange, the workshop served as a catalyst for renewed collaboration. It fostered stronger, trust-based relationships among key actors, reinforcing the networks essential for coordinated action and long-term systemic impact. Through facilitated sessions, participants co-developed practical strategies to strengthen fisheries governance, with a deliberate emphasis on empowering fisher communities, particularly women, to assume leadership roles in management and policy processes. These strategies reflect a thoughtful integration of grassroots realities and institutional frameworks, ensuring both relevance and scalability.

Importantly, the convening surfaced actionable pathways to enhance transparency and accountability across the fishing sector. Stakeholders proposed mechanisms such as community-led monitoring, public access to licensing and enforcement data,

and inclusive reporting systems. The dialogue also crystallized strategic priorities for advancing gender inclusion and organizational capacity building. These priorities will serve as guiding pillars for future programming and advocacy, ensuring that fisher organizations are not only beneficiaries of reform but active architects of a more just and sustainable fisheries sector. The FLE also issued a communique reaffirming its commitment to advancing equity, representation, and accountability within Ghana's fisheries sector. In pursuit of these goals, participants pledged to:

- Strengthen fisher organizations and build the capacity of their members to effectively articulate and address their needs, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making spaces;
- Foster inclusive, participatory, and collaborative engagement with all fishers, fish workers, their representative bodies, and relevant stakeholders, grounding governance processes in the lived realities of those who sustain the sector;
- Ensure gender-responsive representation by actively involving both male and female fishers, fish workers, associations, and trade unions in identifying shared priorities and shaping collective engagement with the state, development partners, and private sector actors; and
- Monitor the implementation of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention No. 188, and, where necessary, submit a shadow report to the International Labour Organization to uphold transparency, accountability, and decent work standards across the sector.

These outcomes align closely with Ghana's National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy, which emphasizes inclusive governance, sustainable resource management, and community empowerment. They also advance key targets under the Sustainable Development Goals particularly SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). For development partners and policymakers, the convening offers a timely opportunity to invest in scalable, community-driven solutions that strengthen climate resilience, protect livelihoods, and institutionalize equity within the fisheries sector. By supporting these strategic priorities, donors can help catalyse systemic change that is locally grounded, nationally aligned, and globally relevant.

5.0 Recommendations

The following is a summary of recommendations that came out of participant conversations and breakout sessions.

1. All actors should embrace the government's commitment to fishery co-management and work to improve information sharing, dialogue, and initiatives that enable greater participation of local fisher and fish worker organisations.
2. Government should support and engage fisher associations to establish real-time information hubs and institutionalize quarterly inter-association meetings to improve access to updates, foster strategic coordination, and transform disputes into opportunities for unity and growth.

3. The leadership of fisher associations should leverage the new fisheries law to strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms at the landing beach and within fisher organizations. These meetings would also serve as safe spaces for dialogue, healing, and strategic coordination, ensuring that disputes do not fester but rather become opportunities for growth and unity.
4. CSOs and donor institutions should invest in capacity-building initiatives and legal literacy programs which are crucial for empowering fisher and fish worker organisations. These programs should work closely with fisher and fish worker associations and unions to amplify fisherfolk voices, support policy influence, and build the visibility, discipline, and equity-driven leadership through mentorship and strategic engagement with CSOs.
5. CSOs, including both environmental and community development NGOs should ensure advocacy efforts and policy influence is helping to advance the rights and welfare of fisherfolk. More support is needed for inclusive initiatives that enhance the visibility and strengthen the credibility of fisher organizations, increase transparency around policy advocacy strategies, and facilitate regular briefings and mentorship programs. These efforts should be anchored in core values of transparency, discipline, and equitable treatment.
6. Fisher associations should actively promote inclusive engagement especially of women and marginalized groups by:
 - (a) Strengthening internal representation and outreach through peer learning and strategic partnerships
 - (b) Prioritizing leadership development and legal literacy to enhance advocacy and rights awareness
7. Fisher and fish worker associations should systematize their membership dues structure and also diversify their funding strategies beyond membership dues by:
 - (a) Exploring community-driven contributions, partnerships, and tailored proposals
 - (b) Ensuring transparent and inclusive budgeting to build trust and credibility within their organizations

Annex 1: Copy of Concept Note and Agenda

CONCEPT NOTE AND AGENDA ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND FISHER ORGANIZING INITIATIVES IN GHANA

Accra, Ghana, July 23 to 24

Introduction:

This concept note outlines the plan to facilitate a Learning Exchange among fisher and fishery worker organizations to learn how they are supporting their members and engaging in sustainable fishery management initiatives. The learning exchange is being organized by the Accountability Research Centre (ARC) to share the findings from a six-country study on fisher organizing and fisher driven solutions to sustain livelihoods and fisheries.

Based in American University's School of International Service, ARC bridges research and frontline perspectives to learn from ideas, institutions, and actors advancing strategies to improve transparency, participation, and accountability. The proposed Learning Exchange is supported by and comes out of a collaboration with the Fishery Governance Project (FGP), a funder-practitioner collaboration working to build a shared understanding of issues and solutions at the intersection of improved fisheries governance and advancements in labour rights. The FGP centres its approach on international treaties, improved market action, and enforcement and victim protection.

This event brings together key stakeholders, including government officials, fisher organizations, labour representatives, and international experts to share knowledge, discuss best practices, and develop collaborative strategies for a more sustainable and equitable fisheries sector in Ghana. The event will delve into successful co-management models, analyse the challenges and opportunities related to labour rights, and unpack initiatives that aim to improve governance in the sector such as ILO Convention 188 on Work in Fishing and other related agreements such as the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI).

Each day will focus on distinct yet interconnected themes. Day one will concentrate on the foundational aspects of co-management, worker rights protections, and the strengthening of fisher organizations. Day two will focus on the critical role of women in the sector and the development of future collaborative strategies. The event will be a dynamic mix of presentations, panel discussions, breakout sessions, and networking opportunities.

Objectives:

1. Strengthen collaborative fisheries management and fisher rights protections;
2. Identify effective strategies to empower fisher and fishery worker organizations, including those led by women;
3. Learn from diverse organizing and advocacy strategies used by fisher organizations to influence policy and protect fishers' rights and welfare, including from fisher cooperatives in Latin America.

Expected Outcomes:

1. Enhanced understanding of sustainable fisheries management principles and best practices;
2. Strengthened collaborative networks among key stakeholders;
3. Actionable strategies and plans developed for improving fisheries governance and empowering fisher communities;
4. Increased capacity of fisher organizations, and especially women, to participate in fisheries management.
5. Pathways identified to implement greater transparency within the fishing sector.

**DRAFT AGENDA -- ARC LEARNING EXCHANGE:
SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND FISHER ORGANIZING IN GHANA
Accra, Ghana
July 23-24, 2025**

****DRAFT AGENDA**

***Speakers are to be confirmed*

TIME	SESSION TITLE	TOPIC FOCUS	RESOURCE PERSON/Speakers (to be confirmed)
DAY 1: Co-Management, Fisher Organization, and Labor Rights			
8:30 - 9:00	Registration & Welcome Coffee	Informal Gathering // Arrival and networking	Eric Mawuko Atsiatorme (Coordinator)
9:00 - 9:30	Opening Ceremony & Introductions	Introductions	Coordinator
		Chairperson acceptance remarks	Nana Kwesi Agyeman IX (Chair)-Paramount Chief of Lower Dixcove and Vice President of the Western Region House of Chiefs
		Welcome addresses, and overview of objectives	Professor Judy Gearhart
9:30-10:30	Upwelling: Fishers Organizing for their rights	International trends in fisher organizing and advocacy	• Professor Judy Gearhart • Connor Moynihan
10:30-11	Keynote Address by Honourable Mrs. Emelia Arthur		Honourable Mrs. Emelia Arthur, Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture
10:30 - 11:00	Coffee Break & Networking (Group photo with Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture)		
11:00-12:30	Implementing ILO Convention 188 (C 188): Advancing Labor Rights and Coordinating with PSMA	• What are the challenges, opportunities, and progress made through the ILO facilitated dialogue and ratification of ILO C 188?	Moderator: Mr. Awudu Enusah, GMA Representative and Chairperson of the Tripartite Committee Panel Members: • Emmanuel Kwame Mensah – International Labour Organization (ILO)

		How can the implementation of PSMA and C 188 be coordinated to improve the sector?	- Papa Yaw Atobrah-Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity (GFRA) - Michael Angmor-National Union of Seamen, Ports, and Allied Workers (NUSPAW) of TUC - Jerome Dzeamesi-Ghana Industrial Trawler's Association (GITA)
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch & Informal Networking		
1:30-2:30	Ghana's Success in Co-Management Approaches	- What progress has Ghana made in the initial phases of its fishery co-management programs? - How can the process be sustained and strengthened?	Moderator: Gideon Sarpong (EJF) Panel: - Mr. Socrates Segbor-Principal Advisor on GFRA - Kenneth Arthur- Central Co-Management committee chairman - Dr. Angela Lamptey-Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) - Vance Kwaku Adedze-Volta Region Spokesperson for GNCFC
2:30 - 3:30	International Organizing Experiences and Knowledge Sharing	Reflections on Organizing Strategies and Government Engagement on Fishery Management	Judy Gearhart moderates a question-and-answer panel discussion: - President Jose Luis Carrillo Galaz - Mexican Confederation of Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperatives (CONMECOOP) - President Gabriela Cruz - National Federation of Artisanal Fisher Cooperatives (FENACOPEC)

3:30-3:45	Coffee Break & Networking		
3:45-5:15	Strengthening Fisher Organizations for Sustainable Impact	What does it take to organize fishers? What are the challenges to unifying members? And how does each organization work to engage government and industry representatives?	Moderator: Matilda Adjagba – International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) • Nana Jojo Solomon - Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC) • Nana Kweigyah - Canoe and Gear Owner Association of Ghana (CaFGOAG) • Ebenezer National Union of Teamsters and General Workers (NUTEG) • Mr. Andy Tagoe - Ghana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU)
5:15-5:30	Day 1 Closing Remarks	Summary of day's events	Chairperson closing remarks
Day 2: Women's Roles and Future Strategies			
8:30 - 9:00	Recap of Day 1 & Introduction to Day 2	Review of Day 1, Intro to Day 2	Rapporteur-Ms. Dorcas Agbesi
9:00-10:30	Empowering Women in the Fisheries Sector	Presentation and Discussion: Critical role of women, strategies for participation and leadership, success stories	Moderator: Ms. Musa Bavina (Gender and Social Inclusion Expert-GFRA) • Mrs Regina Solomon - National Association of Fish Processors and Traders Associations (NAFPTA)- • Ms Lydia Tettegah- African Confederation of Professional Artisanal Fishing Organizations (CAOPA) • Ms Yaa Tiwah Amoah - Fisheries Commission

			(FC) Post Harvest Division
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break & Networking		
11:30 – 1:00	Facilitated Reflection: Labor rights in fisheries and promising solutions	Breakout groups and report back on solutions identified during prior panels.	Moderator: Eric Mawuko Atsiatorme
1:00-2:00	Lunch & Informal Networking		
2:00-3:30	Breakout groups: Collaborative strategies for advancing solutions identified	How do we put solutions into action? Breakout discussion topics: • Collaborative strategies, • Integrating co-management, • Support for organizing, • Government transparency	Moderator: Emmanuel Kwame Mensah, ILO
3:30 – 4:00	Closing Session	Actionable Outcomes and Next Steps	Rapporteur/Chairperson
4:00-4:30	Administrative formalities, coffee break and departure		

Annex 2: Text of the Communique

Communique from the participants of the Ghana Fisher Learning Exchange Forum July 2025 @ AH Hotel, East Legon, Accra, Ghana Hosted by the Accountability Research Centre and the Fisheries Governance Project

We the Ghana Fisher Learning Exchange Forum (GFLEF) members having met on the 23 & 24 of July 2025, have discussed issues as fishers and fish workers associations and trade unions in collaboration with stakeholders advocating for workers' rights and sustainable fisheries to identify common challenges and the strategies needed to achieve our goals.

GFLEF recognizes that the seafood sector is of paramount importance to Ghana's culture and economy and that we have a responsibility to be good stewards of this important natural resource.

GFLEF thus stands ready to support a vision of fisheries and aquaculture management that is inclusive and strong, in the interest of promoting food security, decent jobs, labour standards, and economic growth.

GFLEF affirms that strong and inclusive fishers and fish workers organizations play a critical role in achieving both economic prosperity and fisheries sustainability and that success will require robust and continuous dialogue with the state and across the sector.

To this end, high functioning, independent trade unions, fishers' associations, and fish workers associations have the potential to effectively influence management and government actions while advancing their wellbeing. Therefore, we agree to:

1. Strengthen our organizations and enhance the capacity of our members to effectively address and represent their needs;
2. Establish inclusive, participatory, and collaborative engagement with all fishers, fish workers, their organizations, and all relevant stakeholders;
3. Include both male and female fishers and fish workers associations and trade unions in identifying shared goals in our engagement with the state, development partners, and businesses; and
4. Commit to monitoring the progress of implementation of the ratified ILO Work in Fishing Convention No. 188 and provide a shadow report to the ILO when necessary.

We thus pledge to continue identifying commonalities and alignments among and within our organizations – in the interest of positioning the fishing community in Ghana for greater success towards recovering and sustaining our treasured fisheries.