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Understanding the Social Equity Challenges of Fishery Improvement Projects

A high-level scan of current challenges within Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs)

March 2025

CEA CONSULTING

Acknowledgements

This research was commissioned by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) through the generous support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

CEA relied on interviews with FIP participants for the primary data collection for this work, as well as a voluntary, anonymous survey sent out to two FIP Communities of Practice. We would like to thank Jesse Marsh and Heri Heri from the FIP Community of Practice for their assistance with survey preparation and distribution, and we are grateful to the NGOs and industry members that participated in our interviews.

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Executive Summary

In June of 2024, CEA Consulting partnered with WWF to conduct research to better understand current equity challenges affecting fisheries participating in Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs). Using a mixed-methods approach, CEA conducted interviews with 17 informants and deployed a survey to members of the FIP implementing community to gather a breadth of perspectives on the contextual, procedural, management, recognitional, and distributional equity conditions of the fisheries included in this study. Informants were also invited to share recommendations for how buyers could help address the identified challenges. The following report summarizes the study's findings.

Contextual Equity: Wild-caught fishing communities exist within complex socio-economic systems in which multiple social, economic, and political factors can magnify their vulnerability. These threats include:

- A lack of adequate public goods, such as drinking water, education, paved roads, health care, and social safety benefits;
- Insufficient or counterproductive government engagement that neglects or worsens fishers' economic and social marginality;
- Intense competition over shared marine resources from the aquaculture, tourism, and renewable energy sectors;
- Organized crime activities that threaten fishers' physical security;
- An increasing severity and frequency of natural disasters and the migration of fish stocks due to climate change; and
- Pervasive cultural attitudes that limit women's broader participation and leadership in fisheries' improvement efforts.

Support from civil society (including fisher cooperatives and NGOs) has proven critical to addressing these threats, though progress varies by FIP.

Procedural Equity: Generally, there appears to be insufficient fisher participation in fishery policy and regulatory decision-making. Reasons for this include:

- Limited spaces exist for fisher input
- Material constraints (e.g., lack of Internet connection) prevent fishers from engaging in available decision-making fora.

Nevertheless, there have been examples of fishers aggregating to influence decision-making..

Managerial Equity: At the FIP level, fishers can play a consequential role in decision-making and often channel their voices through fisher cooperative leadership. As part of their social workplans, a growing number of FIPs are instituting mechanisms through which fishers can submit their grievances.

Recognitional Equity: While fishers appear to have an awareness of the rules and regulations that govern their fishery, broader awareness of their constitutional rights varies across the FIPs.

- In some cases, civil society and governments work to foster a culture of rights awareness among fishers.
- The broader culture of informality – especially for small-scale fisheries – can make securing formal human rights and labor protections challenging for many fishers.
- Fishers' traditional knowledge has proven valuable to the development of effective fisheries management policies but there remain difficulties in having this knowledge codified into law.

Executive Summary

Distributional Equity: Though the greatest beneficiaries vary by context, industry appears to benefit the most from current fishery improvement efforts while fishers and women see the fewest benefits from their participation in FIPs. In a few cases, fisher groups, particularly older male fishers, have been able to capture greater benefits than other fishers, particularly women and youth. Often, fishers shoulder the financial burdens of environmental sustainability improvements and have reduced access to traditional fishing grounds. Because many women occupy post-harvest roles (or have been pushed out of fishing), they cannot enjoy the same access to product as their male fisher counterparts. In terms of potential effects of FIPs on local access to fish, the results vary. For some FIPs, local demand (and price) is greater than that of exporters and so product is sold into local markets (with some product additionally exported, based on demand). In other cases, fishers receive greater financial benefits when they sell to the export market but there are no perceived negative impacts on local food security. There were a few exceptions where export market demand has been detrimental for local consumption.

Buyer Recommendations: In general, interviewees agreed that greater industry support for FIPs was needed. Informants offered a range of recommendations for more robust industry engagement that broadly fall into four buckets:

1. Instituting fair and transparent pricing practices (among trading partners) that ensure an equitable distribution of benefits and enhance the bargaining power of fishers to set prices;

2. Generating demand for FIPs through strong market commitments and supplier policies that ensure FIPs can access the market and see financial returns on their improvement efforts;

3. Investing in and engaging with fishers as trusted partners in fisheries improvement efforts, and working closely with government and civil society organizations; and

4. Bolstering the capacity of fishers to grow their business and management potential, especially as a means to: 1) drive social improvements; and 2) improve their capacity to engage with and learn from market actors.

Section 1

Introduction

Background

Market-based approaches, including certifications, ratings, and fishery improvement projects (FIPs), have contributed significantly to advancing the sustainable seafood movement over the past three decades. Industry and consumer audiences are increasingly acknowledging the social and environmental issues in seafood production and more fisheries in more diverse contexts are engaged in improvement efforts.

However, market-based approaches are also facing increasing criticism, especially around their potential negative social impacts. Examples of criticism include arguments and evidence that market-based approaches: 1) fail to appropriately engage small-scale fishing communities, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities; 2) run afoul of international human and labor rights laws, and 3) contribute to an inequitable distribution of benefits and costs, often shouldered by fishers, processors, and other first-mile participants in the global seafood value chain who are least able to absorb these costs.[1, 2]

To deepen their understanding of the social challenges underpinning wild-caught fisheries participating in FIPs, WWF commissioned CEA Consulting (CEA) to identify perspectives and needs around equity in fisheries management using the lens of FIPs. CEA conducted the following activities to execute this work:

1. Developed a list of questions to survey FIP community members around social equity needs and challenges, as well as broader efforts to address social equity;
2. Conducted interviews and deployed a survey across geographies and fisheries to gather responses to these questions; and
3. Drafted a report synthesizing the data collected on the key social equity improvements needed in small-scale and commercial fisheries to inform WWF's retailer and end buyer engagement efforts.

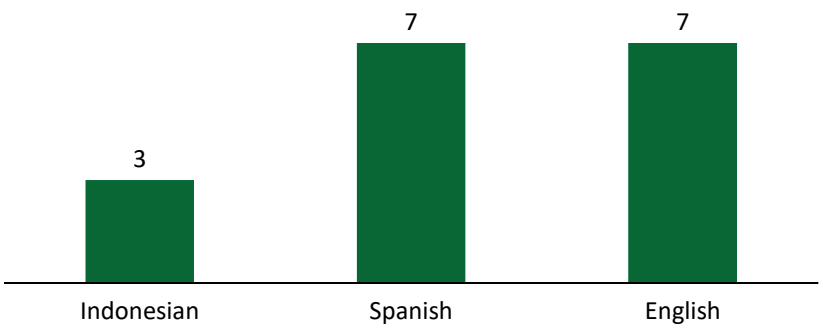
[1] Sparks et al. (2022). "Worker-less social responsibility: How the proliferation of voluntary labour governance tools in seafood marginalise the workers they claim to protect."
[2] Williams et al. (2023). "Fishery improvement projects: A voluntary, corporate "tool" not fit for the purpose of mitigating labour abuses and guaranteeing labour rights for workers."

Methodology

As part of the primary data collection effort, CEA conducted interviews with informants representing nine FIPs, spanning gear type, commodity, and geography. Interview respondents were asked a range of questions that sought to uncover equity issues apparent in their supply chain, as well as solicit recommendations for retailers and end buyers. For each of the nine FIPs included in the study, CEA spoke to at least one FIP lead and one buyer. A total of 17 individuals contributed information via the interviews.[1]

CEA also deployed a survey to the FIP Community of Practice to gain a breadth of perspectives across the FIP implementation community in Latin America and Southeast Asia. The 14-question survey included a mix of Likert scale and open-response questions and aimed to gather perspectives on the social challenges and needs of wild-caught fishing communities. To enable wider participation in the study, CEA deployed English, Spanish, and Indonesian language versions of the survey. The below graphic summarizes the breakdown of survey responses by language.

Survey responses by language (n=17)



[1] CEA spoke to one buyer who sourced product from two different FIPs included in the study.

Study limitations

Although CEA was able to harvest a breadth and depth of perspectives from the FIP implementing community, there are several limitations of the study design:

- **Skewed geographic representation**: CEA's ability to survey across geographies was constrained by the study team's language capacity. As such, interviews were limited to English and Spanish. The majority of FIPs included in this study (n=5) are from the Latin America and Caribbean region, with less data available from Southeast Asia and Africa.
- **Inadequate representation of fisher and first-mile perspectives**: Due to budget and timeframe considerations, the data collection approach was limited to interview and survey informants with access to computers and teleconferencing equipment (e.g., computers, Internet connectivity). As a result, our study captures the perspectives of NGO coordinators and buyers from the FIP implementing community but does not include fishers, first-mile participants, or other coastal community representatives.

Given the wide and diverse areas of inquiry (including the different dimensions of equity) included in this study, the fisheries field at large would benefit from further investigation on several topics, as well as opportunities for more geography-focused analyses. Any forthcoming effort to understand the equity challenges and needs of wild-caught fisheries ought to center the voices of fishers, first-mile participants, and other coastal marine resource users. The wealth of scholarship conducted on ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management agrees that the leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is integral to protecting the marine environment and defending the livelihoods of those who depend on it most. Their perspectives would richly contribute to and shape a research agenda focused on understanding and addressing wider social challenges facing wild-caught fisheries.

> *…Fishery management is people management, and the consequences of decisions have long-standing impacts on people, as much as on the environment.*

CEA relied upon the 2021 Bennett et al. framework to structure a research agenda focused on social equity in conservation.

To shape the research agenda of this study, CEA relied upon existing analytical frameworks of social equity applied to conservation problems. Social equity is concerned with the fair distribution of costs and benefits amongst the participants in a conservation intervention (Friedman, et al. 2018). Frameworks focused on social equity in conservation tend to focus on four components of equity necessary for any intervention: recognitional, procedural, distributional, and contextual.

The equity framework in Nathan Bennett et al.'s 2021 paper, "Advancing Social Equity In and Through Marine Conservation," offers a more expansive social equity framework. In addition to the conventional components of social equity, the Bennett 2021 framework includes a dimension concerned with managerial equity, as defined below. This more expansive framework was used to structure this report, with a section focused on each aspect of the social equity framework.

Components of the social equity framework (adapted from Bennett, et al. 2021)

1. **Contextual**: The social, economic, and political conditions that influence people's pre-existing status as well as the structures that determine people's ability to achieve procedural, managerial, distributional, and recognitional equity.
2. **Procedural**: The inclusion and effective participation of all relevant actors and groups in rule- and decision-making for conservation policies and programs, which requires good governance practices such as transparency and accountability.
3. **Managerial:** The extent to which local people can participate in, carry out the work of, be responsible for and/or have a leadership role in management activities.
4. **Recognitional**: The acknowledgment and incorporation of the rights, tenure, cultural identities, practices, values, visions, knowledge systems, and livelihoods of local groups into conservation governance, planning, and management.
5. **Distributional**: The level of fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens between different groups, including current and future generations, of the outcomes of conservation actions.

Section 2

Contextual Equity

The social, economic, and political conditions that influence people's pre-existing status as well as the structures that determine people's ability to achieve procedural, managerial, distributional, and recognitional equity.

Key takeaways:

- The world's wild-caught fishing communities are beset by social, economic, and political challenges that affect their ability to participate in and benefit from fisheries' activities.
- Gaps in the delivery of public services, including education, health care, and built infrastructure predispose fishers to economic and social vulnerability. Fisher cooperatives and other civil society organizations can provide some protections to fishers, but these largely depend on the leadership, strength, and size of the cooperative.
- Insufficient government engagement fails to protect fisher and community interests. For many fisheries, government involvement in fisheries management has been counterproductive to supporting fisher livelihoods.
- External threats, such as competing uses for marine resources, organized crime, and climate change, further compound fisher vulnerability.
- Longstanding attitudes towards gender roles have limited the participation of women in fisheries.
- Civil society involvement is helping to address many of the contextual threats facing fishers.

Wild-capture fishing communities face a wide range of social, economic, and political challenges that manifest differently within each fishery.

The world's fishing communities are beset by social, economic, and political challenges that affect their ability to participate in and benefit from the fishery's activities.

Fisher communities are challenged by the lack of adequate infrastructure. Well-organized fisher cooperatives and civil society organizations can help deliver missing public services, though this varies by FIP. For many FIPs, the government's inadequate (and often counterproductive) engagement further heightens their vulnerability.

Other external threats, such as organized crime and climate change, magnify the vulnerabilities of fishers, while pervasive cultural attitudes governing gender roles restrict women's participation in fisheries management.

Civil society organizations are making important strides to address these contextual equity concerns. For example, efforts within some FIPs to elevate the leadership and contributions of women are increasing representation. Conservation actors are working to address the broader, structural concerns facing fisher communities.

Challenge external to fishery		How it manifests within the fishery
Lack of adequate basic infrastructure and provision of public goods, including lack of basic sanitation/food safety infrastructure; roads to increase market distribution; and limited education/literacy	→	Limited fisher (and cooperative) capacity for business development and growth
Inadequate or counterproductive government engagement	→	Fishers' inability to comply with government regulations
Competition over marine resources, climate change, and organized crime	→	Magnified fisher vulnerability; reduced income security and physical safety
Gender norms and cultural attitudes	→	Limited participation of women in fisheries management; gender-based violence

Inadequate infrastructure is a profound challenge for the world's fishers; cooperatives can help, but their effectiveness varies by FIP.

The most profound challenge facing fishing communities is the lack of access to public goods. Several informants, particularly those from Latin American FIPs, highlighted that many fishers lack access to basic infrastructure, such as fresh drinking water, or roads and equipment, which limited post-harvest processing capacity. Lack of educational infrastructure also has consequences. For example, one of the fishery cooperative presidents for a FIP in Latin America did not know how to read or write; such a lack of literacy can put fishers at a disadvantage in price and trade negotiations.

The lack of broader financial infrastructure has also proven to be a significant challenge for fishers. Across geographies, fishers struggle to access capital. Informants agreed that the low levels of savings of fishers and income from fishing, in addition to the lack of access to strong financial safety nets, can limit the possibilities for fishers to invest in more sustainable fishing practices. Often, fishers may find themselves in cycles of debt due to predatory lending practices. The lack of protections, such as fisher insurance, can magnify many of the inequalities already present within the fishing value chain.

Well-organized fisher cooperatives have been critical in filling some of the gaps left by inadequate public service provision. Some fisher cooperatives include a robust package of social protections for members, such as pensions, retirement funds, and income guarantees. However, smaller cooperatives with weaker leadership can often compound the challenges facing fishers; one informant described how one of the cooperative's presidents was stealing from its members.

> *"Smaller co-ops don't have infrastructure, social security, consistent income—they live paycheck to paycheck. It's easier for traditional buyers to just offer them to pay for medical treatment, gasoline for the boat—and then they charge less for the fish."*

A general disconnect between governments and fishers exacerbates the vulnerabilities of fishers and their communities.

While they generally varied in their perceptions of the importance of government involvement, informants universally agreed that government management (or often, a lack thereof) can compound fisher vulnerability. Several representatives from the FIPs expressed frustration at the lack of attention and engagement fishers receive from the government. Examples cited included lack of public funds flowing to FIPs, with NGOs often financing FIPs and their extensive start-up costs; lack of government support for increased surveillance at sea, which would significantly improve fisher working conditions and physical safety; and finally, stalled government support for fisheries improvement due to pressure from industry lobbies.

Even engaged governments can create regulations that may be counterproductive to protecting fishers. For example, in one Latin American country, a law to formalize all fishing vessels requires all vessel owners to provide proof of secondary education, which may be difficult for many fishers to obtain. As one informant noted, the formalization requirements (which were enacted with limited fisher input) levy a series of taxes that could "complicate things for fishers and boat owners." Similarly, an informant from another geography noted that the political environment in which the fishery operates is unpredictable, which can make it difficult to have a long-term, trained workforce—the rules change often and without warning. This was stated as the reason why many fishers operate informally and under short-term contracts.

> *"There's not much support from the government, so fisheries' monitoring and surveillance depend on NGO support to pay for their services. There's no interaction with fishers outside of that."*

> *"The big challenge is an unpredictable regulatory environment. The government has a tendency to push out regulations without warning and without considering the impact on the fishery."*

Threats beyond the control of the FIP—competition over resources, organized crime, and climate change—magnify fisher vulnerability.

Wild-capture fisheries are embedded in complex environmental and socio-economic systems. Multiple contextual factors external to the fishery itself can influence equity in the fishery. Factors range from competing interests over shared marine resources, to organized crime, to climate change.

Amidst a rapidly industrializing marine environment, marine resources are in constant dispute among different users. In some cases, the tourism sector often has more bargaining power to influence decisions on marine resource use than fisheries participants. Similarly, wild-capture fisheries face steep competition from a growing aquaculture industry. One informant noted the shrimp aquaculture industry has been able to raise bigger products and sell them at lower prices than wild-caught shrimp, creating hardship for fishers. In addition, artisanal fishers face competition from industrial fleets. For example, fishers in Peru and Ecuador are losing their catch to large-scale fleets from China that fish outside their exclusive economic zones, "affecting the biomass, lives, and economics of the fishers." In Indonesia, the central government recently changed regulations to allow larger-scale fleets to fish (and compete for resources) in the area historically reserved for medium-sized (FIP participant) vessels.

Several informants noted that the threat of organized crime poses significant risk to fisher safety and livelihoods; this problem appears to be more specific to Latin American FIPs. In Ecuador, fishers are navigating a turbulent political climate amidst a civil war resulting in low government capacity to enforce surveillance at sea. As one informant noted, fishers have faced threats of extortion from criminal groups, including drug traffickers and pirates. An informant broadly representing Latin American FIPs stated that fisher cooperatives are often forced to sell fish to organized crime groups at a reduced rate, cutting into their revenue.

Fisher vulnerability to climate change remains a constant threat. Several informants representing tropical FIPs noted that the increasing severity and frequency of hurricanes damage fishing vessels and decrease the quantities of catch landed every season. Informants noted the importance of alternative livelihoods in the face of intensifying climate change, which will make fishing activities more precarious.

> *"Climate change adaptation is a big challenge. The [fishers'] main activity is fishing, and they do not have capacity to diversify their incomes."*

Gender strongly influences participation in and benefits from the fishery.

Gender roles strongly influence women's ability to participate in and benefit from fishing activities. Informants across FIPs uniformly noted that women rarely participate in fishing activities due to numerous factors, including (but not limited to):

- Pervasive attitudes regarding gender roles and 'machismo' amongst male fishers and vessel owners;
- Lack of necessary infrastructure and provisions (e.g., childcare, private toilets) on and off vessels to support participation and ensure decency and privacy for women while at sea; and
- Onerous physical labor and inadequate equipment that prevent women from performing certain tasks aboard the vessels.

As a result, women who work in fisheries are mostly in post-harvest or administrative roles.

> *"One of the cooperative members came up to me and was really worried. He said, "I only have daughters, what will happen to them when I die?"*

In many cases, the benefits associated with cooperative membership, such as preferential access to catch, pension benefits, and income guarantees, are exclusive to fishers. As a result, many women can only access cooperative benefits through their spouses and other male relatives. One informant recalled when a cooperative member approached them and was worried that his daughters would not have a secure future if he were to pass away, as the benefits from the cooperative can only be accessed through his membership. The overwhelming representation of men in these cooperatives strongly influences fishery decision-making (see page 19 for further detail), limiting women's ability to exercise their voice.

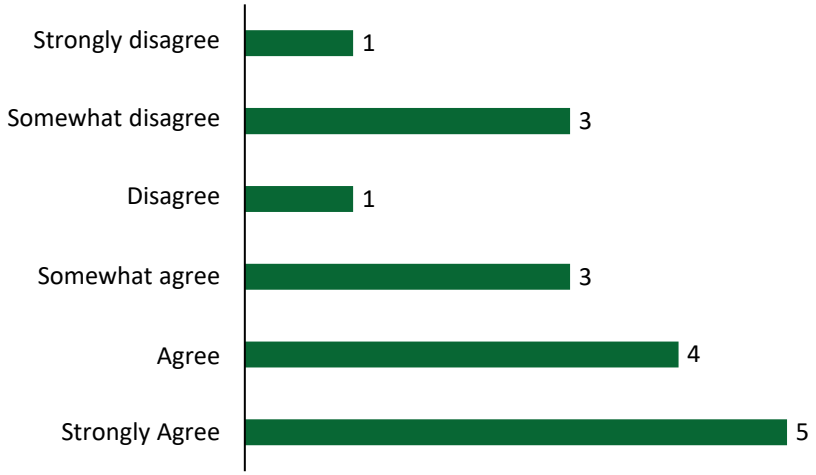
> *"In 95% of the fishery, the members of the fishery are men; there is a lack of a greater presence of women in the activity, which makes their opinion [not represented well in decision-making].*

Via support from NGOs and fisheries management leadership, women are increasingly exercising their voice in FIPs.

While fishing remains a male-dominant activity, women do play a prominent role in the post-harvest stage. Across FIPs, women are critical in driving the economic success of the fishery, as they dominate processing, marketing, and trading in the local market. Furthermore, women participants in the value chain have been eager to learn about how to improve their fishing activities and generate further economic returns. Nevertheless, informants across FIPs noted that more workplans need to include more explicit value generation for participants across the value chain so that women processors, traders, and marketers can see the financial benefits of their participation in a FIP.

Women have been able to participate in fisheries decision-making via other avenues, as some are government officials or may serve in administrative roles within fisher cooperatives. In Ecuador, for example, both the current minister and undersecretary of fisheries are women. Many of the FIPs surveyed include a component to improve the visibility and participation of women across the value chain in FIP decision-making.

Gender influences the way people participate in or benefit from the fishery. (n=17)



> *For women, it is really hard to be part of the fishing organization because everyone wants to be part of the cooperative and they're not as able to join…they're not represented well, but it's getting better.*

Section 3

Procedural and Managerial Equity

The level of inclusiveness and participation in decision-making and the embodiment of good governance principles. The extent of local capacity for, leadership in, and authority over management activities.

Procedural Equity Key takeaways:

- Fishers generally suffer from insufficient representation in fisheries decision-making and management. In theory, fishers can participate in fora concerning the fishery's governance; in practice, material constraints prevent their active involvement. Exceptions exist throughout various fisheries of fishers successfully influencing decision-making.
- Fishery governance and decision-making protocols vary. It is common for actors across diverse sectors (e.g., fishers, government, civil society, industry, academia) to convene discussions, but the government is the final management authority. Albeit limited, there are opportunities for fishers to provide input on decisions concerning the fishery.
- As part of their social workplans, many surveyed FIPs are beginning to institute grievance mechanisms. These protocols take many forms but often include an anonymous hotline for fishers to submit a range of grievances.

Managerial Equity Key takeaways:

- Compared with management of the fishery, fishers can engage more directly in FIP management. Fisher cooperatives often provide essential leadership on the direction of the FIP, usually in collaboration with civil society organizations responsible for coordination. Nevertheless, adequate representation of fisher interests appears to highly depend on the existence and strength of the cooperative.

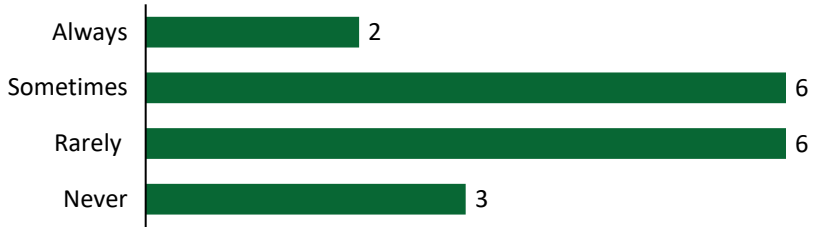
Fishers are generally not well-represented in fishery decision-making or management.

Fishers generally lack sufficient representation in the decision-making for—let alone management of—the fishery. Nominally, fishers can offer their input at government-convened committee hearings that deliberate on key decisions affecting their fishery. In practice, fishers do not attend these meetings, either due to a lack of interest or because of conflicting schedules. An informant even noted that the decision-making meetings for the fishery often occur at the same time that fishers are out at sea for the day. Material constraints, such as lack of access to Internet connection, computers, or email, similarly challenge a fisher's ability to participate in the management and decision-making of a fishery. Women are universally underrepresented in fisheries' decision-making or management. Decision-making at the FIP level also often excludes fisher voice; many fishers are unaware they were in a FIP and did not know about pathways for participation.

> *"Fishers are probably the least represented because they're living in remote villages and may not have phones or email. The fishers are not in the room where the laws are trying to be passed."*

Nevertheless, fishers have aggregated to exercise their voice. For example, in the case of one FIP, a group of fishers rallied against a specific government mandate affecting the fishery as they felt the government had not provided sufficient communication or evidence to justify the decision. Similarly, fishing associations and cooperative leadership have proven instrumental in influencing the decision-making of the fishery. Other dynamics can crowd out fisher voices. One informant noted that one participant in the decision-making forum for the fishery works for a collection company and "derailed some of the plans made" in the stakeholder meeting because they conflicted with his business interests.

How frequently are fishers attending and participating in meetings where decisions are being made for the fishery? (n=17)

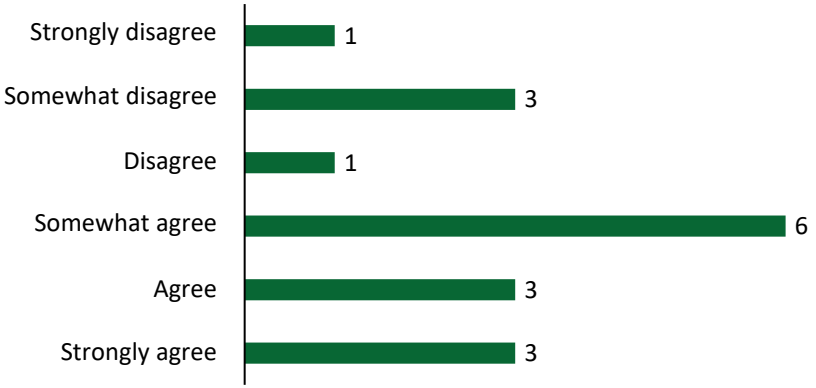


Generally, the local and regional governments make decisions concerning the fishery; fishers are able to provide some input.

Governance and decision-making protocols vary widely by fishery. Most commonly, the provincial or regional management agencies are responsible for enacting rules to govern the fishery. Scientific agencies and research institutions may work with the management authorities to ground regulations in data.

Fishers generally lack management authority but can provide input. In the Southeast Sulawesi region of Indonesia, there are provincial and regional fisheries co-management meetings where fishers and other community representatives are invited to discuss issues with government officials. Similarly, several fisheries convene multi-sector committees to allow government, academia, NGOs, and fishers to engage in dialogue with one another—though the informant for this FIP admitted that the committee "does not meet as frequently as it should." An informant also noted that while fishers attend these fora, their perspectives may not always result in policy change, as "the same leaders that were there 20 years ago are participating, so changes in fisheries management are non-existent."

All participants in the fishery are able to participate equally in the decision-making of the fishery. (n=17)



> *There is a group of fisherfolk who are always present at public consultations, who are sometimes able to gather more fishers to attend. These are the leaders of the fishing communities. Considering the lifestyle of fishers and how public consultations are organized, it is often limiting.*

Fisher cooperatives play varying management and decision-making roles in FIPs.

There are significantly more opportunities for fishers—and particularly, cooperatives—to make decisions and help manage FIPs. For example, one fisher cooperative in Mexico convenes assemblies that allow members to provide feedback on proposed FIP activities. The NGO coordinators for the FIP work with the cooperative to execute the FIP workplan. In another example, NGO coordinators work with multiple fisher cooperatives to deliberate on key decisions and eventually transfer leadership of the FIP to the cooperatives.

While fisher cooperatives provide a critical platform for fishers to exercise their voice, adequate fisher representation can be challenging to achieve. As one informant explained, "there are different fishing associations among the fisheries—there's not a unified voice, which can make it difficult to make decisions for the FIP." Cooperative leaders—many of whom are male and tenured—may fail to represent the interests of their diverse constituencies, which could include women and youth.

Some FIPs follow a more executive management structure. In the case of one FIP in Ecuador, the FIP core team is coordinated by exporters and includes representation from five entities spanning industry, civil society, and fishing. For one FIP in Northwest Africa, decisions regarding the workplan are set and executed by the two leads (both of whom are fisheries stock scientists) who were hired by the primary fishmeal buyer in the area.

As part of their social workplans, FIPs are working to establish grievance mechanisms for workers to register complaints.

As part of their efforts to improve the social equity of fisheries, FIP leads are working to establish and enforce grievance mechanisms for FIP participants to file and resolve their complaints. Most of the FIPs surveyed noted that workers are able to submit their complaints via a hotline number or an online platform. FIPs differ in the levels at which the complains are elevated; in some cases, the FIP coordinators run the hotline platforms, while in others, the national fisheries authority is responsible for processing complaints submitted through the platform.

Informants note that workers generally submit a range of different grievances, ranging from illegal fishing activities to severe violations of human rights. For example, an informant noted that the local community often used the hotline number to inform the coordinators that people were still fishing for octopus during closed periods. Women participants have also been able to take advantage of grievance mechanisms to address issues of gender discrimination in the workplace.

> *[We] set up a number shared out to coastal communities so if there's something happening in the villages, [we have communities use] the number. There's one person responsible for answering the call in the coastal communities and the group identifies which stakeholder (e.g., local authority, NGO) that should be aware of the issue.*

Section 4

Recognitional Equity

The acknowledgment and incorporation of the rights, tenure, cultural identities, practices, values, visions, knowledge systems, and livelihoods of local groups into conservation governance, planning, and management.

Key takeaways:

- While fishers appear to have an awareness of the rules and regulations that govern their fishery, broader awareness of their constitutional rights varies by FIP. Some FIPs have benefitted from civil society organizations conducting trainings with fishers. In other contexts, state-sponsored media campaigns aim to educate fishers on their constitutional rights.
- The broader culture of informality – especially for small-scale fisheries – challenges many fishers to secure formal human rights and labor protections. Many FIPs cited this as a key barrier to the greater awareness (and implementation) of human rights.
- Fishers' traditional knowledge has proven critical to the development of effective fisheries management policies. There remain difficulties in codifying this knowledge into law.

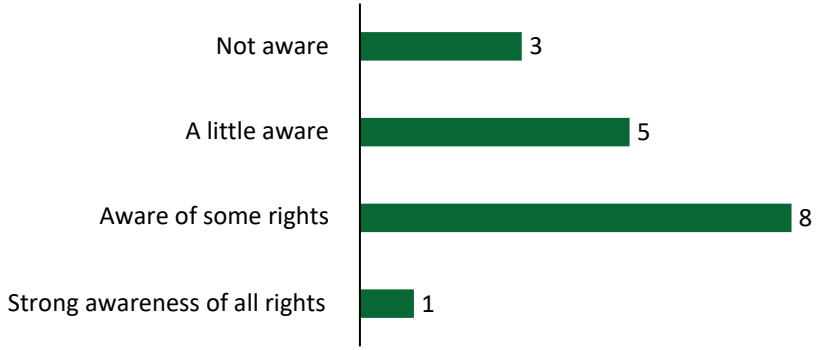
Capacity-building support from NGOs and levels of worker informality strongly influence rights awareness among fishers, which varies across FIPs.

Fishers appear to be aware of the rules and regulations that govern their operations, but awareness of their constitutional rights varies by FIP. Capacity-building efforts by civil society strongly influence rights awareness of fishers. For example, for one FIP in Mexico, the implementing team collaborated with the Mexico National Commission of Human Rights to train the fishers within the region on their human rights. In the Gulf of Thailand, fishers are regularly informed of their rights through newspapers, radio, television, and training courses conducted periodically by state management agencies at least twice a year. Well-organized fisher cooperatives may be critical to broader awareness of the rights and protections available to the fisher; as one informant from Ecuador indicated, fishers in associations tend to be better informed of their rights than independent fishers.

Nevertheless, fishers are challenged to secure basic labor and human rights protections due to the nature of informal work. As one informant noted, while awareness is fairly good among fishers, "[the fishers] know they work in informality and the tradeoffs that come with that….They are aware they can't have labor rights because of the informality of the sector."

Informants surfaced other difficulties to achieving broader rights awareness among fishers. One survey response stated, "[fishers] are fairly aware of their rights, but not so aware of what to do when their rights are undermined or who to go when their rights are violated." In addition, because some FIPs tend to have different fishers every season, NGOs have to re-train new fishers to ensure they have the same knowledge and capacities as the previous season's participants. Each of these challenges poses significant threats to fisherfolk and potentially exposes them to occupational safety risks and unsafe working conditions on the water.

How aware do you think fishers are of their rights, and laws and policies that protect them? (n=17)



Fisher knowledge has been critical in developing evidence-based fisheries management.

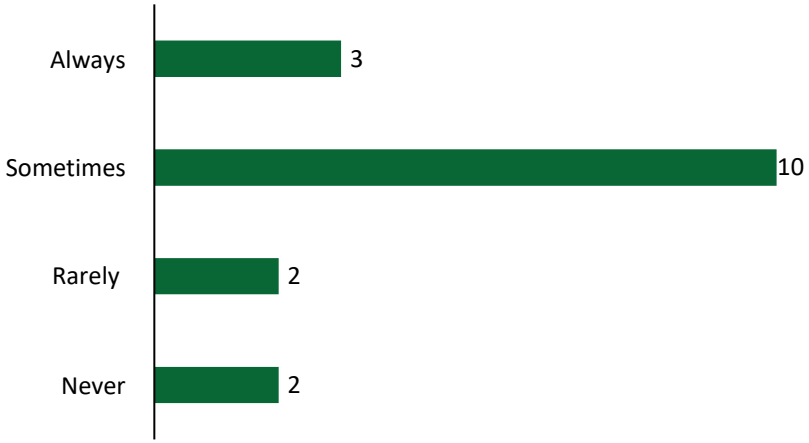
Fisher knowledge has been instrumental to sound, evidence-based fisheries management. Examples of fishers' knowledge used to develop policy include (but are not limited to):

- Spawning and habitat locations;
- Spawning seasons;
- Breeding periods;
- Species sizes; and
- Migratory patterns

For example, traditions governing the times and locations of fishing in the West Saleh Bay in Indonesia have been accommodated by and later included in the Governor's Regulation.

Implementation remains a key challenge in enabling fisher knowledge to be codified in policy. According to an informant from a Latin American FIP, even though fisheries management proposals integrate local knowledge, they have not been published by the fisheries management authority, nor have they been made official. In another example, participatory monitoring frameworks within coastal marine protected areas produce valuable data but the information is rarely considered in national planning efforts.

How often is the knowledge of fishers/fish workers integrated into fishery management? (n=17)



Section 5

Distributional Equity

The level of fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens between different groups, including current and future generations, of the outcomes of conservation actions.

Key takeaways:

- Industry appears to benefit the most from current fisheries improvement efforts, though this generally varies by context. Buyers benefit from sourcing higher quality product, but these same benefits are largely not returned to the fisher. Some fisher groups, particularly older male fishers, experience greater access to benefits than others.
- Overall, fishers and women see the fewest benefits from their participation in FIPs. Some fishers shoulder the financial burdens of environmental sustainability improvements and have seen reduced access to traditional fishing grounds. Because many women occupy post-harvest roles (or have been pushed out of fishing), they fail to enjoy the same access to product as their male fisher counterparts.
- For some FIPs, local demand (and price) is greater than that of exports, so producers prioritize selling to the local market (with additional product exported). In other cases, fishers receive greater financial benefits when they sell to the export market but there was no perceived negative impact on local food security. There were notable exceptions where exporter market demand has been detrimental for local consumption.

Market-based interventions, fisheries policies, and fisher organizational structures add to inequitable distribution of benefits from the fishery.

Informants uniformly agreed that industry experiences the greatest benefits from fishery improvement activities. Several informants suggested that exporters particularly benefit from being able to source higher quality product from A rated FIPs on FisheryProgress and selling these products to markets with greater restrictions, such as the United States and Japan. However, many of these benefits do not pass to the fishing communities where the product is caught. Anecdotally, one global buyer noted an instance where an exporter abused their purchasing power by paying extremely low prices for product they would then sell to global wholesalers and retailers at much higher prices.

> *"The benefit is borne by the purchasing power. The lower the payment to the fishery, the greater the profit they can pocket."*

More senior fishers within organized cooperatives tend to benefit more than other fishers. Tenured cooperative members (who are considered 'cooperative partners') have the greatest access to the best fishing grounds and highest-value species. Another informant from a FIP in Latin America noted that fishers with access to fishing refuge areas generally can manage their resources better and benefit from greater engagement with the government.

Beyond the seafood sector, the tourism industry has been able to benefit from fisheries management policies that favor tourism over fishing access. In one Latin American country, the use of a Territorial Use Rights for Fishing (TURF) program restricts artisanal fishers from accessing select fishing grounds. However, these restrictions do not apply to the region's extensive tourism industry. The informant noted "fishers see spatial harvest control rules as unfair and benefitting the tourism industry more than those of the fishery."

Fishers and women experience the fewest benefits from fisheries.

Ongoing efforts to improve fisheries sustainability have pushed new financial burdens onto fishers. As one informant described, fishers have had to absorb the operational costs (e.g., fishing gear, fishing permits, authorizations, new fuels) from fisheries' sustainability efforts. This is occurring as many fishers continue to face reduced access to fishing grounds, and as a result, product, as noted earlier in this report.

Even within the fishing community, some members experience the burdens far more than others. Artisanal fishers that remain independent from larger fisher cooperatives have not been able to realize the same benefits (e.g., pension funds, income guarantees) as their counterparts. Similarly, aboard vessels, some crewmembers experience greater privileges than others; an informant from an Indonesia FIP noted that while boat captains can access insurance, other crewmembers cannot. Finally, as noted, seniority in some cooperatives brings the opportunity to become a partner and have greater access to catch, disadvantaging younger fishers and women, who cannot become members.

In general, women largely cannot access many of the same benefits that their male counterparts enjoy, particularly where product access is concerned. According to an informant representing Latin American FIPs, "women almost never have access to the species the cooperative catches…they cannot benefit directly from the income received from the sale of the fish."

Informants offered anecdotes of other FIP actors generally shouldering the greatest burdens, including:

- NGOs and other civil society organizations that help coordinate the FIP. Many absorb the costs of the FIP infrastructure, training, implementing, and convenings.
- Where available, government entities that are responsible for establishing and staffing surveillance measures on the water.

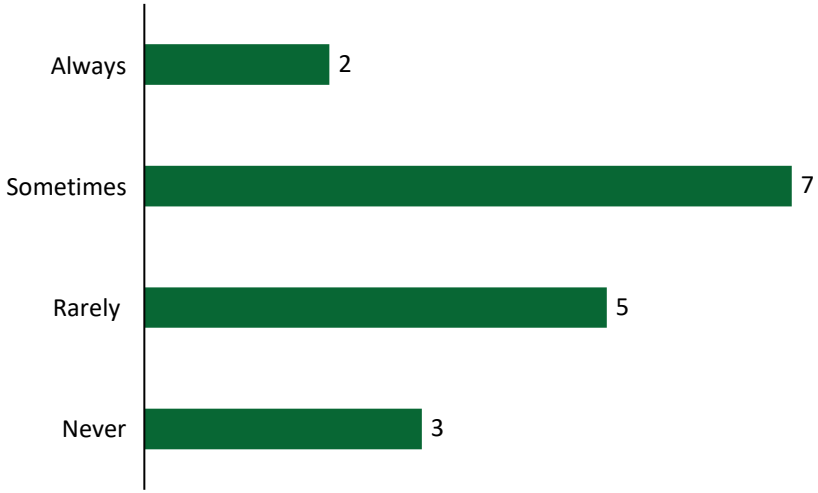
> *"The benefits are not returned to local fishers. They do not feel they get benefits from the implementation of the FIP. What makes them proud are setting up measures to conserve their areas."*

Fishers are incentivized to sell their catch to the export market, with variable effects on local access to the fishery's product.

The ability of local communities to access catch varies by FIP. For a few FIPs, local demand outstrips export demand; vessels will often prefer selling to higher-paying local buyers than to exporters, keeping product within the community. For the majority of FIPs surveyed, fishers are incentivized to sell higher-quality catch to the export market, as it often fetches a higher price compared to the local market. However, interviewees noted community access remains unaffected. In some cases, this is because local demand is for other species; for example, when the community lives in an urban center, there is greater access to other seafood products.

There are a few exceptions where there is limited community access to the product. In Madagascar, women octopus gleaners have been displaced by young men and struggle to access the product. In Belize, over 95% of the harvest is exported, while the remaining catch is sold to the tourism industry; lobster is seen as a luxury and is too expensive for Belizeans. Elsewhere, an informant from Latin America noted that if buyer demand for less lucrative species increases, the cooperatives may increase the prices of those species, which could reduce the number of fish that the community can access.

Buyer demand for the fishery product affects access to seafood for the local fishing community. (n=17)



> *Fishers do keep catch for their families, but it's not what it used to be. It's those people outside of fishing who tend to struggle to get the fish.*

Section 6

Buyer Recommendations

Key takeaways:

- For many informants, industry engagement in and support for fishery improvement efforts could help transform fisher livelihoods. This engagement can take many forms.
- Overwhelming consensus from the research suggests that fair and transparent buying practices (among trading partners) are considered two of the most important changes to implement. Informants encouraged buyers to pay more to ensure an equitable distribution of benefits along the seafood value chain and stable livelihoods for first mile participants. Other suggestions, such as transparent practices and mutual agreement policies, can help strengthen fisher bargaining power during price negotiations.
- Buyer commitments to source from FIPs can be a powerful engine for market demand. Informants agree that it is critical for industry to align their purchasing practices with these market commitments to ensure that fishers (and other FIP participants) are seeing the value of their effort, and to drive continuous improvement.
- By serving as a trusted, engaged partner in fishery improvement efforts, industry can help address many of the contextual threats facing fishers. There is enthusiasm for industry to apply greater pressure to motivate productive government engagement.
- Finally, interviewees voiced an urgent need to invest in the business and management potential of fisher leadership, and the individuals they represent, to drive social improvements and improve producers' capacity to engage with market actors.

There are wide-ranging opportunities for industry to improve fairness in the seafood value chain.

The fisheries field appears to view industry engagement as instrumental to addressing many of the equity issues fishers are facing. This engagement varies – from revising pricing practices, to directly supporting efforts to enhance the capacity of fisher communities. The solution set below is a collection of recommendations from the informants surveyed in this study that can help address one or multiple dimensions of equity.

Recommendation	Contextual	Procedural	Managerial	Recognitional	Distributional
Implement fair pricing practices (including paying more for legally compliant, sustainable, and high-quality product) to ensure an equitable distribution of value across the supply chain.	✓				✓
Adopt an 'open book' policy on pricing so that there is transparency in the price setting process between trading partners.	✓	✓			✓
Institute mutual agreement policies that enable fishers to negotiate the prices of their product.	✓	✓			✓
Support research to determine the degree of fair pricing within seafood supply chains and build the evidence base for improvements.					✓
Advocate for fishery improvement projects to support market access.					✓
Uphold the integrity of buyers by aligning supplier policies with sustainability commitments.					✓
Adhere to the highest bar for social and environmental best practices and reinforce through sourcing from best practice partners.	✓				✓
In partnership with fishers, civil society, and government, engage in FIP management.		✓			
Apply pressure on governments to institute surveillance and monitoring on boats and on the water to ensure safety.	✓				
Require government reporting on fishery status and reporting of data from processors.			✓		
Create pathways for information sharing and learning.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support progress over perfection in the hardest fisheries.	✓				
Strengthen capacity for social improvements, including gender equity.	✓				
Build business acumen through trusted partnerships and investment in fisher and cooperative leadership and training.	✓				

To address distributional equity concerns, there is overwhelming consensus from the field that buyers should engage in fair and transparent pricing practices.

Informants unanimously agreed that buyers should pay more to ensure an equitable distribution of benefits along the seafood value chain. NGO informants suggested that market demands for environmentally sustainable, higher quality product should be reflected in the prices buyers are willing to pay fishers. Otherwise, fishers end up shouldering the financial burden of environmental improvements (e.g., absorbing the costs of modernized equipment, sustainable fuels, fishing licenses) without seeing the financial returns on their efforts to improve the health of the fishery. **One informant suggested that buyers should support analyses in the areas where they are working to understand the gap between what they pay for premium product and what is considered a "living wage" in that market.**

> *"There's a commercialization chain that starts at the production side and ends with the consumer. That value goes all over the economic value chain. It's ideal to have an equitable value distribution so that the fishers feel their effort to conserve and abide by the law is being recognized."*

Transparent pricing negotiations similarly received strong support. Informants emphasized the importance of strong communication pathways between buyers and fishers so that the latter group has a clear line of sight into how prices are set. For example, one intermediary purchases from several FIPs across Mexico; they have established an 'open book' policy whereby fishers are able to see how their prices compare with other groups. One informant even suggested that retailers and buyers should publish their purchase prices from local processors, including details on the location, quantity, price per pound, and final distribution site of the product.

Furthermore, informants noted that mutual agreement policies could help strengthen the bargaining power of fishers entering pricing negotiations with buyers.

> *"The first thing you have to do is pay more and give fishers the liberty to decide."*

Without strong buyer commitments, the benefits of a FIP are not distributed equitably to fishers.

Given that FIPs require additional work, fishers within FIPs are at a disadvantage compared with those outside; stronger advocacy and integrity of commitments from buyers to source from FIPs could help generate more support and ensure fishers participating in FIPs receive the market access benefits as a return on their own investment in sustainability.

Buyer commitments (and follow through) to source from FIPs can be a powerful engine for market demand. NGO informants noted that FIPs are struggling to compete in the market against their non-FIP counterparts—in the words of one informant, "these small-scale projects are barely noticed by retailers." This can create a perverse set of incentives against investing in sustainability improvements. As an informant noted, buyers continuing to source product from fisheries that are not undergoing sustainability improvements disincentivizes engaging in the FIP model.

Informants broadly agreed that supplier policies that give preferential market access to FIPs can help drive further sustainability progress on the water. One informant suggested that buyers should help FIPs establish connections with industry to widen their clientele.

> *Be vocal about the benefits of these projects and the communities behind the fishing process. Acknowledge the hard work that goes into this work—it's hard labor. This labor is not recognized.*

Industry engagement is critical to addressing structural issues facing fishers, such as lack of funding and organized crime.

Informants expressed a strong desire for greater industry investment, to counter the lack of funding for FIP activities. Scant investment in fisheries improvement efforts forces NGOs to dedicate their own funding to sustaining the work. One FIP lead noted that while price premiums are critical to incentivize improvements, they are not enough to pay for the activities associated with the FIP, including staffing, equipment, and infrastructure costs. Industry can provide stable, long-term, and patient support, especially for those fisheries that require significant work to achieve improvements. One informant noted that industry needs to support "progress over perfection" and provide the resources and time needed for transformation to occur.

> *Businesses need to stick with it! The game is to take fisheries that are disasters and try to make them okay…. If you can take management from disastrous to adequate, that's much more important than taking management from adequate to perfect.*

When asked for areas where industry engagement can be most productive, informants expressed enthusiasm for market actors to apply greater pressure on governments to install better surveillance and control measures. As one informant noted, industry can play a powerful role in pressuring governments to mandate surveillance on the coast to protect fishers from organized crime. Others suggested industry could also support improved reporting measures by government that would provide updates on stock health and better traceability data to ensure product origin information is accurate.

Industry can also play a powerful role in helping to organize actors and coordinate fisheries improvement efforts. For example, the Thai Frozen Foods Association's involvement in FIPs has helped finance improvement and capacity-building efforts to promote best practices and adherence to environmental and social standards among its 12 industry partners.

Industry can bolster the capacity of fishers to address broader social and economic challenges.

Informants noted that industry has a unique opportunity to help bolster the business and management capacity of fisher leaders and fisher organizations—work that is integral to FIPs but often outside the traditional workplan.

In the role of a trusted, long-term partner that mutually benefits from a healthier, more valuable fishery, industry can support efforts to improve food safety, quality, and value-add opportunities for fishers. For one fishery in Mexico, industry has been a trusted partner in FIP activities, including providing the funds necessary to build a processing plant onsite for workers to dry, seal, and vacuum-pack the product.

Industry can also invest in honest intermediaries, helping to bring in trusted business partners who will support cooperatives and fishers.

Industry can also invest in efforts to enhance the business and management capacities of fishers and fisher cooperatives. Informants found that industry is best suited to fund a wide range of trainings to help build fisher capacities on subjects including food safety, sanitation, ecosystem restoration, and financial management. Across fisheries, informants are enthusiastic to receive industry support to help train local communities on post-harvest work (e.g., processing) as doing so can help generate employment opportunities for women.

Knowledge sharing and management training was also noted as a key area of opportunity where industry could help bolster the business acumen of fisher leaders, increasing fishers' profitability and improve positioning in the supply chain.

> *Give them tools so they can be more empowered. Give them greater capacity to manage their resources and possibilities.*