



Cooperative Governance and Sustainable Livelihoods

A Comparative Analysis of Artisanal Fishing in Elmina, Ghana

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Published: 06 April 2024 **Received:** 20 January 2024

Accepted: 10 March 2024 **DOI:**
[10.5281/zenodo.18943959](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18943959)

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ABSTRACT

Artisanal fishing is a critical livelihood for coastal communities in West Africa, yet it faces pressures from overexploitation and marginalisation in formal markets. Cooperative models are increasingly promoted as a governance mechanism to enhance sustainability and economic resilience. This study compares the governance structures and outcomes of two distinct artisanal fishing cooperatives in Elmina to assess their relative impact on sustainable catch levels and market access for members. A comparative case study design was employed, utilising mixed methods. Data were collected via structured surveys with cooperative members and non-members, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and analysis of cooperative catch records and market transaction logs. Members of the more vertically integrated cooperative reported a 40% higher median income and demonstrated greater adherence to seasonal fishing bans. However, both cooperatives struggled with equitable benefit distribution, a theme that emerged strongly in qualitative data. While cooperatives can significantly improve market access and incentivise sustainable practices, their internal governance is pivotal in determining whether livelihood gains are sustainable and inclusive. Policy interventions should support cooperative capacity building in financial management and transparent governance. Development programmes must integrate mechanisms for intra-community equity alongside sustainability metrics. Artisanal fisheries, Cooperatives, Governance, Sustainable livelihoods, Market access, Ghana This paper provides novel empirical evidence on the specific governance mechanisms within fishing cooperatives that correlate with improved sustainability and economic outcomes, moving beyond generic promotion of the cooperative model.

Keywords: *artisanal fisheries, cooperative governance, sustainable livelihoods, West Africa, comparative analysis, market access*

Article Highlights

- Vertically integrated cooperative members reported a 40% higher median income.
- Stronger cooperative governance correlated with greater adherence to seasonal fishing bans.
- Both studied cooperatives struggled with equitable benefit

Policy Imperative

Development programmes should integrate mechanisms for intra-community equity alongside sustainability metrics.

This analysis moves beyond generic promotion of the cooperative model to examine specific governance mechanisms.

<p>distribution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy must support capacity building in financial management and transparent governance.	
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ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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