

A COLLECTIVE ACTION ASSESSMENT

GROUP-BASED AQUACULTURE SYSTEMS IN GHANA: A COLLECTIVE ACTION ASSESSMENT



Sarah Appiah, Giulia Zane and Marie-Charlotte Buisson
International Water Management Institute

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Why collective action matters

THE CHALLENGE

Ghana faces a persistent fish supply-demand gap. Aquaculture is increasingly positioned as a pathway to food security, livelihoods and youth employment. However, smallholders, youth and women face high entry costs, limited finance, weak technical capacity and uneven access to inputs and extension.

POLICY RESPONSE

Since 2018, the Government's Aquaculture for Food and Jobs (AFJ) and partner programmes have supported group ventures to expand fish production and livelihood opportunities, especially for youth and women.

WHY GROUPS

Group approaches aim to pool resources, share risks and improve access to services and markets (Kassam et al., 2011; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2004).

EVIDENCE GAP

Little is known about the experiences of these ventures and how sustainable they can be.

Study objective & scope

RESEARCH QUESTION

Group formation is not the same as collective action. What makes group-based aquaculture work and what sustains it?

14 COMMUNITIES

4 REGIONS

QUALITATIVE DESIGN

Ostrom's 1990 Design Principles • Focus Group Discussions • Key Informant Interviews

PROJECTS / REGIONS

AFJ—Ashanti • GIZ—GoG—Western • IWMI-FC—CSIR—North-East • RESULT—Upper East

Ostrom's principles translated into four themes

CLEARLY DEFINED OWNERSHIP

Defined boundaries, local ownership and collective decision-making.

EFFECTIVE INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

Monitoring, appropriate sanctions and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

PREVENTION OF FREE-RIDING

A proportional balance between benefits and costs.

EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Nested institutional arrangements within polycentric governance.

Principles: boundaries; benefit-cost equivalence; collective choice; local ownership; monitoring; graduated sanctions; conflict resolution; recognition of rights to organize; and nested institutions.

What the study found

OWNERSHIP GAP

Formal structures existed, but a true ownership mentality was often weak.



UNEVEN GOVERNANCE

Monitoring, sanctions and conflict resolution were inconsistently applied across groups.

FREE-RIDING PRESSURES

Labour imbalances, large groups and language barriers weakened participation.

SUPPORT GAPS

Weak coordination and extension delayed identification of operational problems in some cases.

EXTERNAL VULNERABILITY

High feed costs, limited access to quality fingerlings, weak markets, theft and climate shocks constrained performance. Consistent with (Agrawal, 2001; Markelova et al., 2009) that wider market and external-shocks also shape performance.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Build functioning groups, not just group structure

Strengthen member ownership, accountability and participatory decision-making.

Invest in inclusive enterprise capacity

Extend training beyond production to business management, financial literacy and conflict management in preferred languages.

Sustain support beyond start-up

Provide continuous coaching, extension and problem-solving support across the production cycle.

Connect groups to markets

Promote aggregation, processing, collective marketing and private-sector partnerships to strengthen market access and returns.

Reduce enterprise vulnerability

Develop appropriate finance and risk-management mechanisms, alongside locally viable solutions to high feed costs and access to quality fingerlings

KEY POLICY MESSAGE

Sustainable group-based aquaculture requires functioning collective institutions, market integration and sustained support. Collective action should be treated as an institutional capability to be built, not an automatic outcome of group formation.

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