Throughout the Caribbean, more than 182,000 people are directly and indirectly employed in the fisheries sector. Small-scale fisheries are vital to local economies, and ensure food security and good nutrition. Today, fishers are facing various challenges: marginalisation, diminishing access to fish, ocean grabbing by powerful interests and climate change. Furthermore, they are often excluded from active participation in the management of the very marine resources their livelihoods depend on.

To address these issues, the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) was founded in 2007. It aims to improve fishers’ quality of life and develop a sustainable and profitable fishing industry through networking, representation and capacity building. The CNFO developed an integrated fisheries governance approach that involves small-scale fishers in the region, promotes their participation in fisheries management processes and allows for the inclusion of fishers’ knowledge, experience and interest into fisheries policy and law. The CNFO is now active in fisheries governance at local, regional and global levels.

Fishers can enforce, and for themselves achieve, a higher level of compliance than by any other means,” says Mitchell Lay, artisanal fisherman and coordinator of the CNFO. “We are not lawless nor without ethics. In order to fish sustainably, we need to know what we are doing. The scientists are trained to collect data and to do assessments and to make recommendations based on trends, etc. They have a particular area, yes, but we are the people who are in a position, who can not only provide information but assist as well in terms of making recommendations based on good sets of information. The fisher is the one in the field. It is impossible or impractical for scientists to cover the area that fishers cover every day. Fishers, even though they may not have the same academic levels, can be just as intelligent as scientists. Once equitable collaboration between researchers and fisherfolk occurs, relevant information can be generated, such as the extent of the resource base, its diversity and how fisherfolk can best access this diversity to benefit their economic welfare in the long-term.”

Strategic partnerships for fisherfolk
National fisherfolk organisations are strengthened through strategic partnerships with fisheries management bodies, NGOs and academia. They facilitate training, advocacy and representation in regional fisheries governance and the sharing of best practices.

Compliance with policy frameworks
Although national policy and legislation often provide for the participation of fishers in fisheries management, the reality is different. Therefore, strong fisherfolk organisations can promote compliance with existing policies and strengthen the involvement of fishers and their organisations in fisheries governance.

Establishment of fisherfolk organisations
National fisherfolk organisations are established through collaborative effort. The organisations ensure the participation of small-scale fishers in fishery governance and management on all political levels.

Use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
The use of (open-source) ICT facilitates communication in geographically dispersed regions and at all activity levels. It enables the collective planning that is crucial in an international context.

Promotion of active participation
Training activities in leadership, business, communications, advocacy and representation contribute to strong fisherfolk organisations and their appropriate participation in fisheries governance.

Solution: Strengthening Caribbean fisherfolk

- Fishers collaborating on suitable gear and fishing techniques
- Fishers enforcing compliance
- Fishers promoting sustainable fishing

This solution is being implemented by the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO).