



FAMENET

CLLD in fisheries and coastal communities Achievements and Lessons

Final Synthesis Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

May 2025

FAMENET executive summary

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Executive summary

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) is a bottom-up, participative approach to fostering sustainable development through projects selected at local level to address local needs. CLLD was funded under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF, 2014-2020) for the second programming period in “fisheries and aquaculture areas”¹. Approximately 10% of the EMFF budget was allocated to CLLD - and managed by 348 Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs). These FLAGs had an average budget of EUR 2.2 million each and, together, supported 14 300 local projects in 19 Member States (MS).

As implementation of the EMFAF (European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, 2021-2027) was getting underway, FAMENET collected and analysed information to understand the tangible results that CLLD had achieved, and what the participative process of bottom-up local development can bring to local communities and the EU.

This report, published in May 2025, brings together information and analysis based on data reported by EMFF Managing Authorities in Infosys²; information provided by around 150 FLAGs in response to tailor-made surveys; and survey responses from more than 900 local stakeholders from fisheries and aquaculture communities.

The main results of this study are summarized below.

➤ **CLLD is effective at mobilising stakeholders to drive local development**

On average, FLAGs have each associated around 112 people from 7-11 different interest groups to develop a local development strategy for their area; and approximately 17 people from 6 different interest groups are involved in decision-making. This has **engaged local communities in driving change and deciding which local projects should receive EU³ funding**. The fishing sector and local municipalities are especially present on the FLAG decision-making bodies, as are the tourism and aquaculture sectors. Other private sector stakeholders, along with NGOs, environmental organisations and research bodies are also common among the FLAG members. However, **women and youth emerge as groups to engage better with in the future**. 88% of local stakeholders surveyed agreed that the FLAG strategy focused on their area’s most important needs.

➤ **CLLD empowers people to undertake initiatives considered beneficial for their community**

The presence of a team on the ground with a specific outreach and support function has enabled local stakeholders to access EU funding for the first time and to implement projects they would not have undertaken without FLAG support. **FLAGs have helped develop local knowledge, build stronger networks and increase trust between stakeholders**, enabling fisheries and aquaculture communities to better manage their local resources and capitalise on their potential. 94% of local stakeholders surveyed indicated that they had acquired new knowledge and/or skills thanks to the FLAG, while **84% indicated that the FLAG had enabled them to improve or influence life in their community**. The CLLD process, including the cross-sectoral collaboration it has fostered, has resulted in a strong perception among stakeholders that **local governance has improved**, including more participative decision-

¹ Areas with a significant presence of fisheries and/or aquaculture activities, as designated by each MS

² Reporting obligation according to EMFF Art. 97.1.

³ The EMFF and EMFAF budget that FLAGs manage is co-financed by the Member States

making related to local resources and better coordination between different organisations and their activities.

➤ **CLLD contributes to improved socio-economic and environmental dynamics in fisheries and aquaculture communities**

New partnerships, cross-sectoral collaboration and funding to develop and trial new ideas has led to **numerous innovations** of direct relevance to fisheries and aquaculture communities. CLLD has also helped boost the economy in local communities. On average, around **60 jobs have been created or maintained in each local area**, thanks to EMFF CLLD, along with the creation of some **new local businesses** and support to existing ones to **diversify their incomes streams** and/or increase resource efficiency. Stakeholders have also been mobilised to address the environmental challenges faced in coastal communities, ranging from water pollution to biodiversity loss. An average of six different actions were funded in each area, helping to raise awareness, change mentalities and introduce **concrete measures to protect and restore the natural resources** on which so many livelihoods depend.

CLLD funded under the EMFF (and now the EMFAF) has put the **fisheries and aquaculture sectors at the heart of local development** for more resilient local communities where the importance of the primary sector is given visibility and **local supply chains are strengthened**. Cross-sectoral **collaboration**, increased trust and an agenda to drive change for a sustainable blue economy is helping to foster a **more healthy and forward-looking dynamic** in many coastal communities.

➤ **CLLD brings citizens closer to Europe**

CLLD has demonstrated the relevance of the EU in fisheries and aquaculture areas, by mobilising local stakeholders around EU objectives for a sustainable blue economy. FLAGs have raised awareness and the uptake of EU funding opportunities, with an estimated **48% of CLLD projects funded under the EMFF being implemented by beneficiaries receiving EU funding for the first time**. Direct involvement in the development of their area, access to funding - and the many concrete benefits that local communities are deriving from CLLD-funded projects - are bringing Europe closer to its citizens. This is evident in the positive shift of opinion in fisheries and aquaculture communities, where 60% of local stakeholders surveyed reported an **improved opinion of the EU since knowing their FLAG**.

➤ **Recommendations for increased impact in the future**

EUR 643 million was effectively delivered to local stakeholders to implement projects on the ground. However, procedures for doing so should be more efficient. Only 30% of FLAG managers found that national or regional delivery systems facilitated their work and, while local stakeholders were less critical, only 64% were satisfied with the speed of receiving their grant. **Quicker and simpler procedures, and fewer administrative requirements**, would allow FLAGs to engage new stakeholder groups and project promoters, including more young people (only 10% of projects were implemented by under 40s), thereby capitalising on a broader base of talent and ideas.

At the same time, **FLAGs must be sufficiently resourced**. While CLLD has demonstrated that it can be extremely powerful for bringing change and direct benefits to local communities, it is only as effective as the financial and human resources dedicated to it. Big variations in FLAG budgets, staff numbers and community involvement ultimately translate into varying degrees of success and impact in fisheries and aquaculture communities.

Report conclusions

Summary of findings and conclusions

This synthesis report demonstrates the effectiveness of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in engaging local stakeholders in development processes, thanks to the presence of local partnerships – Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) – and their **specific outreach function and budget to fund action on the ground**.

With relatively small amounts of funding, **CLLD has made a big difference** in coastal communities, according to 78% of local stakeholders surveyed. The setting up of FLAGs has played an important role in bringing together people from different interest groups to develop a strategy to address their area's needs and challenges. The participative nature of strategy development and of decision-making regarding which local priorities should receive funding makes **CLLD a valuable tool for ensuring EU money goes to real needs**. It is also helping to demonstrate the relevance of the EU in fisheries and aquaculture areas by supporting local people around Europe to take action that brings tangible benefits to coastal communities.

This report highlights how FLAGs have invested in developing local knowledge and capacity, through direct support, studies, training and exchange among stakeholder groups. **Better knowledge, stronger networks and increased trust between local stakeholders** is enabling fisheries and aquaculture communities to better manage their local resources and capitalise on their potential. New partnerships and cross-sectoral collaboration have led to innovations to make fisheries and aquaculture more environmentally sustainable, more profitable and more forward-looking.

While EMFF CLLD in some MS focused primarily on supporting activity related to fisheries and/or aquaculture, other MS have used CLLD as a tool to diversify coastal communities and foster new blue economy sectors. In all cases, the **fisheries/aquaculture sector has been engaged as a central player in development processes**, ensuring their integration with other blue economy sectors and better visibility for the important role that they play as a source of employment and food products.

While CLLD involves relatively small sums of money, it has demonstrated a broad range of results that are helping to foster dynamic and resilient communities in coastal and fisheries areas. Strong variations between FLAGs are apparent, but **on average 60 jobs have been created or maintained in each local community covered by EMFF CLLD**. An average of four new businesses were also created in each area, 12 existing businesses were supported to diversify their activities and revenue sources, and others were supported to become more resource efficient.

Many FLAGs have **helped introduce a change in mindset** among certain local businesses and other organisations. Actions to minimise the impact of economic activities on marine and aquaculture ecosystems are widespread among FLAGs, and actions to reduce waste and make local economies more circular are starting to take off. FLAGs have also funded the development and piloting of renewables (wind, solar and tidal energy) for boats, machinery and equipment in fisheries communities in line with Europe's drive for a carbon neutral economy.

Between them, the 348 FLAGs funded under the EMFF supported around 14 300 local projects, equivalent to an average of 43 projects in each community. This is helping create a constructive dynamic among stakeholders in coastal communities, build ownership at local level for key EU policies, and open up **access to EU funding for thousands of project promoters for the first time**

Lessons and recommendations for successful CLLD in fisheries and coastal areas

CLLD has demonstrated that it can be extremely powerful for bringing change and direct benefits to local communities. However, it is only as effective as the financial and human resources dedicated to it. This report also reveals that results differ heavily from one MS to another – as well as from one FLAG to another. Below, we present some brief lessons and recommendations for ensuring that CLLD brings maximum impact to fisheries and coastal communities:

- ✓ CLLD is a flexible tool that allows local communities to tailor EU support to their specific needs, thanks to a decision-making body made up of community members from different interest groups.
- ✓ While setting up local groups implies certain costs, much of the added value of CLLD stems precisely from having this team on the ground providing outreach and support to the community. Indeed, FLAGS have proven effective at generating projects that would not have happened without their animation activities and without CLLD funding.
- ✓ FLAGS need sufficient budget and staff resources to be effective in mobilising community members and to fund a critical mass of different projects to address each area's needs.
- ✓ Most FLAGS have associated a broad range of individuals and interest groups, however, a minority had only 3-4 interest groups on their decision-making body, missing an opportunity to mobilise talent and contacts from other sections of the local community. In particular, some FLAGS could improve female representation and many of them could benefit from better engaging the young.
- ✓ Simpler and quicker procedures to apply for and receive funding could significantly enhance the reach and impact of CLLD by reducing time spent on administration and attracting more potential project promoters, including of different profiles.
- ✓ Delegating additional responsibilities to the FLAGS, such as the formal project approval and payment of local projects (e.g. in Greece) is one solution for speeding up approval and payment processes.
- ✓ Simplified cost options for small-scale projects and broader accessibility of advance payments could also offer potential to make grant delivery more efficient and accessible to a broader range of local stakeholders.
- ✓ Simplifying and streamlining the procedures to approve new FLAGS between programming periods would also help maintain the positive dynamic created among stakeholders in coastal communities and trust in the EU institutions.
- ✓ Maintaining funding in the future for bottom-up initiatives such as CLLD (and increasing it in certain areas) could strengthen the visibility and democratic legitimacy of the EU and increase the impact of EU policy on people's lives.

Read the full report here:

[CLLD in fisheries and coastal communities - achievements and lessons - European Commission](#)