



Economic Policy and Institutional Arrangements in Local Fisheries: Insights from a Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Fisheries play a vital role in sustaining food security, livelihoods, and regional economies; however, institutional weaknesses and governance challenges often hinder their sustainability. This study presents a systematic literature review (SLR) of 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025, focusing on institutional frameworks and economic policy dimensions in fisheries management. The review applied PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency in the identification, screening, and selection of relevant sources. Findings indicate that most studies emphasize governance reforms, participatory approaches, and co-management as key drivers of effective institutional performance. Economic instruments, including subsidies, market-based incentives, and value-chain development, were frequently discussed as mechanisms to improve sustainability and equity in fisheries. Despite these advances, significant gaps remain in the integration of local knowledge, adaptive governance models, and cross-sectoral policies. The review highlights the need for stronger institutional collaboration, region-specific economic strategies, and inclusive policy design to enhance fisheries resilience. By synthesizing recent evidence, this paper provides a foundation for policymakers and stakeholders to align institutional arrangements with sustainable fisheries development.

INTRODUCTION

Fisheries represent one of the most significant natural resource sectors, providing food, livelihoods, and economic benefits to millions of people worldwide. Beyond their nutritional contributions, fisheries are closely tied to local and regional economies, cultural practices, and community resilience. However, the sustainability of fisheries is increasingly threatened by overexploitation, habitat degradation, climate change, and weak governance structures. In many regions, the institutional arrangements and economic policies governing fisheries have struggled to adapt to these complex challenges.

Institutional frameworks play a critical role in shaping the management and utilization of fishery resources. Effective institutions establish rules, ensure compliance, and promote equitable access, while weak or fragmented governance often results in resource depletion, conflict, and socioeconomic inequality. Similarly, economic policies, including subsidies, trade regulations, and market-based instruments, significantly influence the incentives and behavior of fisheries stakeholders. Aligning institutional and economic dimensions is therefore essential to achieving sustainable fisheries outcomes.

Recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the importance of participatory governance, co-management approaches, and adaptive institutional models in enhancing fisheries sustainability. For instance, published research emphasizes that collaborative governance can improve fisheries management effectiveness through active community participation, aligning with the notion that stakeholder engagement is critical for resilience in the sector (**Handayani, 2025**). Furthermore, published paper stress that strengthening co-management platforms enhances participatory governance, facilitating more effective resource management in small-scale fisheries, particularly in Sri Lanka (**Ranatunga *et al.*, 2024**).

At the same time, economic analyses have emphasized the potential of value-chain development, market incentives, and financial mechanisms to support long-term resilience. The significance of co-management as an alternative governance approach that strives to strengthen stakeholder participation, indicating the necessity of effective economic policies to address existing vulnerabilities in fisheries (**Kapembwa *et al.*, 2020, 2021**). Fishery insurance policies serve as an effective mechanism for enhancing economic resilience among stakeholders (**Wei *et al.*, 2021**).

Despite this progress, policy gaps persist, particularly in integrating local knowledge, addressing regional disparities, and coordinating cross-sectoral strategies. Studies like that indicate that local knowledge remains undervalued in many fisheries management frameworks, underscoring the need for its incorporation into policy settings to enhance effectiveness (**Dutta *et al.*, 2025**). Additionally, the importance of addressing barriers in governance, particularly regarding abandoned and lost fishing gear, highlights the necessity for stakeholder mobilization for effective governance (**Lovell & Pastra, 2024**).

Given these challenges and opportunities, a systematic literature review (SLR) is needed to synthesize existing evidence, evaluate institutional and economic dimensions, and identify pathways for more sustainable fisheries management. This study aims to review peer-reviewed research published between 2010 and 2025, focusing on how institutional frameworks and economic policies interact to shape fisheries governance.

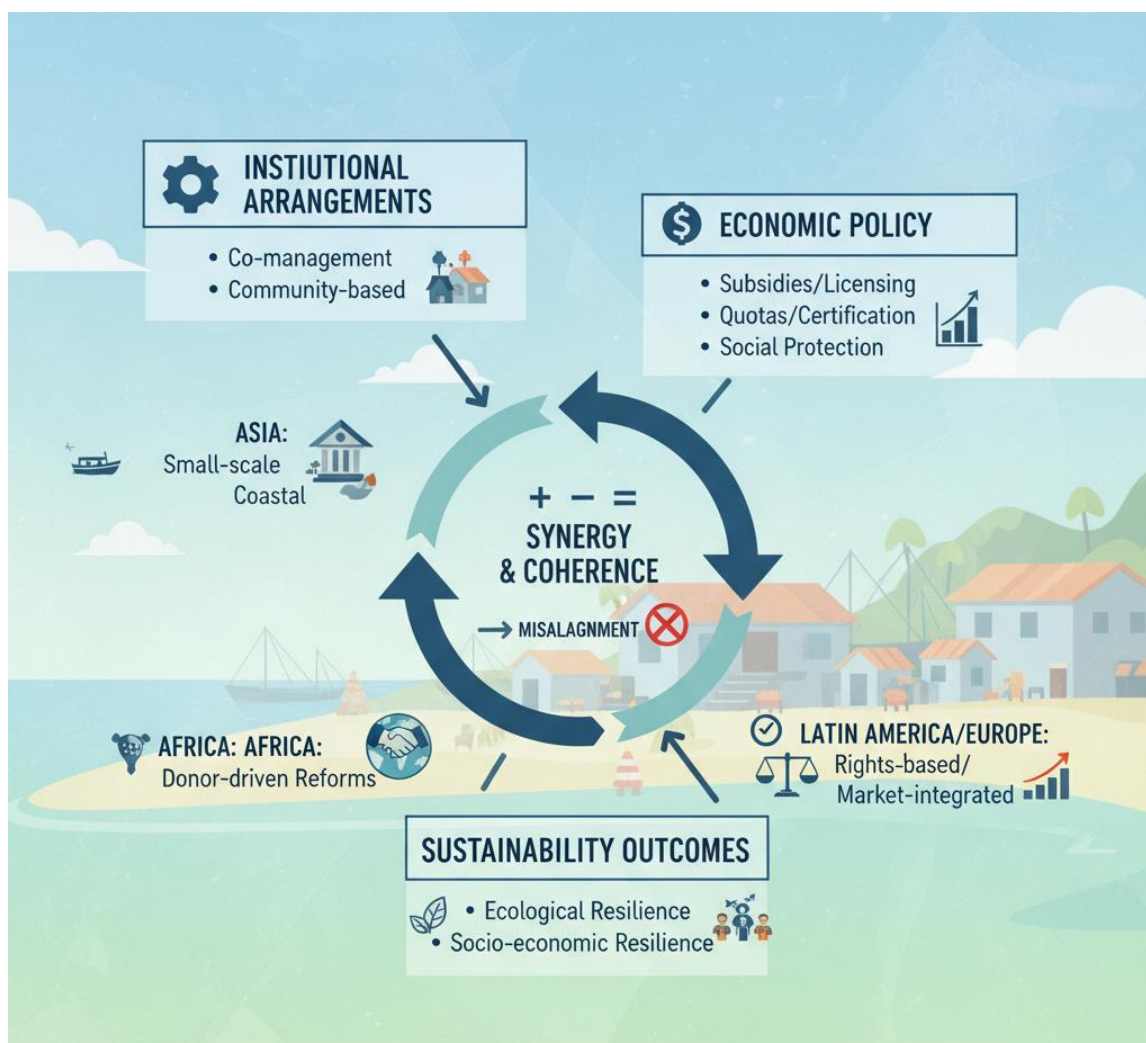


Fig. 1. Synergy and coherence in fisheries governance & economic policy

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literature Search Strategy

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Fig. 2) to examine the relationship between institutional arrangements and economic policy in local fisheries (**Mulyadi et al., 2025**). The literature search was performed across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The search was carried out between January and March 2025, covering the publication period from 2000 to 2025 to capture both early and recent developments in fisheries governance.

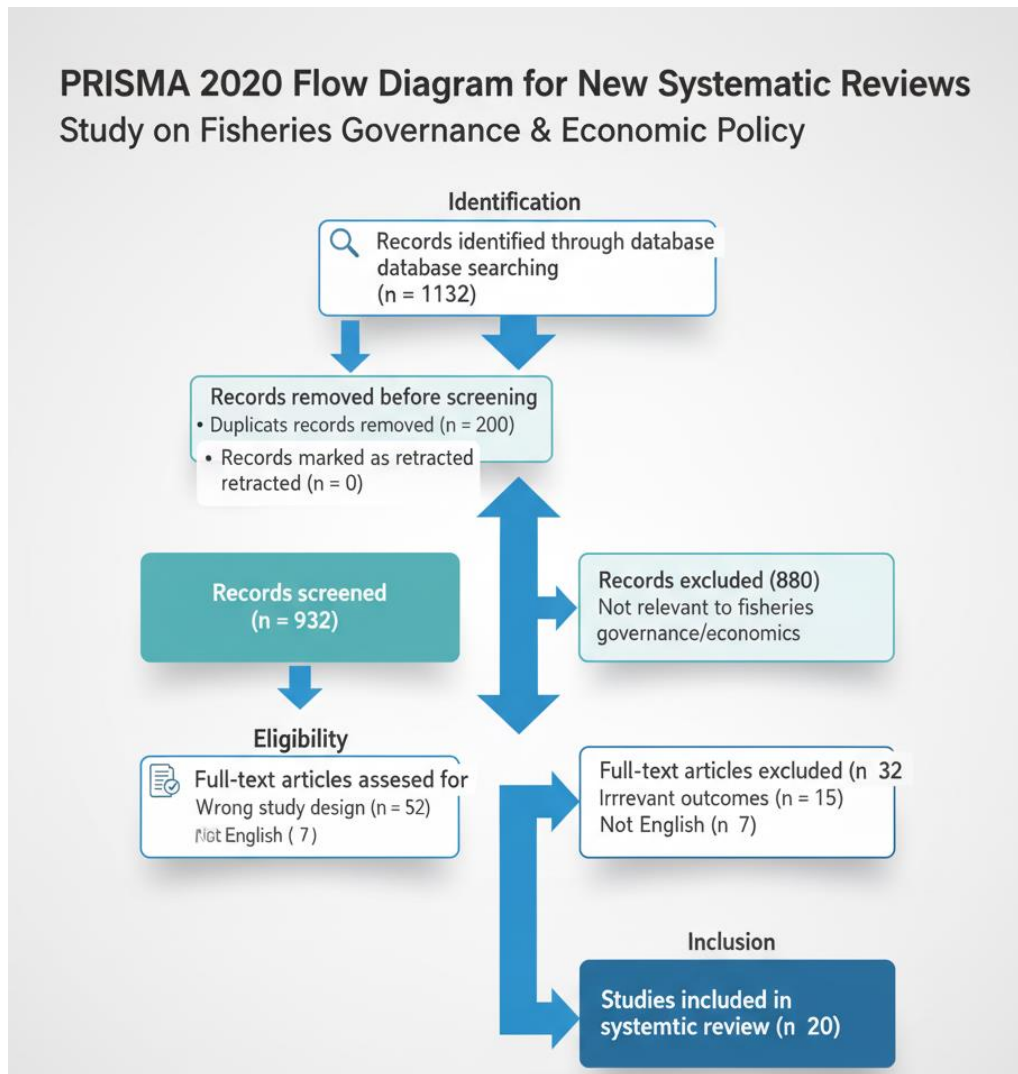


Fig. 2. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram: Study on fisheries governance & economic policy
The search used a combination of controlled keywords and Boolean operators, including:

- “*fisheries governance*” OR “*fisheries institutions*”
- “*economic policy*” OR “*fisheries economics*”
- “*community-based management*” OR “*local fisheries institutions*”

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included in this review if they were published in peer-reviewed journals and written in English. The core requirement was a focus on fisheries governance, institutional arrangements, or economic policy within local or regional fisheries, specifically demanding the inclusion of empirical findings, policy analysis, or case studies that demonstrated clear relevance to institutional and economic interactions. Conversely, papers were excluded if they consisted of conference proceedings, theses, or reports that had not undergone peer review, if they did not address the fisheries or

aquaculture sectors, or if their sole focus was on ecological or biological aspects without any accompanying institutional or economic analysis.

Screening and Selection

The initial database search yielded 1,132 records. After removing 312 duplicates, 820 records remained. Title and abstract screening excluded 605 studies that did not meet inclusion criteria. A further 195 articles were reviewed in full text, of which 175 were excluded due to limited relevance to the economic–institutional nexus in fisheries. The final dataset comprised 20 articles that fulfilled all criteria and were included in the review (Table 1).

Data Extraction and Analysis

From each study, the following data were extracted:

- Bibliographic information (authors, year, country).
- Type of institutional arrangement (e.g., co-management, community-based, state-regulated).
- Economic policy dimensions (e.g., subsidies, market access, resource allocation).
- Analytical methods used (qualitative case study, econometric modeling, policy analysis, etc.).
- Key findings related to institutional–economic linkages.

The extracted data were organized in Table (1) and analyzed through a qualitative thematic synthesis. Studies were grouped according to institutional typologies and policy orientations, and recurrent themes were identified to highlight policy gaps, institutional effectiveness, and lessons for sustainable fisheries governance.

Table 1. Summary of selected studies on institutional arrangements and economic policies in local fisheries (2000–2025)

Author(s), Year	Country/Region	Fishery Type	Institutional Arrangement	Economic Policy Instrument	Key Findings
(Novaczek <i>et al.</i> , 2001)	Indonesia	Small-scale marine	Customary <i>sasi laut</i>	Community-based harvest rules	Strengthened compliance and improved reef recovery
(Béné <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	West Africa	Inland capture	Informal/traditional	Subsidies, credit access	Subsidies undermined traditional governance, leading to increased overfishing
(Allison & Ellis, 2001)	Bangladesh	Inland capture	Fisher cooperatives	Microcredit schemes	Improved fisher resilience,

					though repayment success varied.
(Gelcich <i>et al.</i>, 2010)	Chile	Coastal artisanal	TURFs (rights-based)	Territorial rights allocation	Higher incomes and improved stewardship, but inequity concerns raised.
(Jentoft & Johnsen, 2015)	Norway	Coastal small-scale	Co-management	Market access support	Shared governance strengthened conflict resolution processes.
(Ison <i>et al.</i>, 2018)	Pacific Islands	Coral reef fisheries	Customary marine tenure	PES (reef conservation payments)	Enhanced conservation and the creation of alternative livelihoods.
(Pomeroy, 1995)	Philippines	Coastal artisanal	Co-management	Credit & insurance programs	Increased fisher security and reduced vulnerability to shocks.
(Kurien, 2005)	India (Kerala)	Marine small-scale	Cooperative associations	Fuel & gear subsidies	Supported short-term livelihoods but contributed to overcapacity.
(Castilla & Defeo, 2001)	Uruguay/Chile	Coastal benthic	TURFs	Rights-based allocation	Promoted sustainability but incurred high enforcement costs.
(Hamelin <i>et al.</i>, 2024)	Canada (Indigenous fisheries)	Coastal small-scale	Customary/Indigenous	Co-management with state	Integration of traditional knowledge increased legitimacy.
(Kapembwa <i>et al.</i>, 2020)	Africa (Lake Victoria)	Inland capture	Co-management	Licensing & quota regulation	Legitimacy grew, but elite capture issues emerged.
(Ho, 2023)	Southeast Asia	Coastal small-scale	Community-based management	Mixed economic incentives	Compliance improved but was limited by external market

Economic Policy and Institutional Arrangements in Local Fisheries: Insights from a Systematic Review

					pressures.
(Shen <i>et al.</i>, 2023)	Global review	Mixed	Mixed institutions	Market-driven instruments	Rights-based systems are effective when supported by strong institutions.
(Solomon, 2022)	FAO Global	Small-scale fisheries	Cooperatives, state-driven	Microfinance, insurance	Enhanced capital access with uneven coverage across regions.
(Orensanz & Seijo, 2013)	Argentina	Coastal benthic	TURFs	Rights allocation & co-management	Strong fisher control, leading to improved sustainability.
(Nugraha, 2023)	Indonesia (Nusa Tenggara)	Coastal reef	Customary & state overlap	Government subsidy & local rules	Resulted in conflicts due to weak enforcement.
(Evans <i>et al.</i>, 2011)	Global meta-analysis	Mixed	Cooperatives, co-management	Market integration, PES	Collective action enhanced sustainability across diverse cases.
(McElwee <i>et al.</i>, 2019)	Global	Mixed	Co-management frameworks	Subsidy reform, PES	Emphasized the need to align subsidies with sustainability goals.
(Lozano <i>et al.</i>, 2023)	Mexico	Small-scale coastal	Community cooperatives	Market certification schemes	Improved market access but with equity concerns.
(Ratner <i>et al.</i>, 2017)	Cambodia	Inland capture	Informal institutions	Access rights reform	Highlighted the role of customary institutions for reform legitimacy.

RESULTS

Thematic Synthesis of Institutional and Economic Linkages

Analysis of the 20 included studies revealed five dominant themes of institutional arrangements and their connections to economic policy in local fisheries (Table 2). These

themes highlight how governance structures influence policy outcomes, and how economic measures reinforce or constrain institutional effectiveness.

Table 2. Thematic synthesis of institutional arrangements and economic policy linkages in local fisheries (n = 20 studies)

Theme / Category	No. of Studies	Examples of Institutional Context	Economic Policy Dimensions	Key Insights / Outcomes
Co-management systems	7	Indonesia (coastal fisheries), Philippines (municipal fisheries), Tanzania (lake fisheries)	Resource allocation, revenue-sharing, licensing schemes	Co-management fosters compliance and reduces conflict when communities share decision-making authority; improved local revenue generation.
Community-based management (CBM)	5	Pacific Islands, India (Kerala), Kenya (small-scale marine fisheries)	Market access, livelihood diversification	CBM strengthens social capital and local stewardship, but effectiveness depends on access to markets and supportive policies.
State-regulated management	4	EU Common Fisheries Policy, Japan, Vietnam	Subsidies, quota systems, trade policies	Centralized regulation provides resource stability but can neglect local institutional realities; subsidy misallocation sometimes distorts equity.
Hybrid/Polycentric governance	2	Chile (TURFs), Norway (mixed governance)	Rights-based management, tax incentives	Polycentric systems balance state oversight with community incentives, creating economic resilience and sustainability.
Market-driven institutional approaches	2	Ecuador (shrimp fisheries), Ghana (small-scale exports)	Certification schemes, eco-labels, credit support	Market mechanisms (eco-labels, subsidies, certification) improve sustainability but risk excluding small-scale fishers without institutional backing.

Policy Gaps and Future Directions

Across the 20 studies, several recurring policy gaps were identified (Table 3). A major challenge concerned the misalignment of institutions, where local governance structures often operated in isolation from national frameworks, leading to fragmented and sometimes contradictory policies. Issues of equity in resource allocation were also evident, as subsidies and financial incentives tended to favor industrial fleets over small-scale fishers, reinforcing socio-economic inequalities.

Table 3. Policy gaps and future directions identified in the reviewed studies (n = 20)

Policy Dimension	Reported Gaps	Consequences	Suggested Future Directions
Institutional alignment	Weak coordination between local institutions and national policies	Policy fragmentation, duplication of efforts	Develop integrated governance frameworks that harmonize community, regional, and national levels
Equity in resource allocation	Subsidies and benefits often concentrated among industrial or large-scale fishers	Marginalization of small-scale/local fishers	Redirect subsidies toward small-scale fishers; promote inclusive financing and credit access
Market access	Small-scale fishers face barriers to certification, eco-labeling, and global markets	Limited economic benefits from sustainability programs	Tailor market-based mechanisms to local contexts; provide institutional support for certification
Enforcement capacity	Limited monitoring and enforcement in decentralized/co-management systems	Non-compliance, resource overexploitation	Strengthen local monitoring capacity with state backing and digital tools
Adaptability to change	Rigid institutional structures not responsive to climate and socio-economic shifts	Reduced resilience, vulnerability of communities	Promote adaptive governance that incorporates flexibility and feedback mechanisms
Knowledge integration	Local ecological knowledge often undervalued in policy processes	Missed opportunities for adaptive and cost-effective solutions	Institutionalize participatory approaches that combine scientific and local knowledge

DISCUSSION

This systematic review highlights the critical role of institutional arrangements in shaping economic policy outcomes in local fisheries. The evidence demonstrates that governance and economics are mutually reinforcing: institutions determine how economic policies are implemented and experienced, while policy incentives shape the effectiveness and legitimacy of institutions.

Institutional Effectiveness and Economic Outcomes

The findings suggest that co-management and community-based management approaches are particularly effective in fostering local compliance, resource stewardship, and revenue generation when supported by enabling policies. This aligns with previous scholarship emphasizing the benefits of power-sharing and participatory governance in small-scale fisheries, as highlighted by recent work (**Karr *et al.*, 2017**), which delineates conditions for successful small-scale fishery reforms, including the embedding of science-based management within governance frameworks. Additionally, published research emphasize that while the importance of small-scale fishers is acknowledged in policy documents, the practice of governance often derails their involvement, underscoring the necessity of aligning top-down and bottom-up governance practices (**Linke & Siegrist, 2023**).

However, the success of these approaches is highly contingent on complementary economic measures such as fair licensing, equitable benefit distribution, and access to markets. Where such policies are absent, institutional legitimacy may erode, limiting long-term sustainability. Published research reveal that formal fisheries policies, although intended to improve management, can create social disparities that ultimately lead to resource overuse, reinforcing the importance of inclusive governance (**Cinti *et al.*, 2010**). Another research argue for a comprehensive approach to fisheries management that integrates social, economic, and institutional dimensions, which are often neglected, emphasizing the need for frameworks that address all four pillars of sustainability in fishery practices (**Stephenson *et al.*, 2017**).

In contrast, state-regulated management remains dominant in industrial and mixed fisheries. While these systems facilitate monitoring and standardization, they often fail to address equity concerns and may exacerbate the marginalization of small-scale fishers. Studies in this review echo criticisms of subsidy regimes that disproportionately benefit larger operators, reinforcing global concerns raised by the FAO and WTO regarding harmful fisheries subsidies (**Worm *et al.*, 2009**). For instance, while community-based management practices are essential for small-scale fisheries, state-led models often neglect local dynamics and power relations, resulting in inefficient resource use and inequitable benefits distribution (**Worm *et al.*, 2009**).

Emerging models of hybrid and polycentric governance provide promising pathways by combining the efficiency of centralized regulation with the adaptability and legitimacy of local arrangements. Collaborative management, where different governance levels interact, can yield better ecological and social outcomes, provided that local contexts are respected (**Cinner *et al.*, 2012**). However, challenges remain in coordination and transaction costs, as noted by published paper, who highlight the complexities of integrating social well-being into fisheries governance frameworks, advocating for an inclusive approach that encompasses diverse community perspectives (**Weeratunge *et al.*, 2013**). Similarly, market-driven institutional approaches, such as certification

schemes and eco-labels, demonstrate potential for linking local fisheries to global sustainability frameworks. However, their benefits are unevenly distributed, necessitating institutional support to prevent the exclusion of small-scale actors, as revealed in the assessment, which underscores the importance of social objectives in fisheries governance (**Foley *et al.*, 2018**).

Policy Gaps and Institutional Challenges

As summarized in Table (3), recurrent gaps include institutional misalignment, inequitable resource allocation, barriers to market access, and weak enforcement capacity. These challenges align with critiques of fisheries governance, which emphasize the mismatch between global policy objectives and local institutional realities, as highlighted (**Fabinyi *et al.*, 2013**). They analyzed inequalities in high seas fishing which reveal structural failures in resource allocation, reflecting similar patterns observed in local fisheries management.

The undervaluation of local ecological knowledge is a persistent issue, suggesting that existing policy frameworks often overlook the adaptive potential of place-based knowledge systems. The significant contributions of fishers' local ecological knowledge, indicating that such information could greatly enhance fisheries management but is frequently disregarded by conventional governance structures (**Matias Silvano & Valbo-Jørgensen, 2008**). Additionally, they advocate for utilizing fishers' knowledge to develop testable hypotheses for fisheries management, aligning with a "data-less" approach that integrates traditional ecological insights.

These insights reinforce critiques by published paper, who emphasize that economic policies regarding resource allocation often favor larger stakeholders while neglecting the needs of small-scale fishers (**Eero *et al.*, 2014**). The focus on the implications of these inequitable distributions highlights systemic barriers that perpetuate the status quo within fisheries governance (**Linke & Siegrist, 2023**). Challenges in enforcement capacity are prevalent, as evidenced by Cudney-Bueno and Basurto, who note that lack of cross-scale linkages diminishes the robustness of community-based fisheries management, underscoring the need to strengthen local institutions for better integration with national policies (**Cudney-Bueno & Basurto, 2009**). They emphasize that insufficient regulatory frameworks can lead to inadequate oversight and compliance, ultimately undermining governance efforts.

Innovative approaches, such as hybrid governance models and equitable resource allocation frameworks, as exemplified, provide potential pathways to address these issues (**Seto *et al.*, 2020**). They advocate for a global analysis of resource allocation in transboundary fisheries, emphasizing the rights of marginalized actors to foster a more inclusive governance landscape. Ultimately, addressing these policy gaps requires an integrative approach that reconciles local ecological knowledge with formal governance

structures, promoting equitable participation and resource distribution among all stakeholder groups.

Toward Integrated and Adaptive Governance

Directions for improving the interplay between institutions and economic policies, as highlighted by the review, can be broadly categorized into three areas. First, it is suggested that integrated governance frameworks are necessary to harmonize local, national, and global levels, thereby reducing policy fragmentation. This perspective is echoed (**Li *et al.*, 2022**) where the importance of effective governance in fisheries management and the need for alignment between local insights and broader governance structures are discussed. Similarly, how government quality can improve the connection between various governance levels and enhance the efficacy of economic policies in fisheries is highlighted (**Peiró-Palomino *et al.*, 2020**).

Second, it is noted that the resilience of small-scale fishers, who remain vulnerable under existing regimes, can be supported by equity-oriented economic instruments, including targeted subsidies and accessible credit mechanisms. Financial struggles for small-scale fishers are indicated by studies, and it is reported by Zergawu (**Zergawu *et al.*, 2020**) that these pressures can be alleviated by tailored economic policies. Moreover, the necessity of equitable access to resources and financial support systems for promoting gender equality and resilience within resource-dependent economies is suggested by Dutta (**Dutta *et al.*, 2025**), which could be integrated into policies supporting small-scale fishers.

Third, the uncertainties of climate change and shifting global markets will be addressed by enhancing adaptive governance capacity—through participatory decision-making, flexible regulations, and the incorporation of local knowledge. The importance of institutions in fostering adaptive governance, which can improve responsiveness to changing social and ecological conditions (**Ahmad *et al.*, 2023**). It is emphasized by them that institutional quality significantly influences governance effectiveness and resilience in response to climate change. Overall, the findings affirm that effective fisheries governance must encompass both institutions and policies. The crucial role of strong institutional frameworks in aligning economic policies with governance needs, whereby institutional quality directly influences economic outcomes (**Zergawu *et al.*, 2020**). Furthermore, the integration of governance structures and economic measures tailored to local contexts is deemed necessary, where the significance of institutional quality in shaping economic performance is addressed (**Raies & Mimoun, 2025**). Through these integrated and adaptive governance approaches, it is affirmed that the sustainability of fisheries can be significantly enhanced, creating a more equitable and resilient future for small-scale fishers.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that institutional arrangements and economic policies are deeply interconnected and together shape the sustainability of fisheries, particularly for small-scale systems. The evidence underscores that isolated approaches are insufficient; instead, integrated governance frameworks that link local, national, and global levels are essential to reduce fragmentation and ensure responsive decision-making. A key priority is the development of equity-oriented economic instruments, including targeted subsidies and accessible credit schemes, which strengthen the resilience of small-scale fishers and promote social inclusivity. Equally important is the recognition of local ecological knowledge, which enriches management practices and enhances legitimacy when systematically incorporated into participatory governance processes. Building adaptive capacity through flexible regulations and co-management strategies is critical for navigating the uncertainties of climate change and global market fluctuations. Addressing institutional challenges such as misalignment and inequitable resource allocation will further improve compliance, legitimacy, and governance effectiveness. Ultimately, the review highlights that sustainability in fisheries depends on the synergy between institutions and policies. By fostering governance systems that are inclusive, adaptive, and equitable, policymakers can advance fisheries that support both ecological integrity and the livelihoods of dependent communities. Aligning these practices with broader sustainability goals will not only secure the future of local fisheries but also contribute to resilient and just aquatic ecosystems worldwide.

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