



## **COMMUNIQUE**

### **Conference on Fisheries and Coastal Environment Accra 2017**

Scientists from Ghana's universities and research institutions, civil society, private sector, fishermen and fishmongers, government ministries and agencies, representatives from the USAID Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) of the University of Rhode Island, USA in all numbering 240, convened in Accra for the first Conference on Fisheries and Coastal Environment (CFCE), referred to as the Accra Conference 2017.

Supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Cape Coast from 25- 27<sup>th</sup> September, 2017, the Conference was opened by the Minister of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD), Hon. Elizabeth Naa Afoley Quaye (MP) and closed by the Senior Minister, Hon. Yaw Osafo-Marfo of the Office of the President of the Republic of Ghana. In attendance were the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast, Professor Joseph Ghartey Ampiah, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, Hon. Francis Kingsley Ato Cudjoe (MP), the USAID/Ghana Deputy Mission Director, Steven Hendrix and traditional authority.

Participants included the Provosts of the Colleges of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, and Health and Allied Sciences from the University of Cape Coast, Head of Local Government Service, representatives of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, representative from the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum, leadership of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the National Development Planning Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, members of the Fisheries Commission, the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council, the National Fish Processors and Traders Association, and fishermen and fish mongers from the four coastal regions of Ghana.

The scientists were from the University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Education, Winneba; University for Development Studies, University of Energy and Natural Resources, and Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. Civil society represented at the Conference included Imani Ghana, Hen Mpoano, Friends of the Nation, Free the Slaves and the Concerned Ghanaian Citizens in Fisheries.

The Conference provided a platform for researchers, journalists, political representatives and representatives from think-tanks to connect around issues of vital national interest concerning sustainable fisheries and coastal management in Ghana. The theme was **CHANGING MARINE FISHERIES AND COASTS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGING MINDS**. Participants worked in interactive and dynamic sessions to consider issues in six main areas:



- Fisheries and coastal governance and policy
- Fisheries economics and value chains
- Ocean and coastal environments
- Mariculture and green businesses for the coastal environment
- Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices
- Livelihoods and poverty reduction in coastal areas

Scientists and researchers made oral presentations on fifty-two (52) specific research topics and seventeen (17) posters. There were also four (4) keynote presentations delivered by key industry experts followed by panel discussions in plenary sessions. Five (5) special sessions and breakout working groups deliberated on topics such as Sustaining Fisheries & Coastal Research and Extension, Opportunities and Actions in the Post-Harvest Sector, Community-Based Fisheries Management, Child Labour and Trafficking in Ghana, Fisheries Stock Assessment and Current Status of Dwindling Food-Fish Stocks. Based on the deliberations, and considering the national importance of coastal ecosystems and fisheries to the people of Ghana, a number of specific recommendations were made:

1. **The small pelagic fish stocks which constitute 70% of the fish production are at record low levels.** This is due to many factors including open access in the canoe sector, increasing fishing capacity of all fleets, and excessive fishing effort. This is exacerbated by illegal fishing and costly input subsidies provided to the artisanal sector which has resulted in increased economic hardships for over 160,000 persons directly involved in the fishery, and the livelihoods of 2.2 million persons who indirectly depend on the fishery. Food security is also at risk and over 100,000 MT of low cost high nutritionally important fish protein supply is being lost annually. Economic hardships in fishing communities also create risks for maritime security, child labour and human trafficking in the fisheries sector. Urgent action is needed by all stakeholders in the fisheries sector to implement a suite of management measures to rebuild the fishery. This should include actions by MoFAD and the Fisheries Commission as well as support from fisherfolks and other stakeholders such as fish processors, marketers and their associations. Inaction means a continuation in declining trends, reduced food security, increasing poverty in fishing communities, and significant decrease in the sector's contribution to the national GDP.
2. **Increase emphasis on Ghana's fisheries post-harvest sector.** The fisheries post-harvest sector in Ghana directly employs as many as 130,000 people, including an estimated 30,000 women directly engaged in fish smoking. Recent innovations in smoker ovens, such as the "ahoto" oven, promoted by the Fisheries Commission, produce better quality fish with less smoke and drastically reduced levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) which are cancer causing substances. Led by the Fisheries Commission, and supported by other stakeholders with USAID support, the "ahoto" oven and other innovations increase profits and incomes and thereby improving the wellbeing of coastal communities. These



and other processing innovations should be given increased attention by the Fisheries Commission, Ministry of Health and relevant agencies.

3. **Immediately adopt and provide the resources for a new national co-management strategy for fisheries and coastal areas.** The importance of enabling local stakeholders to participate in and directly manage coastal, marine and estuarine resources is a recognized global good practice. Governments around the world acknowledge that working with local civil society and non-government organizations greatly increases their effectiveness in protecting and sustaining the resources on which their countries depend. Recognising the Fisheries Commission's intent to adopt a co-management strategy for the Ghanaian fisheries, the Conference expresses its support to this strategy and recommends that the Fisheries Commission moves forward as quickly as possible to adopt co-management as a national policy to enable local communities play a greater role in managing Ghana's fisheries and coastal resources.
4. **Boost Ghana's small pelagic fisheries through closed seasons and reduced effort.** The conference participants acknowledged the need to boost the small pelagic fisheries such as mackerel, sardines and anchovies. Small fish such as these contributes an average of 60% of the total animal protein consumed nationally and up to 90% in some small coastal communities. This protein source is vital for the people of Ghana, particularly children and pregnant mothers. However, increasing Ghana's small pelagic stocks requires that the Fisheries Commission immediately develops a plan to reduce subsidies, the number of canoes, and implement a closed fishing season as was done traditionally in the past. Without these actions, the collapsed small pelagic stocks will not rebuild. Current catches are already at 10% of catch levels in 1998.
5. **Immediately implement actions to control illegal transshipment of fish ('saiko' fishing).** Trawlers are now illegally engaged in exploiting small pelagics, blast freezing the catches at sea and tranship to canoes for landing and sales. This practice is depleting the already collapsed stocks depriving canoe fishers of their livelihood support, and forcing them into other negative and illegal practices that further impact small pelagic stocks negatively. It is estimated that "saiko" fish catch may nearly equal or in some cases, exceed legal catch by canoes depriving Ghana of a critical natural resource and avoiding payment of taxes that could be used to support the fisheries sector. The Accra Conference 2017 recommends the Fisheries Commission, Fisheries Enforcement Unit and other related Government agencies to immediately begin developing plans to eliminate the practice of "saiko" fishing.
6. **Increase regional fisheries management cooperation with other West African Countries.** Given the recognition that Ghana's fish stocks move and are shared by other West African countries, it is vital that Ghana cooperates with the neighbouring nations to



harmonize policies and laws aimed at stock management. It is vital to Ghana's national interests to work with other West African countries on management efforts including input and output controls, implementing joint closed seasons and establishing protected areas.

7. **Work with other Gulf of Guinea countries to discuss a shared fisheries research vessel.** Given the importance of science as a basis for managing fisheries resources, the Accra Conference 2017 agreed that discussions with other Gulf of Guinea governments should consider the acquisition and shared use of a fisheries research vessel.
8. **Immediately constitute the Fisheries Commission Board.** The Fisheries Commission plays a central role in sustainable management of one of Ghana's fisheries. However, a Board is yet to be established to oversee its activities, particularly the National Fisheries Management Plan 2015-2019 (NFMP). In the absence of this Board, there is no monitoring of the Fisheries Commission's progress toward implementing the NFMP. The Fisheries Commission Board should be put in place as a matter of national urgency to achieve the goals of the National Fisheries Management Plan.
9. **Fisheries issues should be devoid of political interference.** Efforts to sustainably manage Ghana's coastal and marine resources can never be successful unless political interference with the management responsibilities of government agencies is stopped. Political interference in the responsibilities of government agencies mandated to protect coastal and marine resources is a threat to Ghana's long-term national food security and economic contribution of the fishery. It is therefore crucial to curtail political interference in enforcement of laws. The Conference called for support from all stakeholders including the law enforcement agencies to help address this issue.
10. **Remove subsidies that encourage over-exploitation of marine and coastal resources.** Subsidies within the fisheries sector are largely counter-productive and encourage overfishing. Government subsidies indirectly continue to support the building of new canoes and acquisition of more powerful outboard motors even while the fish stock they go after is near collapse. Global experience shows that removing subsidies contributes to sustainable management of fish stocks. The Conference recommends that the government should review all fisheries sector subsidies and ensure that they are appropriately re-channelled into a coastal development fund to support social and economic interventions such as mariculture and investments in the green economy for the benefit of the coastal communities.
11. **Stop Child Labour and Trafficking.** The Conference participants recognized the negative impact of child labour and trafficking on Ghana's fisheries and agriculture sectors. In addition, participants recognized that coastal communities are among the poorest people in Ghana and as such serve as sourcing areas for child trafficking. The Conference calls on



the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to embark on a national campaign against child labour and trafficking in the coastal communities.

- 12. Implement a national campaign to control plastics.** The growing menace of plastic wastes generated across Ghana which end up in the sea directly affects the livelihoods of fishers and indirectly affects fish consumers. Participants called for a national campaign involving EPA, NDPC, District Assemblies and other stakeholders to control the disposal of plastic wastes including banning plastic bags in favour of biodegradable ones.
- 13. Government should develop mechanisms to fund research and extension in fisheries and coastal management.** Global best practices recognize that governments have a role to play in ensuring that scientific research, extension, outreach and public education support efforts to sustainably manage marine and coastal resources. The Accra Conference 2017 unanimously agreed that a university-based national funded programme be established to support these activities. The programme should solicit cooperation from the private and public sectors to deal with issues that resonate with local and regional governments and communities. Particularly, extension and public education through local universities should support government efforts to raise the awareness of Ghanaians. While the ultimate responsibility of this programme lies with government, it is recommended that it should be included in the National Fisheries Act with a provision to provide grants to support it.
- 14. Formation of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Society of Ghana to support research and extension in the sector.** Given the national importance of fisheries and the coastal environment to the nation, a Fisheries and Aquaculture Society has been formed to serve as a focal point for research into issues of national importance, exchange of scientific information, and data on coastal environment, fisheries and aquaculture in Ghana. The Conference formalised the establishment of the society by the launch and appointment of an Interim Management Committee and Patrons to put structures in place for running the Society.
- 15. Protection of coastal ecosystems.** The Conference noted the extensive degradation of coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, lagoons, estuaries and beaches through anthropogenic activities. These ecosystems are important to fisheries production as they are utilised as nursery areas by juvenile marine fishes. The beaches are also utilised as landing sites for canoes and boats. The Conference unanimously agreed that these ecosystems should be protected by enforcing all the existing regulations and formulate new ones where necessary.



## DISCLAIMER

This communique is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the University of Cape Coast and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.