



# USAID Builds Capacity for Healthy Fish Processing in Ghana

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: Photo Credit: CRC

Victoria Koomson, the Executive Director of CEWEFIA.

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## Telling Our Story

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Fish processing is a major source of income for the majority of women in Elmina, a fishing community in the Central Region. Women work from dusk to dawn to ensure fish are ready for the market. Their effort contributes to the food security of their families, their products feed much of community, and finished products are exported to many other areas of the country including the northern regions of Ghana. However, their business expansion and levels of incomes are hindered by a lack of skills and knowledge on how to manage their finances. Most also lack knowledge and skills related to hygienic fish processing, storage, and packaging.

Women like Victoria Koomson, the Executive Director of the Central and Western Region Fish Mangers Improvement Association (CEWEFIA), a local non-governmental organization based in Elmina, provide support to these women to help them address these challenges. She sums up her concern about the plight of women processors, “Seeing the women with their babies strapped to their back smoking fish in the heat of the smokers, made worse by the hot sun beating down on them, was such a worry to me.”,

Starting four years ago, Victoria planned her approach. She needed to renovate and upgrade a fish processing facility that her association rents to migrant fish processors to provide a better working environment for these women. Working with support from the USAID Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, and in collaboration with the Ghana Fisheries Commission, she started to work.

Now, the CEWEFIA’s newly upgraded demonstration center for small-scale fish processors and traders not only offers a safer and more comfortable place to work, it also meets the Fisheries Commission basic standards for local hygienic fish processing kitchens and offers training on exactly those things that she identified as needed by local women. Training programs offered by CEWEFIA now include hygienic fish handling and processing techniques, hygienic packaging, fire safety, small business financial management, value addition opportunities, record keeping and improved processing technologies like the new fish smoking *Ahotor* oven. The *Ahotor*, meaning “comfort” in the local dialect, uses 30 percent less fuelwood, significantly reduces smoke exposure to women and their dependent children, and reduces cancer causing compounds in smoked fish that can affect the health of processors and consumers.

The CEWEFIA Fish Processing and Training Center was designed around the concept of separate work areas for fish receiving and washing, smoking, cooling, and packaging. This avoids cross contamination as fish move through the separate stages. Separation of work areas is a core requirement for the new Class I Hygienic Fish Processing facility certification, developed and implemented by the Fisheries Commission and the Ghana National Standards Authority, with support from USAID. Felicia Mensah, a 59-year-old fish processor recounts her experience, “The CEWEFIA fish processing facility is a blessing to us, the training we receive here is helping to transform the way we used to do business and the way we help our families”.

CEWEFIA’s trainings have already improved the skills of more than 1,823 women processors over the last four years. But there are also direct benefits to CEWEFIA itself. USAID support has also strengthened CEWEFIA’s capacity in the areas of fundraising, financial management, and strategic planning. As a result, CEWEFIA has been able to raise funds from other sources such as FAO, the North American Women’s Association, Star Ghana and the BUSAC Fund, to support development of women processors in Elmina.

Victoria Koomson believes that CEWEFIA is playing an important role in improving smoked fish quality in Ghana and the lives of fish processors themselves. “We provide training that ultimately improves all aspects of fish processors lives and produces healthier fish for their families and consumers. At the same time, we are addressing specific environmental concerns by reducing pressure on mangrove forests used for fuelwood. This is change by our people for our people”, she says proudly.