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# SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROJECT (SFMP)

## Uplifting the Role of Traditional Authorities in Fisheries Governance



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THE  
UNIVERSITY  
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## **ACRONYMS**

CCM	Centre for Coastal Management
CEWEFIA	Central and Western Region Fishmongers Improvement Association
CRC	Coastal Resource Center
CSLP	Coastal Sustainable Landscape Project
DAA	Development Action Association
DFAS	Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Science
DMFS	Department of Marine Fisheries Sciences
DQF	Daasgift Quality Foundation
FtF	Feed the Future
GIFA	Ghana Inshore Fishermen's Association
GIS	Geographic Information System
GNCFC	Ghana National Canoe Fishermen's Council
HM	Hen Mpoano
ICFG	Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance
MESTI	Ministry of Environment Science and Technology
MOFAD	Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SFMP	Sustainable Fisheries Management Project
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
SSG	SSG Advisors
STWG	Scientific and Technical Working Group
UCC	University of Cape Coast
URI	University of Rhode Island
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WARFP	West Africa Regional Fisheries Development Program

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## **SECTION 1: ABSTRACT**

Inclusiveness of traditional leaders is crucial for effective fisheries governance. Traditional systems and indigenous knowledge have proven effective in promoting voluntary compliance of local and customary laws/bye-laws in many environmental and natural resources such as fisheries management. In local Ghanaian fishing communities, traditional leaders (i.e. paramount chiefs; queen mothers; regents, and headmen or '*odikros*') are very important institutions for governance that could play key roles in sustainable fisheries management practices.

Nonetheless, their roles and powers in fisheries governance are diminishing by day due to current system of governance which has given more power to the central and local government authorities compared to the traditional systems. Finding the right balance between traditional systems and the central fisheries management system led by government will help address the weak fisheries governance. It is for this reason that the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) through FoN tried to uplift the role of traditional leaders in fisheries management and governance.

SFMP through FoN supported traditional leaders from coastal areas of Ghana to review how they could play active roles in the current fisheries governance towards the promotion of best fisheries management practices. As a result, Traditional leaders have shown increasing interest to participate in collaborative fisheries management initiatives in Ghana.

## **SECTION 2: ISSUE (BACKGROUND)**

Ghana's long history of fishing has largely been artisanal and been governed by traditional and customary by-laws and management practices. Until central government stepped-in to regulate fisheries, the sector was well-managed using traditional systems. In the past, traditional systems were very effective in promoting and ensuring voluntary compliance of customary laws and by-laws in local fishing communities and other areas in Ghana.

The traditional leadership (paramount chief and his direct official functionaries) relegated their authority to the chief fisherman to strategically govern and manage fisher folks and fishing activities at the landing sites. The culture and traditional practices of communities influences the fishery practices within the areas, as well as the operations of the landing beach. Key example is the observance of weekly traditional fishing holidays which was effectively supervised and enforced by the chief fishermen. These days were observed because the traditional authority backed the chief fishermen to religiously forbid fishing on these days.

Central Government's involvement in fishing was to control the fisheries industry with national fisheries laws and directives in an attempt to promote sustainability in the face of multiple use of Ghana's marine space. This control has however, contributed to eroding the powers and involvement of traditional systems in the fisheries governance; in that government's engagement relatively to fisheries development has sidelined the chief fishermen and traditional leaders including Chiefs and Queen mothers. One of the problems is that some artisanal fishers in Ghana are migrant fishers, moving from place to place depending on which areas their trade will yield them more profits. For this reason, they could decide to practice illegal fishing to deplete the resources, and then move to a more viable community or region. The eroded roles of the traditional systems have made fisher not to respect or recognize the role of traditional leaders in fisheries governance. Also political infiltration has bestowed

powers on central and local government systems more than the traditional systems and has reduced participation of traditional leaders in fisheries governance.

The resultant effect could be the widespread use of illegal methods in fishing and low compliance of fisheries laws by fishers.

When traditional leaders managed fisheries in the olden days, they focused on their communities and made sure they protected their territories from unnecessary encroachment by illegal operators. In the early days, before one settled and fished in their communities, the traditional leaders were consulted to approve the migrants only after they swore an oath to practice sustainable and legal fishing. In the current government-managed fisheries, it is open access and a “free-for-all” regime where anyone with the means could enter and start fishing whether sustainable or not.

Learning lessons from a previous Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance (ICFG) initiative – where a Fisheries Working Group was piloted, the SFMP through FoN also created a platform for active inclusion of traditional leaders in fisheries governance, by facilitating the creation of a traditional leaders working group to bring together all paramount traditional leaders from the four coastal regions of Ghana. This brought back the interest of traditional leaders in taking up the mandate of ensuring their active participation in fisheries governance, and also ensuring the right fishing methods are used by fishers in their communities. This showed in their quest to partner the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD) in implementing the first ever closed fishing season for all fleets in August 2018, which sadly could not materialize.

### **SECTION 3: PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

SFMP through FoN adopted an integrated strategy to address the eroded traditional systems in fisheries governance. The strategy begun with the assessment of the role of traditional system in fisheries governance and the interest of traditional leaders. Also influential traditional leaders in the fishing communities were identified and engaged through series of meetings. These meetings were held in collaboration with Fisheries Commission and sought to facilitate renewed interest and active participation of traditional leaders in fisheries governance. The meetings were also used as a platform for discussing fisheries co-management and the role of traditional leaders. The meetings also explored more efficient grounds of employing traditional systems to improve fisheries governance.

The engagement stressed on appreciation of the roles of Traditional Leaders in fisheries management guided by the National Fisheries Management Plan (NFMP 2015-2019). The NFMP incorporated some traditional fishing management practices like fishing holidays, Closed Season and Closed Areas amongst others, which a working traditional system could activate. The Paramount Chiefs and Queen Mothers engaged were supported to sensitize their peers and communities on their roles in fisheries governance through series of regional meetings organized in the four coastal regions.

The sensitization exercises led by the traditional leaders won many fisher folks and gained their willingness to support implementation of the NFMP.

## SECTION 4: PROGRESS AND RESULTS

The platforms and engagements with coastal chiefs and queen mothers has facilitated increased involvement and leadership of Traditional leaders in fisheries management and governance in most fishing communities. For instance, the Paramount chief of Lower Dixcove, Nana Kwesi Agyeman IX dedicated the whole Kundum festival in 2018 to sustainable fisheries management under the theme: “Empowering Communities for Effective Fisheries Co-Management, The Role of Traditional Leaders”



Figure 1: A Picture of Lower Dixcove Kundum Festival Invitation Card

Nana Akosua Gyamfiaba II, acting paramount queen mother of Shama Traditional Area also went from beach to beach sensitizing fishers to support the implementation of the fisheries management plan and to comply with the fisheries laws. She also played a very crucial role in ensuring the effective implementation of community-based fisheries co-management within the Pra area.

The paramount chiefs and queen mothers from the Volta Region also took up the initiative to gather all fisher folks in their Jurisdiction to inform them to comply with the fisheries laws and support the implementation of the NFMP.

One key result of this strategy was the formation of Traditional Leaders Working Group (TLWG) in each region. A platform was then created for the TLWG to have an interface with leadership of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC) to identify strategies in strengthening relationships and feedbacks. For example, the traditional councils resolve to invite Chief Fishermen to report to them on the state of fisheries management at the landing sites for deliberation and decision making.

At the national level, the TLWG engaged MOFAD on rationale for closed season for all fleets that was proposed for August 2018. The TLWG and all relevant processes needed to roll-out



the program. The need to put a halt to the seemingly exclusion of traditional leaders was passionately discussed, and a good agreement reached between the two parties to support fisheries management as it is a livelihood and food security issue. Going forward, traditional leaders were expected to take on active roles in communicating dates for closed season implementation as well as other fisheries management initiative since they are the closest to the resource users.

## **SECTION 5: LESSON LEARNED**

Role of Traditional Leaders in fisheries governance is crucial – particularly to have an oversight of Chief Fishermen and providing traditional leadership for fisheries compliance. Traditional leaders can lead effective crusades for sustainable fishing by rallying the support of the fisher folks, including chief fishermen, within their communities to comply with laws and management plans, which would produce tremendous impacts for Ghana’s fisheries sector by improving people’s livelihoods and promoting sustainability. In areas, where their traditional roles have been long sidelined, such as in Ghana, the traditional leaders need to properly recognized and engaged to live up to their traditional roles in providing strong leadership in their areas of traditional jurisdiction to compliment the efforts of government in bringing law and order, and socio-economic improvement and well-being into the fishing communities.

As populations continue to expand, increased number of people keep demanding fish as their first-choice protein intake due to its cheapness and health reasons. In addition, the open access contributes an over-saturated industry. Regulations as enshrined in the fisheries laws and the national marine sector plan need therefore to be enforced; and better still voluntarily complied to prevent the sector from further resource degradation. The role of Traditional leaders has to be emphasized and harnessed to support voluntary compliance and enforcement strategies.

With the firm acknowledgement of the roles of traditional chiefs and queen mothers vis-à-vis the role of the chief fishermen, it is clear that the chief fisherman is subservient in authority to the stool: more so as the paramountcy is gazetted under the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs but not the office of the Chief Fisherman. It is therefore crucial not to exclude traditional leaders in fisheries discourse thinking chief fishermen will automatically update the traditional leaders.

## **SECTION 6: APPLICATION**

Effective systems analysis is key to achieving project deliverables, especially when there is the bit of governance of natural resources. In similar project designs, there should be a proper integration of all the relevant systems; with all management systems properly and adequately inter-connected. The role of the traditional systems must not be underplayed. The traditional systems must complement the national ones.

Inclusion of traditional leaders in programs must be a matter of urgency to contribute to halt the current state of collapse of the fish stocks due to overfishing. Once traditional leaders are involved, more youthful leaders should also be included as they are, those who form the bulk of the workforce, to combat illegal fisheries practices.

## **SECTION 7: NEXT STEPS FOR GHANA**

Legitimacy must compliment legality for sustainable fisheries management and governance in Ghana. As much as it is necessary for inclusion of traditional leaders in fisheries governance, it is expedient for recognition of their roles in legislation (fisheries Policy). It is also key to include traditional leaders from coastal communities on the Fisheries Commission Board, and

also create strong roles for them in any co-management schemes. For sustainability sake, incentives need to be provided for their participation. It should be cautioned however that their inclusion in inputs and pre-mix benefits must be discouraged.

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*For instance, The Paramount chiefs made it clear that without them the institutionalization of the additional fishing holidays will not work, since the existing fishing holidays were instituted through the traditional systems.*

*Therefore, they stressed the for consultation with the traditional leaders for the effective implementation of the National Fisheries Management plan.*