

## COMMUNIQUE

### **Conference on Fisheries and Coastal Environment Accra, August 19 – 21, 2019**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Fisheries and Coastal Environment (CFCE Accra 2019) was held in Accra from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> August 2019. The conference was attended by 282 participants drawn from Ghanaian universities, representatives from the USAID Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) with the University of Rhode Island, USA, Fisheries and Aquaculture Society of Ghana, Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea, Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Bank's West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program, government ministries and agencies, private sector, civil society, research institutions, fisheries associations, fishermen, fishmongers and the media. Deliberations at CFCE Accra 2019 focused on:

- Marine and Coastal Environment and Management
- Fisheries Science and Fisheries Biology
- Fisheries Management and the Postharvest Fish Value Chain
- Aquaculture and Livelihoods
- Cross-cutting issues in Fisheries and Coastal Management

The CFCE Accra 2019, recognizing

- the national importance of marine and coastal ecosystems and fisheries to the people of Ghana providing livelihood for 2 million people and contributing 4.5% to the national GDP;
- the importance of fish for the national food security strategy and livelihood;
- that the fish stock is at an alarming stage and on the verge of collapsing;
- the significant contribution and opportunity of the blue economy to the socio-economic development of Ghana;
- the need for political will to include civil society in decision making for better fisheries and coastal the management
- the need for regional collaboration among neighbouring countries;
- the pollution and degradation of the coastal environment; and
- the growing menace of pollution, particularly plastic wastes in our seas;

reached the following recommendations for the attention and necessary action of the Government, MoFAD, Fisheries Commission, Fisheries Associations, all other stakeholders and the Media:

- 1. Immediately end overfishing and enhance Ghana's small pelagic fisheries.** The Conference participants acknowledged the need to end overfishing and improve the small pelagic fisheries such as sardinellas, mackerels and anchovies. The harvesting of small

pelagics is the backbone of artisanal fisheries which contribute 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 women. However, rebuilding Ghana's collapsing small pelagic stocks requires that MoFAD and the Fisheries Commission cooperate to implement measures to limit subsidies that exacerbate overfishing, cap fishing effort, reduce the number of canoes and trawlers allowed to fish, use lessons from the recent closed seasons for the artisanal, semi-industrial and trawl sub-sectors to institute a regular annual closed season for all fleets between July and August, and, eradicate IUU fishing, particularly the "saiko" and light fishing. Additionally, actions are needed to decrease the impact of trawling on the small pelagic stocks by restricting the trawlers to fish in offshore waters, reduce conflicts between the canoe and trawling sub-sectors and extend the Inshore Exclusive Zone.

2. **Re-direct input subsidies that encourage over-exploitation of marine and coastal resources into subsidies that benefit fishing communities.** Subsidies within the fisheries sector are largely counter-productive as they provide incentives to increase fishing efforts and thereby making the overfishing situation worse. Government pre-mix fuel and other input subsidies indirectly support the building of new canoes and acquisition of more powerful fishing nets and outboard motors, increasing fishing capacity while the fish stocks are severely overfished and near collapse. Global experience shows that removing subsidies contributes to sustainable management of fish stocks. The Conference recommends that the government review and evaluate all fisheries sector subsidies and consider ways that they could be appropriately re-channelled into fisheries and coastal development programs while reducing fishers' access to bad subsidies to improve their social and economic investments in the blue economy for the benefit of Ghana.
  
3. **Increase emphasis on improving Ghana's fisheries post-harvest sector.** The post-harvest handling of fish is an important sub-sector in the fisheries value chain that needs to be improved to ensure food security and safety. The Post-harvest sector directly employs an estimated 30,000 women directly engaged in fish smoking. Recent innovations in smoker ovens, promoted by the Fisheries Commission, produce better quality fish with less smoke and drastically reduce levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) which are carcinogenic. They also reduce fuelwood use which in turn reduces pressure on mangrove ecosystems. These and other processing innovations as well as improvements in fish handling and use of ice should be given increased attention by the Fisheries Commission, Ministry of Health and relevant agencies to attract private investments and efficient production and marketing.

- 4. Conduct annual stock assessment to monitor the status of fish populations, harvest rates, and predict future stocks.** Management of Ghana’s fish stocks should be based on reliable scientific assessment and data which includes local ecological knowledge. In view of this, the Fisheries Commission’s recent improvements relative to electronic data collection and stock assessment should be strengthened to provide reliable information for decision making on the main marine fish stock groups including large and small pelagics, demersals finfish and cuttlefish. The CFCE 2019 strongly recommends the government and local universities of Ghana collaborate on the design and acquisition of a new research vessel, as well as increase the human resource base by employing and training the youth and others for continual collection of reliable data to support decision making. This is particularly important for setting closed seasons, determining optimum mesh sizes of fishing gear and designating protected areas. The Conference also recommends the formalization of the Science and Technical Working Group (STWG) or adopt an equivalent scientific body, under existing laws, in order to engage scientists from local universities and fisheries associations in fish stock assessment and science-based management advice. This scientific body will complement and add significant scientific value to the annual stock assessments of the the Fisheries and Scientific Survey Division of the Fisheries Commission.
- 5. Approve, implement and provide resources for a national co-management strategy for fisheries and coastal areas.** Community-based fisheries management plans should be developed by communities with technical assistance from the Fisheries Commission. The policy must have an allocated budget to provide funds for co-management implementation. Policy implementers should recognize the dynamism of different communities and resources and apply different management measures and institutional arrangements depending on the resources to be managed. The co-management policy under consideration by cabinet should be approved and implemented.
- 6. Implement actions to eradicate illegal transshipment of fish (‘Saiko’ fishing).** Trawlers are increasingly exploiting small pelagic fish resources and contributing significantly to the depletion of the nearly collapsed stocks, depriving artisanal fishers of their livelihood support, and forcing them into other illegal practices that further impact small pelagic stocks negatively. A recent study estimated that nearly 100,000 metric tonnes of fish are landed annually through “Saiko”, of which approximately 55 percent are juveniles of small pelagic species. The trawlers that are licensed to catch demersal fish are targeting small pelagic species that are meant to be exploited by the artisanal fishers and transship them illegally in specially built canoes owned by local businessmen and sold back to the fishing communities. The CFCE Accra 2019 recommends that the Fisheries Commission, Fisheries Enforcement Unit and other related Government agencies should immediately take advantage of the goodwill expressed by leadership of Ghana Industrial Trawlers Association and the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen’s

Council to eradicate the practice of “saiko” fishing and find ways to reduce the excessive by-catch of juveniles by the trawler fleet.

7. **Increase regional fisheries management cooperation with other West African Countries.** The fish stocks in the sub-region are highly migratory, interconnected and interdependent. Therefore, local management measures will not fully achieve the desired results in the long term without regional cooperation. Following the experiences of the closed seasons in Ghana and elsewhere in the sub-region, efforts should be made to create a network of closed seasons and closed areas among countries in the Gulf of Guinea based on reliable scientific information which allows fish stocks to recover. During these closed seasons, opportunities should be given to fishermen and fishmongers to legally import fish to sustain livelihoods and fish protein needs of the nation.
8. **Implement a national campaign to control plastics production, use and pollution.** Plastics are becoming a significant problem in net hauls during fishing expeditions. This has come about as a result of direct dumping into the seas and rivers, and poor solid waste management in Ghana. The growing menace of plastic wastes in our seas directly affect marine fishes, the livelihoods of fishers and health of consumers. CFCE Accra 2019 calls for a national campaign involving EPA, NDPC, District Assemblies and other stakeholders to develop systems for the proper management of plastic wastes and introduce incentives for fisherfolks for plastic reclamation and recycling.
9. **Develop mechanisms for stronger research collaboration on issues in the sector.** Global best practices recognize the invaluable role of scientific research and public education to sustainable management of marine and coastal resources. The CFCE Accra 2019 unanimously agreed that a sustained research system, which includes the active participation of local universities and fishermen, women processors and other stakeholders, be put in place to strengthen the needed information for sustainable fisheries and coastal management. While the ultimate responsibility of this programme lies with government, it is recommended that the National Fisheries Act should include a provision that provides a mechanism and funding to support applied research and extension grants to support a network of coastal and fisheries related universities. This model of collaborative research between the public, private sector, fisheries associations, and research institutions should be encouraged and supported.
10. **Develop capacities of national association of resource users and co-management groups.** In Ghana’s fisheries sector, a robust representative institutional ecosystem of transparent and accountable government, universities, and civil society organizations is of critical importance to drive and sustain the transformational change urgently needed to reverse unsustainable resource exploitation and secure fisheries livelihoods. The institutional ecosystem is key because the size and geographic scope of the sector, and especially the artisanal sub-sector, surpasses the capacity of the government that is

operating with limited human and financial resources to manage with a top down approach. Fishers, processors and other stakeholders are likewise limited in their capacity to coordinate and effectively take concerted action to manage common resources for their own benefit without organization and representation at a significant scale. The CFCE Accra 2019 calls on Government through the MoFAD to facilitate organisational capacity development of user groups and provide the needed recognition in law to support the management of local fisheries and coastal resources.

### **11. Need for legal reforms in fisheries.**

The current Fisheries Act 625 of 2002 is seventeen years old while the fisheries sector continues to experience a rapid transformation. The current law and associated regulations have been found to be deficient in adapting to current situations and to move the sector into modern fisheries management and economic growth development strategies. There is confusion in terms of roles and responsibilities with regards to the work of the Fisheries Commission and MoFAD. The Conference applauds the Ministry for its initiatives to revise the Act to address gaps in emerging challenges from other sectors that affect fisheries like mining, oil and gas, etc. For instance, Section 93 of the Act is vague with regards to Fisheries Impact Assessment. Like other extractive industries, a Fisheries Transparent Initiative should be included in the new law to ensure higher transparency. The new law should redefine the Inshore Exclusive Zone (IEZ) and further increase the zone to help reduce conflicts between the canoe and industrial trawl sector, as well as to help protect small pelagic stocks for the exclusive harvest of the canoe sector. Marine Police and Fisheries Enforcement Unit mandates and authorities must be properly clarified in the new law. The Conference highlighted some specific changes, for instance, that every fisheries infraction case must first be registered at the court before any arbitration process is invoked. Section 116 of the Act dealing with compounding of offence must be reviewed in the new law to address the lack of clarity in the Out of Court settlement process. There are inadequate provisions made for inland fisheries and aquaculture in current law. It is also necessary that the new law contains a provision that recognizes the position of the chief fisherman and his elders and Traditional Authorities in the co-management of the fishery. The legal reform should redefine the role of scientific input into fisheries management.

**12. Establish Marine Protected Areas for the protection of marine and 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 for fisheries production as they are utilised as nursery areas by many 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 establishing Marine Protected Areas, enforcing all the existing regulations and formulate new ones where necessary. The impacts of climate change and increasing sea level needs



to be considered in the policies and programs to protect and preserve these essential habitats and the ecosystem services they provide for human well-being.

### **DISCLAIMER**

This communique reflects the views and opinions of participants at the Accra Conference 2019. The contents of this communique are the responsibility of the individual contributors at the conference and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government, the Government of Ghana and other Conference sponsors.

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