



Friends of the Nation



REVIEW FISHERIES ACT TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NOW!

Background

Ghana's fishing sector plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of the nation, especially in the areas of employment, food security, and nutrition and poverty reduction. Fish consumption provides essential fatty acids, high-quality proteins, vitamins and minerals, and thereby help prevent malnutrition, developmental disorders and diseases. Also the fisheries sector plays a very important role in poverty alleviation in Ghana. The fishing operations in Ghana consist of three subsectors which are, the industrial, the semi industrial and the artisanal subsectors. The artisanal subsector is responsible for approximately 70 percent of the total fish production in Ghana and employs over 60 percent of the women involved in the fishery value chain.

However, Ghana's fishery resources especially from the marine are heavily overexploited, and Ghana only produces a fraction of its annual fish requirements, with the sector recording a decline in production over the past couple of years. This is evidenced from the contribution of fisheries to the GDP, which has decreased from about 6 percent in 1993 to the present level of 1.5 percent. Also, in terms of absolute output, fish landing has fallen, over the years. In order to sustain the per capita annual consumption of fish (estimated at around 24.2 kg in 2010), imports have increased substantially in the most recent years, reaching USD 373 million in 2013. (FAO Fishery and Aquaculture Ghana Country Profile, 2016).

Ghana's Marine fishery is in crisis, a fish stock assessment conducted in 2017 for small pelagic reported that the stocks are severely overfished and that overfishing continues to exacerbate beyond the level of sustainability. Fisher folks also confirmed that fish landings are all time lowest and many fishers now spend more hours fishing with fewer fish catches. Fisher folks have over the years raised concerns of weak governance and the wasteful over-capacity and widespread of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing of the sector.

Additionally, due to the weak enforcement and low compliance of the fisheries laws, fishers use of unsustainable and harmful fishing methods that is contributing to over fishing and degradation of critical coastal fisheries habitats. Sadly, Ghana's marine fish stock has declined significantly to the extent that many fishing communities are experiencing severe poverty from declined livelihoods.

Facts from the Fishing Industry

- Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is a lucrative venture in many coastal African countries, especially those without resources to police their exclusive economic zones.
- The global losses due to IUU fishing alone are estimated to be as high as US\$23.5 billion per year with West African waters deemed to have the highest levels of IUU fishing in the world, representing up to 37 percent of the region's catch, (OECD, 2012).

- Most of this catch occurs not on the high seas but in coastal waters under national jurisdiction (Global Oceans Commission, 2013).
- Ghana lost about 100,000 metric tonnes of fish amounting to about \$50 million in 2017, through illegal fishing activities.
- According to friends of the Nation, about 2.6 million Ghanaian are fully or partly dependent on the fisheries sector for employment.
- According to the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, the fishery sector is estimated to contribute 3% of the total GDP and 5% of the GDP in agriculture. Marine fisheries account for over 80% of the fish consumed in Ghana.



- Ignorance among fisher folks on the dire consequences of indulging in illegal fishing. This is largely as a result of poor or lack of public education on best fishing practices.
- Weak fisheries law enforcement mechanisms, that is, although there are adequate laws to regulate fishing activities their enforcement is weak due to poor logistics and inadequate law enforcement personnel, greed, gaps in the prosecution of fisheries infractions and political interference.
- The perception of legitimacy among Saiko fishermen due to some taxes fishers claim to pay to the district assemblies contributes to the increase in this form of IUU fishing. Saiko fishermen do not see themselves as contributors to the issue of overfishing in the sector and do not see the damage the practice causes to the long term sustainability of the fishery.

Challenges in the Fishing Industry

- Weak governance of the fisheries sector in Ghana has led to declining marine fishery resources, conflicts and widespread illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices.
- There are serious concerns of mismanagement of the Fisheries Development Fund (a fund established for the development of Ghana's Fisheries sector) due to lack of openness, low transparency and lack of accountability in the management of the funds.
- Issues of high levels of discretionary powers and decisions which are unguided especially by fisheries managers including Committees that adjudicates on fisheries infractions.
- Overfishing and overcapacity which has led to continuous decline in the capture of fishes, coupled with rising levels of fishing effort and decreasing profit has resulted in increased poverty in fishing communities. This situation is strengthening the socio-economic justification for illegal fishing popularly called "Saiko" fishing.
- With the current open access fishery regime, people decide to enter the fishery sector at will, thereby putting marine resources under severe pressure leading to scarcity of fish. As fish becomes scarce fishermen resort to more and more desperate and disingenuous measures including the use of light, dynamite, carbide and fine mesh nets to survive.
- This action, consequently, leads to a depleting fish catch and diminishing livelihood for over 4 million Ghanaians - that is fishers and their dependents.

Effects of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing Practices on the Economy, Environment and the Ghanaian

- It has exacerbated overfishing and jeopardized the livelihoods of artisanal fishers, who have few alternative sources of income.
- The widespread sale of illegally caught fish has led to trawlers and in-shore vessels engaging in the illegality to compete more directly with the canoe fleet for the small pelagic catch and at the expense of the canoe fishers involved.
- Illegal fish catch and sales now means that more of this already overfished resource is harvested, further depleting the resource and threatening collapse of the fishery and long term economic viability of the industry and livelihoods of tens of thousands of fishing households.
- The ordinary Ghanaian will be denied access to fish if the open regime of illegal fishing is not checked.
- Widespread illegal fishing means that regulatory measures put in place to help rebuild the health of fish stocks cannot work as intended, thereby, endangering the economic recovery of the fisheries sector.

Benefits of an Effective Implementation of the Fisheries Act to Ghanaians and the Fishing Community

Among other benefits, the effective implementation of the Fisheries Act 625, 2002 will:

- Ensure sustainable development in the country's fisheries sub-sector and encourage fishing using sustainable and approved methods.
- Promote transparency, participation and accountability by all stakeholders in the management of the fisheries industry.
- Stimulate growth in the industry by enforcing and prosecuting recalcitrant fisher folks who go contrary to the provisions of the law. Without a good regulation, management of the industry will be problematic.
- Create a vibrant fisheries industry that creates job opportunities, contribute to improved national economy (Gross Domestic Product) and improved income for fisher folks hence contributing to poverty reduction in fishing communities in Ghana.
- Inculcate modern reforms of fishing and its regulations to make Ghana be at par with globally acceptable practice to boost the industry.
- Help replenish the dwindling fishing stock with a specific restriction as to the quantum of fish to be harvested per year.
- Focus on the reduction in fishing days and reduce harmful incentives and subsidies as well as prescribe the number of boats to be allowed to fish in order to sanitize the industry.
- Restructure the Fisheries Commission and clearly define the roles of the Board of the Fisheries Commission and that of the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD) to help address the weakness of the commission and avoid duplication of roles.
- Provide chief fishermen the legal instrument to give them authority to enforce the country's fisheries laws.

Way Forward

- Fishermen should support government by collaborating with the marine police to end the Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing along the Ghanaian coasts.
- Fisher Folks and the general public should engage the Police and report cases of illegal fishing promptly so as to curb the menace. Government should educate the police on the dire consequences illegal fishing has on the economy.
- Government to intensify sensitization, education and engage the public more about the repercussions of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the country. This will make fisher folks to comply with the necessary legal and regulatory framework as well as manage fisheries resources on sustainable basis.
- Civil Society, Non-governmental organizations, traditional and Opinion leaders at the district and community level can form volunteer watch dog groups and associations to closely monitor activities at the shores of the country and be actively involved in the fight against illegal fishing.
- Government to also empower the relevant security agencies likes the marine police, Navy among others with the necessary logistics and resources needed to end illegal fishing along the shores of the country.
- Government may also reduce political control and interference in Fisheries prosecution to promote effective implementation of the fisheries laws and management plans.

Action to Duty Bearers

- Relevant duty bearers should ensure the review and effective implementation of the Fisheries Act to address the depleting fish stock and the issues of Unregulated, Unreported and illegal fishing practices the sector.
- Security Agencies to prosecute all who are found culpable to be engaged in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the country. This will serve as a deterrent for others.



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