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Success Story

Fisheries Enforcement/Ghana



Hen Mpoano photo

Artisanal canoes docked in a harbor in Ghana's Western Region

Western Region Sets the Pace for the Coast

The Western Region of Ghana, where rich biological diversity and natural resources abound, has drawn attention recently not only for those riches, but for a surge in oil exploitation activities and the ensuing opportunities, challenges and threats. Food security in the fisheries sector is among those challenges.

The Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance initiative, a four-year United States Agency for International Development-funded program, has

been working to address food security and related issues in the coastal region. The program, begun in 2009 and known locally as Hen Mpoano (Our Coast), was implemented by the Coastal Resources Center of Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island.

Among its successes, Hen Mpoano transformed the Western Region into a model for enforcement of fisheries violations, which pose a significant threat to food security.

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Fisheries violations being adjudicated in the Western Region of Ghana.

Ghana's Fisheries Act provides for the prosecution of individuals who violate fisheries laws. Prompted by a September 2010 case in which the Western Naval Command was unable to prosecute several violators, the Government of Ghana committed itself to establishing a platform for such prosecutions. With Hen Mpoano-led studies as corroboration, the fisheries prosecution chain in the Western Region was strengthened, resulting in successful enforcement of fisheries violations.

Early on, Hen Mpoano had identified weak enforcement and compliance of fisheries laws as significant causes of the declining fisheries economy. Major reasons included ignorance of the institutions in the prosecution chain, lack of collaboration and coordination among institutions and inadequate knowledge of the ecological bases of the laws. To address these issues, Hen Mpoano spearheaded a training workshop in March 2011 for those parties responsible for prosecutions, including the Attorney General's Department of the Western Regional Coordinating Directorate, the Regional Police Command, the Fisheries Commission, Circuit Court judges, the Western Naval Command and the Environmental Protection Agency. Among other goals, the training sought effective and efficient handling of prosecutions.

By September 2012, 18 cases had been successfully tried with 15 convictions and three acquittals. The Western Region continues to be a model for the other coastal regions.

In the first half of 2011, 36 fisheries violations were recorded and 16 of those went to court, resulting in five convictions. Just 10 months later a review of fisheries cases brought after the training revealed a tremendous improvement in prosecution of fisheries violations. Out of a total of 36 fisheries violations recorded in mid-2011, 16 had been sent to court with five convictions, while 11 cases were ongoing as at December 2011. By September 2012, 18 cases had been successfully tried with 15 convictions and three acquittals. Six other cases were still ongoing in court, and another five fisheries violations were yet to be tried.

The Western Region continues to be a model for other coastal regions, as stakeholders continue to meet and learn from one another, improving and strengthening the prosecution chain. All this leads to improved food security for the people of Ghana.