



BEFORE AND AFTER

From Ground to Tabletop

Fishers abandon the ground to instead cut fish on clean tabletops



BEFORE: Susana Bisiw standing between two fish butchers on the beach



Photo Credit: Daasgift Quality Foundation

“Our community stands out from others because we are now practicing safe fish handling. Our fish is no longer dirty because we cut them on tables.”

Susana Bisiw
Fishmonger, Shama Bentsir,
Western Region-Ghana

In Ghana there is a long-held belief that “Salt from the sea water kills the bacteria and germs likely to contaminate the fish from cutting on the ground.” The Shama Bentsir community now knows differently.

At the break of dawn, the women fish processors of Shama Bentsir rush to reach the beach with their head pans—ready to buy “any and all” fish that are landed. Unfortunately, while the demand for fish is increasingly high, fewer and fewer fish are being landed. And while fish is critical to local food security, in 2014, landings were only 15 percent of the maximum landings (about 280,000 metric tons) for 1996.

This makes it even more critical that the fish that are landed are handled carefully and kept healthy for consumption. It has always been traditional practice for fishermen to offload fish directly onto the beach and for fish processors to then cut and process them there on the ground as well. However, this ground is a mixture of sand and fecal matter—the result of the longstanding habit, especially in fishing villages, of defecation on the beaches.

In response, the USAID Feed the Future Initiative is bringing knowledge about a healthier way of food handling to the people of fishing communities such as Shama Bentsir. Not only is it helping rebuild a collapsing fishery, it is helping protect consumer rights and people’s health. This includes the USAID Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, which is providing training and raising awareness on hygienic fish handling. One example is what is happening in Shama Bentsir.

After an eight-week training on business management skills for 2014 selected micro-, small- and medium-scale enterprises in the Western and Central Regions, about 98 percent of the beneficiaries in one community, Shama Bentsir, now cuts their fish on wooden tables instead of on the fecal-polluted beach sand. Some of the women fish processors proudly took project staff to the landing site after a training session to demonstrate behavior change in action.

So far, the project team has trained 751 enterprises and is scaling up the Healthy Fish Campaign using “best fish-handling practices” competitions among communities. The goal is to train more than 1,100 enterprises in Year 2 and have many, many more communities handling their fish as Shama Bentsir now handles its fish.