

Special feature



• Returning from sea with almost empty nets

Revamp the fisheries sector

By Shirley Asiedu-Addo

THEY taste nice, especially when fried and while still hot. In appreciation of their great taste, they find themselves in soups and stews.

The average Ghanaian loves fish and is said to consume 23 kilogrammes of fish per year above the global average of 16 kilogrammes per person per year.

But as we crunch into their little bones, we crunch our way to scarcity; the scarcity of pelagic fish that have been the mainstay of our nation's fish industry.

It is serious, our fisheries are in crisis. The small pelagic fish, including the sardinella or the herrings, the anchovies and the mackerels, constitute the backbone of the nation's fish form, but are being wiped out by our actions and inactions.

The fishermen and the fishmongers bear witness to this. They go to fish and

come back almost empty handed.

Reality

The reality is that bad. Ghana's small pelagic fishery stocks are on the verge of collapse.

Statistics from the Fisheries Commission indicate that annual sardinella or herring catch has plunged continuously, while the number of artisanal fishing canoes rose to more than 13,000 in 2014.

Hundreds of fishermen and fishmongers depend on the sea for their livelihoods.

In many fishing communities in the four coastal regions of Ghana, the people do virtually no other business. Their lives and those of their dependents are intertwined with the fortunes of the sea and what it gives them.

And with the current open access and entry into the fishing business, there is overfishing.

More people are entering the fishing industry, exploiting the sea and yet taking home virtually nothing.

The situation is gloomy and stakeholders in the fishing industry have to act fast.

Statistics

Catches of most important species of the small pelagic resources have been decreasing sharply since 2007 and have reached about 15 per cent of the maximum landings realised in 1996.

The Scientific and Technical Working Group (STWG) of the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) estimates that the current weight of fish in the ocean of small pelagics is the lowest in more than 30 years.

Prof. Kobina Yankson of the STWG and SFMP indicated that the stocks had been overfished and faced depletion.



• The future of small pelagics such as these are in trouble.

Causes

He explained that one major cause of

NUMBER CRUNCH

13,000

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• Fishermen in parts of Cape Coast come back with crabs.

the state of the fisheries in the country is overfishing.

With the non-regulated entry into the fishing industries many along the coast automatically turn to fishing.

Another major cause of the state of the fisheries is the increasing fleet of fishing vessels.

The number of canoes in artisanal fishery was more than 12,728 in 2014, well over the 9,095 required to sustain the fishery resources.

One main resolution played up by experts and agreed to by all stakeholders is the closed season.

With the closed season, fishermen would be required to halt their activities in the sea for a period to be agreed by all stakeholders to give the sea "rest" and to restore its stocks.

Some fishmongers at Axim agree to this perfectly.

"We give fishermen money for their fishing expeditions and they are not able to pay us back. We know something is definitely wrong. "We agree that the situation is gloomy," they noted.

SMFP

The implementation of the SFMP of the USAID and allied agencies has committed to ensuring that the nation rebuilds its stocks.

A forum organised discussed the effective implementation of the National Marine Fisheries Management Plan, a national policy for the management of the marine fisheries sector.

National Marine Fisheries Management Plan

A five-year management plan to provide a strategic framework for

reversing the declining trend of fish resources is to be implemented from 2015 to 2019 to help reduce the excessive pressure on fish stocks and ensure the effective implementation of a fisheries legislation.

It would help ensure that the fisheries waters were exploited within biologically acceptable levels, while protecting marine habitats and bio-diversity.

The National Dialogue

Participants in a national fisheries dialogue in Cape Coast recently organised as part of SFMP's efforts to rebuild the fisheries, recommended a closed season on fishing activities to help rebuild the critical fisheries stock levels.

Mrs Emelia Abakah Edu, representing the National Fish Processors and Traders Association, said they fully supported the idea of a closed season.

Nana Duncan of the Inshore Canoe Fishers Association also supported the idea of a closed season.

The forum also called for protected marine zones to help restore stocks.

Mr Brian Crawford, the Chief of Party of the SFMP, said

it was time to move from the walk to the talk to restore the fisheries sector.

November 21 every year is World Fisheries Day and this year, a durbar on the state of the fisheries was held in Komenda in the Central Region on the theme: "Sustainable fishing is key. Ghana's food security depends on us."

Political interference

Other stakeholders called on politicians to stop playing politics with the fisheries sector.

"We want politicians to tell us the truth. They should tell us the truth about the fisheries sector and stop dividing us along party lines," one other fisherman stated.

Nearly a fourth of children below five are

undernourished, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Ghana is currently a net importer of fish. Further declines could be worrisome as a result of the negative impact on the health of the people, particularly, children below five.

The fight to restore the fisheries sector must be won. We cannot, as a country, afford to lose this war.



• Many coastal women depend on the fisheries sector to support their families.