



# “Green-green”: A threat to livelihoods in coastal communities in the Western Region

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Hen Mpoano

THE  
UNIVERSITY  
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GRADUATE SCHOOL  
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For more information on the Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance project, contact: Coastal Resources Center, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay Campus, 220 South Ferry Road, Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882, USA. Brian Crawford, Director International Programs at [brian@crc.uri.edu](mailto:brian@crc.uri.edu); Tel: 401-874-6224; Fax: 401-874-6920.

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## **“Green-green”: A threat to livelihoods in coastal communities in the Western Region**

By Donald Underwood and Mark Fenn

**TENS of thousands of fishermen, fish processors, fish distributors, tourism operators, and hoteliers in Ghana's Western Region depend on the sea to support their families and businesses. Furthermore, fish is the primary source of protein for most Ghanaians, and both foreign and domestic tourists are increasingly flocking the Western Region's coastline to swim in its beautiful waters and dine on fresh fish landed by local fishermen.**

This reliance on the sea is no different in the Jomoro District's coastal village of Benyin. As you walk along Benyin's scenic coastline or chat with community members, you will quickly learn that their livelihoods are under threat by a seemingly harmless green macroalgae locally referred to as *green-green*.

*Green-green* is anything but harmless—these algae blooms fill the sea with silky, cotton-like tufts of algae that tint the sea green and coat the beaches in a dense, verdant carpet. These algae blooms have periodically choked the coastline west of the Ankobra River since 1993, and reports suggest that they are becoming more frequent and longer lasting. The blooms prevent fishermen from fishing by clogging nets and discourage tourism by sullyng beaches. Unfortunately, the cause of these events is poorly understood. Fishermen and others who rely on the sea for their livelihood are becoming increasingly desperate for answers and a solution to the algae blooms.

When speaking with local fishermen and fishmongers, it became apparent that *green-green* is not merely a nuisance—it is a direct threat to their families' survival. Fears of malnutrition are increasing among community members. One fisherman described the situation this way: “*Green-green* is the biggest problem we (the fishermen) face. It usually comes during the dry season, which is also the fishing season. This year, it began in January and has not left. We cannot go to sea to feed our families; when there is *green-green* our children are hungry.”

The fishery sector is not the only industry being threatened by the algae blooms. One foreign tourist staying at a Benyin resort decided to end her stay early saying, “I came with my son to enjoy the beach and swim, but the sea is filled with this green stuff. I don't want to go in the water without knowing what it is—besides it sticks all over your body.”

In the absence of clear answers, community members are speculating that the algae is being intentionally placed in the waters to prevent them from fishing, this claim, they believe is supported by the fact that the algae only occurs in communities west of the Ankobra River. Others are blaming illegal dumping across the border in Ivory Coast for the algae blooms. What is clear is that fishermen and other stakeholders are looking to researchers and the Ghanaian government to identify the cause of *green-green* and to provide possible solutions to the problem.

However, Coastal Resources Centre-Ghana (CRC) has helped to sound the alarm at the national level with the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), the MEST (Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology), and the GCLME (Guinea Current—Large Marine Ecosystem Program).

As the nutrient source for the algae blooms is thought to originate from the Ivory Coast, CRC sent a delegation to the Ivory Coast to assess the extent of the bloom in Ivorian waters and to discuss developing a joint action-research programme with the Ivorian Fisheries Service and the associated Oceanographic Research Centre. Later this year, a bilateral research programme will begin to research a means for addressing this problem.

CRC will provide ongoing technical support through refined analysis of the algae that allows for the identification of the nutrient source, whether from the Aby Lagoon, Abidjan's lagoons; or if it is a runoff associated with human waste, agricultural products, industrial sources; or from a change in the upwelling off the coast. Needless to say, there is the urge both within Ghana and Ivory Coast to address this important issue. Through this medium and diverse radio shows transmitted on Tuesdays throughout the western coast, CRC/the Initiative will keep people informed on developments.