



USAID SUPPORTS GHANA'S FIRST CLOSED SEASON FOR ARTISANAL FISHERS

“We cannot sit and watch the collapse of the industry. We care about the future of the fishing industry and we really need to push hard for the alternative that is finally better for the sector and the people.”



Naa Afoley Quaye, Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development

With the implementation of the closed season for the first time there is greater stakeholder appreciation and public awareness of the closed season as a key measure for rebuilding the nation's depleted fish stock.

Socrates Apetorgbor, Fisheries Specialist with SFMP

The fisheries sector in Ghana is beset with overfishing, resulting in a dramatic depletion of stocks. The total landings of the small pelagic fish, primarily mackerel, sardines and anchovies, have decreased by 86 percent, from 138,955 Metric Tons in 1996 to 19,608 Metric Tons in 2016. As result, there has been a significant loss of income for households in more than 300 coastal communities who rely on fisheries as their primary source of livelihood. Small pelagics, are often referred to as *‘the people’s fish’* because they make up the majority of the animal protein intake for most Ghanaians. Over the past 10 years, the situation is becoming worse, making life more difficult for fisherfolk.

Nana Jojo Solomon, the secretary of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen’s Council says, “The looming crisis of the artisanal fishery threatens economic growth in the sector and presents a potential internal security problem that directly affects the livelihoods of as many as 150,000 people involved in the marine fishery sector.”

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been responding to the situation since 2015 through the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, (SFMP), and in cooperation with the Fisheries Commission, to rebuild the nation’s depleted fish stocks. The initiative included the establishment of a Scientific and Technical Working Group in 2016 that provides scientific stock assessments and recommendations for sustainable fishing to the Commission. It brought together key stakeholders including scientists from the University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana, Fisheries Scientific Survey Division, representatives of local NGOs and representatives of the fishing industry associations. A study by the working group projected a complete collapse of *the people’s fish* stock by 2020 without immediate actions.

In line with the National Fisheries Management Plan, the Science and Technical Working Group recommended a closed season during August. This is the peak month when fish spawn and reproduce, thereby providing fish for future years. The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development responded, and through a series of dialogues with stakeholders, declared a closed season from May 15, to June 15 2019 for the artisanal and semi-industrial fleets and August 1 – September 30, 2019 for the industrial trawlers. Najih Lazar, an international fisheries scientist working with the project and a member of the scientific working group said, “With an annual closed season and eradication of illegal fishing methods, it is projected that the stock of the people’s fish will recover and landings will increase from the yearly landings of 19.608 metric tons recorded in 2016 to 90,000 metric tons per year by 2030 with an estimated value of US\$ 54 million.”

“For the first time, there is greater stakeholder appreciation and public awareness and of a closed season as a key measure for rebuilding the nation’s depleted fish stocks. It has also generated public support and political will toward addressing the problem.” says Socrates Apetorgbor, a fisheries specialist working with the project.

Now that sustainability has become an important goal for fisheries management, the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, Naa Afoley Quaye, said, “We cannot sit and watch the collapse of the industry. We care about the future of the fishing industry and we really need to push hard for the alternative that is finally better for the sector and the people.”