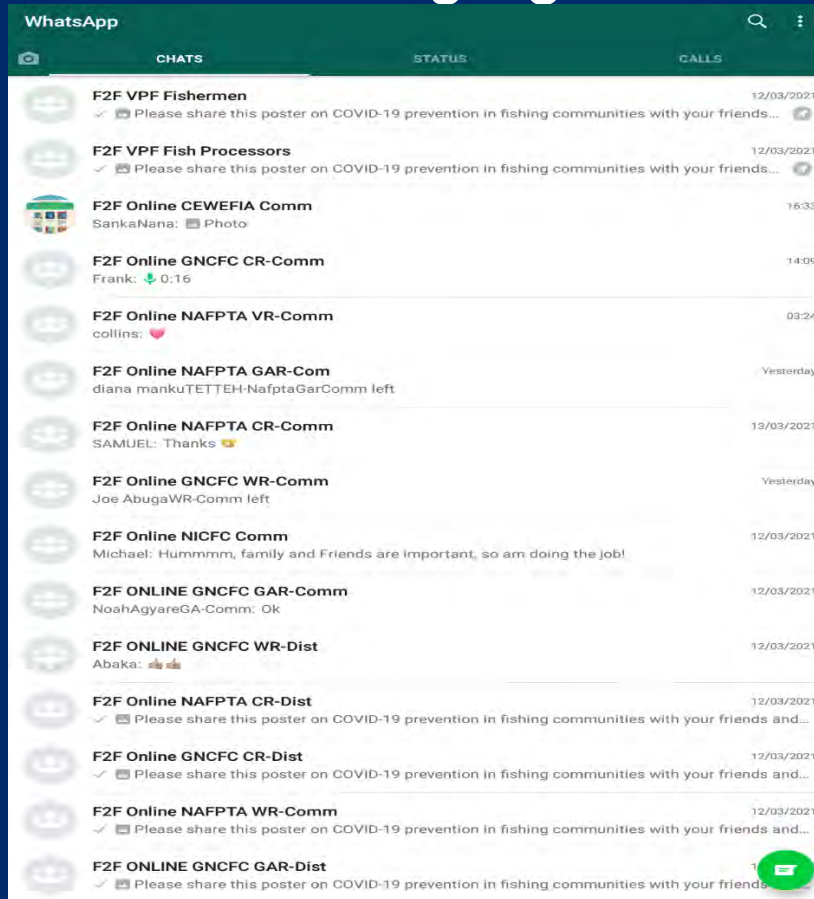




SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROJECT (SFMP)

Execution Report on the Activation of Mass Messaging Platforms



MARCH 2021



Hen Mpoano



Friends of the Nation



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Cover photo: Screenshot of the WhatsApp virtual platforms (Credit: SFMP)

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ACRONYMS

CEWEFIA	Central and Western Region Fishmongers Improvement Association
CRC	Coastal Resources Center
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAA	Development Action Association
F2F	Fisher to Fisher
FC	Fisheries Commission
FoN	Friends of the Nation
GHS	Ghana Health Service
GIFA	Ghana Inshore Fishermen Association
GITA	Ghana Industrial Trawlers Association
GNCFC	Ghana National Canoe Fishermen’s Council
HM	Hen Mpoano
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
IUU	Illegal Unreported Unregulated
MOFAD	Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Information
MMDA	Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies
NAFAG	National Fisheries Association of Ghana
NAFPTA	National Fish Processors and Traders Association
NCCE	National Commission on Civic Education
NICFC	National Inland Canoe Fishermen Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SFMP	Sustainable Fisheries Management Project
SBCC	Social and Behavior Change Communication
UCC	University of Cape Coast
URI	University of Rhode Island
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VPF	Virtual Platform for Fishers

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We would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Fisheries Commission, GNCFC, NAFPTA, CEWEFIA, and DAA in providing the database of representatives for the platforms and also helping to manage the platforms.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana in March 2020, it was considered that this unanticipated development could have dire consequences on the artisanal fisheries sector, which is central to the economy and livelihoods of about 300,000 men and women in over 300 coastal communities given the communal nature of landing fish and the related post-harvest activities. To prevent infection and spread of the pandemic among fishing communities in Ghana, the project adopted a Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC) Strategy to influence fisherfolk knowledge, attitudes and practices.

The safety protocols of handwashing, nose mask wearing, and social distancing to limit infection and spread of the virus required the need to adopt innovative approaches to providing information to the fishers. The SFMP therefore replicated its innovative Fisher to Fisher (F2F) dialogue in a virtual form with the formation of social media groups (WhatsApp groups) across the entire coastal fishing communities, linked to a collaborative decision-making center, a **Virtual Platform for Fishers (VPF)**. The approach is in consonance with the vision of the [USAID Digital Strategy](#) of advancing progress in partner countries and communities on their journey to self-reliance through effective, efficient and responsible digital initiatives that enhance security and economic prosperity.

A total of 21 WhatsApp groups representing both fishermen and fish processors at various levels were formed. All groups were interconnected or linked to one of the two groups representing the national executives of fishermen, the GNCFC, or fish processors, the NAFPTA, constituting a Virtual Platform for Fishers (VPF). The rest of the groups comprised; 8 groups each for GNCFC and NAFPTA at the district and community levels for the four coastal regions and 1 group each for NICFC, CEWEFIA, and DAA at the community level. The 21 groups had a total membership of 787 at its creation. In total 48 messages were posted on the platforms averaging 2 posts each week with 85 percent of the membership on average reading these messages. The platforms also played a role in the implementation of the pilot economic safety net scheme as urgent mass messages targeting the district and community representatives of the fisher associations were shared through the groups.

COVID-19 IEC materials such as video campaign songs, posters and jingles and animations were disseminated throughout the groups and group members were provided with data for four months to be able to access the materials and also disseminate them to other community members.

BACKGROUND

In consonance with the vision of the USAID Digital Strategy (USAID Digital Strategy: 2020 – 2024) of advancing progress in partner countries and communities on their journey to self-reliance through effective, efficient and responsible digital initiatives that enhance security and economic prosperity, SFMP aimed to provide support to FC to facilitate the formation of social media groups (WhatsApp groups) to share, discuss, and disseminate information related to COVID-19 in the fishing communities in local languages. The idea was to replicate SFMP’s innovative Fisher to Fisher (F2F) dialogue process in a digital form with the formation of social media groups (WhatsApp groups) across the entire coastal fishing communities, linked to a collaborative decision-making center, a **Virtual Platform for Fishers (VPF)** to strengthen engagement, openness and inclusiveness of all fishers, and in the process, create a secured digital ecosystem for informed decision making.

Two components were planned for the virtual platform, the first being a platform having representatives of the Fisheries Commission and Communication Experts of the SFMP and representatives of all fisheries associations; the National Fisheries Association of Ghana (NAFAG), the Ghana Tuna Association (GTA), Ghana Inshore Trawlers Association (GITA), Ghana Inshore Fishermen Association (GIFA), Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCF) and the National Inland Canoe Fishermen Council (NICFC). The second Virtual Platform was to have representatives of the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA), the Development Action Association (DAA) and the Central and Western Region Fishmongers Improvement Association (CEWEFIA) in addition to the SFMP and the FC representatives.

In order that two factors, language and gender, which influence interpersonal communication, social interaction and group dynamics, not become barriers to group discussions and dissemination of relevant information, 24 social media groups were planned to be formed. The groups were to be composed of representatives of the various fisheries associations classified into “National” “District” and “Community” level groups on the basis of their influence in the local community and social status of members within the various fisheries associations. The selection of stakeholders to constitute the social media group was such that all the 292 landing beaches across the four coastal regions would be represented with an initial membership of 901 stakeholders taking cognizance of gender equality. A graphical representation of the structure of the social network group is as shown in Figure 1.

Expected outcomes

- 24 WhatsApp groups to be created.
- 24 messages to be disseminated each quarter averaging two messages per week.
- 20 percent of group membership to open posted messages.

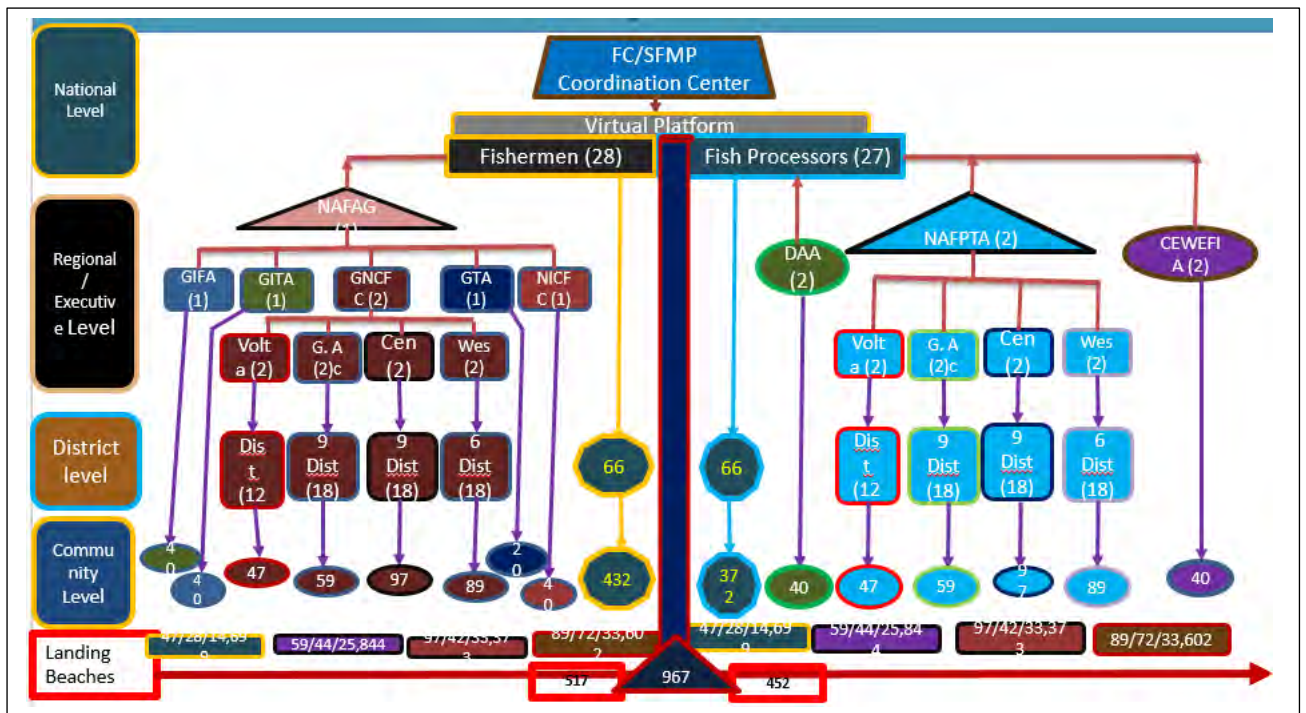


Figure 1 A graphical representation of the proposed structure of the WhatsApp platforms

Workshop Objectives

The project's goal was to ensure that fisherfolk at 300 landing sites, processing and/or fish market sites better adhered to COVID-19 disease prevention protocols. Considering the mode of spread of the virus, and the prevention practices needed to keep safe, it was realized that fisherfolk needed to change their behaviors. The preventive protocols required one to start practicing actions they would rather not do on a regular day. SFMP collaborated with MOFAD/FC, MoH/GHS and the fisheries associations to develop and implement a Social and Behavior Change Communication

EXECUTION REPORT ON THE ACTIVATION OF MASS MESSAGING PLATFORMS.

Quarter 1, FY 21

In keeping with the Social Behavior Change Communication Strategy of the COVID response project, which aimed to influence all spheres of the fisherfolk information ecosystem including the digital information ecosystem, it was proposed that 24 groups were to be created on the “WhatsApp Messenger” app platform. Out of the twenty-four proposed platforms, twenty were created in quarter three of year six. An additional group consisting of members from the NICFC was created in Q1, FY21, bringing the total number of groups created to twenty-one. At the conception of the SFMP COVID-19 response program, it was thought that the virtual platform for fishers would include all segments of the fisheries sector including the industrial sub-sector. However, the three associations constituting the industrial and semi-industrial sub- sectors of Ghana’s fisheries; GTA, GITA, GIFA did not express interest to be part of the VPF. Consequently, the total number of WhatsApp groups created for dissemination of COVID-19 SBCC materials was limited to 21, instead of 24 groups as was originally envisaged.

The breakdown for the 21 groups formed are as follows: 2 groups at the national level constituting a VPF, 8 groups each for GNCFC and NAFPTA at the district and community levels for the four coastal regions and 1 group each for NICFC, CEWEFIA, DAA at the community level. The 21 groups had a total membership of 787.

At the national level, the first group for fishermen consisted of:

- Representatives of the Fisheries Commission.
- Staff (Project Manager, Chief of Party, Communication Unit, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Fisheries Officer) of the SFMP and SFMP Partners (UCC, FON, HM).
- Representatives of all fisheries associations; NAFAG, GTA, GITA, GIFA, GNCFC, and NICFC.

The second group for fish processors consisted of representatives of NAFPTA, DAA, and CEWEFIA in addition to the SFMP and the FC representatives.

At the district level, the groups consisted of regional representatives of the association present in the VPF national level group, representatives of the association from the coastal districts in the region, and the regional director of the Fisheries Commission and SFMP Staff.

At the community level, the groups consisted of regional representatives of the association present in the VPF national level group, representatives of the association from the landing beaches in the region, and zonal officers of the Fisheries Commission and SFMP Staff.

In total 24 messages comprising SFMP’s IEC materials on fisheries issues COVID-19 IEC materials (posters, campaign song video, animations) in English and in the local languages were disseminated via the 21 WhatsApp platforms twice every week in Q1 FY21. The criteria for the selection of beneficiary households under the pilot Economic Safety Net Scheme and other messages related to the scheme were also shared. A total of 88 percent of the total group membership of 787 persons accessed/opened the messages posted on the platform which shows a high engagement with posted content. Detailed breakdown of the membership and engagement of posted content can be found in the Q1 FY21 WhatsApp groups indicator.

Members were regularly encouraged to share the COVID-19 materials with friends and family in their communities on social media or through other channels. They also participated

in group discussions through text, voice messaging, and images on adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols at landing sites, fisheries issues, and on specific community concerns.

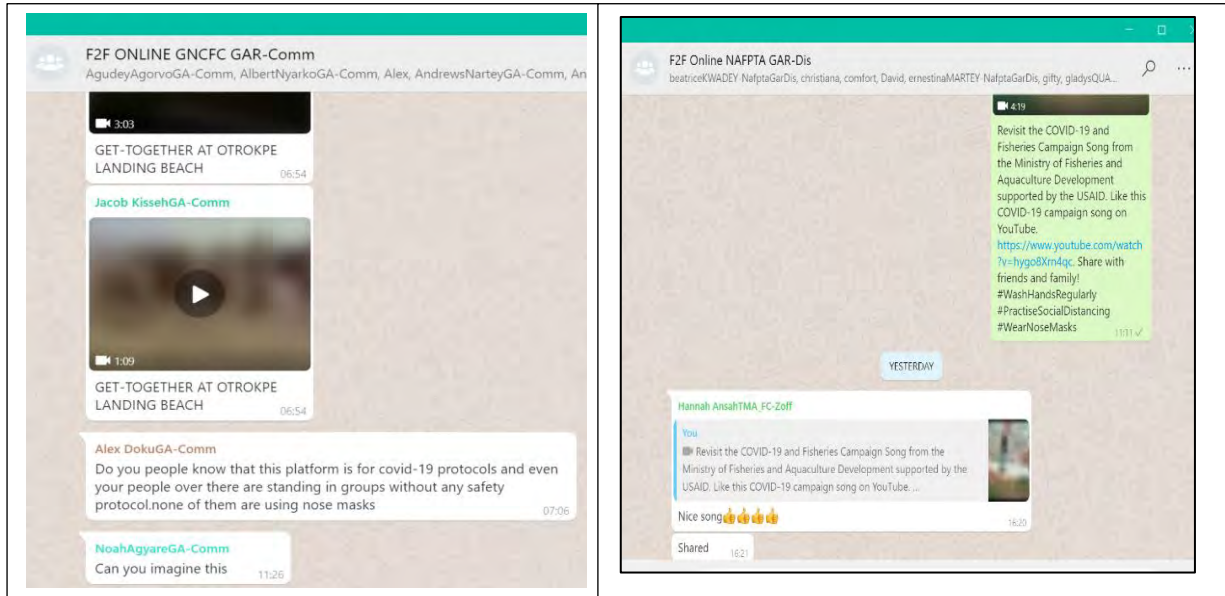


Figure 2 Screenshots of discussions on some of the WhatsApp platforms Q1

Left: Group members admonishing another member for flouting safety protocols at a community event.

Right: Campaign song on coronavirus posted in a group.

To incentivize active engagement among members and the sharing of the IEC materials, call credit and data bundles were provided on a monthly basis for four months (September to December 2020). Using the services of a bulk digital payment service provider, Npontu Technologies, SFMP was able to successfully provide airtime and call credit top up to group members for four months. It was projected that the groups will be maintained through community driven social interests beyond the implementation of this COVID response program even after the provision of airtime and data bundles ends.

Quarter 2, FY 21

After the end of the four months airtime and data top up support at the end of Q1, FY21, group membership fell from 787 to 700 in this quarter across the twenty-one groups. This is an average of 4 people exiting each group over a 10 week period. This shows that a majority of the group membership will continue to be in the groups beyond the implementation of this COVID response program. Detailed breakdown of the membership and engagement of posted content can be found in the Q2 FY21 WhatsApp groups' indicator.

Members were regularly encouraged to share the COVID-19 IEC materials with friends and family in their communities. Members of the platform continue to engage each other through text, voice messaging, and images on adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols at landing sites, fisheries issues, and gave feedback on the progress of the economic safety net scheme through the platform.

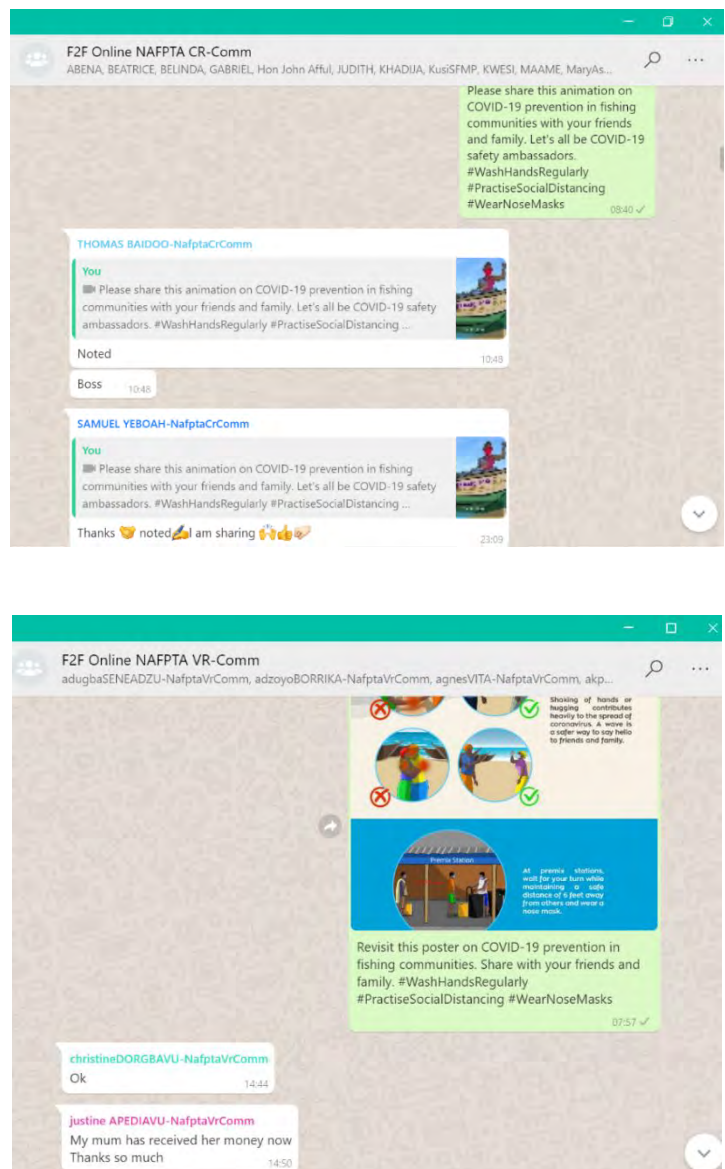


Figure 3 Screenshots of discussions on some of the WhatsApp platforms Q2

Top: Screenshot of a group member stating his intentions to share a COVID-19 prevention animation.

Bottom: A group member expressing her gratitude about her mother receiving the cash transfer.

CONCLUSION

Feedback from group members and the leaders of the fisheries association has shown the WhatsApp platforms to be useful in mass dissemination of matters concerning fisherfolk. It is clear that it would prove beneficial for the Fisheries Commission and fisheries associations to take up the administration of the social media platforms. The WhatsApp platform could go a long way in serving as a virtual public forum where resource users and policymakers nationwide such as the Fisheries Commission, chief fishermen, landing beach committees, or co-management groups can share and document best practices and success stories relating to the fight against IUU fishing and similar sustainable fisheries management practices.