



SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROJECT (SFMP)

Success Story: Fishers Become Researchers in Fight to Restore Stocks

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For more information on the Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, contact:

USAID/Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project
Coastal Resources Center
Graduate School of Oceanography
University of Rhode Island
220 South Ferry Rd.
Narragansett, RI 02882 USA
Tel: 401-874-6224 Fax: 401-874-6920 Email: info@crc.uri.edu

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Detailed Partner Contact Information:

USAID/Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP)
10 Obodai St., Mempeasem, East Legon, Accra, Ghana

Telephone: +233 0302 542497 Fax: +233 0302 542498

Maurice Knight	Chief of Party maurice@crc.uri.edu
Kofi Agbogah	Senior Fisheries Advisor kagbogah@henmpoano.org
Nii Odenkey Abbey	Communications Officer nii.sfmp@crcuri.org
Bakari Nyari	Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist hardinyari.sfmp@crcuri.org
Brian Crawford	Project Manager, CRC brian@crc.uri.edu
Justice Odoi	USAID Administrative Officer Representative Jodoi@usaid.gov

Kofi.Agbogah
kagbogah@henmpoano.org
Stephen Kankam
skankam@henmpoano.org
Hen Mpoano
38 J. Cross Cole St. Windy Ridge
Takoradi, Ghana
233 312 020 701

Andre de Jager
adejager@snvworld.org
SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
#161, 10 Maseru Road,
E. Legon, Accra, Ghana
233 30 701 2440

Donkris Mevuta
Kyei Yamoah
info@fonghana.org
Friends of the Nation
Parks and Gardens
Adiembra-Sekondi, Ghana
233 312 046 180

Peter Owusu Donkor
Spatial Solutions
powusu-donkor@spatialdimension.net
#3 Third Nautical Close,
Nungua, Accra, Ghana
233 020 463 4488

Thomas Buck
tom@ssg-advisors.com
SSG Advisors
182 Main Street
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 735-1162

Victoria C. Koomson
cewefia@gmail.com
CEWEFIA
B342 Bronyibima Estate
Elmina, Ghana
233 024 427 8377

Lydia Sasu
daawomen@daawomen.org
DAA
Darkuman Junction, Kaneshie Odokor
Highway
Accra, Ghana
233 302 315894

Gifty Asmah
giftyasmah@Daasgift.org
Daasgift Quality Foundation
Headmaster residence, Sekondi College
Sekondi, Western Region, Ghana
233 243 326 178

For additional information on partner activities:

CRC/URI:	http://www.crc.uri.edu
CEWEFIA:	http://cewefia.weebly.com/
DAA:	http://womenthrive.org/development-action-association-daa
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SUCCESS STORY

Fishers Become Researchers in Fight to Restore Stocks

In the quest to rebuild Ghana's fish stocks, some fishers are now helping conduct fish stock assessments



Photo Credit: Elizabeth Eifah, UCC Researcher

46-year old Fisherman - Raymond Annan, recording information of fish at sea

“This collaborative research is very insightful; I now know the alarming status of our stocks; I am ready to learn more and help educate peers on the state of our fishery”.

Raymond Annan
Fishermen, Sekondi - W/R, Ghana

In Ghana, fisheries plays a major role in the country's socio-economic development. Fish has long been the preferred and cheapest source of animal protein with about 75% of total annual production consumed locally. Ghanaians eat an average of 20-25kg of fish per person per annum — higher than the world average of 13kg. As much as 65% of animal protein in the Ghanaian diet is thought to be from fish.

Yet in the last 10 years, stocks of four key fish stocks in Ghana's waters have declined by 23%. To help revive the fishery, researchers and scientists must first understand more about the stocks. To conduct at-sea assessments, however, would require them to hire boats and crew — resources fishermen already have.

Through a USAID Feed the Future Initiative, Ghana intends to rebuild a collapsing fishery to reduce poverty and hunger. The Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP), in partnership with a sister project of the University of Cape Coast and a Science and Technical Working Group, has trained local fishermen to help understand the fisheries — a critical first step in reversing the decline. This collaborative team approach of technical and non-technical members helps fishers — often excluded from such processes — to experience firsthand science-based decision-making and become part owners in the process.

To date, SFMP has trained 12 fishers, who record information during fishing expeditions without losing significant time from their fishing effort. As they haul their catch, fishers note the quantity of fish caught, size and sex, and for females, their egg maturity. All that's needed is a filet knife, paper, pencil, and photos.

Raymond Annan is a fisherman from Sekondi and also a member of the collaborative fish research team. Now, as he hauls his catch, he records with hash marks on paper the number of fish he catches in each of the four key species. He cuts them open and records their sex, size, and maturity of the eggs if females. Raymond also takes photos.

This team approach and simple methodology is proving invaluable and plans are already underway to train another 20 fishermen toward the SFMP goal of 100 trained fishermen and women processors on the team by 2017. The collected data not only serves the SFMP science/technical team, but informs those implementing Ghana's National Fisheries Management Plan; a plan signaling Ghana is serious about its fisheries crisis and committed to restore its health.

For the first time ever, fishermen are doing more than fish; they're helping with research and decision-making on the future of Ghana fisheries.

Telling Our Story

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Washington, DC 20523-1000
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