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GHANA

New Oven Offers a Better Way to Make a Living in Fishing Communities

110 fuel-efficient and profitable fish-smoking ovens called 'Ahotor' have been constructed across the nation's coastal regions.



Photo Credit: USAID SFMP

Fish processors experiencing the benefits of the 'Ahotor Oven'

"I've been able to offer healthy fish to my customers and to make more money."

Abu Mohamed
Planning officer, Shama District Assembly in the Western Region.

For Abu Mohamed, a planning officer at Shama District Assembly in the Western Region, harnessing newly improved fish-processing technology has been a great choice. "I've been able to offer healthy fish to my customers and to make more money," he says.

Abu is an early adopter of the new technology.

More than 30,000 fish processors, mainly women, are engaged in the daily business of fish processing in Ghana. The majority are using traditional "Chorkor" ovens that expose them to plumes of smoke and health-related risks for respiratory disease, skin rashes and eye problems. The potential for cancer among consumers of fish smoked in Chorkor ovens was researched and reported by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Food Research Institute. Excessive smoke deposition from incomplete combustion of wood and dripping of fat onto open flames causes carcinogenic organic compounds to settle on the product. Moreover, Chorkors burn excessive amounts of fuel, emitting more of the carbon that contributes to climate change.

The USAID Sustainable Fisheries Management Project realized there was a need for an improved oven. A better oven could enhance food security and business for many fish processors along Ghana's coast. The Project developed a new, more energy-efficient, and cost-effective stove design in collaboration with the Post-Harvest Unit of the Fisheries Commission and the Ghana Food Research Institute. SFMP then constructed 110 of the new "Ahotor" (comfort) ovens across Ghana's coastal regions in the last two years.

The fuel-efficient Ahotor oven uses about one-third less wood than a Chorkor to smoke the same quantity of fish. With reduced fuel costs, processors operate more profitably. And, with less smoke filling work areas, the processors literally enjoy a healthier atmosphere.

An Ahotor oven also saves time. "In the past, I used to process 10 baskets of fish in five days using the traditional oven. But with the Ahotor, I spend less than two days to process the same amount of fish," says Eva Atsitsogbi, Volta Regional President of the Ghana National Fish Traders and Processors Association.

As part of its development program for 2018 through 2021, the Shama District Assembly will build 96 Ahotor ovens for the five main fishing communities in the area "This will help us produce wholesome fish products, create better job opportunities for youth, and increase the revenue base," says Mohamed. Emmanuel Kwarteng, a technical advisor with SNV responsible for post-harvest activities, believes the adoption of the oven by the District Assembly is a bellwether event that enhances the project and the Fisheries Commission's commitment to reduce serious health and environmental risks and to provide opportunities that raise the standard of living for fish processors.

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