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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**GHANA**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Bringing Behavior Change Through Entertainment

**A gripping radio drama connects the public with pressing coastal and fisheries issues**



Hen Mpoano photo

*Actors perform the radio drama “Biribireba,” which brought messages of sustainability, coastal resilience, and fisheries governance through storylines spiced with romance and corruption to a broad audience in Ghana.*

***The radio drama series “Biribireba” was one of the tools that the ICFG initiative successfully used to communicate program goals and win the support of local people. ICFG, a four-year program that concluded in January 2014, was implemented by the Coastal Resources Center (CRC) at the University of Rhode Island’s Graduate School of Oceanography.***

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People everywhere like a good story, with plenty of action and drama told in a convincing way. And telling stories is the oldest form of education and information sharing we have, one that has not lost its power to entertain and persuade even in this age of technology. That certainly was the case with the Ghana radio drama series titled “Biribireba,” a tool the USAID-funded Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance (ICFG) initiative successfully used to communicate program goals and win local support. This support translated to behavior change as more and more people identified with the values and goals of ICFG, known locally as Hen Mpoano (Our Coast), and an associate award of USAID’s Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems Program (SUCCESS). Biribireba means “something is coming” in the Ghanaian local dialect, and the phrase served as the name of the fictional coastal fishing village where the drama was set. “People were glued to their radios every Tuesday,” said Kofi Agbogah, Executive Director of Hen Mpoano. The 52-episode show reached an estimated 2.5 million Ghanaians and was produced by PCI Media Impact,

In this village natural resources abound, but the residents misuse them through illegal, corrupt, and negligent means until resources start declining and the community starts facing insurmountable challenges. The residents harvest tilapia, crabs, mudfish, and other species of fish but do not see the importance of these resources and the need to conserve them. The village finally embraces positive change when some community members realize that “something is really going to come (happen)” if attitudes do not change. “Biribireba” was filled with intrigue, corruption, temptation, chaos, suspense, and love. But unlike other dramas, it was infused with important messages. After the 15-minute episodes, a magazine show featured community leaders, fisheries, and other natural resource experts in panel discussions relative to the issues raised in the show. Phone-in sessions gave the listening audience the opportunity to discuss characters and plot and for education and communication to continue. Hen Mpoano gathered evidence of changes in behavior through phone-in sessions, as well as pre-drama and post drama surveys. Some community members called in to confess their ignorance of the issues. As new converts to the importance of coastal and fisheries management, some volunteered to be panel members and to educate their peers. “Biribireba” also created a platform for stakeholders in the fisheries and coastal zone and fostered effective communication among resource users and policy-makers.