



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Success Story // Ghana

'Biribireba' Radio Drama

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 drama was part of the communications strategy of the Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance initiative (ICFG).

Bringing Behavior Change Through Entertainment

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." It was one of the tools that the Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance initiative successfully used to communicate program goals and win the support of local people. This support then translated to behavior change as more and more people identified with the values and goals of ICFG, known locally as Hën Mpoano (Our Coast). *Biribireba* is a phrase in the Ghanaian local dialect literally meaning "something is coming," and the phrase served as the name of the fictional coastal fishing village where the drama was set.

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 for sustainability and posterity until resources start declining. The village finally embraces positive change when some community members realize that "something is really going to come (happen)" if attitudes do not change.

And that "something," it became apparent to characters and audience alike, will not be good for Biribireba. In the end destructive behavior by series characters was punished, and good behavior was rewarded.

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND
GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF OCEANOGRAPHY

DONALD ROBADUE
CRC PROJECT MANAGER
DON@CRC.URI.EDU
(401) 874-6128
WWW.CRC.URI.EDU



COASTAL RESOURCES CENTER



Left, Staff prepare a banner representing the fictional village of Biribireba. **Above**, a billboard advertising "Biribireba." **Below**, preparing for an episode at the recording studio.

"People were glued to their radios every Tuesday," said Kofi Agbogah, Executive Director of Hen Mpoano. The show reached an estimated 2.5 million Ghanaians

The 52-episode program aired over three years during HEn Mpoano, a four-year United States Agency for International Development program that concluded in early 2014 and was implemented by the Coastal Resources Center (CRC) at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography. The program was broadcast on Ankobra FM, Goodnews FM and Shama Radio in order to reach all of HEn Mpoano's target groups. "Biribireba" was produced by PCI Media Impact, which specializes in communications for social change, in partnership with Sustainamatrix, which specializes in building collaborative readiness and strategic communications.



The drama produced a clearer view of the fisheries and coastal governance issues confronting communities of Ghana's Western Region. These include weak ecosystem governance and dysfunctional nested systems of governance, over-exploitation of fishery resources and declining fish stocks, threats to biodiversity assets, accelerating sea level rise and increasing flooding and erosion. Burgeoning oil and gas production offshore complicated and multiplied these challenges as the population in the coastal zone is set to double in the next 20 years. These pressures created the need for a communications campaign that would address fisheries

management and climate change and create attitudinal and behavioral change in coastal people. "Biribireba" did this.

The program opened with a catchy theme song that drew in young and old and built on community traditions of storytelling. Some characters were played by people from the local communities, helping create community buy-in. Like all dramas, "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 that episode. 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 the drama 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, policy makers such as the Wildlife Division of Forestry Commission, Fisheries Commission, fishing community leaders.