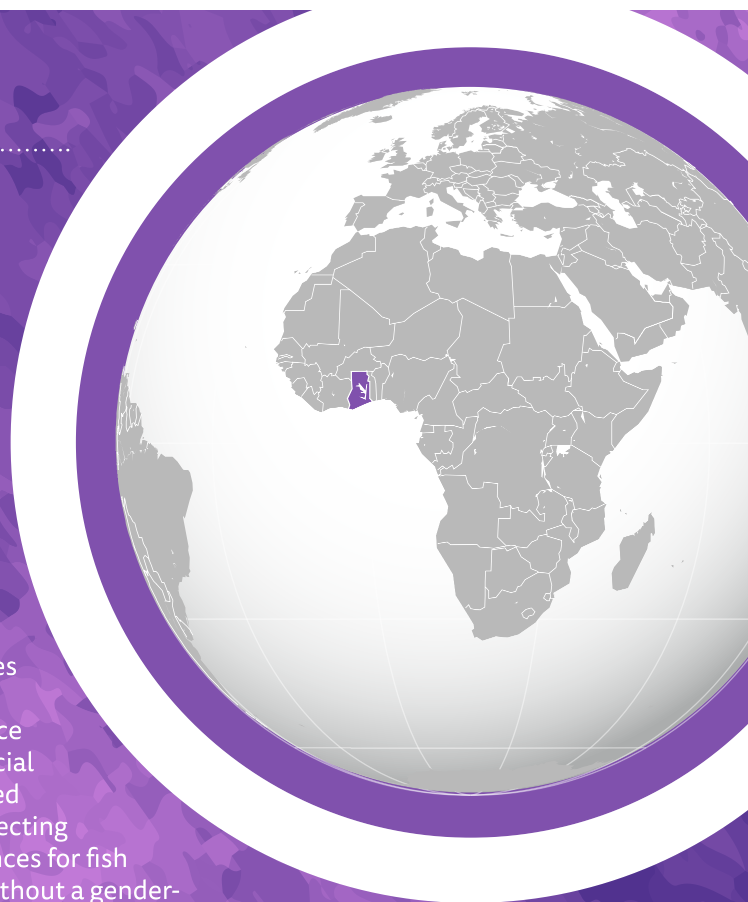
The Republic of Ghana



Across Ghana's fisheries value chains, an estimated 99,642 women make key contributions, particularly through post-harvest activities such as processing and trading. These influential traders, or *fish mammies*, manage the distribution of fish across local and regional markets, helping ensure that affordable seafood remains accessible. Many women also own fishing canoes and gear, provide financial support to fishers, and participate in decision-making within informal networks that regulate sales and trade.

Despite their relative economic power and Ghana's progress on gender equality, many women still face significant barriers, including challenges in securing tenure rights as well as limited access to capital, equipment, training opportunities, and literacy, which constrain their full participation in fisheries governance. Some of these challenges are shared among all those who work in the fisheries sector. However, they disproportionately impact women, who also face additional gender-specific barriers that include: restrictive social norms, gender-based violence, discriminatory laws, and limited political representation. Recent labour reforms aimed at protecting male industrial fishing crews have had unintended consequences for fish mammies, underscoring the risks of implementing policies without a gender-responsive approach.

Organisations like the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA) have strengthened women's collective voice. The adoption of safer fish processing technologies and the expansion of financial inclusion also have contributed to progress for women. However, sustained investment in gender-responsive policies, capacity building, and improved market access remain essential to enhancing women's agency and resilience – and to create a more equitable and food-secure fisheries sector.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the role of seafood production in Ghana, with a focus on gender dimensions, highlighting opportunities to strengthen gender equity and women's empowerment in the sector and beyond. It is part of a series meant to offer development partners, government agencies, NGOs, donors, and researchers with a snapshot of gender equity and fisheries to inform the planning and delivery of relevant activities these actors might be involved in or are in the process of developing.

November, 2025

Fisheries production

The Sea Around Us estimated total annual marine capture production for Ghana's fleets as follows:[a]

- Marine subsistence[b] (2019) – 30,928 tonnes
- Marine commercial[c] (2019) – 204,292 tonnes by the industrial sector, with 181,187 tonnes caught within Ghana's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The remaining 23,105 tonnes were caught in the EEZs of Benin (5%), Togo (4%), Côte d'Ivoire (2%) and Liberia. Local artisanal fleets accounted for an additional 219,917 tonnes captured within Ghana's waters. Ghana flagged vessels caught 65,039 tonnes on the high seas.

Foreign industrial fleets also operate within Ghana's EEZ. In 2019, their total industrial catches were estimated at 43,878 tonnes, with vessels flagged to Belize accounting for the majority (61%), followed by those flagged to Japan (13%), Côte d'Ivoire (9%), France (7%), and other nations, including China and Togo, contributing the remaining 10%.

Fish consumption

Apparent fish consumption[d] was estimated at 23.6 kg per capita per year (2021), exceeding the global average of 20.6 kg. Fish consumption was estimated as high as 35 kg per capita per year in 2016 when unofficial data were included.[2] Seventy-five to eighty percent of fish caught is consumed locally.[3]

Fish contributes an estimated 50–80% of the animal protein consumed nationally,[4,5] with pelagic fishes accounting for 71% of total fish intake.[3,6] Common species include sardinella (*Sardinella aurita* and *Sardinella maderensis*), anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus*), bonga shad (*Ethmalosa fimbriata*), Atlantic chub mackerel (*Scomber colias*), Cunene horse mackerel (*Trachurus trecae*) and round scad (*Decapterus punctatus*).[7,8] Fish is consumed in a variety of forms - fresh, smoked-salted, dried, salt-dried, canned, fried, fermented, or grilled.[3,9] On average, households spend 22% of their food budget on fish, mostly smoked,[10] with poorer households allocating up to 26%.[11] Fish imports have also increased substantially, rising from around 20,000 tonnes in the early 1990s to approximately 361,000 tonnes in 2017, reflecting growing demand and pressure on local supply.[2]

Economic contribution to GDP

In 2021, the fisheries sector in Ghana contributed an estimated 0.9% to Ghana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[12]

Employment contribution (all)

> "389,609 individuals were directly engaged in the fisheries sector in 2016, including pre- and post-harvest as well as subsistence fishing activities."

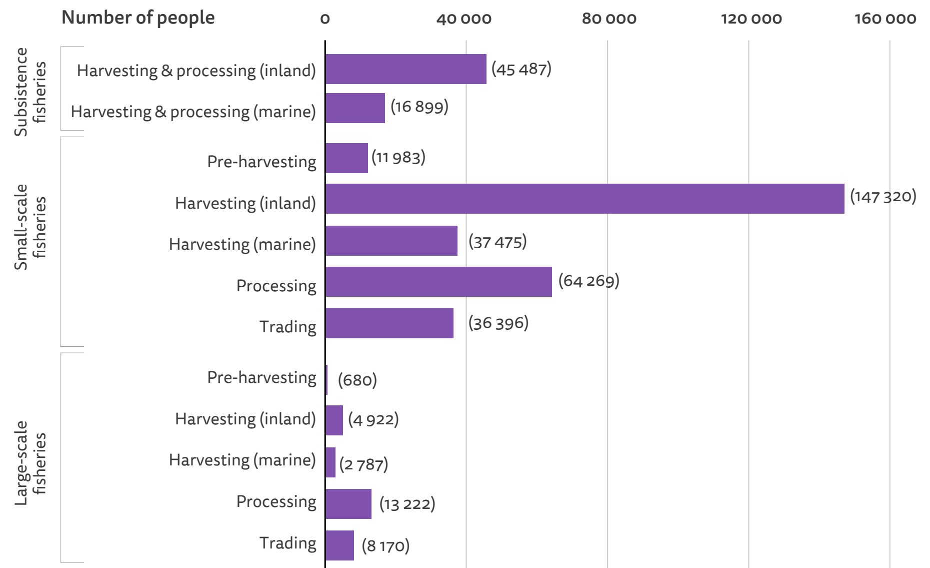
National data

Official estimates suggest that 10% of Ghana's population is engaged in fisheries-related activities[13] - employing 140,000 fishers in the country's four coastal regions – as well as processing, boat building, and other ancillary jobs.[14]

Illuminating Hidden Harvests estimates

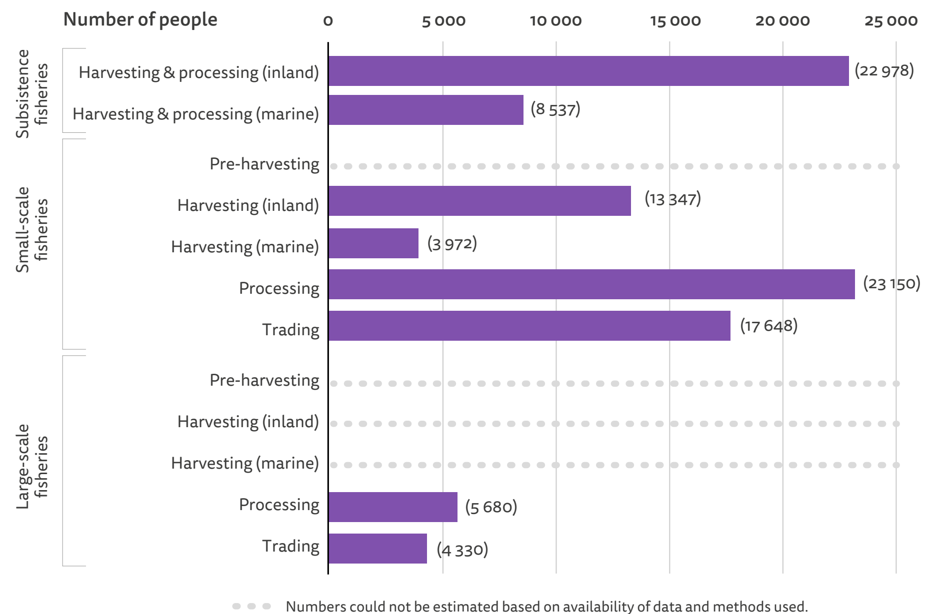
The Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH)[15,e] initiative estimated that 389,609 individuals[f] were directly engaged in the fisheries sector in 2016, including pre- and post-harvest as well as subsistence fishing[g] activities. Most individuals were involved in the marine small-scale fisheries (SSF)[h] sub-sector (see image below). Beyond these workers, the IHH also estimated that approximately 1,771,892 people depended, at least partly, on fisheries or subsistence fishing: 1,421,448 in SSF, 236,926 in subsistence fisheries and 113,518 in large scale fisheries (LSF).[i]

Note that a large proportion of people engaged in fisheries, whether for subsistence, or as part of SSF or LSF, were estimated to be active in inland fisheries (see also footnote [j]).



Employment contribution (women)

The IHH Initiative[15,k] estimated that 99,642 women were active in fisheries value chains in 2016, with the SSF sector providing the greatest source of livelihoods for women (see image below). Women accounted for 51% of the total number of people engaged in subsistence fisheries (harvesting and processing) and they represented 36% and 48% of individuals engaged in the processing and trading activities of SSF, respectively. In LSF, women made up 43% of those engaged in processing and 53% of those engaged in trading activities.



Numbers could not be estimated based on availability of data and methods used.

"Women are critical to food and nutrition security, making fish available in urban and rural markets at relatively affordable prices in smoked and dried forms that are accessible to households that often lack electricity or refrigeration."

In Ghana, women make substantial contributions to estuarine, lagoon, and mangrove-based shellfisheries and play central roles in fish processing and distribution systems, professions traditionally passed down from mother to daughter. In addition to processing, marketing, and selling fish, some women also fund fishing trips, run businesses,[l] and own fishing canoes and gear. Women are critical to food and nutrition security, making fish available in urban and rural markets at relatively affordable prices in smoked and dried forms that are accessible to households that often lack electricity or refrigeration. Despite these contributions, women face significant barriers, including limited access to capital, equipment, and training. While these

challenges affect all workers in the fisheries sector, they disproportionately impact women, who also face additional gender-specific barriers including restrictive social norms and gender-based violence (GBV) that further limit their participation in fisheries governance and resource management.

"Over 60% of those involved in shellfish fisheries are women."

Harvesting

While traditional norms often restrict women from engaging in fishing at sea,[19] they play a dominant role in nearshore shellfish fisheries in Ghana. Over 60% of those involved in these fisheries are women. They collect a range of species including oysters, clams, periwinkles and crabs in areas such as the Densu Delta, Keta Lagoon, and Ankobra estuary.[21,22] In the Densu Delta area, organized women harvesters have championed sustainable, resource user-led co-management, grounded in strong community organisation, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and a shared commitment to protecting livelihoods and ecosystems – supported by partnerships and financing.[23] In the Greater Accra Region, many women - particularly those from the Volta Region - harvest clams from freshwater lagoons and lakes. Some women also fish in smaller bodies of water and at the edges of lagoons, where they collect oysters, crabs and other fish species.[24] Their contributions extend across the entire value chain, including harvesting, processing, marketing, and distribution.[23] Shellfish harvesting is typically done using traditional, low-cost methods such as handpicking or using simple tools like baskets and rakes.[25] To prevent injuries during the harvest of shellfish, women often wear improvised footwear made from old clothing.[23] One exception to the women-dominated shellfish sector is the Volta clam fishery, where men largely control harvesting and transportation activities.[26]

"Fish processing and trade are essential to the livelihoods and economic empowerment of women and their contributions are critical to ensuring food and nutrition security across both urban and remote rural communities in Ghana."

Post-harvest activities

Fish processing and trade are essential to the livelihoods and economic empowerment of women,[27] and their contributions are critical to ensuring food and nutrition security across both urban and remote rural communities in Ghana.[28,29] These post-harvest activities enable women to stabilise fish supply during off-peak seasons,[30] contribute to household food access and expenses, support children's education and broader wellbeing, gain social recognition, and strengthen local economies through measures like tax revenues.[31] Fish are primarily processed using traditional methods such as smoking, drying, salting, frying, and fermenting, resulting in products like *koobi* (tilapia), *kāko* (shark) and *momone* (fish species, squid, and octopus).[32] Fish smoking, the most common preservation method, is practised by women throughout Ghana's coastal towns such as Apam, Axim, Dixcove, Dzelukope, Elmina, Half Asini, Keta, Shama, Tema, and many more. The practice not only preserves fish but also holds cultural significance and produces highly valued complex flavours.[33] While less common, modern processing methods such as canning are also used.[34]

Fish mammies and processors

The distribution of fish to markets is primarily managed by two groups of women: 'small fish mammies', who are often relatives of fishers and operate on a smaller-scale, and 'big fish mammies', who are larger-scale traders with greater financial means.[35] Small and big fish mammies act as essential links between fishers and consumers. During low catch seasons, many women supplement their income by engaging in non-fishing activities such as farming and selling items like soap, salt, and agricultural products.[36]

Small fish mammies typically purchase fish directly from fishers, at the beach off canoes, in port from vessels, or as imported fish, before selling it in local markets for household consumption, resale, or to processors.[18] Imported fish, which consists mostly of a diversity of small pelagic species (e.g., mackerel, horse mackerel, sardinella, and herring), often come

from countries such as Senegal, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Namibia, and even Yemen.[18] Fish mammies mostly buy and sell fish rather than processing it themselves.[m]

"Big fish mammies tend to have more capital, enabling them to own cold storage space and finance fishing trips within their communities."

Big fish mammies tend to have more capital, enabling them to own cold storage space and finance fishing trips within their communities.[18] They typically buy fish directly from vessels (e.g., from fishing crew recruiters, from captains via boatswains, or from fisheries observers) and sell it in markets beyond their local districts. Big fish mammies also supply fish in bulk to wholesalers, who distribute it to local businesses like hotels and eateries. In some communities, women self-organise through savings groups to finance fishing trips. In exchange, fishers deliver their catch to these women for processing and sale. Most financing for fishing trips is on credit to purchase essential supplies like fuel, ice, and food, meaning big fish mammies rely on their ability to purchase fish from fishers to sustain their livelihoods. Kinship ties, especially marriage, supported by entrepreneurial skills, largely determine women's access to fresh fish.[30] Many women reinvest earnings from fish sales into their husbands' fishing operations, securing their role as primary buyers and distributors while simultaneously strengthening their husbands' economic standing. This mutual economic dependency underscores the importance of marriage in fishing communities, enabling both partners to earn a livelihood from fishing. Declines in small pelagic fish stocks – a critical input for women processors - are directly impacting women's incomes and limiting their capacity to support fishers (see also *Threats and drivers of change* section). Given that many men work alongside their wives in this sector, these economic challenges quickly extend to household-level income security.[n] When a big fish mammy retires, the role often passes to a female relative, maintaining important market relationships.[o]

"Many women reinvest earnings from fish sales into their husbands' fishing operations, securing their role as primary buyers and distributors while simultaneously strengthening their husbands' economic standing."

Some women own canoes and fishing equipment, such as nets, meaning they can dictate when and where boats fish, and who should captain and crew the vessel.[8] They may also finance the maintenance and repairs of boats and nets.[35] These roles give women some influence and potential leverage over fishers who work for them.[8] However, traditional norms can constrain their influence, leading to power struggles with male canoe captains. Studies show that in matrilineal Fante fishing communities, women use relatives or sons as captains to retain control,[37] and establish agreements with captains and crew members regarding profit-sharing and the distribution of leftover fresh fish (*Mboadzi*).

The *Konkohene* or *Konkohemaa* ("chief", "queen fishmonger")[26] is a key figure among women in the fisheries sector. She is the one to bargain with fishers[26] and, working alongside the *Apofohene* (chief fisherman), helps negotiate fish prices at the beach[30] and mediates disputes.[38] Traditionally, women in fishing communities in Ghana's Central region, including *Konkohemaa*, owned boats, financed fishing trips and secured a share of the catch. However, the transition to industrial fishing, combined with rising operational costs and falling profits have weakened their traditional authority and reduced their influence in price-setting, as sales increasingly respond to market dynamics.[26]

Regional trade networks

Women-led informal trade networks play a vital role in Ghana's fish distribution system, ensuring that affordable, traditionally processed small pelagic fish - mainly smoke-dried species like sardinella anchovies - reach both urban and remote areas, including regions with limited refrigeration. These extensive trade routes stretch from coastal Ghana to the north and into Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin, and Burkina Faso, contributing significantly to regional food and nutrition security.[29,39] One study estimated that

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informal fish trade across the Ghana–Togo–Benin borders moves around 6,000 tonnes of fish annually, with a market value of approximately US$14 million.[40] These networks rely on women's expertise in preservation, logistics, and market dynamics, making them central to the resilience of the small fish food system.[28]

"Despite [COVID] hardships, women traders showed strong resilience by activating trust-based social networks and adapting trade routes, highlighting how socially embedded informal trade networks can help mitigate shocks."

Border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted women's operations, limiting mobility, reducing trade volumes and income, and negatively affecting household diets.[41] Despite these hardships, women traders showed strong resilience by activating trust-based social networks and adapting trade routes, highlighting how the socially embedded informal trade networks can help mitigate shocks and sustain regional food systems in times of crisis.[41]

Ghana also serves as an important regional trade hub for shark products, particularly meat and fins. Unlike in many neighbouring West African countries, shark meat (*kāko*) is commonly consumed in Ghana. Since the mid-1980s, declining fish populations have led fishers and communities to increasingly turn to shark meat as an affordable source of protein.[42] Local production[42] is supplemented with imports from countries such as the Gambia, Senegal, Mauritania, Liberia, and Cameroon, where Ghanaian migrant fishers catch sharks that are processed by expatriate Ghanaian fish mammies.[43] These women often finance the transport via road of dried shark meat to Ghana, typically using heavy-duty trucks. Once in-country, fish mammies handle sorting, distribution, and sales of the product.[p]

Women fish processors: Challenges, innovation, and collective action

Women fish processors, particularly those involved in smoking fish, face multiple occupational health challenges. Traditional fish-smoking methods, using metal drums or clay ovens fueled by firewood, expose women to significant smoke and heat during processing. This can lead to respiratory issues, eye irritation, headaches, and burns.[31,44] In some cases, severe burns to the fingers have impaired women's ability to access official services requiring fingerprint identification.[45] Improved processing technologies, like the FAO-*Thiaroye* and *Ahotor* ovens, have shown promise in reducing toxic smoke emissions by 40–70%[46] (see also *Threats and drivers of change in fisheries* section). The adoption rate of these improved processing technologies has however been low.

"Limited access to ice and cold storage facilities and poor infrastructure, combined with logistical difficulties in reaching secondary markets, affects [women processors'] ability to preserve and distribute fish effectively."

Women in the sector also face multiple operational challenges. Limited access to ice and cold storage facilities and poor infrastructure, combined with logistical difficulties in reaching secondary markets, affects their ability to preserve and distribute fish effectively. While physical post-harvest losses are generally low,[47] post-harvest value losses can be substantial.[q] The labour-intensive nature of the work, combined with low profit margins and declining catches, places additional pressures on already vulnerable livelihoods.[36]

Access to financial support and formal credit remains a critical barrier. Due to lack of collateral, women commonly rely on informal loans, including through savings groups or microcredit arrangements.[24] Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) can be effective in supporting marginalized fisher groups, including women, in underserved rural areas by helping them build resilience, generate income, and improve financial literacy while expanding access to financial services. Beyond financial barriers, women also face challenges in accessing logistic and institutional support.[30] Male fishers, for example, may benefit from government subsidies for gear and fuel, while women often lack equivalent assistance. Even when women invest capital in fishing operations, they may have limited influence over catch and selling decisions.

Regional processor associations under the umbrella of the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA) have helped women navigate these challenges. Established in 2015, and now with over 14,700 members, NAFPTA represents small- and medium-scale women fish processors and traders across Ghana.[48] As part of the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFishNet), the association provides networking, capacity building, and peer learning opportunities. It has also worked in collaboration with partners to standardize improved fish processing methods and promote hygienic handling practices to ensure the consistent quality and safety of processed fish. Many processing facilities under the association have hygienic standard certification and meet international quality criteria, further enhancing local formal market and export market access for women in the sector.[r] Processor associations can also facilitate access to microloans and help address broader social welfare concerns, such as children's health and education.[8] Importantly, these efforts have strengthened women's collective voice in fisheries governance, and provided economic and social support, enabling them to advocate more effectively as key stakeholders in the sector. Recent data indicate that 62% of women in the sector are members of such groups, gaining access to financial services, markets, and influence.[27]

"[Efforts by processor associations] have strengthened women's collective voice in fisheries governance, provided economic and social support, enabling them to advocate more effectively as key stakeholders in the sector."

Gendered vulnerabilities and advancing women's voice in governance

In some fishing communities, women face challenges related to power imbalances. In contexts marked by economic hardship, the practice of "sex for fish" has emerged – transactional arrangements where women and young girls exchange sexual favours for fish. Driven by prevailing gender norms, socio-economic pressures, an increasingly cash-based economy, and the collapse of the fishing industry,[38,49–51] the practice has severe health and social consequences.[51] Research suggests it is more commonly reported in the Central Region than in the Western Region of Ghana.[52]

Women's participation in fisheries governance has historically been limited, despite decisions directly impacting their work.[53] One notable exception is the Densu Delta oyster fishery, where women have led the establishment of one of the few formalised co-management systems in the country, and with women leading training programmes and advocating for policy support.[23] For the most part, however, women have been overlooked in technical initiatives including training opportunities, community meetings, and management decisions.[31,53] However, recent developments show promising shifts toward more inclusive approaches. The co-management policy for fisheries, for instance, explicitly acknowledges the impact of management decisions on women's livelihoods and mandates women's inclusion in small-scale community-based co-management committees.[54] These committees facilitate shared decision-making between the Fisheries Commission and local stakeholders through consensus-building to generate buy-in and voluntary compliance with management measures.[55] While large-scale committees do not explicitly require women's participation, they recognise the NAFPTA as a key stakeholder.[54]

Targeted interventions have demonstrated positive results in supporting women's empowerment and leadership opportunities. Fisheries training programmes, for example, have helped boost women's confidence and strengthened recognition of the valuable perspectives women bring to fisheries governance.[24] Despite persistent challenges, women fish traders continue to demonstrate resilience and entrepreneurship, helping to ensure that affordable, nutritious fish remains available in markets throughout Ghana.[2]

"The ban [on saiko] has caused hardships for women who previously owned saiko canoes, or were involved in the purchase, sale and processing of saiko fish"

Unintended gendered impacts of fisheries governance reforms

Since 2021, governance interventions in Ghana's industrial marine fisheries sector have impacted the livelihoods of women working in fish processing and trade. First, a "yellow card" warning issued to Ghana in 2021 by the European Union under its 2008 *Council Regulation to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing* led the government to enforce a ban on *saiko*, a form of transshipment where industrial trawlers transfer catches of undersized or low-quality pelagic fish to specialized canoes at sea.[56] This ban has caused hardships for women who previously owned *saiko* canoes, or were involved in the purchase, sale and processing of *saiko* fish.[57] Formerly, women were the first point of contact at landing sites, receiving fish on credit, selling it, keeping the profits, and paying the remaining balance at the "*saiko* office" in Elmina.[57] Following the ban, small pelagic fish are now landed directly at Tema harbor by industrial vessels, packaged into cardboard boxes ("cartons"), and transferred to cold store facilities before being transported by road to former "saiko centers" along the coast, such as Apam, Axim and Elmina. With fish prices set by influential "big cold store women" or big fish mammies reflecting higher transport costs, many small fish mammies along the coast can no longer afford to buy the fish.[57] As a result, some travel to Togo or Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire to buy fish because it is cheaper there; others buy fish imported from as far away as Yemen and Senegal.[57]

"Fishers are no longer given carton fish as payment by captains, and fish mammies no longer receive fish to sell [with far-reaching effects on livelihoods and food security]."

Second, recent efforts by a tripartite committee composed of national regulators (Ghana Maritime Authority), employers (Ghana Industrial Trawler Association, and Ghana Tuna Association), and worker representation (The National Union of Seamen, Ports and Allied Workers) to improve the working conditions of industrial fishers have focused on the application of labour standards set out in the International Labour Organisaton Work in Fishing Convention (C188). As part of these efforts, workers formerly boarding industrial vessels without work agreements are now protected by a 'no work without contract' policy. The contracts issued to fishers stipulate their wages, which were formerly composed of a cash amount plus several boxes of 'carton fish' – the same species and quality of fish traded in *saiko* transshipments – which the fishers would sell to their fish mammies in port after each fishing trip. Under the new policy, the value of these carton fish have been converted to a cash amount. Thus, fishers are no longer given carton fish as payment by captains, and fish mammies no longer receive fish to sell. This has affected the income and livelihood viability of many women working in and around Tema port, with far-reaching effects. Fishers are no longer able to borrow money from fish mammies, for example, to secure their position on a fishing vessel before the start of the annual closed season (normally 1 July - 31 July for the artisanal canoes and semi-industrial fleets and 1 July – 31 August for industrial trawl vessels)[58,s] or support their families during financial difficulties. The inability to bring fish home has also affected the food and nutrition security of fishers' families. While these policy changes aim to improve working conditions and combat IUU fishing practices, their full impact on women's livelihoods and food security in the fishing communities is not yet fully understood and requires further investigation.

Social considerations

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping gender dynamics in Ghana and remain some of the most persistent barriers to gender equality. The country's traditions-based society, influenced by religious leaders, chiefs, and traditional beliefs, often limits women's opportunities for advancement.[59] While traditional beliefs remain influential, they are often hidden or downplayed in public discourse. Recent efforts to criminalize witchcraft accusations and dismantle "witch camps" highlight ongoing challenges.[60]

Labour force considerations

Women make up 46.5% of Ghana's total workforce, with a labour force participation rate of 65%.[59,61] However, this participation does not necessarily translate into better economic opportunities.[62] Many women opt for self-employment to balance income generation with domestic responsibilities,[62] as childcare facilities lack government support, despite constitutional provisions.[63] Women are overrepresented in low-skilled work and the informal sector, especially agriculture,[64] which is often seen as an extension of domestic labour. This results in poor working conditions, low pay, and limited social protections.[59] Gender-based discrimination in the workplace further exacerbates the situation.[65] A notable 2018 case involved two female employees of the Ghana Fire Service having their appointments terminated due to pregnancy.[65] Three key obstacles to increasing women's representation in the workforce are i) low literacy rates, ii) low participation in tertiary education, and iii) limited engagement in professional occupations.[66]

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Land and asset ownership

Women also face significant barriers to land ownership and property rights, despite legal protections. Social norms continue to restrict their ability to own and use property,[67] limiting economic independence and access to credit.[62] As of 2014, only 8% of women owned land compared to 30% of men.[68] In fishing communities, limited land rights for women can restrict their access to space for fish processing activities.[69] Additionally, limited access to assets makes it more difficult for women to establish or expand businesses.[62]

Education

Education shows both progress and persistent gaps. While literacy rates for girls and women aged 15-24 have improved to 92.2%, reflecting progress in education access, gender gaps remain in higher education.[59] Men are 2.5 times more likely than women to participate in tertiary education.[66] Regional disparities are particularly stark, with overall secondary education rates in northern Ghana being significantly lower than in southern Ghana.[70]

"While literacy rates for girls and women aged 15-24 have improved to 92.2%, reflecting progress in education access, gender gaps remain in higher education."

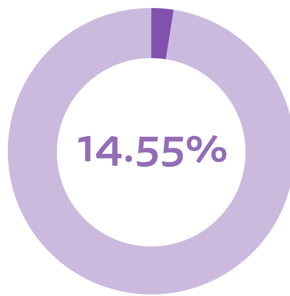
These regional inequalities extend beyond education. Women in rural and northern areas are more likely to experience multidimensional poverty.[62,70] The *kayayei* phenomenon, involving young women migrating to cities to work as head porters, underscores the complex intersection of gender, poverty, and migration.[65]

Women's rights and political empowerment

Ghana's legal framework provides a strong foundation for gender equality, with protections enshrined in the 1992 Constitution and the country's accession to various international treaties (see section *Key frameworks promoting gender equality and their ratification status*). However, cultural norms, implementation gaps and political underrepresentation continue to hinder the full realization of these rights.

Ghana's legal efforts to promote gender equality date back to 1960, with the establishment of the National Council of Women, which recognised women's contributions in the country's fight for independence and sought to empower them through vocational training and childcare services.[66] That same year, Ghana also introduced an affirmative action policy requiring women to hold 40% of positions in public boards, councils, and commissions.[66] However, this law was repealed in 1998, and efforts to reinstate it faced delays. The Affirmative Action Bill was finally passed

(unanimously) in July 2024 and signed into law in September 2024.[71] The bill seeks to increase women's representation in political, economic and societal spheres, setting a target of at least 30% participation by 2026 and 50% by 2030.[71]



Percentage women in the parliament (2025).

Political representation

Despite legislative efforts, women remain underrepresented in Ghanaian politics. Women currently hold 40 out of 275 parliamentary seats (14.55%), a modest increase from previous years,[72,73] but still far below the 30% threshold set by the UN and Beijing Declaration and Ghana's own 2026 target under the Affirmative Action Bill.[71] While women actively engage in pre-election politics, many hesitate to run for office due to entrenched traditional norms, intimidation, social stigma, lack of financial resources, discrimination and GBV, and significant personal costs.[55-57] While women often participate in local governance activities, they are frequently restricted to auxiliary roles such as "women's organizer," limiting their influence in decision-making processes.[74]

Gender issues are also marginalized in national discourse, often dismissed as "women's issues". With men dominating parliament, topics such as GBV, childcare, and economic equity are frequently sidelined.[75] Political party structures and policies further hinder women's participation, reinforcing societal norms that position women as subordinate in public life.[76]

> "Gender issues are also marginalized in national discourse, often dismissed as 'women's issues'."

Despite these challenges, a few women have achieved prominent political roles, though they remain exceptions rather than the norm. Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, Ghana's former First Lady, and 2016 presidential candidate, played a pivotal role in the establishment of the *31st of December Women's Movement*, one of Ghana's most influential women's rights organisations. Other important political figures include Georgina Woode, Ghana's first female Chief Justice (2008), and Joyce Bamford-Addo, the first female speaker of parliament (2009).

Professor Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang, a former Minister of Education (2013-2017), made history as the first woman to be nominated as a running mate for the National Democratic Congress presidential candidate in 2020 and 2024. Following the NDC's victory in the 2024 election, she was sworn in as Ghana's first female vice president on January 7th, 2025. The presence of women in key ministerial positions has continued to increase, with Hawa Koomson serving as Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (2021-2024), Akosua Frema Osei-Opare as Ghana's first female Chief of Staff (2017), Ursula Owusu-Ekuful as Minister of Communication and Digitization (2017-2024) spearheading gender inclusion in the tech sector, and most recently, Emelia Arthur as Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture (since 2025), and Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, as the 7th Secretary-General of the Commonwealth – the first woman from Africa to hold this office. This growing representation in executive positions signals progress, though significant gender gaps in political participation remain.[74]

> "Emelia Arthur : Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture (since 2025). Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey : 7th Secretary-General of the Commonwealth."

Gender equality policies

Ghana has introduced several policies to support gender equality. The *National Gender Policy 2015* focuses on issues such as women's economic empowerment, GBV prevention, and improved access to education. Additional efforts, such as gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting across government ministries, aim to integrate gender considerations into national planning. The *Domestic Violence Act 2007* marked a significant step in criminalizing GBV and led to the establishment of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit.[74] The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, established in 2001 as the Ministry

"Political barriers, financial constraints, capacity gaps within public institutions, ambiguities in roles and responsibilities across ministries and government levels, and cultural resistance continue to limit the effectiveness of Ghana's gender policies."

of Women and Children's Affairs at the time, has played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights across education, labour and healthcare.[74] Meanwhile mentorship programmes were also implemented, reaching over 7,200 girls and boys by 2019, to build agency among youth.[74] Despite these initiatives, implementation challenges remain. Political barriers, financial constraints, capacity gaps within public institutions, ambiguities in roles and responsibilities across ministries and government levels, and cultural resistance continue to limit the effectiveness of Ghana's gender policies.[77]

Gender-based violence

Despite legal advancements, GBV remains a significant issue in Ghana. The *Domestic Violence Act 2007* was intended to provide protection for victims, yet between 2020 and 2022, more than 18,000 domestic violence cases were reported, with actual numbers likely higher due to underreporting.[60] Many women hesitate to report abuse due to fear of stigma, lack of financial resources, and limited access to justice, particularly in rural areas where traditional beliefs and practices continue to influence dispute resolution.[22,42] Community responses to GBV vary, with many preferring to handle issues internally through traditional authorities or family structures - rather than being reported to law enforcement - where victims often face social biases and financial barriers to legal recourse.[52]

"Female genital mutilation – although reportedly not practiced in coastal areas – remains one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based violence in Ghana"

Female genital mutilation, although reportedly not practiced in coastal areas,[t] remains one of the most pervasive forms of GBV in Ghana. This is despite its criminalization in the 1994 Amendment Act to the Ghanaian Criminal Code,[77] and public commitments by former female circumcisers and traditional leaders to renounce the practice and support its eradication.[60] The practice of early and forced marriage continues to affect many young girls, who are often married before the legal age of consent, trapping them in cycles of poverty, illiteracy, and domestic abuse.[60] Economic, social, psychological, physical, and sexual violence remain widespread, perpetuated by power imbalances, cultural norms, and economic insecurity.[62]

Efforts to combat GBV have included community education programmes and grassroots advocacy initiatives. Organisations such as Womankind, founded in 1991, have worked to increase women's political and social power while advocating for an end to GBV.[59] Other programmes, such as the *Safe Space Initiative*, have sought to empower young girls with knowledge of their rights, and the provision of alternatives to early marriage through schooling and apprenticeships.[50]

Key frameworks promoting gender equality and their ratification status[u]

- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) signed in 1980 and ratified in 1986; CEDAW Optional Protocol acceded to in 2011.[78] Ghana submitted its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports in 2012.[78] Ghana has opted to report under CEDAW's optional simplified reporting procedure. In the simplified reporting procedure, the process is commenced by the Treaty Body preparing a list of issues prior to reporting.[v]
- Beijing Platform for Action. Ghana submitted its progress report as part of Beijing +25 in 2019[65] and Beijing +30 in 2024.[80]

- √ Ghana ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1989[81] and the Maputo Protocol in 2007. In January 2023, Ghana had 10 outstanding state reports and had yet to report on the Maputo Protocol since its ratification.[82] In June 2024, The Department of Gender, under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, held a one-day workshop to validate inputs and finalize Ghana's draft report on the Maputo Protocol.[83]

Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)

SIGI[z] values range from 0 for no discrimination to 100 for very high discrimination;[aa] with higher SIGI values denoting higher inequality.

Year	Total aggregated index value	Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive & financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
2019[84]	35 (med.)	59 (v. high)	20 (low)	31 (med.)	23 (low)
2023[85]	38 (med.)	44 (high)	28 (low)	25 (low)	52 (v. high)

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The GII[y] value is given on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 being 0% inequality, indicating women "fare equally" in comparison to men, and 1 being 100% inequality, indicating women "fare poorly" in comparison to men. The assessment of women 'faring equally' or 'poorly' compared to men refers to their relative standing in health, political representation, education, and economic participation.

Value (2023)[86]
0.514

Rank (2023)
138
(out of 172 countries)

Gender in fisheries governance[ab]

Seventeen fisheries governance documents[w] were reviewed. Of these, seven documents reference women or gender in some regard: six through explicit mention of women or gender (without feminine pronouns), none solely through the use of feminine pronouns (she/her), and one through both. The review covered a range of policies, strategies, plans, legislation, and regulatory frameworks relevant to management and development of Ghana's fisheries sector.

"The National Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for the Fisheries Sector (2016) positions gender equality and women's empowerment as central to effective fisheries governance."

The **National Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for the Fisheries Sector** (2016) positions gender equality and women's empowerment as central to effective fisheries governance. It outlines goals to strengthen gender integration in policy, ensure equal opportunities for women and men in decision-making, improve post-harvest training for both genders, and enhance gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation. The strategy roots in acknowledgement of the importance of the fisheries sector to the country's economy and culture, as well as the critical contributions of women in processing, marketing, vessel ownership, and financing fishing trips. It builds from an established framework for gender mainstreaming across national, regional, and international levels. The annex offers implementation tools, including a theory of change, a matrix of goals and indicators, and working definitions of key terms such as "gender equality" and "women's empowerment."

The **Co-management Policy for the Fisheries Sector** (2020) delegates decision-making to local authorities and aims to increase the involvement of fisheries resource users in the development and implementation of management plans. It requires representation of women on Community-Based Co-management Committees and recommends that leadership roles, in the form of the chairperson and co-chairperson, be held by individuals of opposite genders. The policy recognises women's traditional and ongoing roles in fisheries - including as "fish market queens," fish processors, and marketers - and references these roles using feminine pronouns. It also highlights women's involvement in vessel ownership and financing fishing trips.

The **Fisheries Commission Act, 1993 (No. 457 of 1993)** (1993)[x] mandates the inclusion of at least two women on the Fisheries Commission.

The **Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector Development Plan 2011-2016** (2011) identifies gender equity as a guiding principle and highlights the contributions of men, women, and youth across the sector.

The **Sector Medium-Term Development Plan 2014-2017** (2014) sets seven points of operational focus, one of which is to create around 2,000 indirect jobs for women fish processors and traders through the *Aquaculture Nucleus-Outgrower Input Support Scheme.*

The **National Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing** (2014) acknowledges the critical role of women in fish preservation, smoking, and market sales.

The **Fisheries Management Plan of Ghana – A National Policy for the Management of the Marine Fisheries Sector 2015-2019** (2015) identifies Strategy 6.0, *Promoting community group involvement in post-harvest and facilitating business opportunities.* The key action under this strategy is facilitating the creation of women's fish processor and trader associations to improve their access to microcredit schemes.

Threats and drivers of change in fisheries

Several key threats to and drivers of change in Ghana's coastal ecosystems and encouraging examples of how these may be addressed are outlined below. Threats and drivers of change to fisheries may have specific gender dimensions associated with them making gender integration necessary in efforts to improve adaptation and foster resilience in the face of change.

"These [small pelagic] species are a vital source of livelihoods for people in SSFs and underpin nutrition security, not only for people living near the coast but also those far inland."

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing - *Saiko* is an outlawed practice in which industrial trawlers tranship illegally caught small pelagics to purpose-built canoes at sea. Trawlers targeting these fish modify the gear they are licensed to use (i.e., for demersal catches close to the benthic floor) to conduct mid-water trawls with smaller meshed nets that catch small pelagics. These species are a vital source of livelihoods for people in SSFs and underpin nutrition security, not only for people living near the coast but also those far inland (hence their colloquial name 'the people's fish'). Modification of trawl gear is illegal (L.I.1968 Regulation 15(1)), as is industrial fishing within the Inshore Exclusive Zone to target small pelagics, and transshipping at sea.[87] In 2017, an estimated 100,000 tonnes of fish were lost due to *saiko*.[88] By comparison, IUU fishing by industrial trawlers that same year resulted in nearly the same amount of fish being caught as by Ghana's entire artisanal fishing sector.[88] It is important to note that while *saiko* is reported to have largely stopped, anecdotal evidence suggests that industrial vessels continue to target small pelagics illegally, landing these fish in port and selling them directly to cold stores.[57] In 2024,

Ghana licensed 45 industrial trawlers, some of which participated in a USAID-funded electronic monitoring trial to improve transparency in the sector. However, the data from this initiative are yet to be analyzed.[ac]

"Although Ghanaian law prohibits foreign ownership of industrial vessels, foreign companies operate through local 'shell' companies, maintaining control over the industry while circumventing regulations."

A key enabler of IUU fishing is the use of **beneficial ownership structures**. Although Ghanaian law prohibits foreign ownership of industrial vessels, foreign companies operate through local "shell" companies, maintaining control over the industry while circumventing regulations.[89] **Weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of compliance** with current fisheries management measures, **limited monitoring capacity, and political interference** have allowed these activities to persist.[89–91] The promised canceling of the 2025 'closed season' for artisanal fishers by the current president in fulfillment of his election campaign promise[92] underscores some of the ways political dynamics influence decision-making.

Destructive fishing methods - Harmful fishing practices including the use of light and chemicals like detergents, carbide, and DDT further compound the strain on Ghana's fisheries.[35,93] Chemicals and explosives indiscriminately destroy marine wildlife and habitats, undermining future stocks. Despite Ghana's fisheries laws already banning these practices,[ad] and community requests for stricter penalties, enforcement remains weak. These practices also create direct economic and health burdens for women processors: Fish caught using chemicals spoil faster and break apart during smoking, making it difficult to preserve them for sale, reducing their market value, and increasing post-harvest losses.[93] Additionally, the handling of chemically treated fish has been linked to skin irritation and other health concerns among fish processors, while its ingestion may also pose a serious health hazard to fish consumers.[93]

"Scientific assessments show that in 2019, landings of key small pelagic species [...] fell to their lowest levels since 1990, representing just 41% of peak landings in 1993."

Overcapacity of the artisanal sector - The sharp decline in catch and catch per unit of effort (CPUE), combined with a significant increase in canoe numbers over the past two decades, points to overcapacity in the canoe sector as a key driver of pressure on small pelagic fish stocks.[91] The current status of small pelagic fish stocks is severely overfished (i.e., biomass levels well below the point needed for maximum sustainable yields (MSY)) and overfishing is occurring (i.e., fishing mortality and effort are well above what can produce MSY).[94] Scientific assessments show that in 2019, landings of key small pelagic species - including round and flat sardinella, anchovies, and mackerel - fell to their lowest levels since 1990, representing just 41% of peak landings in 1993.[91] CPUE for canoes also dropped to a record low, about 25% of peak levels.[91] As CPUE declines, so too does the economic viability of small-scale fishing. While efforts by the government to register all canoes as part of the Marine Fisheries Management Plans (2014-2019 and 2022-2026) have been underway since 2014, many registered vessels are still not properly embossed, limiting effective monitoring and enforcement. Migrant fishers operating without proper documentation further complicates governance and oversight.[95] In response to overcapacity, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development has placed a three-year ban on the construction of new canoes, effective from October 2023 to September 2026.[96] Framed under the slogan "*Pause, No New Canoes Now*" the measure aims to curb overcapacity and reduce pressure on overfished stocks, particularly small pelagics.[96]

"While climate impacts contribute to the declining trend in Ghana's marine fish stocks, local ecological degradation is also a major driver."

While climate impacts contribute to the declining trend in Ghana's marine fish stocks (see *Climate change* section below), local ecological degradation is also a major driver. The **destruction of critical habitats**, including mangroves that function as fish nurseries due mainly to over-cutting for fish smoking and housing construction,[97] has severely undermined the reproductive capacity of many species.[98] **Coastal pollution** from domestic,

industrial, and plastic waste[99] further contributes to habitat degradation, weakening the ecological foundations that underpin fisheries productivity.

These environmental stressors act as multipliers when combined with fishing pressures (e.g., illegal practices, destructive fishing methods, and fleet overcapacity).[100] Together they create a negative feedback loop in which declining stocks face increasing fishing pressure from both industrial and artisanal sectors, leading to further stock depletion, with disproportionate consequences for women, many of whom depend on consistent and affordable supplies of small pelagics for processing and trade. As fish become smaller, scarcer, and often more expensive, women's income security erodes, and the nutritional quality of processed products reaching local markets declines. The interconnected nature of these threats highlights the need for integrated management approaches that address unsustainable fishing practices and environmental degradation while also considering the social dimensions critical to supporting sustainable livelihoods and nutrition security, and strengthened governance measures.[94,100]

"Fishing communities are facing increasing competition for coastal space due to urban expansion, tourism development, and infrastructure projects."

Encroachment on landing and processing sites - Fishing communities are facing increasing competition for coastal space due to urban expansion, tourism development, and infrastructure projects. As land is converted for commercial use, fishing communities struggle to find space for their activities – disproportionately affecting women who rely on these areas for fish smoking and drying - as well as meet the rising cost of living in fishing communities with fishing incomes.[101] Overcrowding at remaining processing sites has led to sanitation challenges, conflicts, and greater exposure to environmental hazards such as flooding and pollution. Insecure land tenure further compounds the issue, as many fishers lack formal ownership rights over the spaces they have traditionally used for generations.[69] These overlapping challenges have prompted calls for government action to formally protect landing and processing sites, recognises traditional use rights, and ensure that coastal development policies do not displace or marginalize fishing-dependent communities[101] - particularly women, whose livelihoods and contributions often go unrecognised in land-use decisions.

"Fish smoking is a critical livelihood activity for many women, yet traditional processing methods expose them to serious health risks."

Health risks and smoke pollution in fish processing - Fish smoking is a critical livelihood activity for many women, yet traditional processing methods expose them to serious health risks. The metal drum kiln and Chorkor oven, widely used to hot-smoke fish in Ghana, generate heavy smoke, leading to respiratory illnesses, eye problems, and an increased risk of long-term health conditions[102] such as asthma. These methods also compromise food safety and contribute to postharvest losses.[102]

Improved smoking technologies, such as the *Ahotor* oven and FAO-*Thiaroye* oven[102] have demonstrated important health and economic benefits. By reducing women's exposure to heat and smoke and shortening processing times, these ovens improve working conditions.[103] They also reduce firewood consumption, improve the quality of smoked fish, and lower the contamination levels of harmful compounds like Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PAH),[104] as well as *Listeria*, histamine (for some species) and *Clostridium* in the final product.[10] By reducing PAH levels to meet international food safety standards,[ae] these technologies make smoked fish more marketable, allowing women processors to earn up to 100 Ghana cedis (GHS) per kilogram - nearly ten times the local market price.[102]

Despite these benefits, widespread adoption remains limited. The *Ahotor* oven's high cost and the need for upfront investment create significant barriers, while technical problems have discouraged continued use of the technology among early adopters and other women processors.[105] Broader

uptake will depend not only on affordability and training, but also on alignment with local contexts, such as the ovens' ease of use, proximity to processing sites, availability of raw materials, consumer acceptance of the final product, premium pricing opportunities, and alignment with sociocultural considerations.[72,75]

"Offshore oil exploration and production have introduced new pressures on Ghana's marine environment and coastal livelihoods, especially in the Western Region."

Oil exploration - Offshore oil exploration and production have introduced new pressures on Ghana's marine environment and coastal livelihoods, especially in the Western Region. Since the discovery of oil at the Jubilee Field in 2007 and subsequent drilling, portions of traditional fishing grounds have been rendered inaccessible due to exclusion zones - typically extending 500 meters around oil rigs and pipelines - enforced by oil companies for safety and security purposes.[106] Beyond restricted access, oil industry operations increasingly interfere with fishing activities. An increase in supply vessels and security patrol boats around oil fields has led to reported incidents of nets and gear being damaged or destroyed by passing ships.[106] In addition to physical disruptions, oil exploration and extraction pose environmental risks, including habitat degradation, pollution, and harm to marine wildlife.[106]

Climate change - Climate change is increasingly impacting fisheries in Ghana, particularly small-scale fisheries. Rising sea surface temperatures are altering the timing, seasonal distribution and abundance of migrating fish stocks and may have contributed to the significant declines in fish populations, such as round sardinella (*Sardinella aurita*) between 1992 and 2010.[107] Modeling studies project that by 2050, climate change alone could lead to losses in Ghana's fishing industry's catch potential by 26% or more.[108] Changes in rainfall patterns have also disrupted the seasonal predictability of fishing, increasing uncertainty and financial risk for fishers. Declining catches, coupled with rising fuel and gear costs, are pushing many fishers into debt, with limited access to alternative livelihoods or social protections.[107] These changes threaten the contributions of Ghana's blue food systems to livelihoods and food and nutrition security.[109] Small-scale actors – including women, Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups – are often more vulnerable to climate impacts due to limited access to financial resources and decision-making processes.

Gender in ODA allocation for fisheries

Between 2012 and 2022, Ghana received a total of USD 33.28 million in fisheries Official Development Assistance (ODA),[af,ag] of which 15% (USD 5.75 million) was allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment in fisheries (i.e. tagged with gender markers 1 or 2). No gender equality-focused financing for Ghana scored as 'Principal' (gender marker 2). Fisheries aid to Ghana represents 5% of fisheries aid to the Sub-Saharan Africa region and gender-equality focused fisheries aid represents 2% of gender-equality focused fisheries aid to the region.

Of the ODA allocations screened for gender markers, gender-equality focused financing for fishing in Ghana came from the United States (76%), Canada (16%) and Norway (8%).

Examples of programmes or initiatives aiming to advance gender equality in fisheries

The **Feed the Future Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity** (GFRA, 2021-2025) is a USAID initiative implemented by Tetra Tech under the Feed the Future programme, focused on recovering small pelagic fisheries (sardines, anchovies, etc.) and improving coastal livelihoods. Project objectives include improving alternative livelihoods and resilience for fishing communities especially women and youth and increasing their role in fisheries decision-making. An assessment of GBV undertaken in partnership with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD) and Fisheries Commission in fishing communities in Ghana's four coastal regions was also undertaken as part of this program.[38]

The Women in Fisheries Against Violence (WiFAV, also referred to as WiFVES, 2022-2025) is an initiative funded by the European Union explicitly targeting GBV in Ghana's fishing communities across the Central and Western Regions. The project is being implemented by Hen Mpoano together with the NGO CEWEFIA and is aimed at achieving gender equality by combating GBV, abuse and discrimination in Ghana's marine fisheries sector. Key activities include enhanced access to social services and livelihood support for women survivors of violence or those at risk, establishing community systems to prevent GBV (such as awareness campaigns to shift harmful gender norms, and community watchdog groups), training local stakeholders to better address and adjudicate abuse cases, and creating safe spaces for women in these communities.[110] The project works with Ghanaian institutions like the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the police, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, and Department of Social Welfare to improve reporting and justice for GBV cases. The project also involves traditional leaders and the media to amplify women's voices and condemn abuse.[111]

"This project was designed to address the need for greater attention to food security for women shellfishers and their families, while improving biodiversity conservation of the ecosystems on which their livelihoods depend."

The **Women Shellfishers and Food Security Project** Phase I (2020 - 2022) and Phase II (2022 -2025) were supported by USAID through an award to the University of Rhode Island and co-created in partnership with the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, the University of Ghana, TRY Oyster Women's Association in The Gambia, and World Agroforestry. This project was designed to address the need for greater attention to food security for women shellfishers and their families, while improving biodiversity conservation of the ecosystems on which their livelihoods depend.[112] Specifically, the project aimed to enhance the evidence base, raise awareness, and empower stakeholders to adopt and implement effective strategies in regions with strong potential for expansion and replication across eleven coastal West African countries, from Senegal to Nigeria. As part of Phase 1, the program conducted the first regional assessment of women-led shellfisheries across 11 West African countries,[23] and established a community of practice to develop and share a toolkit on women's shellfisheries co-management in West Africa.[113] Phase II built on these results to demonstrate the benefits of rights-based co-management of shellfish-mangrove-food systems in Ghana and The Gambia and established a West Africa Shellfish Knowledge and Outreach Hub to support regional stakeholders.

Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries (2020–2021) was a project funded by Norway's Development Agency (NORAD) and implemented by FAO in support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. The project focused on improving livelihoods and food security by enhancing women's contributions and rights in fisheries in Ghana and five other African countries.[114] The project focused on addressing gender inequalities in Ghana's fisheries sector by building women fish

processors' and traders' capacity through business training, improving their access to finance and improved processing technologies (including improved smoking ovens), and strengthening their organisations to better advocate for their inclusion in governance structures.[114] The FAO-NORAD project laid groundwork for a broader programme (2021–2023) on **Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender-equitable and climate-resilient food systems and livelihoods**. The aim of the project was to combine documentation of women's contributions in small-scale fisheries with capacity building and best practices to address critical gaps in working conditions, fish loss and waste, limited infrastructure, nutrition needs, and support greater representation in decision-making processes.[115]

The European Union-funded **Far Ban Bo** ("Protecting Fisheries Livelihoods" in Akan) project (2017–2020) was implemented by a group of NGOs led by CARE Denmark and Ghana, with Friends of the Nation and Oxfam in Ghana.[69] Its objective was to ensure more sustainable and equitable fisheries by empowering local communities to participate in fisheries management and combat illegal fishing to improve food security, nutrition and livelihoods.[116] The project engaged fishers (men) and fish processors/traders (women) in five coastal communities to improve fisheries governance and livelihood practices. As part of project activities, Far Ban Bo piloted the participatory mapping of landing sites to secure these sites for artisanal fishers and create safe, designated spaces for women to process and trade fish. The project also established a Village Savings and Loan Association with strong female representation and strengthened fishery associations and civil society organisations, including those with active women members, to enhance their participation in fisheries governance.[116]

"The Far Dwuma Nkɔdo project aimed to enhance environmental sustainability and social equity within Ghana's fisheries sector."

The **Far Dwuma Nkɔdo** ("Securing Sustainable Fisheries" in Akan) project (2016-2020), was a collaborative initiative between the Environmental Justice Foundation and Hen Mpoano, with funding from the European Union and German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.[117] The project aimed to enhance environmental sustainability and social equity within Ghana's fisheries sector. Its primary objectives included reducing IUU fishing, empowering small scale fishing community members (including women) to report illicit activities and secure their tenure rights, and promoting co-management approaches to fisheries.[117] The project funded a community-based gender analysis to support gender mainstreaming across fisheries value chains and ensure women and vulnerable groups have representation in reforms addressing tenure rights reforms.[36]

"The Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, among other achievements, helped the Densu Oyster Pickers Association, a women-led shellfish harvesting group, develop a co-management plan for the oyster fishery in the Densu Delta."

The **Sustainable Fisheries Management Project** (SFMP) was a five-year initiative (2014-2019) aimed at rebuilding marine fisheries stocks through responsible fishing practices. It was led by the University of Rhode Island under USAID/Ghana funding, and implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development and the Fisheries Commission.[118] One of the project's core strategy was gender integration – recognising women's critical role in fish processing and trade. The project's gender strategy was integrated across four main components: strengthening co-management systems and modernizing processing techniques; enhancing business and technical skills through science-based training; increasing women's participation in policy dialogue and regulatory compliance; and improving access to finance while building climate resilience in fishing communities. Among other achievements, the project helped the Densu Oyster Pickers Association, a women-led shellfish harvesting group, develop a co-management plan for the oyster fishery in the Densu Delta. The SFMP piloted the *Ahotor* oven, which was coupled with training and micro-finance support to help fishmongers (predominantly women) adopt the new ovens.

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Top: Fish mammies awaiting the offloading of fish on the beach in Miemia, Western Region, Ghana. Photo: Steve Lindfield.
Bottom: A fish processor watches artisanal fishers sort the small catch from their beach seine. Butre, Western Region, Ghana. Photo: Steve Lindfield.

Endnotes

a Marine fisheries statistics are derived from catch reconstruction under the Sea Around Us - *http://www.seaaroundus.org/data/#/eez.* The approach utilized builds on national statistics and accounts for discards as well as sectoral catch data that often is not included in official datasets (e.g., artisanal or recreational catches). The Sea Around Us data is also utilized here as a consistent frame of reference for and to facilitate comparison across the set of countries for which fact sheets were developed as part of this project. Sea Around Us data are distinguished according to the following categories: large-scale (i.e., industrial) and small-scale (i.e., artisanal, subsistence and recreational) fisheries catches. Recreational catches were not considered here.

b "Marine subsistence" is used by the Sea Around Us to refer to the amount of annual marine capture production landed by the subsistence sector. This consists of fisheries conducted by women and/or noncommercial fishers for consumption by one's family, and where applicable, the fraction of the commercial catch that is given to crew or the community (mainly from small-scale fisheries)[1]

c "Marine commercial" is used by the Sea Around Us to refer to the amount of annual marine capture production landed by commercial fisheries. These are fisheries whose landed catch is sold commercially (as opposed to being consumed and/or given away to the crew) and encompass both the industrial (large-scale) and artisanal (small-scale) sectors[1]

d The term "apparent" refers to the average food available for consumption, which for several reasons (for example, waste at the household level), is not equal to average food intake or average food consumption. The amount is calculated as production + imports – exports - non-food uses, +/- stocks variations and divided by number of people partaking of it.

e The Illuminating Hidden Harvests estimates are utilized here as a consistent frame of reference for and to facilitate comparison across the set of countries for which fact sheets were developed as part of this project (visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to access all the fact sheets).

f Estimates calculated based on labour force surveys and Income Expenditure Surveys as part of the Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) project.

g Subsistence fisheries activities, also referred to as "working for own consumption", are defined by the IHH as activities that individuals of any sex and age carried out at least once over the last 12 months in order to produce and process fish for their own final use, with no transaction occurring in the marketplace. By definition, they are considered here as small-scale fisheries. (Table 2.1, p.11) [16]

h Small Scale Fisheries (SSF) are distinguished from Large Scale Fisheries (LSF) according to a characterisation matrix that distinguishes between fisheries according to gear use, vessel characteristics, fishing operations, types of storage and preservation of catch, employment/labour, and use of catch. The characterisation matrix allows for a standardised approach to classify and characterize fisheries at the global and regional level, allowing for high levels of variation between fisheries. SSF generally includes low-technology, low-capital, labour-intensive fishing practices. Often, the term artisanal is used to refer to small-scale fisheries. In the context of the IHH work, the term small-scale fisheries refers to the whole value chain of pre-harvest, harvesting and post-harvest activities, including subsistence fisheries and excluding recreational fisheries.[17]

i According to IHH estimates, 2,404,231 people belong to a household where at least one person engages in fisheries or in subsistence fishing.

j The high share of inland fisheries employment in the IHH estimates has been flagged by the authors and the IHH team as surprising. These estimates are based on the 2013 Ghana Labour Force Survey and were calibrated to 2016 to ensure cross-country comparability. Possible explanations for the unexpectedly large inland share include: (1) classification issues, such as estuarine fishing being recorded as inland rather than marine; and (2) potential coding errors. Some literature does seem to confirm that inland fisheries in Ghana are underreported18–20; in the interest of transparency, the IHH team reported the original estimates, and we do so here as well, with the understanding that future updates may allow for contextually grounded revisions.

k The Illuminating Hidden Harvests estimates are utilized here as a consistent frame of reference for and to facilitate comparison across the set of countries for which fact sheets were developed as part of this project (visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to access all the fact sheets).

l Co-author contribution.

m Co-author contribution.

n Details throughout this section provided by co-author.

o Co-author contribution.

p Co-author contribution.

q Co-author contribution.

r Details throughout this section provided by co-author.

s Noting that the closed season is newly announced by the Ministry each year. In 2025, Ghana's artisanal sector did not have a closed season; the semi-industrial fleet's closed season lasted from 1-31 July, that of the industrial fleet from 1 July – 31 August 2025. Source: FCWC.

t Co-author contribution.

u Visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to read summaries of key conventions/policies, as well as additional information about key indicators used in this factsheet.

v 'Some Treaty Bodies offer a new optional simplified reporting procedure to deal with the backlog of reviews and the delay in State reporting. In the simplified reporting procedure, the process is commenced by the Treaty Body preparing a list of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR) before a State submits its report. Under the simplified reporting procedure, the State party's response to the LOIPR constitutes the State report to be reviewed under that particular treaty. The aim of this procedure is to streamline the reporting process by removing the need for States both to submit a report and then respond to a list of issues and questions. It also importantly encourages States to produce more focused reports that respond to their reporting obligations under a particular treaty.'(79)

w Sourced from the databases FAO LEX, ECO LEX, and SSF LEX. Fisheries governance documents include fisheries policies, laws, acts, plans, strategies, and regulations. A database of all reviewed governance documents can be found here: 10.5281/zenodo.15098510.

x The Fisheries Commission Act, 1993 (Act No. 457 of 1993) was repealed by the Fisheries Act, 2002 (Act No. 625 of 2002), and later amended by the Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 2014 (Act No. 880 of 2014). While the original Act includes provisions regarding women, the revised Acts do not reference women or gender, and so only the original is noted in this section.

y Visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to read summaries of key conventions/policies, as well as additional information about key indicators used in this factsheet

z Visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to read summaries of key conventions/policies, as well as additional information about key indicators used in this factsheet.

aa Countries are classified into five groups according to their SIGI score: (1) very low level of discrimination (0 < SIGI < 20); (2) low level of discrimination (20 < SIGI < 30); (3) medium level of discrimination (30 < SIGI < 40); (4) high level of discrimination (40 < SIGI < 50); and (5) very high level of discrimination (50 < SIGI < 100). Source: OECD (2023) Social Institutions and Gender Index. OECD International Development Statistics (database).

ab Visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to read summaries of key conventions/policies, as well as additional information about key indicators used in this factsheet.

ac Co-author contribution.

ad Article 11 of the Fisheries Regulations of 2010 states that '(1) A person shall not within the fishery waters of this country (a) use any fishing method that aggregates fish by light attraction including use of portable generator, switchboard, bulbs beyond 500 watts or bulbs whose cumulative light intensity attracts fish and long cable to facilitate light production or any other contrivance for the purpose of aggregating fish by light; (b) use bamboo for the purpose of aggregating fish; (c) use explosives, obnoxious chemicals and any other prohibited fishing methods which render fish more easily caught; or (d) operate pair-trawling.' Article 88 of the Fisheries Act of 2002 states that '(1) A person shall not (a) permit to be used, use or attempt to use an explosive, a poison or any other noxious substance for the purpose of killing, stunning, disabling or catching fish, or in any way rendering fish more easily caught, ...'

ae Commission Regulation (EU) No 835/2011 of 19 August 2011 amending Regulation (EC) No 1881/2006 as regards maximum levels for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in foodstuffs.

af Visit *https://oceanrisk.earth/* to read how ODA allocations were derived.

ag Different from OECD standard methods, this is measured in disbursements from DAC countries (including EU Institutions) to recipient countries. This captures the amount of money given, as opposed to the amount of money committed. Original data was downloaded on 17th June 2024.

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