

# Go Back, Retrieve It

The Sankofa Project seeks to investigate the gendered socio-economic effects of the fisheries closure in four coastal regions of Ghana to understand how the policy affects communities

A research project was launched in Ghana to focus on equitable, inclusive and sustainable fisheries management. Titled Creating Synergies between Indigenous Practices and Scientific Knowledge (ISIPSK), it is led by Okafor-Yarwood at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, and funded by the PEW Fellows Program in Marine Conservation at the Pew Charitable

The Sankofa project seeks to investigate the gendered socio-economic effects of the fisheries closure in four coastal regions of Ghana to understand how the policy affects communities, especially its impacts on women, who typically process, distribute and sell the catch. The project will involve working with community leaders and fishers to identify practices inspired by local ecological knowledge that can be integrated with state-sanctioned management interventions to inform the development of more sustainable, equitable and locally appropriate marine conservation measures.

The project focuses on Ghana's four coastal regions: Volta, Central, Western and Greater Accra. However, data collection could be extended to communities in other countries, such as Ivory Coast or Togo, in the pilot phase of implementing a closed fishing season. The latter will inform areas of intersection, allowing developments to be viewed through a cross-comparative case study.

The objectives of this project are three-fold: one, advancing knowledge on the gendered impact of the closed fishing season, focusing on socio-economic implications, using an interdisciplinary (science-policy interface) and cross-regional approach; two, examining how indigenous practices can be integrated into marine conservation interventions; and, three, developing innovative ways of disseminating information to develop an effective sub-regional fisheries conservation and sustainable livelihood plan.

## Collaboration

CaFGOAG is a sub-contractor and the fishers association collaborating on the project and other collaborators

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Trust. Local partners from Ghana collaborating with the university for the research initiative include the Fisheries Commission of Ghana, the Fisheries Committee for West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC), and the Canoe and Fishing Gear Owners Association of Ghana (CaFGOAG). The project is now named 'Sankofa', meaning, to wit, 'go back and retrieve it'. In this particular case, it refers to going back to retrieve positive historical practices that promote sustainable fisheries.

Fisheries are vital to food security and the livelihoods of millions of people in West Africa. Despite this, the region's fisheries suffer from over-exploitation, pollution and the impacts of climate change. In Ghana, after the near collapse of several important fisheries, the government implemented closed fishing seasons, including a one-month-per-year closure for small-scale artisanal fishers. Although intended to improve fisheries sustainability, the closure has had broad economic and social impacts.

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Fishermen mending net, Canoe Basin, Tema. Train more members in data collection and prioritize fishers' participation in data collection to support the implementation of fisheries co-management in Ghana's artisanal fisheries sector is the next action plan

contributed to identifying the research sites across the four regions where data will be collected. They also helped in designing the research questions and appropriate methodologies for data collection. As part of its role, CaFGOAG will support access to research sites, support community entry and other resources required for the successful completion of the project, identify relevant stakeholders to participate in the research, and create awareness about the project among stakeholders. CaFGOAG has provided two research assistants for the project and will promote the implementation of the recommendations based on the research findings.

On 24 November 2023, project partners held a successful first inception meeting, hosted by the executive director of the Fisheries Commission. The meeting was called to enable a discussion among partners on the project implementation strategies, the selection of project sites, and the responsibility of collaborators. A series

of engagements was planned among collaborators to finalize arrangements before data collection.

By 2024, three meetings have been held already. The first was on 12 March 2024. The discussions centred on the project sites, research methodology and tools, communication tools, and resources needed for the successful implementation of the project. The second meeting was on 16 April 2024, discussing the community entry plan presented by CaFGOAG and the training for research assistants on the methodology and instrument for data collection, which is scheduled for May. Fieldwork and data collection are slated for July 2024 and will be preceded by community and stakeholder engagements. The third meeting, held on 7 May 2024, was the first of a two-part training for research assistants, with the second scheduled for later in preparation for fieldwork in July.

The project is in line with the principles of Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale

Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). The project will specifically highlight the plight of small-scale fishers in the face of declining fisheries, as well as the implementation of conservation measures. The project will contribute to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries in Ghana through the promotion of integration of indigenous ecological knowledge with state-sanctioned management interventions to inform the development of more sustainable and locally appropriate marine conservation measures.

### The expectations

The project will mobilize and support women and men in maritime small-scale fisheries to make a major contribution to livelihood, employment, food security and revenue by promoting their participation in decision-making, and implementation of measures that reflect the aspirations of fishing communities. This will contribute to achieving healthy and resilient fishing communities.

The project partners cut across researchers, policy makers, regulators and fishers working together to inform fisheries policy and implementation. This is remarkable at a time when Ghana is at an early stage of implementing the fisheries co-management policy. Planned engagements with the Small Pelagic Co-Management Committees will further strengthen the committees and make them effective. This collaboration is beneficial for a number of reasons.

One, it will enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the research findings, which is very important for influencing policy decisions. It offers fishers the opportunity to have input into management interventions that reflect their aspirations. For CaFGOAG, it enhances the credibility of the work the association does, both now and in the future.

Two, the collaboration offers an opportunity for training and capacity building for members of CaFGOAG, something very much needed to increase knowledge and experiences, which will positively impact the work of CaFGOAG and artisanal fishers in Ghana.

Three, the collaboration is important for data sharing and access. This collaboration offers many prospects for facilitating access to valuable resources from partners that CaFGOAG can rely upon in engagements with members and other stakeholders.

Four, CaFGOAG has the opportunity to receive valuable insight and expertise guidance from partners, particularly the University of St Andrews, as technical assistance for its work as a fishers' association, which will improve effectiveness and efficiency. Through this collaboration, the university is making available to CaFGOAG equipment that will aid the organization's role in the research project and its work even later on after the project concludes.

And, finally, five, the collaboration expands CaFGOAG's professional networks, connecting the association with researchers, policymakers, regulators and other stakeholders. CaFGOAG will leverage this to improve engagement with all relevant fisheries stakeholders in the quest to effectively participate in fisheries management and governance with a goal of ensuring sustainable fisheries livelihoods for members and all fishworkers in Ghana. The benefits of the collaboration on this research project are enormous, and CaFGOAG needs to put the experiences to be gained to good use. To this end CaFGOAG plans to:

- Sustain and expand the network of collaborators and partners for more policy research projects and other initiatives. Collaborations will be explored for fisheries policy advocacy initiatives towards more inclusive fisheries governance.
- Train more members in data collection and prioritize fishers' participation in data collection to support the implementation of fisheries co-management in Ghana's artisanal fisheries sector. This will also improve the science-policy interface anchored on fishers' active and effective participation in decision making, leveraging on the improved capacities to deepen engagements with members and other stakeholders, and improve the internal structures and workings of the association to be able to perform effectively and efficiently. 

#### For more

##### Canoe and Fishing Gear Owners Association of Ghana (CaFGOAG)

<https://www.cafgoagghana.org/>

##### Creating synergies in Ghana's small-scale fisheries

<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/marine-fellows/fellows-directory/2023/ifesinachi-okafor-yarwood>

##### Fisheries Committee for West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC)

<https://fcwc-fish.org/>