



PROFILE

Lydia Sasu – Hungry for a cause Twenty-four years ago, a women’s advocate spoke up and the technocrats listened

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The year was 1998. Lydia Sasu, the notable personality being profiled in this column, was then a civil servant in the Department of Women in Agriculture in the Ghanaian Ministry of Food and Agriculture and also the Coordinator of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Using the authority and privilege at her command, Lydia worked relentlessly to highlight the need for holistic and sustainable solutions to tackle the all-pervasive problem of hunger in Ghana. By drawing attention to the problems of illiteracy, unemployment, poor health and the under-representation of marginalized groups, including women, Lydia made the all-important connections that allow the root causes of hunger to be identified and addressed.

As a result, a campaign organization, the Development Action Association (DAA), was established in 1999, with Lydia as its Executive Director. Born and brought up in a farming household herself, Lydia’s efforts through the DAA were focused on the anti-hunger campaign and the promotion of education and skills training for farming and fishing communities. Twenty-four years have elapsed since the DAA was formed, and its impact on its members and on communities mired in poverty have been profound. In 2002, Lydia was invited to attend the FAO World Food Summit, where she joined forces with farmer groups and other stakeholders to create a national farmer’s platform in Ghana – the Farmers Organizations Network in Ghana (FONG). Subsequently, FONG became

a member of ROPPA – a small-scale farmers network in West Africa.

Lydia Sasu met Chandrika Shama and Nalini Nayak of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) at Tsokomey, Ghana in 2002. Through this meeting, for the first time in the sector, many hidden dimensions of human rights in small-scale fisheries were brought to light and the groundwork for an expanded focus on lobbying and advocacy in the sector was laid. Equally important were certain later collaborations with TESCOD and FAO on the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines.

With rural women at the forefront of her work, Lydia Sasu initiated World Rural Women’s Day celebration in Ghana on 15 October this year with the intention of bringing rural women together to share best practices and lessons learned on food security and make their voices heard. Under her leadership, DAA is currently operating as one of the eight partners for the Sustainable Fisheries Management Programme (SFMP), jointly run by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Ghana, which aims at rebuilding targeted marine fisheries stock in the country. Under the SFMP programme DAA was provided with an office complex and fish processing centre at Kokrobite in Ga South District of Accra where women fish processors are trained.

Lydia Sasu continues to play a key role in DAA as an advocate, skilled trainer and educator in both small-scale fishery and agriculture. She has been recognized with over a dozen national and international awards including the Women’s Creativity in Rural Life by Women’s World Summit Foundation in 2011, the Kleckner Trade & Technology Advancement Award as well as the Iowa USA at the World Food Prize in 2015; the FAO 40th anniversary award in Ghana in 2016; the USAID Ghana Women of Courage Award and the US Embassy of Ghana award for Woman of Courage in 2020. 📌

Smoking fish efficiently

The *ahotor* oven represents an improvement on the widely used *chorkor* smoker, and is an energy- and time-efficient fish smoking technology

By Naana Nkansah Agyekum (nagyekum@oxfam.org.uk), Media and Communications Officer, Oxfam, Ghana

My recent tours in some coastal communities in the Central, Western and Volta Regions of Ghana exposed me to a daily reality of fishmongers in the region. As part of a fisheries sustainable project being implemented by Oxfam and its partners, such visits to fishing communities are quite frequent.

During one such trip, interactions with some fishmongers resulted in my visiting a fish processing shed, and that was when I got a taste of the struggle that they have been going through all these years. Within the few minutes I spent there, my eyes reddened, and I found myself gasping for breath. I walked out feeling sorry for the women who are subjected to this torturous experience on a daily basis to ensure we get the smoked fish that we love so much.

But this daily hardship of the women could be lessened with the use of a new technology for smoking fish called the *ahotor* oven. The *ahotor* oven was developed by SNV Ghana under Sustainable Fisheries Management

Project (SFMP) to improve on the quality and competitiveness of smoked fish through the use of a clean smoking technology. The *ahotor* oven is designed as an improvement over the existing *chorkor* smoker.

The *ahotor* oven is energy efficient and helps women fish processors reduce the quantity of firewood in smoking fish. It also improves the quality of smoked fish and reduces the content of the Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PaH) contamination level, usually found in smoked fish. The combustion chamber in the oven ensures efficient combustion or burning of wood.

In contrast, the *chorkor* smoker, which is quite popular with most of the fishmongers because of its low cost of construction, poses a health risk to fish processors as they have to endure the high rate of combustion that it involves.

“We need special training on the hygienic handling of fish as well as support in the construction of the improved *ahotor* ovens for smoking our fish,” says Madam Emelia Abaka, a fishmonger in Axim. She adds, “The old *chorkor* smokers are not good for smoking as the fish absorbs a lot of smoke in the process.”

“The assistance of the government and the private sector is needed to subsidise the cost of construction of the *ahotor* oven to make it affordable for most women,” explains Emelia.

According to the Ghana Standard Authority, fish smoked with the *ahotor* oven also passes the standardization test and makes them acceptable to the other formal markets like the supermarkets. Quality fish that meets the standardization mark is not only healthy but increases the profit margins for the fishmongers.

Oxfam and partners conducted a research on Gender Enterprise Marketing (GEM) within the fisheries value chain and recommended the need for standardization of smoked fish.

According to the OXFAM GEM report, “The women need support in the area of training and capacity building in order to establish profits and ultimately improve their livelihoods. Support for the women is mostly from NGOs but this is not extensive and so accessibility is low. Government institutions like the National Board for Small-scale Industry can provide the needed assistance for the rural women.”

EMELIA ABAKA EDU



The *ahotor* oven is energy efficient and helps women fish processors reduce the quantity of firewood in smoking fish. It also improves quality of smoked fish



Fishmongers using the chorkor smoker, which is quite popular because of its low cost of construction, but which poses a health risk to fish processors as they have to endure its higher rate of combustion

Rubby Adukpoh is an Assembly Member of the Dzelukope Electoral Area of the Keta Municipality in Ghana. She is also the Leader for the National Fish Processors Traders Association. Rubby explained to me that in her municipality, most women – about 80 per cent – still use the chorkor smokers.

“They don’t have the money to construct the new ahotor oven which was introduced to them. As a leader, I’m trying to encourage them to use the new ones because I have observed the differences in using both,” says Rubby.

“With the chorkor smokers, the water that drains from the fish gets back to the fire but the ahotor oven has a chamber that drains the water separately,” Rubby explains. “The ahotor oven offers that extra time while processing your fish to do other things but you don’t have that flexibility when using the chorkor smoker as your fish can easily burn,” she adds.

Rubby Adukpoh is not only encouraging the women to use the new oven but also dialoguing with NGOs and the local district authority to garner support for the women for complete migration to the ahotor oven.

The cost for constructing the ahotor oven ranges from GHS 1600 to GHS 1800 (USD 274 to USD 308) but the chorkor smoker costs just GHS 200 to GHS 400 (USD 34 to USD 68).

According to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, 500 ahotor ovens have been distributed to fish mongers across the country, with 80 more under construction, to complement the initial supply.

Some fisheries projects in the past have subsidised the construction of the new oven for fishmongers. But like Oliver Twist, the women are asking for “more” as the support was far from enough to cover all the women within the coastal communities.

Rubby Adukpoh cannot overstate the importance of this. “I am appealing to all stakeholders within the fisheries sector to come on board to fully support the migration to the ahotor oven,” she says

She also wants government ministries and the agencies in charge of Ghana’s fisheries to pay frequent visits to coastal communities. She believes this will give them the opportunity to witness the socio-economic status of women in the sector first-hand so as to craft better and more effective policy decisions. ❏

The ahotor oven is energy efficient and helps women fish processors reduce the quantity of firewood in smoking fish

ARTICLE

Gender Ideology and Manoeuvring Space for Female Fisheries Entrepreneurs

Ragnhild Overa; *Research Review* NS 19.2 (2003) 49-66

This review is by **Chandrika Sharma**, Executive Secretary, ICSF

This article explores how gender ideologies shape the 'manoeuvring space' enjoyed by women fish traders in Ghana, a country where fish marketing and trade in the artisanal sector is almost entirely in the hands of women. While the fishery at sea is seen as a male domain, the market ashore is considered female, each domain with its parallel gendered hierarchies. Overa notes that the power balance between the female and the male hierarchies is, however, often asymmetric—while male leaders usually exercise their authority in society as a whole, the authority of female leaders seldom extends beyond women's domains.

Women traders have, in recent years, made inroads into the male-dominated sphere of fishing. Opportunities opened up with the introduction of outboard motors (OBMs) in the artisanal fisheries in the 1960s. Many fish traders found it useful to invest in OBMs given the higher return on investment. While this led to the canoe fisheries becoming more capital-intensive, it also increased the importance of fish traders as creditors. Some of these traders were women, transcending gender norms to enter the sphere of fishing by becoming canoe-owners themselves.

Overa bases her analysis on fieldwork undertaken in three ethnically diverse communities—the Fante of the Moree region, the Ga-Adangbe of the Kpone region and the Anlo-Ewe of the Dzelukope region—characterized by different languages, kinship systems, marriage practices and the socio-economic organization of production systems. The degree to which women 'crossed over' from being fish traders to actually buying equipment and running fishing companies

themselves, varied. Overa found that whereas the Fante women came to occupy a powerful role as investors and owners, the Anlo-Ewe women rarely became owners of canoes and beach seines. Among the Ga-Adangme, it was mostly women in urban areas like Accra and Tema who became owners. She argues that differences in gender ideology could explain these differences. For example, a matrilineal kinship system is observed in Moree, whereas in both Kpone and Dzelukope, patrilineal kinship systems prevail. In Dzelukope, moreover, the pattern of residence is virilocal or patrilocal—the man sets up his own household and the wife moves in with him. In Kpone and Moree, on the other hand, it is duo-local, with women staying in 'women's houses' and men in 'men's houses'.

Overa suggests that the combination of the matrilineal kinship system and the duo-local residence pattern in Moree served to expand women's manoeuvring space. Further, the women in Moree were able to solicit the co-operation of their men, since, within the matrilineal system, men stood to gain when female relatives invested in fishing equipment. The women in Kpone and Dzelukope, on the other hand, found it possible to overcome gender barriers only through migration to urban areas. Overa suggests that the degree to which women are able to employ entrepreneurial strategies beyond the female domain largely depends on men's perception of these strategies.

The article is a good example of grounded scholarship that draws on analysis of local gender ideologies to develop a better understanding of factors that influence the space and power that women from fishing communities can 'capture'. In the context of local realities it challenges broadly-held generalizations, for example, that motorization and technological change always adversely affect women. It also provides interesting insights into creative strategies employed by women, portraying them as dynamic actors, constantly strategizing to enhance their spaces—a far cry from the picture of 'women as victims' often portrayed in fisheries literature. ❏



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.

News/ Ghana**Free the Fishing Boys**

A Press Release (summarized below) dated 11 March 2003 from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva, draws attention to .child labour in the fisheries in Ghana

A programme, implemented by the IOM with the Ghanaian authorities, the ILO, Catholic Relief Service and the local NGO APPLE, aims to return to their families more than 1,200 children who have been trafficked into forced labour in the Central and Volta regions of Ghana.

To date, IOM staff in Yeji and Atebubu districts of Brong Ahafo region have successfully registered 814 children who are currently employed under slave-like conditions in numerous fishing communities established along the shores and on islands scattered on Lake Volta.

The victims, mostly boys aged between 5 and 14, are forced to work from dawn to dusk casting and drawing nets. They live separately in cramped thatched roofed huts, are poorly fed, suffer physical abuse and never get paid. Their diet consists mainly of cassava with watery soup. They never eat fish. Because of their poor diet, harsh living and working conditions, many suffer from water born illnesses and experience stunted growth.

For more information contact: IOM Geneva, Tel: 41.22.717.9111 mpi@iom.int

FROM AFRICA/ Ghana**Together we build**

Getting together has helped the women in the Central and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana

by Lydia Sasu, Project Coordinator of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign/ Action for Development (FFHC/AD) project in Ghana.

The FFHC/AD project, a small project with a grass-roots base, operates in the Central and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. It covers 13 village associations, of which six are fishing villages. One of the many objectives is to help the associations grow into self-sustaining groups.

All the members of the associations meet regularly to exchange ideas, to discuss problems and find solutions. At one of these meetings, women from Bortianor, Faana and Chokomey villages (in the Greater Accra Region) complained that fishermen were collecting five handfuls (instead of the customary one handful) of anchovies from each basket of anchovies that they carry for the women from the boats, at Bortianor beach. The women complained to the chief fisherman of Bortianor, who tried unsuccessfully to solve the problem.

The women of Bortianor then invited other women from the village associations of Oshiyie and Kokrobite, as well as the chief fishermen from these villages, to help them resolve the problem. At this meeting, held at the house of the chief fisherman of Bortianor, the practice of collecting five handfuls of anchovies was prohibited and the earlier practice of collecting one handful was reverted to.

Women in these associations have also begun to take other initiatives. Aware of the decline of fish resources over the years, they have collectively decided not to buy fish caught through the use of explosives.

FROM AFRICA/Ghana**Breaking through culture**

by Lydia Sasu, Project Co-ordinator of the Food for Hunger Campaign, Ghana

In Ghana, while the men go fishing, their wives and daughters are the ones who process and market fish. Women also take up other income-generating activities like petty trading, preparation of oil, etc. to clothe, educate and feed the family. They work hard through the day.

Traditionally, men would never assist in smoking the fish and would spend their time mending their nets or resting after their fishing expeditions. Of late, however, the young men have been educated to break through this culture. They are entering into fish processing, marketing and distribution of processed fish to assist their wives and the family. This has come as a big relief to the women. At times, when the fish is landed land in the morning and the wife is away selling fish in the market, some men start the fish processing activity until the wife joins them later. These are positive signs of change.

FROM AFRICA/Ghana**Exchanging experiences****by David Eli of TESCOOD, Ghana**

In an exchange programme in December 1998, 13 women fishworkers from eight fishery co-operative societies in Benin visited Ghana. The exchange was facilitated by ID Pêche, Benin and TESCOOD, Ghana. Both ID Pêche and TESCOOD are NGOs working with artisanal fishing communities in Benin and Ghana respectively.

The main objective of the exchange was to enable women fish processors from Benin to learn more about the various fish processing techniques of their Ghanaian counterparts and to discuss other matters of mutual interest.

Among the places visited by the group was the Tema Fishing Harbour. Here they were able to observe the different levels of the fishery in operation — the artisanal, the semi-industrial and the industrial. They saw the operations of fresh-fish vendors, both at the wholesale and retail levels. The retailing activities of the vendors of imported frozen fish was another area they observed. What was amazing to them was the fact that it was primarily women who controlled fish marketing at the harbour. They saw the big cold rooms and the workers (mostly men) being managed by these women. In the fishing village of Prampram, where TESCOOD had organized a *durbar* (meeting) of fishworkers for the celebration of the World Fisheries Day, they interacted with women representatives from 13 fishing communities.

Later the women of Prampram, Lekpongunor and Ningo joined hands to take their Beninese counterparts through the construction of the Chorkor Smoker. They were also taken through some rudiments of fish-tray construction. It was interesting to see these women handling carpentry tools to construct the trays. In Tsokomey, a fishing village some 30km west of Accra, the women met with members of local women's associations. They discussed issues relating to credit, organizational strategies and technical inputs. The issue of fish marketing came up strongly.

The women identified high tariffs and the intimidating attitudes of custom officials as the major hin

drances to cross-border fish trade, and stressed the need to resolve these problems. They sought the assistance of both TESCOOD and ID Pêche on the matter.