

# ORGANIZING WOMEN IN GHANA'S FISHERIES

*Understanding the Capacity of Ghanaian Women's Organizations to Contribute to Fisheries Management Solutions for Human Wellbeing and Ecological Sustainability.*



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## GLOSSARY

**ARC** - Accountability Research Centre

**CAOPA** – *Confederation of African Artisanal Fisheries Professional Organizations*: A continental network promoting sustainable artisanal fishing and supporting fisher folk associations across Africa.

**CAFGOAG** – *Canoe and Gear Owners Association of Ghana*: Represents small-scale, artisanal fishers and canoe owners across Ghana’s coastal regions.

**CEWEFIA** – *Central and Western Fishmongers Improvement Association*: A women-led NGO focused on improving the livelihoods, safety, and rights of fishmongers and processors in Ghana’s Central and Western Regions.

**CoS** – *Circle of Support*: A structured network of women who come together to provide emotional, practical, and sometimes professional support to individual members.

**CSO** - *Civil Society Organization*: Refers to a non-state, non-profit, voluntary entity that operates independently of government to advance collective interests, values, or causes.

**DAA** – *Development Action Association*: A member-based NGO supporting rural women, including fish processors and farmers, with training, infrastructure, and advocacy support.

**DOPA** – *Densu Oyster Pickers Association*: A community-based group of women oyster harvesters supported by DAA, working along the Densu estuary.

**EJF** – *Environmental Justice Foundation*: An international NGO working on fisheries governance, environmental protection, and social justice, including women's leadership and labor rights.

**FAO** – *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*: A specialized agency of the UN that leads international efforts to defeat hunger, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture and fisheries worldwide.

**FC** – *Fisheries Commission*: The regulatory agency under Ghana’s Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development responsible for managing fisheries resources and implementing sector policies.

**GAWU** – *General Agricultural Workers’ Union*: A national union affiliated with TUC, advocating for agricultural and fisheries workers’ rights, including efforts against child labor and informal labor exploitation.

**GBV** – *Gender-Based Violence*: Harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse.

**GFRA** – *Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity*: USAID funded food security project aimed at restoring small pelagic fish stocks, enhancing fisheries governance, and improving livelihoods in coastal communities.

**GNCFC** – *Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council*: A national body representing canoe owners and artisanal fishers, with limited but growing inclusion of women.

**ITF** – *International Transport Workers’ Federation*: A global trade union federation representing transport workers, including those in fishing and maritime sectors.

**IUF** – *International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations*: A global federation supporting workers in agriculture and food sectors.

**Konkohemaa** – A queen fishmonger who buys fish directly from canoes at landing beaches, often serving as a leader or intermediary in the post-harvest value chain.

**MoFA** – *Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture*: The government ministry responsible for policy, planning, and coordination of Ghana’s fisheries and aquaculture sector.

**MELR** - Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations

**MoGCSP** - Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

**NAFAG** – *National Fisheries Association of Ghana*: The national umbrella organization for male-dominated fisheries associations.

**NAFPTA** – *National Fish Processors and Traders Association*: A government-facilitated association formed to represent women processors and traders across Ghana.

**NGO** – *Non-Governmental Organization*: An independent, non-profit group that provides services, advocacy, or capacity building in various sectors.

**NUTEG** – *National Union of Trade and Employees of Ghana*: A labor-related body involved in organizing and protecting workers’ rights.

**Premix Fuel** – A subsidized fuel mix provided by the government to artisanal fishers, often distributed through committees that typically exclude women.

**SFCLS** – *Safe Fish Certification and Licensing Scheme*: A quality assurance initiative aimed at improving standards in fish handling and mar within the fisheries sector

**SPCC** – *Small Pelagic Co-Management Committee*: A national body supporting the management of Ghana’s small pelagic fishery, with representation from fisher folk associations.

**SFMP** – *Sustainable Fisheries Management Project*: A USAID-funded initiative that ran from 2014–2021 to support sustainable fisheries and women’s empowerment in Ghana.

**VSLA** – *Village Savings and Loans Association*: A community-based savings and credit model used to improve financial access and build solidarity among women.

**WiFVEs** – *Women in Fisheries Against Violence and for Economic Self-Sufficiency*: An EU-funded project aimed at addressing GBV and promoting economic empowerment among women in fisheries.

## ABSTRACT

This report provides a critical assessment of how Ghanaian women within the fisheries value chain are organizing to assert their voice, improve labor conditions, and influence sector governance. It offers a deep analysis of women's roles across harvesting, processing, trading, and support services, and highlights the diversity of their contributions and the systemic vulnerabilities they face.

Drawing on field interviews, institutional engagement, studies of associations, and workshop discussions, the report evaluates the structure and functionality of women's groups, their effectiveness in advocacy, and their inclusion in decision-making spaces. It also examines how social, economic, and gender-based inequities shape participation and labor outcomes.

The report concludes with strategic recommendations to strengthen women's organizing, enhance social protection, support informal labor, and advance more inclusive, sustainable fisheries management in Ghana.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Purpose and Methods**

This report investigates the status of women's organizing in Ghana's fisheries sector. It aims to understand how women across different roles are engaging with fisher associations, the barriers they face to meaningful participation, and how their collective action can contribute to human well-being and sustainable fisheries governance. It also provides recommendations for strengthening women's associations and enhancing their impact on fisheries policy, economic empowerment, and social protection.

The analysis was conducted through a rapid field-based assessment complemented by validation during a national Fisher Learning Exchange in July 2025 in Accra, Ghana. Fieldwork included 60 key informant interviews with association leaders, members, and unaffiliated women workers, such as head porters and descenders. Field visits were made to four coastal regions, and findings were triangulated with secondary literature and Civil Society Organization (CSO) reports to ensure credibility and depth.

### **Findings**

Women are central to Ghana's fisheries economy but remain underrepresented and underserved in policy spaces, due to systemic exclusion. While older and more financially stable women (e.g., processors, canoe owners) are more likely to lead and participate in associations, younger and informal workers (e.g., porters, descenders) face barriers such as low awareness, financial exclusion, and mistrust of leadership. This reflects a stratification within women's roles in the sector.

Associations have delivered notable successes, including improved access to training, credit, markets, and participation in national fisheries governance. Women reported gains in capacity building, equipment distribution, and solidarity through welfare schemes like Circles of Support (CoS) and Village Savings Loans Associations (VSLAs).

However, significant challenges persist. Many women reported dissatisfaction with their associations, including unclear mandates, unmet expectations, exclusion from decision-making, and weak social protection. Associations themselves acknowledged problems with governance, donor dependency, limited policy influence, and fragmented organizing. A disconnect exists between national-level leadership and grassroots expectations, often resulting in top-down communication and disappointment at the local level.

### **Recommendations**

To strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of women's associations in the fisheries sector, it is important that associations clarify their mandates and improve the benefits they provide to members. Clearly defining their purpose, developing sustainable funding models, and offering tangible services that directly respond to women's real needs will increase trust and participation.

At the same time, communication and leadership must be revitalized. Rebuilding local structures, introducing mentorship opportunities for younger women, and using VSLAs as organizing platforms can help bridge communication gaps while fostering greater inclusion across generations. Associations could also expand their inclusiveness by reducing barriers to participation, particularly for women working in the informal sector and for younger members. This could include not only lower entry barriers but also encourage the expansion of the number and types of associations to provide more specialized representation for different groups. For example, employees and owners often have different interests and needs. Emerging groups like head porter and descaler associations can develop independently rather than as extensions of existing organizations. Outreach, flexible dues systems, and leadership that fairly represents the diversity of women in the sector are all critical steps. Furthermore, collaboration across associations and networks is essential. By joining forces with other female- and male-led associations and with labor unions, women's groups can strengthen advocacy on shared priorities like fisheries management, decent work, and social protection.

For supporting organizations and donors, the way forward involves ensuring that programs align with association needs. Empowerment strategies could be tailored to the economic and social priorities of women in fisheries, with particular attention to working capital, safety, and processing equipment, reproductive health services, and supplemental livelihoods. Investment in institutional strengthening is equally critical. Support should move beyond one-off workshops or event-based initiatives to long-term mentoring, organizational development, and the provision of internal accountability tools that enhance sustainability. Coordination among donors also remains a pressing need; harmonized interventions will reduce fragmentation and maximize impact. Finally, institutionalizing gender equity within the sector is vital. Establishing a well-resourced gender unit within the Fisheries Commission would not only mainstream women's inclusion in fisheries governance but also work with other government agencies to ensure that gender considerations are embedded across all programmatic processes.

Women's associations in Ghana's fisheries have the potential to be transformative actors for social justice and fisheries management. With strengthened internal systems and inclusive leadership, they can become powerful vehicles for advancing women's rights and ecological stewardship in coastal communities

## I.0 INTRODUCTION

Ghana's fisheries sector is vital to national food security, employment, and the cultural identity of coastal communities. The small-scale sector contributes about 55% to total marine catches. It supports the livelihoods of over 3.2 million Ghanaians, creates jobs for about 20% of the active labour force, and provides animal protein to the nation (MoFA, 2022). Women form the majority of the post-harvest workforce serving as processors, traders, porters, and financiers, yet their contributions often go unrecognized in policy-making and they remain largely excluded from decision-making platforms.

The sector itself faces mounting pressures: depleted fish stocks, labour exploitation, gender-based violence (GBV), child labour, and persistent economic vulnerabilities. In response, the Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture (MoFA), has introduced reforms such as co-management strategies and labour rights protections for fishers under instruments like ILO Convention 188 (ILO C 188). Within this evolving policy landscape, strengthening women's ability to organize emerges as a critical strategy for building resilience, improving governance, and promoting equity.

A focused examination of women's organizing is both timely and strategic. Across the fisheries value chain, women face intersecting challenges that demand collective action. For instance, female canoe owners and processors regularly navigate volatile negotiations with male crew, while young informal female workers, such as porters and descalers, endure hazardous working conditions and low pay with little social protection. Organizing offers these women a path to safer working conditions, improved bargaining power, and inclusion in the governance of the fishery resources they rely on. Through collective platforms, women can advocate for meaningful reforms such as better purchasing arrangements with fishers', access to credit, and protection from GBV.

Despite being deeply impacted by fisheries management decisions, women's voices remain underrepresented in fisheries management discussions. Strengthening women-led organizations can help ensure their priorities are reflected in the governance of the fisheries resource. Moreover, well-organized groups can become conduits for targeted support to enhance their livelihoods, such as training in business management, financial literacy, hygienic fish handling, and reproductive health services.

Women in the sector occupy diverse roles, each with distinct needs that benefit from tailored organizing strategies. Women entrepreneurs, whether owning processing businesses or fishing canoes, often manage operations in male-dominated environments. They would benefit from collective training and business support services. While, informal workers like porters and processors could organize to secure better wages, formal recognition, and reducing their economic vulnerabilities.

Ultimately, stronger women’s organizing is not just a vehicle for economic empowerment it is a lever for systemic change. When women have access to resources, training, and solidarity, they are better equipped to protect themselves, advocate for their rights, and promote the well-being of their families and communities.

*Strengthening women’s collective voice is essential to achieving a more just, resilient, and inclusive fisheries sector in Ghana.*

Within this context, this report investigates the status of women’s organizing in Ghana’s fisheries. Specifically, to understand:

1. **Representation:** How different women in the sector are currently involved in associations?
2. **Barriers:** Why some women are not involved in associations?
3. **Member Experiences:** How the experience of association members aligns with their expectations?
4. **Association Experiences:** How the women leading associations assess the strengths and challenges of their organizations?

This work was conducted to support a two-day Fisher Learning Exchange convened in July 2025 by the Accountability Research Centre (ARC) of American University in Accra, Ghana. Previous research highlighted the key role women play in Ghana’s fishing sector and noted the need for deeper engagement. The work was funded by the Fisheries Governance Project, a funder-practitioner collaboration working to advance solutions at the intersection of improved fisheries governance and advancements in labor rights.

The report is organized around these sections:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2. Background: Women in Ghana’s fisheries – roles, associations, and supporting organizations
- Section 3. Methods
- Section 4. Findings: The status of women’s organizing in the sector
- Section 5. Recommendations: Realizing the potential of women’s contributions to human wellbeing and ecological sustainability
- Section 6. Key Take-Aways

## 2.0 BACKGROUND: WOMEN IN GHANA'S FISHERIES – ROLES, ASSOCIATIONS, AND SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Women are central to Ghana's fisheries sector. Although there is no verifiable data on the exact number of women involved, it is widely acknowledged that women outnumber men across the fisheries value chain. Estimates suggest that each canoe supports about eight women entrepreneurs (Konkohemaa or fish processor), which translates to roughly 96,000 women linked to the 12,000 canoes operating in Ghana's marine waters (MoFA Canoe Frame Survey, 2022), serving as Konkohemaas and fish processors. This figure does not include the many thousands of women engaged as informal workers and those in inland fisheries.

Women who work informally as oyster pickers, head porters, descalers, and commission-based traders are typically overlooked and unaccounted for in official data. Most of these women have little or no formal education and are the primary caregivers in their households. Many, including adolescents, are raising multiple children while working as head porters and fish descalers, positions that are especially invisible within the fisheries value chain.

Poverty, limited access to credit facilities, and the absence of social safety nets keep many in vulnerable positions. Their working conditions are often unsafe, and exposes them to smoke, hazardous harvesting practices, and unsanitary environments. Gender-based violence (GBV), driven by poverty, marginalization, exclusion from decision-making spaces, entrenched social norms, and the decline of fish stocks, further compound their challenges (USAID, 2022a). Children of women in fisheries are also affected. Many are drawn into work at landing sites, processing centers, or even at sea. This exposes them to child labor risks, disrupts schooling, and perpetuates cycles of poverty (USAID, 2022b).

Despite their enormous economic contributions, women remain under recognized in fisheries governance (ILO 2017, 2020; FAO 2018, 2021). Addressing these gaps is critical to achieving gender equity and sustainable fisheries management in Ghana.

### 2.1 Women in Ghana's Fisheries Value Chain

Women's roles are diverse and essential, ranging from labor-intensive support functions to leadership in trade and investment. Despite this, most of their work remains informal, precarious, and unrecognized in policy and governance spaces. Key roles occupied by women are shown in Table I.

**Table 1: Role and status of women in fisheries**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Status</b>
Canoe Owners and Financiers	This small but influential group of women either own canoes and fishing gear or provide informal financing for fishing expeditions. Despite their economic power, many are uncomfortable to openly acknowledge ownership, and often allow male managers or crew to front as owners and make key decisions. While they retain some behind-the-scenes influence, their roles are largely informal and under-recognized within official governance structures.	Employer
Konkohemaa	Traditional leaders in fish marketing at the beach, working closely with chief fisherman and other fishers. They finance fishing expeditions, set prices, and buy fish directly from canoes at landing sites. They often act as intermediaries in local fish distribution networks and provide leadership in conflict situations.	Employer
Fish Processor	These women own and operate fish processing businesses, engaging in activities such as frying, smoking, and fermenting of fish. Some manage their operations from privately owned facilities, while others utilize communally shared processing sheds. They typically have teams of younger women working for them. Many invest in processing equipment, maintain hygiene standards, and ensure the quality of fish processed. Their roles position them as both employers and key influencers within the post-harvest segment of the fisheries value chain.	Employer
Head Porters	Young women who carry basins of fish from shore to processing sheds or market centers for a daily wage.	Employee
Descalers and Helpers	Young women who assist in cleaning and preparing fish. They often work informally with minimal and inconsistent earnings. Some receive small cash or in-kind payments, such as leftover fish, while others are paid only at the end of the year (they are fed and sheltered by the processor during the year), making their income highly unpredictable.	Employee
Fish Traders	Traders of fresh, smoked, or fermented fish. Some trade fish locally within their communities, while others sell at major regional markets and even across international borders. Trading may be done for processors on commission-basis.	Employer/ Employee
Shellfish Harvesters	Women who harvest oysters, clams, and other shellfish. They usually use rudimentary tools and sometimes work under hazardous conditions.	Employee

## 2.2 Women's Fisher Associations

Women constitute the majority of the workforce in the fisheries sector, sustain household food security and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. Yet, they remain underrepresented in formal fisheries governance and often lack visibility in fisheries management policy processes. To address these gaps, women have increasingly turned to collective organizing for strengthening women's voices, building solidarity, and mobilizing around shared challenges.

There are three main women's associations in the marine fisheries sector: National Fish Processors Traders Association (NAFPTA), Confederation of Professional Organizations in Fisheries (CAOPA) and Development Action Association (DAA). The Densu Oyster Pickers Association (DOPA) is a smaller group established with facilitation from DAA for oyster pickers in the Densu Estuary.

These associations have evolved from different origins, such as ministerial initiatives, donor programs, or from grassroots aspirations, but all now serve critical functions in organizing women, improving post-harvest handling, and promoting gender-sensitive governance of fisheries. They have not only built a structured regional presence, but have also engaged in national policy processes (e.g., Safe Fish Certification and Licencing Scheme, fisheries co-management), often with donor and NGO partnerships. Additionally, associations typically aim to serve member needs by integrating financial empowerment tools like VSLAs, with targeted training on topics such as GBV prevention and fisheries management actions.

More recently, grassroots organizing has extended to previously invisible segments of the fisheries labour force. The Odo Head Porters Association and the Descalers Association, both formed in 2023, represent a new generation of informal worker associations. These are composed largely of young women, many of whom are caregivers or single mothers. The associations are beginning to formalize member support systems (such as support circles and VSLAs) while pushing for better working conditions and fair remuneration. Their emergence points to a growing awareness and demand for justice within the most precarious and under-recognized tiers of the sector.

In addition to these fisher associations, labour unions are growing their engagement in the sector. The General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU) is active along the Volta Lake, where it leads interventions to combat child labor and promote fair and humane working conditions for fishers and other workers in the fisheries value chain. The National Union of Teamsters and General Workers (NUTEG), affiliated to the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), has been organising women and men fishers in the artisanal and industrial sectors around their rights to decent work, particularly on ILO C188. To date, unions have not engaged women's fisheries associations in the marine sector, although there is limited overlap in membership, or participated in fishery management discussions.

Table 2 and the section below provides additional information of the main organizations representing fish-workers in the marine sector.

**Table 2: Demography of organizations representing fish-workers in Ghana’s marine sector**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Dominant Age</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Coverage</b>
CAOPA	Above 35	15,000	4 Coastal, Oti & Eastern Regions
DAA	Above 35	2000	3 Districts in GAR & CR
Descalers Association	Youth	80	Ngyiresia
DOPA	Above 35	200	Ga South District
NAFPTA	Above 35	17,600	National
NUTEG	Mixed*	374	Greater Accra Region
Odo Head Porters Association	Youth	105	Half Assini

*NUTEG is the only mixed fisher association on the list, by age and gender.*

The **National Association of Fish Processors and Traders (NAFPTA)** was established in 2015 with the facilitation of the sector minister at the time. Since its inception, the leadership has successfully mobilized women across all regions of Ghana, setting up a national secretariat supported by structured regional, district, and community-level branches. Today, the association boasts over 17,600 registered members spanning all 16 regions, covering both inland and marine fisheries. NAFPTA was founded with the purpose of mobilizing women to access support programs and to advocate for their economic empowerment and improved management of the fisheries sector. Over the years, the association has collaborated with multiple development projects to deliver training in hygienic fish handling, recordkeeping, financial management, child labor prevention, and gender-based violence awareness. It also served as a key partner in establishing the Safe Fish Certification and Licensing Scheme (SFCLS) and has collaborated with stakeholders to expand livelihood support programs for young women in the sector. In addition, NAFPTA operates a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) scheme, which promotes financial inclusion and self-reliance among its members.

The **Confederation of Professional Organizations in Fisheries (CAOPA)** is a continental network that spans 29 member states across Africa, with membership open to both men and women engaged in artisanal maritime and inland fisheries. The Ghana Chapter of CAOPA, which also serves as the women’s wing of the Ghana National Canoe and Fishermen Council (GNCFC), was established in 2021. Within a few years, it has grown to a membership base of approximately 15,000 women across Ghana’s coastal areas as well as in inland fishing communities such as Oti,

Yeji, and parts of the Eastern Region. CAOPA Ghana has built district and regional governance structures to support decentralized engagement and mobilization. It sustains itself in part through an active dues payment system that covers administrative costs, training, and advocacy. The association regularly partners with post-harvest stakeholders to provide practical training in fish processing, marketing, and value addition. It has also facilitated members' access to credit facilities through partnerships with local rural banks, including Nyakrom and Odupong Kpehe Rural Banks. Since its founding, the core mission of CAOPA Ghana has been to promote sustainable artisanal fishing while empowering women in the fisheries value chain.

The **Development Action Association (DAA)** traces its origins back to 1984 when it was initiated with support from the FAO through a project aimed at empowering women engaged in the fish trade. One of its early achievements was playing a central role in the introduction and promotion of the Chorkor Smoker, a technology designed to reduce the health risks and labor burdens associated with traditional fish processing methods. Officially inaugurated in 2000, DAA has since focused on organizing and empowering fisherwomen and smallholder farmers, with a strong emphasis on rural communities. It functions both as a member-based association and as a non-governmental organization (NGO), enabling community ownership while also maintaining partnerships with development actors. DAA operates primarily in the Ga South Municipality and the Gomoa East and West Districts of the Central Region, where it has instituted initiatives such as the annual International Day for Rural Women celebration, a platform that elevates the voices and visibility of rural women. The association also played a leading role in establishing the Densu Oyster Pickers Association (DOPA), in support of women in shellfish harvesting. Through collaboration with government agencies and international donors including USAID under the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP). DAA helped strengthen the capacity of DOPA to manage oyster resources and led a mangrove restoration initiative in the Densu Estuary. The association also facilitated the development of the Densu Community-Based Fisheries Management Plan, which promotes sustainable management of the oyster fishery to enhance food security and livelihoods, especially for women harvesters and other estuarine communities. Despite a reliance on donor funding, DAA has shown strong institutional resilience, maintaining its work and community engagement even during times of limited financial support.

The **Densu Oyster Pickers Association (DOPA)** was established in 2016 under a partnership between the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) and DAA. Based in the Ga South Municipality of the Greater Accra Region, the group focuses on sustainable oyster management in the Densu Delta. Its members, who are largely women, continue to rely on rudimentary methods to harvest oysters and 'baby' tilapia under very precarious conditions. They typically work at night, without protective gear, exposed to harsh weather and multiple health and safety risks. Despite these challenges, DOPA actively participates in mangrove restoration efforts within the delta, recognizing the vital role of mangroves in supporting oyster habitats and broader ecological health.

The **Odo Headporters Association** emerged in 2023 in Half Assini in the Western Region. With a current membership of 120, the association was established to organize porters, provide a support system for members, and advocate for better working conditions. Its members are mostly young women who carry heavy economic burdens, often with multiple children to care for. The association integrates a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) scheme with a Circle of Support (CoS) program to address members' personal and psychosocial needs, which include coping with low wages, cheating, and unfair working conditions.

Similarly, the **Descalers Association of Nyiresia** was formed in 2023 in the Western Region and currently has about 100 active members. It arose in response to the harsh and unsafe working conditions faced by fish descalers, with the goal of advocating for better occupational safety, fair compensation, and more stable livelihoods. Members are primarily young women, many of them single mothers or primary caregivers, who rely on inconsistent daily earnings to sustain their households. Their work is physically demanding and often performed in precarious environments without protective gear. Exposed to unsanitary conditions, sharp tools, and long hours, these workers face exploitation while earning very little, and they typically lack access to healthcare or social protection.

## 2.3 Organizations that Support Women Fisher Organizations

Women in Ghana's fisheries sector, particularly those engaged in artisanal and post-harvest activities, have long relied on state institutions and non-governmental actors for support in advancing their livelihoods and strengthening their voice in governance. Over the past decade, government agencies, development partners, and civil society organizations have launched numerous programs aimed at enhancing women's empowerment, leadership, and protection (Table 3). While much of this support has been channeled through or alongside women's associations, which serve as the main vehicles for organizing and representation, some initiatives bypass or overshadow them. Understanding this dynamic is central to this report, which focuses on how women's associations are positioned within, and affected by the wider ecosystem of support programs in Ghana's fisheries sector. This section reviews the role of key institutions and initiatives that have invested in women fisher-led organizations and gender-responsive fisheries governance.

### 2.3.1 The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Fisheries Commission

The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture (MoFA) was established in 2013 as a specialized institution to focus exclusively on the development, regulation, and management of Ghana's fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The Fisheries Commission, created under the Fisheries Act, 2002 (Act 625), serves as the implementing agency of MoFA and is mandated to regulate and manage fisheries resources, promote the growth of the fishing industry, and ensure compliance with sectoral policies across both marine and inland ecosystems. Its regulatory responsibilities span the entire fisheries value chain, including artisanal, semi-industrial, and industrial actors. Together, the Ministry and the Commission are tasked with creating an enabling environment for

sustainable and inclusive fisheries governance, including support for women engaged in post-harvest processing and artisanal fisheries. In 2018, a national gender strategy was adopted to advance gender equity in fisheries governance, but not implemented. An updated Gender Strategy was adopted in 2024 - [Link](#). However, the implementation of gender-focused initiatives remains constrained by limited budget allocations and a continued dependence on donor funding.

### 2.3.2 Non-Governmental Organizations

There have been Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and donor-funded programs that focused specifically on women in fisheries or mainstreaming gender across broader sectoral interventions. Organizations such as the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) have played a consistent role in supporting the governance and leadership capacity of women's associations, particularly NAFPTA. They provide technical assistance, research, and data to advance women's empowerment. Similarly, Hen Mpoano and Friends of the Nation (FoN) have implemented multiple projects aimed at strengthening local structures, especially within NAFPTA. Another notable organization is CEWEFIA a fishmonger association which has since the year 2020 transitioned into a non-governmental organisation to address the wider needs of rural women in fisheries and related livelihood insecurities.

**Table 3: Projects Aimed at Empowering Women in Fisheries (2015–2025)**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Implementers</b>	<b>Donor</b>	<b>Focus Areas</b>
Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP)	2014–2021	University of Rhode Island CRC, Hen Mpoano, CEWEFIA, FoN, SNV, Daasgift, Development Action Association	USAID	Gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment, with a strong focus on supporting women’s associations (including infrastructure and organizational strengthening), alongside initiatives on VSLAs and safe fish.
Far Dwuma Nkodo	2016–2020	Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), Hen Mpoano	European Union	Gender mainstreamed through addressing illegal fishing, secure tenure rights, empower small-scale fishers, promote alternative livelihoods
Far Ban Bo	2017–2020	CARE Ghana, Oxfam Ghana, FoN	European Union	Combat <i>saiko</i> (illegal transshipment), empower fisher associations, secure tenure rights
CEWEFIA Capacity-Building Projects	2018–2019	Central & Western Fishmongers Improvement Association (CEWEFIA)	STAR-Ghana	Strengthen women’s leadership, advocacy, hygienic processing, community engagement
Power to the Fishers (PTF)	2019–2023	CERATH Development Organization	European Union	Women’s economic empowerment, hygienic fish handling, social protection, VSLA formation
Ghana Fisheries Recovery Activity (GFRA)	2021–2025	Tetrattech ARD, DevWorks Int., Hen Mpoano and partners	USAID	Gender Based Violence, Women’s Participation, Livelihoods for youth, Child Labor/Trafficking, economic resilience
FAO SSF Umbrella Programme	2022–2025	FAO, Ministry of Fisheries & Aquaculture Development	FAO	Women’s empowerment, construction of fish processing facilities, hygiene and facility management
Women in Fisheries Against Violence (WiFVEs)	2022–2025	Hen Mpoano, CEWEFIA	European Union	Combat GBV in fisheries, empower women leaders, build community support systems, and integrate gender into fisheries governance

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This analysis was conducted through a rapid field-based assessment (see Annex A), followed by a validation and refinement of findings during the Fisher Learning Exchange.

Data was collected through:

- 60 Key informant interviews with leaders and members of associations such as NAFPTA, CAOPA, CEWEFIA, DAA, MoFA, Hen Mpoano, EJF, FoN, GAWU, NUTEG, ITF and IUF.
- In-depth interviews with women not affiliated with any group, such as head porters, descalers, helpers, and independent traders; and those affiliated with associations such as processors and traders
- Field visits to Keta, Anloga, Ada East, Elmina, Tema, Half Assini and Ngyeresia enabled direct observation of working conditions and labor dynamics.

Purposive and snowball sampling ensured diversity across regions and roles. Interviews were conducted with informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained, especially for vulnerable participants. Findings were triangulated with existing reports from CSOs and secondary literature to ensure analytical rigor.

Subsequently, the preliminary findings of this rapid assessment were validated during the international learning exchange organized by the Accountability Research Center in July 2025. The event brought together a wider spectrum of stakeholders, including representatives from labor unions, government institutions, and fisher associations, not just women's groups. Participants confirmed the findings and enriched them with deeper insights, particularly around the intersection of labor rights, policy influence, and fisheries governance. This broader validation strengthened the evidence base and sharpened the analysis of how women's organizing efforts are shaping their businesses, welfare and management practices across Ghana's fisheries sector.

## 4.0 KEY FINDINGS: THE STATUS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZING IN THE SECTOR

This section synthesizes the most significant insights that emerged from the study, highlighting patterns, challenges, and opportunities across the various levels of women's organizing in the fisheries sector. The findings reflect both the lived experiences of women and the structural dynamics that shape their participation, representation, and influence. Together, these insights provide the foundation for the recommendations that follow and point to critical areas where action is needed to strengthen women's collective voice and agency in fisheries governance.

### 4.1 Women's Representation in Fisher Associations

Women in Ghana's fisheries sector can be broadly categorized based on their economic status, social capital, and degree of integration into formal structures, particularly associations. Their roles along the value chain, whether as traders, processors, or support labor also influence their visibility, voice, and access to opportunities.

Importantly, integration into associations is not simply a matter of individual choice. It is deeply shaped by power dynamics within the sector, where women with greater financial resources, stability, and social status are more likely to organize and lead. Conversely, women in more vulnerable and informal roles are often excluded, reinforcing a hierarchy within the value chain. This creates a chicken-and-egg situation, while women in less secure positions would benefit from association membership through increased access to credit, support, or recognition, the very nature of their marginalization prevents them from joining.

*Joining an association can both reflect and reduce vulnerability, but access is unequally distributed.*

#### 4.1.1 Women More Likely to Join/Lead Associations

Women leading associations are generally older (aged 35 and above), financially stable, and well established in the fisheries value chain. Their economic position and social recognition enable them to participate in formal associations and, in many cases, to hold leadership positions. Common profiles include Konkohemaas, Processors, Fish Traders, Canoe Owners. Their motivations for joining associations are influenced by challenges in their work, which include:

- **Unfair Purchasing Dynamics:** Women are often compelled to purchase fish under unfavorable conditions, including paying in advance before inspecting the quality of the catch. Due to high demand and limited supply, fishermen hold greater bargaining power, leaving women with little choice but to sometimes accept substandard fish. This reality undermines fishery management campaigns such as "Say No to Bad Fish", which become impractical in such unequal market conditions.

- **Declining Fish Stocks Compromises Bargaining Power:** The general low supply of fish, driven by persistent stock depletion makes it increasingly difficult for women to demand higher-quality fish or enforce quality control. As one respondent remarked, “*There’s no good fish, so what do you do?*” This ecological pressure, combined with their economic and social disadvantage, reduces women's ability to influence fisheries management policies or negotiate better terms.
- **Desire for more tangible benefits- micro loans, equipment, training and social protection:** Due to their roles and influence, these women often serve as gatekeepers and power brokers within their communities and associations. They help shape priorities, make decisions, and, in some cases, determine who gets access to external support, whether from government programs or donor-funded initiatives. Their visibility and influence also mean they are more likely to be selected for exposure visits, awards, and pilot programs. This further reinforces their inclusion, positioning them as key players not just within their associations, but also across the fisheries governance landscape.

#### 4.1.2 Women Less Likely to Join Associations

Younger women (under 35 years) and those engaged in physically demanding, informal, or lower-paying roles within the fisheries value chain are significantly under-represented in formal associations, despite their critical contributions. These roles often include descalers, head porters, assistants, and commission-based traders. Several factors limit their participation, including;

- **Limited Awareness and Mistrust:** Many women are unaware of existing associations or express mistrust due to previous unfulfilled promises by organizers.
- **Barriers to Entry:** Inability to afford membership dues, meet eligibility requirements, and time constraints caused by long working hours and caregiving responsibilities hinder involvement.
- **Exclusion Despite Interest:** Many of these women are migrant workers with limited stability. Although they express strong interest in joining or forming associations, they are often excluded based on job type and informal work status.

Despite these challenges, many women see associations as a pathway to greater opportunity. Their participation is especially important, as they are among the most affected by fisheries management measures, such as seasonal closures and broader challenges like declining fish stocks caused by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

## 4.2 Member Experiences

This section highlights the experiences of women participating in fisheries associations. It explores the practical benefits and meaningful changes these women have experienced through their collective organizing. Their responses underscore the importance of these associations in advancing livelihood opportunities, access to resources, social support, and policy influence.

#### 4.2.1 Successes Identified by Members

Women's associations in the fisheries sector have made notable progress in recent years, despite operating in resource-constrained environments. Through collective action, many groups have improved members' livelihoods, enhanced their visibility, and contributed meaningfully to fisheries governance. The following key successes were identified during the interviews and focus group discussions with association members across various communities:

- **Training and Capacity Building:** Associations have successfully delivered trainings in hygienic fish processing, financial literacy, business management, and leadership. These initiatives have improved members' skills and product quality. *“Being part of my association has built my capacity on hygienic fish handling and better processing techniques. I have since received my Safe Fish Certificate and have access to new markets”* –Fish processors in Half Assini
- **Improved Market Access:** Enhanced practices and visibility have enabled members to access higher-value markets, including hotels, malls, and regional trading networks.
- **Access to Resources and Equipment:** Some associations have facilitated the distribution of essential equipment such as fridges, ovens, nets, and basins. A few have also supported access to land and processing infrastructure. *“As a member of the association I received a fridge, rice and cooking oil during the closed season”*. –Fish processor in Keta
- **Increased Recognition and Visibility:** Several women have received local and national awards (e.g., Best Fish Processor) and gained opportunities for travel and learning exchanges. *“I joined the association so that I can be recognized as a fish processor”*- Fish Processor Elmina.
- **Policy Influence and Representation:** Associations such as CAOPA, NAFPTA, and GNCFC have participated in national fisheries governance platforms, including the Small Pelagic Co-Management Committee (SPCC) and the Fisheries Commission Board where they participate in critical dialogues and decisions about the sector. *“We have a representative on the SPCC. It gives us confidence that we matter in fisheries policy-making and implementation”*.
- **Social Support and Solidarity:** Associations often provide emotional and financial support during social events (e.g., funerals and weddings) and occasionally offer limited welfare assistance. *“Our group has formed a Circle of Support where we meet weekly to check in on one another. We stand together against gender-based violence and offer counseling and material support in times of need”*.

#### 4.2.2 Challenges Identified by Members

While associations have achieved notable successes, many women, particularly those at the grassroots level raised concerns about challenges that have persisted. The following challenges reflect structural and operational issues that hinder the effectiveness of these groups:

## Purpose and Effectiveness in Delivering Benefits

- **Unclear Purpose and Mandate:** Many women expressed limited understanding of their association's purpose, often viewing them as inactive or ceremonial.
- **Inconsistent Member Benefits:** A lack of a shared vision and clearly defined roles has led to disengagement, low dues payment, and weak meeting attendance.  
*"I joined because I thought I'd get support, but I haven't seen anything yet. They say we have to wait."*
- **Weak Social Support Mechanisms:** Associations lack established welfare systems for emergencies such as illness, accidents, or equipment loss.  
*"When my canoe got damaged, no one came to help. I thought that's what we had an association for."*
- **Underutilized Advocacy Platforms:** Despite involvement in national committees, associations often fail to advocate effectively for women's rights or improved labor conditions due to fragmentation and lack of coordination.  
*"If we spoke with one voice, we could fight for better policies, but now everyone is doing their own thing."*

## Representation and Communication

- **Weak Local Structures:** National-level leadership is often more visible and better resourced, leaving local branches with limited autonomy and weak coordination.  
*"My association no longer consults local leaders before making decisions. We only hear things after they're done."*
- **Limited Member Participation:** Decision-making is centralized, often sidelining district and grassroots members. *"Even though I am a president in my district, I am not involved in national discussions. It's like we are invisible."*
- **Top-Down Communication:** Communication is often one-way, with minimal consultation and limited access for grassroots members.
- **Limited Leadership Development:** A few well-known individuals dominate representation, while many women feel excluded or unprepared for leadership roles.
- **Regional Disparities:** For example, women in the Volta Region reported being excluded from training and leadership opportunities despite full compliance with regulations.
- **Lack of Youth and Grassroots Voices:** Young women and those in informal roles (e.g., head porters, helpers) are absent from organizing spaces.
- **Desire for Inclusion:** Women across regions and roles expressed strong interest in more inclusive and democratic association structures.

## Funding & Transparency

- **Accountability and Transparency Issues:** Dues and donations are not always transparently managed. Members complain that they rarely receive financial reports or see tangible results from their contributions. This erodes trust and leads to decline in participation.

*“People stopped paying because no one explains how the money is used.”*

- **Dependence on External Funding:** Many associations rely heavily on donor-funded projects for functionality. While this has brought infrastructure and capacity building (e.g., through USAID, FAO, EU), it has also created dependency, with associations becoming less active or collapsing when funding ends. These donors also come with their priorities which may not necessarily align with their expectations.

*“When the project ended, the group became silent. We don’t meet anymore.”*

## Conflict and Collaboration

- **Conflicts Within and Between Associations:** Several of these associations are hampered by internal tensions, leadership rivalries, and limited adherence to their own constitutions. These governance issues are most evident in associations where inactive structures and unresolved conflicts have stalled growth and participation. In others, such as CAOPA and NAFPTA, competition for members and resources has led to fragmentation and mistrust and a missed opportunity for collaboration to fight the common cause.

*“There is rivalry between CAOPA and NAFPTA. Some members have left because they see no benefit.”*

## Accessibility

- **Inclusion and Equity Gaps:** Associations tend to serve older, more established women (e.g., Konkohemaa, processors, canoe owners), with younger and more vulnerable groups like descalers and helpers are either excluded or not recognized. There is little evidence of systematic efforts to include these women, despite their crucial roles in the post-harvest sector.

*“We are many, but no one comes to talk to us. We only hear about associations when a member dies, and the association shows”.*

- **High Interest, Low Inclusion:** Numerous women not currently affiliated with associations expressed interest in joining, especially for access to training, social support, and livelihood opportunities. Yet this interest is often unmet due to structural and informational barriers.
- **General Awareness Exists but Is Uneven:** Many women (both within and outside of associations) are aware of the existence of women's groups in the fisheries sector.

However, knowledge about how to join, the benefits of membership, or the specific focus of each association varies significantly across communities.

- **Barriers to Access:** This includes financial constraints, such as high registration fees or monthly dues; Time limitations, particularly for women juggling long working hours and caregiving responsibilities; lack of outreach from associations to more marginalized workers like helpers, porters, and young women; exclusionary practices, including selective membership criteria based on age, role, or seniority in the trade; mistrust of leadership due to unmet promises or lack of transparency
- **Desire for More Inclusive Structures:** Respondents called for associations to expand outreach, reduce financial barriers, and create clearer, more transparent pathways for joining—especially for younger or informal workers.

### 4.3 Challenges Identified by Association Leaders

While women’s associations in the fisheries sector have made significant strides, they continue to face a number of structural and operational challenges that limit their effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

- **Weak Governance Structures and Internal Conflicts:** Many associations face leadership disputes, limited transparency, and lack of democratic decision-making processes, which weaken collective action and member trust.
- **Overlapping Memberships and Divided Loyalties:** Members often belong to multiple associations with differing goals, leading to fragmentation, reduced commitment, and coordination challenges.
- **Limited Policy Influence:** Despite their grassroots relevance, associations struggle to effectively engage with policy processes or represent member interests at higher levels of governance.
- **Donor Dependency and Misaligned Priorities:** Heavy reliance on external funding often results in activities driven more by donor agendas than by the actual needs of the members. This is particularly true given that members often resist paying their dues, making it difficult for associations to mobilize funds and effectively manage their affairs.
- **Weak Enforcement of Fisheries Laws:** Inadequate enforcement undermines advocacy efforts, including public campaigns such as “Say No to Bad Fish,” reducing their impact and credibility.

### 4.4 Similarities and Differences in the Perceptions of Members and Leaders

Both association members and leaders recognize key structural and operational weaknesses that limit the effectiveness of women’s organizing in the fisheries sector. Despite the shared challenges, members and associations differ in where they place emphasis and responsibility. The tables below show the similarities (Table 4) and differences (Table 5) in these perceptions.

**Table 4: Similarities in Perceptions: Members & Leaders**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Member Perspective</b>	<b>Leader Perspective</b>
Weak Governance and Leadership	Members report exclusion from decision-making, top-down communication, and lack of leadership development.	Associations cite internal conflicts, limited transparency, and poor democratic structures.
Limited Policy Influence	Members feel disconnected from national platforms and that their voices are not effectively represented.	Associations acknowledge that despite participation in governance spaces, they struggle to engage meaningfully or drive change.
Fragmentation	Members observe a lack of coordination and collective voice, especially in advocacy.	Associations highlight overlapping memberships and divided loyalties, which reduce cohesion and collective strength.
Inadequate Member Support	Members are disappointed by limited social welfare mechanisms and unmet expectations for assistance.	Associations recognize financial constraints due to low dues payment and dependency on donors.

**Table 5: Differences in Perceptions: Members & Leaders**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Member Perspective</b>	<b>Leader Perspective</b>
Expectations vs Delivery	Members often expect tangible benefits (e.g., equipment, welfare, and training) and feel disillusioned when these do not materialize.	Associations focus more on structural and funding challenges that limit their ability to meet those expectations.
Voice and Inclusion	Members emphasize exclusion of grassroots, youth, and informal workers from leadership and processes.	Associations tend to speak at a national or organizational level and may understate internal power imbalances or representation gaps.
Financial Sustainability	Members rarely commit to payment or funding responsibilities because they cannot afford and in some cases do not feel fully served by the association.	Associations stress donor dependency and member reluctance to pay dues as a core issue limiting autonomy and sustainability. This less about perceived value and more about systemic reluctance to of members to pay their dues.
Responsibility for Change	Members see leadership or higher levels of the association as responsible for inaction or poor delivery.	Associations see systemic issues (fragmentation, external dependency, enforcement gaps) as the main barriers to change.

Both association leaders and grassroots members share a common recognition of key challenges, including weak governance structures, limited policy influence, and a lack of cohesion within the associations within sector. However, their viewpoints diverge in notable ways. Members tend to emphasize unmet expectations, experiences of exclusion, and the lack of tangible benefits from their involvement. In contrast, association leaders are more likely to highlight structural barriers, such as limited resources, institutional constraints, and coordination challenges.

These differences point to a disconnect between leadership structures and the expectations of grassroots members. Addressing this gap will require:

- More transparent and participatory governance systems,
- Improved communication and accountability between leadership and members, and
- Greater investment in local-level leadership development and financial independence for associations.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight both the successes and the challenges of women's organizing in Ghana's fisheries sector. Associations have delivered successes in training, access to markets, and solidarity, yet many women remain excluded due to unclear mandates, governance weaknesses, limited financial transparency, and top-down leadership structures. Informal and younger women workers, such as porters and descalers, are particularly underserved, while associations themselves face fragmentation, rivalry, and heavy dependency on external donors. At the same time, government policies and co-management structures often fail to fully incorporate women's voices, leaving systemic barriers unaddressed. The recommendations below directly respond to these challenges by centering on women's associations, while also setting out complementary roles for government, trade unions, civil society, and other key actors.

### 5.1 Women's Associations

Strengthening women's associations is the most direct pathway to increasing women's voice, welfare, and influence in fisheries governance. Associations must address gaps in representation, governance, inclusivity, and sustainability.

#### 5.1.1 Achieving Effective Representation

- Develop separate and specialized associations where appropriate. For example, associations for informal workers such as descalers and porters should be distinct from employer/owner groups like processors and canoe owners, to ensure that the most vulnerable women are not represented by those with managerial authority over them.
- Expand inclusivity by actively reducing barriers to membership, such as high dues and selective criteria. Flexible payment systems, outreach to migrant and younger women, and transparent registration processes can ensure broader participation.
- Proactively build youth and grassroots voices into leadership pipelines through mentorship programs, ensuring generational renewal of women's leadership.

#### 5.1.2 Clarifying Mandates and Structures

- Clearly define the mission and mandate of each association and communicate it consistently to members, to avoid confusion and unmet expectations.
- Differentiate roles among associations (e.g., NAFPTA as a national policy advocacy platform; CAOPA as a regional/continental connector; DAA as a grassroots empowerment body for DOPA and women fishers in its operational area). This will reduce rivalry, overlap, and duplication.
- Develop mechanisms for federated organizing where local and emerging groups (e.g., head porters, descalers) retain autonomy but are linked to national umbrella platforms for joint advocacy.

### **5.1.3 Increasing Effectiveness and Accountability**

- Strengthen governance by institutionalizing regular elections, transparent financial reporting, and internal accountability mechanisms. This will build trust among members and encourage dues payment.
- Adopt sustainable funding models beyond donor dependency, such as cooperative businesses, dues, service fees, and partnerships with local financial institutions.
- Invest in leadership development for both new and existing leaders, including training in negotiation, policy advocacy, financial management, and gender-responsive governance.

### **5.1.4 Building Strategic Partnerships**

- Forge alliances with male-led associations (e.g., GNCFC), trade unions, and international networks to broaden advocacy power on shared concerns such as decent work, fair wages, and resource management.
- Collaborate across women's associations (both employer and employee-led) to present a unified voice on fisheries governance issues, rather than competing for donor resources or members.
- Employer Associations can leverage partnerships with financial institutions, markets, and processors to improve access to credit, equipment, and fair market arrangements for women.

## **5.2 Government and State Agencies**

Findings showed systemic exclusion of women from fisheries policy and co-management, as well as a lack of social protection for informal workers. Government must address these structural barriers.

- Institutionalize gender equity within fisheries governance by operationalizing a Gender Unit within the Fisheries Commission, ensuring adequate resources for implementation of the 2024 Gender Strategy.
- Protect informal workers by extending labor rights and social protection schemes (e.g., supplementary livelihoods and reproductive health services) to descalers, porters, and other precarious groups, through collaboration with the Ministries of Employment and Labor Relations, Health and Gender Children and Social Protection.
- Strengthen co-management by ensuring women's associations are represented in fisheries decision-making platforms, with quotas for grassroots women and informal workers, not just elite leaders.

### 5.3 Trade Unions

Unions are well-placed to strengthen governance systems and extend labor protections to marginalized groups, but they are not yet meaningfully connected to women's fisheries associations.

- Build structured collaborations between unions (GAWU, NUTEG) and women's associations, exchanging lessons on internal democracy, elections, and financial sustainability.
- Expand union outreach to informal fisheries workers (descalers, porters, helpers), ensuring their inclusion in broader labor rights campaigns on decent work, fair wages, and occupational safety.
- Advocate jointly with women's associations for enforcement of labor standards (ILO C188) and for stronger protections against gender-based violence in the fisheries sector.
- Support the implementation of science-based solutions for effective fisheries management, appreciating that the wellbeing of workers in the sector relies on sustainable fish stocks.

### 5.4 Civil Society Organizations and Donors

The study found that some of the challenges faced by women's associations are linked to their donor dependency, fragmented programming, and initiatives that do not always reflect women's own priorities. At the same time, these challenges present valuable opportunities for civil society organizations and donors to deepen their partnerships with women in fisheries, aligning investments with what women identify as most meaningful for their livelihoods and leadership.

- Co-design programs with women by pairing skills training (e.g., in fish handling or governance) with the practical priorities women themselves emphasize such as access to working capital, improved equipment, safe working conditions, and supplemental livelihoods.
- Invest in organizational resilience by supporting long-term approaches like mentoring, leadership development, institutional assessments, and accountability tools that enable associations to grow sustainably.
- Nurture grassroots initiatives by channelling resources to emerging groups of informal workers, helping them evolve into independent organizations while also connecting them to national and regional advocacy platforms.
- Foster donor collaboration to build on each other's strengths and create more coherent support for gender equity and fisheries sustainability.
- Support inclusive advocacy by equipping women's associations with the resources and platforms needed to engage meaningfully in fisheries governance and co-management at both district and national levels.

## 5.5 Other Key Stakeholders

Beyond government and civil society, other actors also hold influence over women's organizing outcomes.

- Traditional authorities (e.g., chief fishermen, Konkohemaas) should recognize and empower women leaders at landing sites, while actively addressing exploitative practices and supporting equitable labor arrangements.
- Private sector actors (markets, exporters, financial institutions) should commit to fair standards on weights and measures, support safe fish certification, and develop gender-responsive financial products tailored to women in fisheries.
- Community leaders and faith-based groups can promote solidarity and reduce stigma against informal workers, while helping to mobilize women into associations.

## 6.0 KEY TAKEAWAYS

This report highlights two central takeaways for strengthening women fisher associations and their role in fisheries governance.

First, well-organized associations have significant potential to influence fisheries management in ways that also advance the social and economic well-being of their members. Associations that are free from partisan interference and built on transparent, accountable structures are better positioned to mobilize collective action, advocate effectively, and deliver tangible benefits to their members. However, many associations currently lack the internal capacity, strategic direction, or legitimacy needed to perform this role effectively. Building functional systems, ensuring inclusive representation, and developing leadership capacity, especially among youth, are critical steps for these associations to become credible actors in the co-management of fisheries.

Second, strategic collaboration is essential for long-term progress. Strong partnerships with other male and female-led associations, labor unions, traditional leaders, government institutions, donors, NGOs, and other stakeholders can significantly enhance the collective capacity of fishing communities to recover and sustain their marine resources. These alliances not only facilitate access to resources and technical support, but also ensure that interventions are grounded in local realities and shared ownership. Inclusive, cross-sector collaboration creates the conditions for more responsive policy-making, fairer resource distribution, and more resilient coastal livelihoods.

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## ANNEX A: Field Interview Guide

### Interview Guide Category A: Women in Fisher Associations

#### **Purpose:**

To understand the experiences, roles, and challenges of women who are part of existing fisher associations or women's associations, and how those associations function and support their members; and draw recommendations for improved organizing and empowerment

#### **Target:**

1. Leadership of NAFPTA, CEWEFIA, DAA, CAOPA, CAFGOAG, GNCFC
2. Randomly selected member (s) of the above associations

#### **A. Respondent Profile/Experiences**

1. Name:
2. Age (optional):
3. Community:
4. Name of association (s):
5. How long have you been a member?
6. If you belong to more than one association..... Can you explain why?
7. Do you hold a leadership role in the association?
8. What role do you currently play in the fisheries sector?
9. What motivated you to join the association?
10. How has being in the association changed or influenced your work or status?

#### **B. Association Structure and Function**

1. What does your association do?
2. How does one become a member?
3. Are members expected to pay dues? If yes, do you fulfil this obligation?
4. If no, why?
5. How does information flow within your association? And with external stakeholders, authorities?
6. How is the association managed and led?

7. How are decisions made within the association?
8. What have been the association's biggest successes?

### **C. Benefits and Challenges of Membership**

1. What are the main benefits you have received from being in the association?
2. What challenges do you face as a member?
3. Are all women involved in fishing able to join? Why or why not?
4. Does the association support women during times of difficulty (e.g., economic hardship, social support)?

### **D. Voice and Representation**

1. Does your association engage with local or national fisheries authorities? Is your association influential in these discussions? Why or Why not?
2. Has your association organised /participated in decision-making forums or advocacy? How?
3. How could the association be more influential?
4. How could your association grow or function better?
5. Is there anything you expect your association to do for you?

## Interview Guide – Category B: Women not in Associations

### **Purpose:**

To understand the perspectives of women in fisheries who are not part of any formal or informal fisher association, reasons for non-participation and recommendations for engagement.

### **Target:**

1. Head porters
2. Descalers
3. Helpers
4. Traders on commission
5. Random women (including Konkohemas and above category that are not members of a group)

### **A. Respondent Profile**

1. Name:
2. Age (optional):
3. Community:
4. What kind of fisheries work do you do?
5. How long have you been in this work?
6. Describe the conditions under which you work (duration, breaks, payment, wages, welfare, etc)
7. Are you satisfied with these conditions? If not, why?
8. What challenges do you face in your work?
9. Do you receive any forms of support for what you do?

### **B. Awareness and Access**

1. Are there any women's associations or fisher associations in your area?
2. Have you ever thought of joining one? Why or why not?
3. What prevents you or other women from joining such associations?

### **C. Individual Voice and Aspirations**

1. If you have a problem or need help in your work, where do you go?

2. Do you feel women like you have a voice in decisions related to fishing?
3. Would you be interested in joining an association or participating in group action (training, advocacy, meetings, etc) in the future?
4. What kind of support would you like to access?
5. What do you hope the government or others could do to support women in fisheries?

## Interview Guide – Category C: Institutions Supporting Women’s Organizing in Fisheries

### **Purpose:**

To understand the roles, strategies, and challenges of institutions and actors involved in supporting women’s collective organizing, leadership, and empowerment in the fisheries sector.

### **Target:**

1. MOFA/FC - Done
2. GAWU
3. Hen Mpoano
4. FoN
5. EJF
6. ITF - Done
7. NUTEG

### **A. Organizational Profile/Experiences**

1. Name of institution:
2. Contact person and position:
3. Scope of work (national, regional, community-based):
4. How long have you worked in the fisheries or women’s empowerment space?
5. What specific programs or interventions does your institution carry out to support women in fisheries?
6. What gaps or needs did you identify before starting these interventions?
7. Are you working directly with women’s associations, cooperatives, or individuals? In what ways?

### **B. Successes and Challenges**

1. What has been your biggest successes in supporting women and women’s organizations?
2. What are the common challenges you encounter in this work?
3. What are the biggest challenges facing women’s organizing and women’s association empowerment?

### **C. Coordination and Policy**

1. Do you collaborate with government, NGOs, universities, community leaders, and/or resource users?

2. Have you contributed to any national or local policy influencing around women in fisheries? Do you know organizations that have done so?
3. How do you access critical information on fisheries management?
4. How do you communicate critical fisheries-related messages/information to fishers, and other stakeholders?
5. Are there coordination platforms or coalitions that focus on women's empowerment in fisheries?
6. How should institutions (government and non-governmental) organize to support women's empowerment in fisheries?
7. What model would you suggest for women's organizing in fisheries?
8. What policy or regulatory changes would most benefit women's organizations in fisheries?