

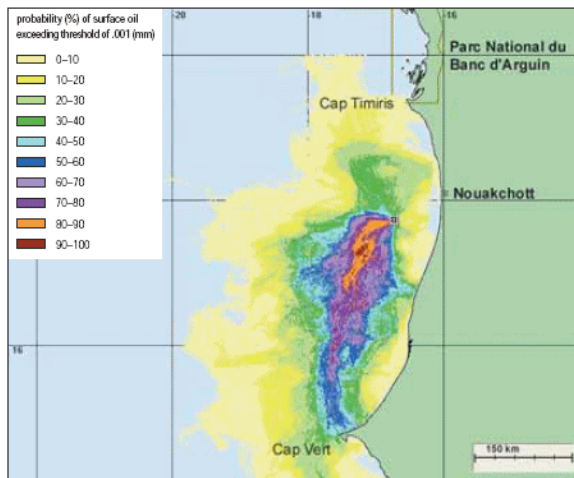


West Africa Coastal Areas  
Management Program

**KNOWLEDGE SHEET 10A | CIVIL SOCIETY**

# Why is it Important to Develop West Africa's Regional Ocean Sustainably?

*Engaging Civil Society on Sustainable Development of West Africa's Ocean*



Oil spills off the coast of Mauritania in 2004 the result of intensified oil exploration. Source: APASA 2004

- The Atlantic Ocean offers many opportunities to the local coastal communities in West Africa with jobs (tourism, fishing, oil and gas, etc.) food, recreation amongst others.
- The Atlantic Ocean however is under threat from natural and human effects that jeopardizes the livelihood of the local coastal population in West Africa
- Fish numbers and types are reducing and important ecosystems are disappearing or are being destroyed, oceans are rising and becoming more destructive.

The Atlantic Ocean off the coast of West Africa has a large bounty that has provided employment for fishermen and women, food for families, astonishing sunsets that have attracted tourists and ports that have carried goods resulting in economic strength for many decades. However, changes in global and regional climate are resulting in rising sea levels, reduced fish numbers and coastal ruin amongst other impacts. To compound the situation, West African has 51% of the total West African population living on the coast. In addition, due to high population growth and the decreased productivity

of agricultural lands in the coastal zones – caused in particular by an increased salinization of the soils – coastal communities are under ever-greater pressure as more people move to the coast that are increasingly dependent on ocean resources for their survival.

This is an obvious move for people as the West African ocean can be a good source of income, it is estimated that the West African fishing industry has a total production value of \$USD 400 million per year (FAO, 2014). Oil and gas can to be extracted from offshore drilling, estimated

at USD 688 million per day by 2030 in the West African Ocean region (EIA 2016). The ocean also increases the possibilities for tourism to the West African coasts, estimated to reach 22 million in 2030 (5.4% increase) in West Africa alone (UNWTO, 2011). To ensure that there are opportunities for everyone living on the coast in West Africa, the ocean needs to be developed sustainably (the practice of maintaining resources for the future). The ocean and coastal area need to be well managed to keep the economic and social advantages that the ocean delivers. Action taken by local communities and awareness of the challenges can aid in protecting this asset.

## Challenges

Attracted by the abundance of the West African ocean the coastal populations continue to grow. With more people living in the coastal areas, there is more stress placed on the fish and animal life through physical disruption and pollution, resulting in the degradation or loss of habitats that have crucial value in ecosystem services and biodiversity.

The increased population results in more people looking to take more resources from the ocean resulting in illegal fishing practices across the coastal regions of West Africa.

Illegal and unreported fishing (catching fish without reporting or misreporting it to the relevant national or regional authorities) in West Africa accounts for an average loss of USD\$1.3 billion per year (Africa Progress Panel, 2014). These practices also reduce the amount of fish that are available for the next years, as the fish stocks do not have time to recover. Therefore illegal fishing affects the food security and economic capability of the entire community.

With the increased population, new jobs would need to be found and one of those areas could be in offshore oil and gas exploration, however, these practices also bring air pollution and the ever-present risk of oil pollution, which severely threatens the marine ecosystems. Oil spills kill fish and other marine life and affect the beauty and accessibility to beaches, which reduces the number of tourists that come to the area (see the figure on oil spills).

Climate changes and not just human impacts also affect the Ocean which serves West Africa. The sea level is rising, changing the dynamics of the coast, for example in Ghana the fish capture has declined steadily from 1999 to 2014 by nearly 50% caused by, amongst other aspects, poor and constantly changing boat landing sites. Soils become more salinized robbing farmers of their livelihood, forcing them to move to the coast or to Urban areas (FAO, 2016)



Elmina, Ghana. Photo: Terry White

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

As a fisherman or woman it is important to follow the regulations, quotas and sizes of fish and to not catch fish outside of the regulations. It is also very important to report illegal or unreported fishing to the local or regional authorities. By doing this you are supporting the future fish types and populations, keeping the fishing sustainable. Unlike minerals and other non-renewable resources that are extracted from the ocean, fishing is a continual contribution to economic growth throughout the region.

An example from Senegal shows the way forward. Along Senegal's coast, fishing communities have made significant progress in developing fisheries management, where the communities themselves take responsibility for managing the health of their natural resources and marine environments. In Ngaparou, 40 miles from Senegal's capital Dakar, residents worked closely with international and regional organizations as part of the West Africa Regional Fisheries Program to establish "co-management areas" run entirely by the local fishing community.

The community group sets limits on the number of fishing boats that can fish at any one time, they also collectively register fishing boats and enforce quotas and fish sizes by self-policing.

Four years since the launch of this activity, fish stocks have completely rebounded in the community. Ngaparou is now one of the most productive coastal marine areas in the country, according to Issa Sagne, President of the Local Committee of Fishers of Ngaparou (CLP) (World Bank 2013).

As the revenue from the fishery industry has increased, employment in Ngaparou has greatly diversified. Local women have joined together to manage a small fishing supply store. The community has also pooled its resources to purchase a refrigerated

truck that allows fishers to sell their catch at markets further from the village.

By taking action and participating and working together with local organisations, the community can take control of its economic future and ensure the Ocean off the coast of West Africa is developed sustainably.

Other ways you can take action are through:

- Participating in *Citizen Science* initiatives - initiatives where you help researchers to collect local data – on the numbers, types and sizes of fish, this will help them to understand better the changes that are taking place and how you can deal with these changes.
- Participating in promoting ocean conservation
- Becoming an Eco-tourism champion, for example in the Seychelles, poachers in a protected area became eco-tourist guides and a fully Seychellois team runs the Reserve where only local people are involved in ecotourism. These activities range from small boat operators to larger tour organizations. Other small businesses on the neighbouring islands, such as shops, cargo service, mechanics, small contractors and boatyards, also benefit from business associated with the Eco-Tourism (Arthurton and Korateng, 2006).

Taking action, participating in initiatives and managing the environment together with the rest of the community creates long lasting economic opportunities and helps to sustainably support West African coastal communities.

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The West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) is a convening platform that aims to assist West African countries to sustainably manage their coastal areas and enhance socio-economic resilience to the effects of climate change. The program also seeks to facilitate access to technical expertise and financial resources for participating countries.



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