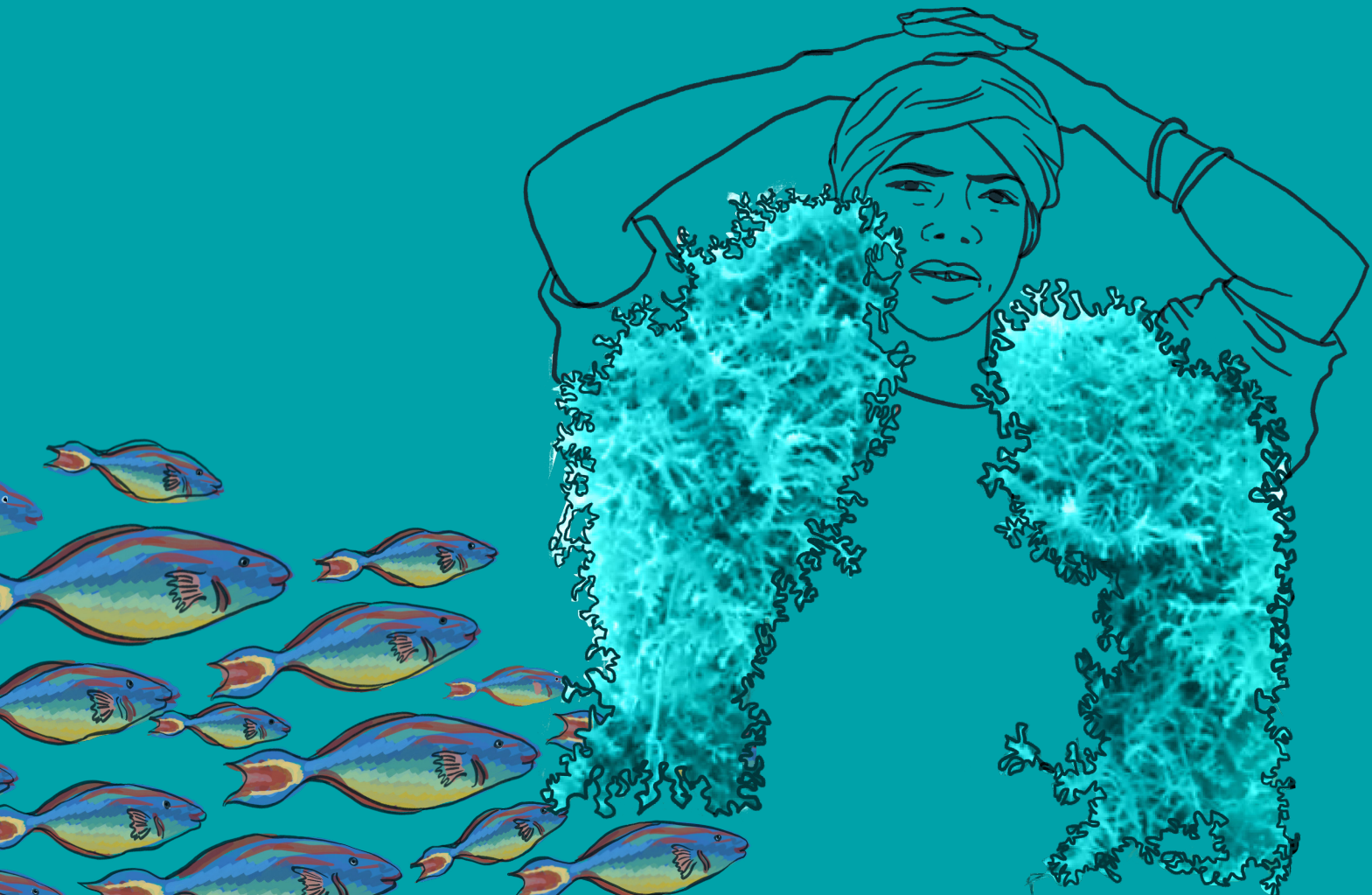


IMPACT STORY

Hub Engagement in Ghana: Exploring the value of International Human Rights for Women in Small- Scale Fisheries





Women in small-scale fisheries are often left out of decision-making processes in fisheries management, community consultations, and capacity building. Photo: Nessim Stevenson

In Ghana, women traditionally occupy the pre- and post-harvest sectors of fisheries, including pre-financing fishing expeditions, processing and distributing fish, and marketing. Despite taking on these significant roles, women in small-scale fisheries (SSFs) are often left out of decision-making processes in fisheries management, community consultations, and capacity-building. Their unique challenges are thus systemically unseen and unaddressed.

Hub researchers Dr **Bolanle Erinosh**o (University of Cape Coast) and Dr **Harrison Golo** (University of Education Winneba) conducted qualitative field research to explore the challenges of women in Ghana's artisanal fisheries (Golo & Erinosho 2023). They found an institutionalisation of inequity between women and men. For example, the legally unrecognised status of women in SSFs means that they do not get priority for loans targeted to fisheries. Their unofficial status also makes them essentially invisible to policy-makers; efforts to 'professionalise' the artisanal fishing sector have overwhelmingly focused on what are traditionally men's roles. Women's specific challenges have received little attention in policy debates.

Golo & Erinosh's paper in Marine Policy identifies not only such challenges but also a potential avenue to address them: international human rights law. Most of the challenges faced by Ghana's women in SSFs amount to violations of their economic, social, or cultural rights.

Ghana is a party to many key human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and its constitution contains strong human rights provisions. In the paper, Golo & Erinosh recommend a human rights approach based on participation of women in decision-making, human rights education and awareness among women in SSFs, and accountability for duty-bearers such as relevant government agencies.

With the Hub's support, Drs. Erinosh and Golo then went beyond publishing their recommendations in an academic journal: they brought their findings directly to those who could use them.

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Bringing research and resources to affected communities

Dr. Erinoshó explains: "Our paper identified the opportunity to use human rights mechanisms to address these issues. But we realised, in order to do that, rights-holders – and rights-bearers – need to be aware of these provisions."

Dr Erinoshó continues: "Few women in Ghana's coastal fisheries are aware of their status and rights under human rights law." For that matter, governmental actors such as the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice had not connected their mandates on human rights with the fisheries sector or its specific challenges. Hub researchers planned an initial workshop in November 2021, bringing together women from coastal communities in the Central Region of Ghana, civil society organisations, and government agencies. Hub researchers shared their research findings, organisations explained how they support women in SSFs, and the women in SSFs themselves shared their key concerns and strategised how they could be addressed.

The workshop was a success in terms of information sharing and reciprocal learning, but the Hub researchers aimed at providing participants to have even more concrete value. So the next three workshops in the Volta, Western, and Greater Accra regions included a pop-up Legal Clinic. Run

by a University of Cape Coast's Faculty of Law Lecturer and two law students, the Legal Clinic gave advice and helped identify next steps to address specific problems.

IMPACT!

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After participating in the first workshop, the Ghanaian civil society organisation Hen Mpoano ("Our Coast") took the lead in convening the next three workshops. Hen Mpoano has worked for the past decade to support inclusive and integrated management of coastal and marine ecosystems; the Hub benefited from their expertise and long-standing relationships of trust with specific communities of women in SSFs.

Presentations and discussions in the following workshops occurred in English, Ga, Fante, Ewe, and Ada, depending on the regions, ensuring all could participate in

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Dr Bolanle Erinoshó
University of Cape Coast





The first Hub workshop brought together women from coastal communities in the Central Region of Ghana, civil society organisations, and government agencies.

Photo: Isich Wisdom

languages they were comfortable with.

Deepening connections

Across the different workshops and pop-up Legal Clinics, women raised similar challenges relating to work, particularly the failure by borrowers (often fishermen) to repay money lent to them by the women, loan defaults involving multiple parties, and unfair dealings by business partners. Participants also expressed significant concerns around sexual and gender-based violence, child labour and trafficking, and feeling forced into buying 'bad' fish for resale (fish caught using methods such as dynamite, DDT, and carbide).

The participating women in SSFs came away from the workshops with much clearer understandings of their rights and possible steps to secure them. In turn, the organisations and researchers were enriched by days of discussion in which these women shared their perspectives on the possible drivers and effects of human rights violations. In addition, participants discovered a wealth of connections amongst each other, as well as previously unexplored aspects of their own remits:

- The Fisheries Commission was present at all four workshops. Representatives shared how they can support fisheries associations, but also learned about the Commission's potential accountability as a duty-bearer to uphold the human rights of women in SSFs.

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- Hen Mpoano enthusiastically dived into the nexus of fisheries and human rights. The organisation is motivated to continue to explore human rights as a relevant part of their mission.
- Governmental entities that deal with human rights, such as the Attorney General's office, had not previously considered the specific concerns of the fisheries sector, let alone those of women within that sector. These events brought that specific constituency to their attention.

- The University of Cape Coast is known for its coastal and marine sciences, but other sectors of the university, such as the Faculties of Law and Social Sciences, have not had a particular focus on coastal communities. New connections have been made within the University, bringing together relevant expertise across a much broader swath of disciplines. The involvement of the Faculty of Law's relatively new Legal

Clinic with the workshops provided a concrete point of connection with these coastal communities.

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stronger support to one another and the potential power in acting together to assert their rights, such as refusing to buy bad fish.

Research informing action, action informing research

Hub researchers are committed to self-reflexivity and iterative research processes. Thus, they are drawing from what surfaced at the workshops to design new research projects:

- A necessary first step to securing rights is education. But even when this happens, cultural contexts can present obstacles; women's demands for their rights may encounter pushback within their own communities. How do certain cultures and customs help enhance the protection of human rights prevent their violation? Better understanding these dynamics could help legal researchers develop effective strategies.
- How can we best carry out "legal empowerment"? What kinds of interventions provide the most effective support for women in SSFs? Hub researchers Dr. Erinosh, Dr. Golo, and Dr. Sulley Ibrahim along with Vanboven Swanzy Essien from the University of Cape Coast Law Clinic are exploring what forms of context-specific support can enable women to navigate the legal system to their own ends.

There are no easy solutions to the challenges faced by women in SSFs. But the work of Hub researchers demonstrates the potential for academic research to both inform and be informed by relevant communities, and we can see how this interactive process is helping to co-identify next steps forward.

Key publication:

Harrison K. Golo and Bolanle Erinosh. 2023. "Tackling the challenges confronting women in the Elmina fishing community of Ghana: A human rights framework," *Marine Policy* 147: 105349.



The workshop brought together women from coastal communities in the Central Region of Ghana, civil society organisations, and government agencies.

Photo: Bolanle Erinosh