

# A Good Year

Interview with Jojo Solomon, president, Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCF) on how artisanal fishers should fish responsibly

## On responsible fisheries

Most countries look up to Ghana when it comes to responsible fisheries and management. Fortunately for us, this time around, we have a minister who has at least demonstrated a political will to do that which is right politically. Ghana is moving forward with a lot of reforms.

## On tenure rights

Most of our development partners, in collaboration with the Fisheries Commission, are trying to work alongside the Lands Commission to ensure that fishers are comfortable. That they have the right to remain where they have been over the years

## On access rights

Fisheries have existed for a long time. If we now introduce other people into this space, we must be mindful of those who are there already, those whose livelihoods are situated there. I think equity must be one of the issues of petition to the government from the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council. The fishing communities are at the seashores and, therefore, we cannot displace them because of oil and gas for hotels and modern development. Fisheries support over 3 million livelihoods directly and indirectly; that is about 10 per cent of the population, all adults. We know that development comes with its own challenges. We need to guard against all these things before they happen.

## On reforms

In the face of the problems confronting the artisanal fishers by the operations of industrial units, the minister has put several measures in place. For the first time in about 20 years, fishers are consistently landing fish, even species that we haven't seen in that duration. The ministerial directive on the gear regime reforms is very efficient. She personally would board the vessels and do a pre-departure inspection. When the vessels get back, nobody touches the fish until she is personally there. Again she is making sure that the vessels are duly seaworthy and registered before she even takes up talk about issuing licences or renewing them. She makes sure that any vessel that has committed an infraction years ago will have no licence; all charges are to be paid before the licences are renewed. That is how we now have about 25-27 vessels there, out of about a hundred vessels. Artisanal fishers must also live up to the expectations and fish

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they have been fishing, especially in the face of oil discovery and development. The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, in collaboration with partners, has taken up most of the issues pertaining to tenure rights. However, when we talk about fishing grounds, we have a few challenges. Most of the blocks have been, I think, allocated to these oil exploration companies. Taking all these things into consideration, we have started addressing these matters with the ministry and the commission. The Blue Economy will come with its own challenges and, therefore, we want to be proactive, instead of being reactive and waiting for something to happen before we show up.

*This interview with Jojo Solomon (solomon.jojo1957@gmail.com), president, Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCF), Accra, Ghana was conducted by N.Venugopalan Programme Manager, ICSF (icsf@icsf.net)*



Jojo Solomon, president, Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCF). Artisanal fishers must also live up to the expectations and fish responsibly, says Jojo Solomon

responsibly. By giving out appropriate fishing nets at 50 per cent subsidy, the minister has ensured that every canoe and artisanal fisher gets an opportunity to discard wrong gear and replace it with nets of approved size. Very soon, there will be a massive inspection of gears in the artisanal sector as well, with the support of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council.

#### **On compensation for workers working on industrial vessels**

Being on the Fisheries Commission's board, I am familiar with the reforms that are on-going. I am also familiar with the fisheries committee on settlement and, therefore, I am well informed that abuses on the vessels are now a thing of the past. Because the Ministry takes a very serious view of how the crew are treated, the sanitation and sleeping conditions on board, and the state of the vessels. The ministry has actually mandated the Ghana Maritime Authority to make sure that all vessels are fully certified internationally before they come for issuance of certificates. The International Labour

Organization (ILO) is also engaging them on issues related to decent work and compensation and allowance to meet international standards.

#### **On conflicts between small-scale fishers and industrial fishers**

The first thing to be tackled was the size of the nets, by the ministerial directive on gear reforms. Instead of 40 metres, the size is now down to 10 metres. These reforms are in place. There is no transshipment. The minister inspects the landed catch to make sure that there are no small pelagics, which is the sole preserve of the small-scale or artisanal fishers. That is why I say that for the first time in about 20 years, fishers are getting their due. I think this is fantastic.

#### **On implementation**

I know that we've always had the vessel monitoring system (VMS) on board. With the automatic identification system (AIS) becoming mandatory now, we have the human element to contend with, which is the observers on board. But then the ministry realized

there are so many unauthorized activities going on. So now they have decided to embark on closed circuit television (CCTV) camera or electronic monitoring system as well. Everything that is humanly, electronically or technologically possible to ensure that industrial trawlers live up to expectation, it is being put in place. It is not 100 per cent foolproof, but we are making immense progress. I think the goings-on in Ghana should be emulated by our regional neighbours. They are carefully monitoring what is going on in Ghana. We had a successful closed season to discuss the results. We are now also registering and embossing the canoe fleet, giving them identification cards to help in monitoring. The policy and budget processes are also expected to be reformed as well. There's a lot going on.

#### **On overfishing, warming waters, plastics and marine debris**

These are global problems, not confined to Ghana. I think that neglect by the relevant authorities and indiscipline amongst the non-State actors themselves culminated in these problems. The ministry is now looking into all these. This has encouraged us to fish responsibly and be conscious to keep our beaches clean.

#### **On reduced catch of small pelagics like herring, sardines, anchovies**

This year, in the Volta region and part of the greater Accra region, two of our four marine regions, we have had cause to stop fishers because the landings of the anchovies were overwhelming and we realized we need to ask the fishers to slow down. We actually had to ask the fishermen to give us a break.

#### **On a moratorium of canoe fishing**

We have held a national dialogue. The minister and the commissioner met with the chiefs in the coastal region, the ministers in the coastal region, the district executives, and the municipal, district and metropolitan chief executives. We are now into community engagement and have reached regional agreements with the fishers and voiced the need for closure because clearly there is overcapacity

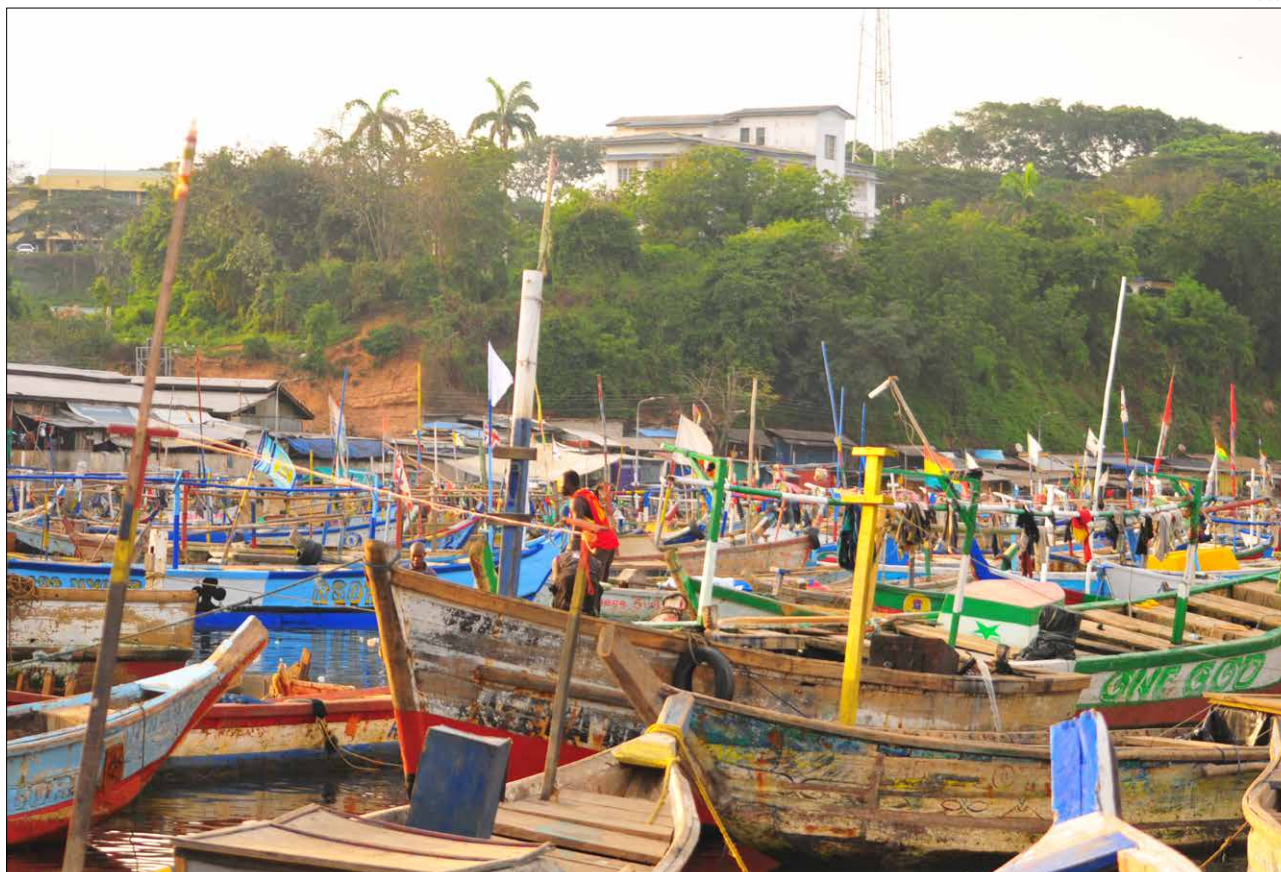
and overfishing. We cannot continue to practice the open-access system. There are too many canoes and fishers chasing very little, fast-depleting stocks, without letting them recover. So it does not make sense. We are now at overcapacity. Instead of around 9,000 canoes that can sustainably fish, we had almost 13,000 canoes. Clearly, we must close access.

#### **On the fight against destructive fishing**

Light fishing is a serious issue for us. We are still educating the fishers. It is kind of difficult because we, as an association or a council, cannot and do not have the right to enforce. So all we do is augment the government's efforts by educating our people and sanctioning them; but I must admit it is not easy. Sometimes these things were done out of desperation. One cannot compete with industrial trawlers; they have very good technology on board. They have GPS and everything that it takes to locate and capture fish, while we are still doing things the old artisanal way. We have come up with a communication strategy called the F2F (fisher-to-fisher) dialogue. It gets to the point that fishers must trust their own leadership. They need to listen when their own colleague fishers tell them to stop what they are doing. It does not help us if people from outside the industry come and speak to them, even if they are from the commission or from the partners; it is kind of difficulty. So we have cast out this avenue or channel called the F2F dialogue to help fishers understand why they should practise closed season, and why they should register their canoes. We have to surmount these problems and we cannot do it all in a day. It is not as if all fishers are engaged in light fishing. Some of them do not like light fishing. I think overcoming it is a process.

#### **On chemical pollutants**

I think our fishery is safe, by and large. We engage with the food and drug authority. We have the Ghana Standards authority working alongside our processers to test the fish. Even in the case of light fishing, we don't believe it uses any hazardous component,



Albert Bosomtwi-Sam Fishing Harbour, Sekondi, Western Region, Ghana. We cannot continue to practice the open-access system. There are too many canoes and fishers chasing very little, fast-depleting stocks, without letting them recover. So it does not make sense, say fishers

except that it aggregates all the fish, both the juveniles and the adults. Since the size of the nets are not prescribed, they catch almost everything, depleting stocks. We are pushing out the few recalcitrant fishers and educating them. The Food and Drugs Authority and the Ghana Standards Authority issue certificates to fishers and I think we can safely say that yes, our fish is wholesome.

#### On co-management

The co-management policy has not really taken off. The idea behind it is that fishers and policymakers would come together and take decisions so that nobody works blind and the right thing is done. As under the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, we believe fishers must be part of decision making right from the stage of conception through to implementation. Only then can we own the system and promote voluntary compliance. If we are part of the decision making, we

understand the issues clearly and there is no suspicion or acrimony. We end up with a system that also works well for industry.

#### On the potential theme for a training programme

First of all, I think responsible fisheries is the key. Our fishery has got into this stage because of indiscipline and irresponsibility. We need to recover our fisheries, we need them to support livelihoods. The government cannot be expected to find a million jobs let alone three million jobs. So fishers must be confronted with their bad habits. If these are taken out, I believe all other bad things will go as well. ♣

#### For more



##### The Missing Link

<https://www.icsf.net/samudra/the-missing-link/>

##### Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC)

<https://twitter.com/GhanaCanoe>

##### MEL4SSF Piloting Ghana by Peter Linford Adjei

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/mel4ssf-piloting-ghana/>

##### Social Development and Sustainable Fisheries: Ghana

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/icsf-social-development-ghana/>