



CHALLENGING HEIGHTS

“To whom much is given, much is expected”

**REPORT ON THE MAIDEN FISHING AND MARINE DIALOGUE
OF THE WOARABEBA TWEII FESTIVAL, 2024**

2024

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BACKGROUND TO THE WOARABEBA TWEII FESTIVAL

The Woarabeba Tweii Festival is an annual event sponsored by Challenging Heights and its media outlet, Nyce Media. This festival is not only a celebration of culture, music, and aquatic activities but also a systems-strengthening project aimed at enhancing the living conditions of the Woarabeba community. The Woarabeba Tweii Festival also focuses on addressing critical social and environmental challenges faced by the Woarabeba community. Human activities such as pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction have had significant adverse effects on the local environment, contributing to issues like poverty, inadequate sanitation, teenage pregnancy, and child trafficking. Climate change further exacerbates these problems, hindering ecosystem recovery and affecting local livelihoods. In response, the festival adopts a holistic approach to social development by:

1. Promoting sustainable fishing and best practices in fish handling to ensure long-term livelihoods and reduce waste.
2. Protecting and preserving the aquatic ecosystem by safeguarding water bodies from pollution and habitat destruction.
3. Improving sanitation within the community to prevent contamination of water sources and enhance public health standards.
4. Raising awareness about climate change and its impact on local livelihoods, educating the community on how to adapt to these challenges.
5. Encouraging economic diversification to create alternative sources of income and foster economic resilience within the community.

Through these initiatives, the Woarabeba Tweii Festival aims to build resilience in the community's systems, foster unity among its members, and contribute to sustainable development and long-term well-being. This festival stands as a testament to the collective commitment of Woarabeba's residents, Challenging Heights, and all other stakeholders to preserving their rich fishing heritage and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

In essence, the Woarabeba Tweii Festival is a powerful tool for social development, aiming to create a resilient and thriving coastal community. Through its focus on environmental sustainability, economic empowerment, and cultural celebration, the festival significantly improves the living conditions of the people of Woarabeba, positioning it as a beacon of progress and unity.

FISHING AND MARINE DIALOGUE

The Fishing and Marine Dialogue is a key component of the Woarabeba Tweii Festival. The dialogue, which was first held during the 2024 edition of the festival, brought together key stakeholders, including fisheries regulators and policymakers, fishermen and fishmongers, NGOs and civil society organizations, community leaders, and the media, to discuss the ever-revolving challenges arising out of climate change on the local fishing industry. The objectives of the dialogue are;

- To raise awareness of the impacts of climate change on the local fishing industry.

- To discuss strategies for mitigating the impacts of climate change on the local fishing industry.
- To promote sustainable fisheries practices.
- To build solution driven partnerships between stakeholders in the fishing industry.

The general expectation of this dialogue is to;

- Increase awareness of the impacts of climate change on the local fishing industry.
- Develop, together with all other stakeholders, strategies for mitigating the impacts of climate change on the local fishing industry.
- Promote sustainable fisheries practices.
- Strengthen partnerships between stakeholders in the fishing industry.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MAIDEN EDITION OF THE FISHING AND MARINE DIALOGUE

The maiden edition of the dialogue embraced a participatory method for discussions and tackling issues. The event featured two main sessions: presentations on understanding, and the effects of climate change, and an open forum discussing mitigation and adaptation strategies. It began with two presentations delivered by a Director from the Fisheries Commission and Geography Lecturers from the University of Education, Winneba. These presentations aimed to simplify fundamental concepts related to climate change. By using the local language, the speakers ensured the content was highly relatable and resonated well with the audience. The event also had a session for panel discussion and open forum. This was specifically included in the structure of the event for feedback, and concerns about the everyday happenings within the industry.

Present at the event were carefully selected stakeholders and representatives of various institutions that play a direct role in the local fishing industry. Specifically, there were reps from the fisheries commission (a government institution), chief fishermen, fishermen and fishmongers (community members), and reps of NGOs, CSOs and the media that operate in fishing areas.

Session 1: Presentation on Climate Change and Its Effects on the Fishing Industry

The first session began with a comprehensive presentation on the effects of climate change on the local fishing industry. The presenter highlighted several observable changes in the marine environment that are directly linked to climate change. These include:

1. **Rising Sea Temperatures:** The increase in sea temperatures has disrupted marine ecosystems, leading to the migration of certain fish species to cooler waters. This has resulted in a decline in fish stocks in local waters, making it harder for fishermen to catch fish.
2. **Rising Sea Waves:** Stronger and more frequent sea waves have made fishing activities riskier and less predictable. Fishermen now face greater dangers at sea, and their equipment is often damaged by the rough conditions.
3. **Depleting Fish Stocks:** Overfishing, combined with the effects of climate change, has led to a significant reduction in fish populations. This has had a direct impact on the income and food security of fishing communities.

4. Unpredictability of Fishing Seasons: Climate change has disrupted traditional fishing seasons, making it difficult for fishermen to plan their activities. This unpredictability has further exacerbated the challenges faced by the industry.
5. Rising Sea Levels: The rise in sea levels has led to coastal erosion, flooding, and the loss of critical habitats for fish, reducing fish stocks and disrupting ecosystems. Additionally, higher sea levels have damaged fishing infrastructure, such as boats and landing sites, further impacting the industry.

The presentation also identified the following human activities that contribute to these effects, including:

1. Indiscriminate cutting of trees and vegetation, which reduces coastal protection and increases vulnerability to flooding.
2. The use of chemicals and lights for fishing, which harm marine life and disrupt ecosystems.
3. Mining sand for construction purposes, which leads to coastal erosion and loss of habitat for marine species.
4. Overfishing, which disrupts marine biodiversity and reduces the ocean's ability to absorb carbon.
5. Improper waste disposal, particularly plastic pollution, which harms marine life and ecosystems.
6. Burning of fossil fuels by fishing vessels, which releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Session 2: Open Forum on Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies

The second session was a panel discussion and an open forum that focused on strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to the new realities of the fishing industry. Participants, including representatives from the fisheries commission, chief fishermen, fishmongers, NGOs, CSOs, and the media, shared their insights and suggestions.

Key strategies discussed included:

1. Planting More Trees/Vegetations: Reforestation, particularly in coastal areas, was emphasized to protect shorelines from erosion and reduce the impact of rising sea levels. Trees also act as carbon sinks, helping to mitigate climate change.
2. Adoption of Sustainable Fishing Practices: Participants called for the adoption of sustainable fishing methods, such as avoiding the use of harmful chemicals and lights, respecting fishing seasons, and using fishing gear that minimizes bycatch.
3. Diversification of Livelihoods: To reduce dependence on the sea, communities were encouraged to explore alternative sources of income, such as aquaculture, agriculture, artisanal and skills work, and small-scale businesses. This would help reduce the impact of declining fish stocks.
4. Community Education and Awareness: There was a consensus on the need to educate fishing communities about the effects of climate change and the importance of sustainable practices. NGOs and CSOs pledged readiness to lead awareness campaigns and training programs.

5. Government and Policy Support: Participants urged the government to enforce regulations against harmful practices like illegal sand mining, use of chemicals and light for fishing and deforestation. They also called for policies that promote climate-resilient infrastructure and provide financial support to affected communities.

Conclusion

The Fisheries and Marine Dialogue was an enlightening event that underscored the urgent need to address the effects of climate change on the local fishing industry. The presentation highlighted the visible impacts of climate change, such as rising sea temperatures, depleting fish stocks, and unpredictable fishing seasons, while the open forum provided practical strategies for adaptation and mitigation. It is clear that a collaborative effort involving government institutions, NGOs, CSOs, and local communities is essential to build resilience and ensure the sustainability of the fishing industry. As climate change continues to pose significant challenges, events like this dialogue play a crucial role in fostering awareness and driving action.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen community-based initiatives to promote reforestation and sustainable fishing practices.
2. Increase funding and support for alternative livelihood programs in fishing communities.
3. Enhance collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and local stakeholders to enforce environmental regulations.
4. Conduct regular awareness campaigns to educate communities about climate change and its impacts.
5. Undertake specific interventions towards replacing lost mangroves in coastal fishing communities

By implementing these strategies, the local fishing industry can better adapt to the challenges of climate change and secure a sustainable future for fishing communities.

Watch video of the 2024 Fishing and Marine dialogue at:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qHHh6X_kg228hjPWF2s8mx5eC7JHi3w0?usp=drive_link