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# OCPP GEDSI Analysis: Ghana

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30 April 2025

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# Acronyms and glossary

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|---|---|
| **ALB** | Arms' Length Bodies |
| **ALDFG** | Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear |
| **CEFAS** | Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science |
| **CEDAW** | Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| **CEWEFIA** | Central and Western Fishmongers Improvement Association |
| **CLaT** | Child Labour and Trafficking |
| **CSOs** | Civil Society Organisation |
| **DAA** | Development Action Association |
| **DOVVSU** | Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit |
| **EJF** | Environmental Journalists Foundation |
| **FC** | Fisheries Commission |
| **GBV** | Gender Based Violence |
| **GDP** | Gross Domestic Product |
| **GEDSI** | Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion |
| **GMS** | Gender Mainstreaming Strategy |
| **GNCFC** | Ghana National Canoe Fisherman Council |
| **GSS** | Ghana Statistical Service |
| **HIV** | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| **ICAI** | Independent Commission for Aid Impact |
| **IUU** | Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated |
| **ILO** | International Labour Organisation |
| **KII** | Key Informant Interviews |
| **LEAP** | Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty |
| **LGBTQI+** | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersect+ |
| **MCS** | Monitoring Control Surveillance |
| **MDG** | Millenium Development Goals |
| **MIC** | Middle Income Country |
| **MOFAD** | Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development |
| **MOGCSP** | Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection |
| **NAFPTA** | National Fish Processors and Traders Association |
| **NGOs** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **NPPOA** | National Policy Plan of Action |
| **OCPP** | Ocean Country Partnership Programme |
| **OPD** | Organisation of People with disabilities |
| **SDDirect** | Social Development Direct |
| **SEAH** | Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment |
| **STD** | Sexually Transmitted Disease |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNICEF** | United Nations Children Fund |
| **UNCRPD** | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| **UNFPA** | United Nations Fund for Population Activities |
| **VAC** | Violence Against Children |
| **WGQ** | Washington Group Questionnaire |
| **WRO** | Women Rights Organisation |

# Executive Summary

**This report sets out the findings from a gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) analysis, focused on biodiversity, sustainable seafood and pollution in coastal areas of Ghana.** The findings will be used to inform the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) on the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in the locations where the programme is implemented. This research has been conducted over a period of two months and involved both primary and secondary qualitative research, including five key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant stakeholders and an in-depth literature review.

**Ghana attained lower middle-income status in 2011, largely due to oil discoveries, raising expectations for poverty reduction and inclusive growth; however, regional disparities, particularly between the North and South, persisted due to historical underdevelopment and environmental challenges**. Despite targeted investments in agriculture and social protection, poverty remains entrenched in the coastal and northern regions. The coastal zone, home to nearly 40% of the population, relies heavily on fishing, which contributes 4.5% to GDP and supports over two million people, though poverty remains a significant issue, especially among post-harvest workers. The fisheries sector is governed by a complex institutional and legislative framework under the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development and the Fisheries Commission, with regulations addressing sustainability and illegal practices. Efforts to mainstream gender and improve inclusivity in the sector include a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, though implementation gaps and weak enforcement persist. Ghana has also ratified key international conventions to protect the rights of women and marginalised groups, though compliance and reporting remain inconsistent.

**Marginalisation in Ghana's coastal fishing communities manifests in diverse social and economic forms, affecting small-scale fishers, women, children, persons with disabilities, migrant fishers, and LGBTQI+ individuals.** Structural inequalities, socio-cultural norms, poverty, limited education, and weak legal protections contribute to exclusion, with female-headed households, child labourers, and people living with STDs or disabilities facing heightened vulnerability. Migrant fishers experience social exclusion and exploitation, while LGBTQI+ individuals suffer increasing violence and limited access to healthcare. Persons with disabilities face pervasive discrimination and accessibility barriers, particularly in physically demanding fishing environments. Despite Ghana's international commitments to disability and gender inclusion, implementation remains weak. Marginalisation is compounded by environmental degradation, geographic isolation, and dependence on marine resources, with intersecting identities further deepening disadvantage.

**Marine pollution, unsustainable fishing practices, and declining marine biodiversity in Ghana's coastal communities are driven by industrial fishing, resource depletion, and increasing competition, leading some local fishers to**

**adopt illegal and environmentally destructive methods out of economic desperation.** These practices not only damage marine ecosystems but also threaten food safety and undermine the livelihoods of women, who are central to the fisheries value chain yet excluded from decision-making due to gender norms, time constraints, and socio-cultural barriers. Conflicts also arise over resource use, with women's livelihoods from oyster harvesting clashing with male-dominated fishing interests and commercial developments along the coast. Poor plastic waste management further worsens marine pollution, resulting in severe ecological, health, and socio-economic impacts, including flooding, food insecurity, and displacement. This environmental degradation disproportionately affects women and children, increasing their exposure to gender-based violence (GBV) as livelihoods are destabilised. Despite their key roles in processing, trading, and harvesting, women remain underrepresented in fisheries governance structures due to entrenched gender norms, weak policy inclusion, and limited access to education and leadership roles. Attempts to empower women through training and advocacy are often met with male resistance, highlighting the need for inclusive strategies that engage both women and men in sustainable marine management.

**Coastal communities in Ghana face growing risks from climate change, including coastal erosion, flooding, and rising ocean temperatures, which damage homes, farmland, and fishing equipment.** These impacts reduce fish stocks, drive up costs for small-scale fishers, and threaten food security and livelihoods. Displacement and disrupted social networks further deepen poverty and vulnerability. Urgent action is needed to improve resource management, support sustainable fishing, and build community resilience.

**SEAH (Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment) in Ghana is underreported but widely acknowledged, particularly in coastal and fishing communities where poverty, gender inequality, and weak law enforcement heighten vulnerability**. While Ghana has gender-based violence (GBV) legislation, socio-cultural norms, limited institutional capacity, and reliance on traditional dispute resolution hinders enforcement. Practices such as transactional sex ("sex-for-fish") are common, exposing women and girls to exploitation and health risks. The fisheries "closed season" exacerbates economic hardship, leading to spikes in domestic violence, child labour, and sexual exploitation. Child protection is further weakened by widespread corporal punishment, hazardous labour, and trafficking, despite international and national child rights frameworks. Community-based protection mechanisms are often undermined by stigma, traditional norms, and lack of access to support services.

**This report examined the different stakeholders in the context of marine biodiversity, sustainable seafood and marine pollution who would be important to engage with on GEDSI, alongside providing a range of recommendations.** The recommendations include:

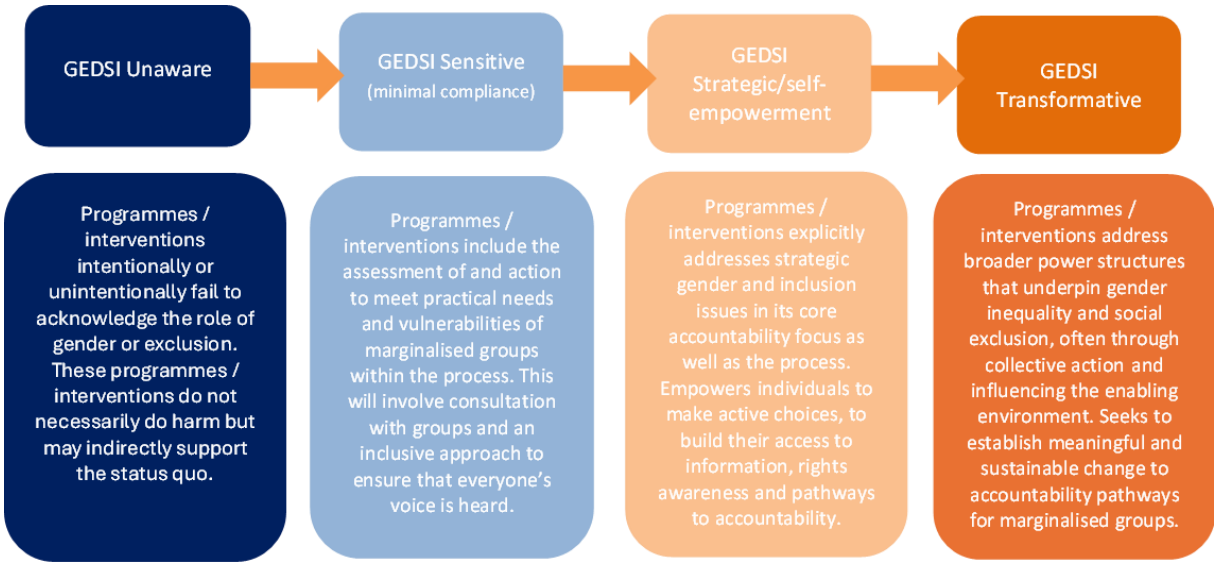
**Demonstrating a strong commitment to GEDSI** within the OCPP through promoting an inclusive dialogue, having a concerted effort to ensure strong representation of women in these groups, working with local authorities, building GEDSI into programming from the start, and undertaking further research on persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups within coastal communities.

The second overarching recommendation is to **address safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme** through reviewing what safeguarding procedures are in place for all partners, reviewing or conducting risk assessments of activities for the programme, undertaking further training and awareness raising of sexual harassment across programme activities, and endorsing the CAPSEAH commitment and working towards compliance.

# 1. Introduction and overview of the analysis

## 1.1. Purpose and objectives

Following an assessment by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in November 2023, where the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) was assessed as unaware on the Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Responsiveness Continuum, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses to support their ambition to better integrate GEDSI responsive approaches in OCPP. This continuum is a framework used to assess and guide programmes, policies, and initiatives in terms of their approach to GEDSI, helping organisations and practitioners understand how their work either reinforces or challenges existing inequalities. Along the continuum, programmes or interventions can range from being GEDSI Unaware, GEDSI Sensitive, GEDSI Strategic or Self-Empowering, or GEDSI Transformative, as shown in Diagram below[1].




In order to meet the objectives of the International Development Act, international commitments to 'do no harm' as part of the SDGs, and DEFRA's own minimum standards on gender and social inclusion, the OCPP must reduce poverty in places it is working and improve conditions for poor people and the most marginalised in this world. It must also ensure this is done in a way that addresses GEDSI and

[1] This framework has been adapted and updated by SDDirect from the Moser Framework. It aligns with the GESI Policy for DEFRA ODA Programmes, and while some of the language used varies, the concepts and approach are similar.

substantially improves the wellbeing of these lives, alongside ensuring that programmes are free from risks associated with sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) which may be inherent in programming within fragile states characterised by high levels of poverty and inequality. As such, on behalf of all the Arms' Length Bodies (ALB) involved in OCPP, CEFAS has contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses to support the OCPP's ambition to becoming more GEDSI Sensitive, and where possible, GEDSI Empowering. These analyses have been undertaken in Ghana, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Belize. This report focuses on Ghana.

**Objectives**: This assignment is intended to further OCPP's understanding of the needs and risks of the marginalised and vulnerable groups in the locations where the programme is implemented, enabling it to adapt interventions to become more GEDSI sensitive and address those needs and risks. To achieve this objective, this GEDSI analysis provides an intersectional assessment of the social and economic context in coastal areas of Ghana, and identifies key risks related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) and GEDSI that can be mitigated and addressed in an appropriate manner.

**Scope**: This analysis focuses on the key themes for the OCPP– marine biodiversity, and marine pollution and sustainable seafood.

**Terminology**

**Gender equality** is the absence of discrimination on the basis of gender in opportunities, in the allocation of resources or benefits or in the access to services, such that all individuals can enjoy equal standards of well-being. It is the full and equal exercise by women, men, boys, girls and people of other gender identities of their human rights: in this situation, women, men, girls and boys have equal rights and equal access to socially and economically valued goods, resources, opportunities and benefits; the different gender roles are valued equally and do not constitute an obstacle to their wellbeing and finally; the fulfilment of their potential as responsible members of society is possible.

**Social inclusion** is the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individual and groups to development opportunities. These barriers may be formal (written laws on spousal property for instance), or they may be informal (e.g. time village girls spend carrying water instead of attending school). In short, social inclusion is about levelling the playing field by making the 'rules of the game' fairer.

**Disability**, according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others'" (UN CRPD, 2006).

**Safeguarding** means preventing harm abuse and neglect perpetrated by staff, contractors and as a result of programmes that are being implemented. An important component of that is SEAH being perpetrated by staff, consultants and contractors targeted. Because it is primarily perpetrated by people (usually men) in

positions of power it often goes unreported. SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is often a form of **gender-based violence** (GBV) and tends to be targeted at either women or children.

### 1.2. Overview of the report

After the introduction to the report, the second section of the report details the methodology employed, including the literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and data analysis processes, as well as the methodological limitations. Section 3 presents the country specific findings for Ghana in response to each of the research questions (as outlined in the Inception Report). The report is structured around the original research questions, with the questions two and four presented together. This was because of significant overlaps between the questions and evidence found in the literature and the KIIs. A stakeholder mapping and lessons learned are also presented in this section. Sections 4 and 5 detail the conclusions and recommendations respectively.

## 2. Methodology and methodological limitations

### 2.1. Methodology

The GEDSI analysis was conducted through a combination of primary and secondary data collection methodologies, including a secondary literature review and a small number of KIIs. Below we set out the detailed approach to each of these phases.

For the secondary data collection, a literature review was undertaken, reviewing documents available from Google Scholar and other relevant electronic databases, such as academic databases and journals. Grey literature, including governmental reports were also reviewed. A small selection of OCPP documents were also reviewed, such as progress reports, and the GEDSI[2] self-assessment. Online literature was identified using key search terms such as:

- GEDSI; women; gender; girls; disability; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex + (LGBTQI+) Intersectionality; vulnerable/ility; marginalised; poor/ poverty; leave no one behind, do no harm, religion, ethnicity, age
- SEAH; safeguarding; child safeguarding; child labour; gender-based violence (GBV) / gender-based violence; violence against children (VAC); interpersonal violence, sexual violence; sexual harassment; sexual exploitation

[2] OCPP refers to this as GESI, however the agreed acronym for the analysis is GEDSI and has been used throughout the report

- Fishing; Aquaculture; fishermen / women, fishers, fisherfolk; overfishing,' pollution; aquatic animal health; climate change; coast; seafood; marine; coastal livelihoods; blue economy, coastal communities, waste / litter picking; marine litter; Ghost fishing gear /Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG).

Full detail of the search and inclusion criteria of external literature can be found in the inception report. The research team have endeavoured to identify and use more recent literature from 2015-present. In some instances, older sources of literature have been cited in the absence of more recent data or information publicly available. Where possible we have attempted to corroborate this with more recent information revealed in KIIs.

KIIs were undertaken as part of the primary data collection. Informants included local and national governments, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Suggestions of the informants to interview were provided by OCPP, based on their experience with working with them as key stakeholders. Data collection tools were used, such as KII guides, consent forms, information sheets and data storage protocols, which can also be found in the Inception Report.[3]

Both documents and interview transcripts were coded using a coding matrix, which organised and highlighted key findings and themes against the research questions. Early findings were shared with OCPP via brief high level written findings. Two validation workshops were subsequently held following the first draft of the report, one at the programme level with all countries and one specifically with Ghana OCPP staff. More detailed findings were shared, discussed and validated.

## 2.2. Limitations

| Limitations | Mitigations |
|---|---|
| The literature review highlighted significant gaps in the research being conducted, particularly for LGBTQI+ populations, persons with disabilities, children, or older people. | Efforts have been taken to consult the grey literature and speak with CSOs and Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) to learn more about on these groups in coastal communities. Where possible we have attempted to obtain country level data and make inferences as to SEAH and GEDSI risks for these groups. Additionally, gaps were discussed during the KIIs to obtain more information where possible. |

[3] A total of 5 KIIs have been conducted to date. An additional 5 KIIs will be finalised before the final report is submitted.

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| The examination of SEAH risks were based on our understanding of the GEDSI situation in Ghana and the broad thematic approach that the programme is taking in the country. The analysis was not able to identify specific SEAH risks related to the individual programme activities due to the limited scope of programme review, as requested by CEFAS. | SEAH risks identified are generic *potential* risks, based on evidence from other countries, or international good practice and learning. They are intended to identify areas for the programme to explore further rather than as a definitive set of risks to be addressed and actively managed. |
| The recent passage of a strict LGBTQI+ criminalisation bill in Ghana has made it challenging to ask direct research questions with key informants on these topics, as this is considered high risk for both interviewer and interviewee. | The National Consultant has used his discretion on whether to ask or probe for further detail on any questions around LGBTQI+ individuals in relation to this research, ensuring not to put himself or the participants at any undue risk. |
| Interviews were conducted remotely which impacted on the type of organisations consulted | Efforts were made to accommodate a diverse range of stakeholders. The research team remained flexible to accommodate their availability for interviews. We have been able to access the national consultant's networks in country, and the OCPP Ghana Team has helpfully nominated individuals for interviews which has helped secure interviews with stakeholders. |
| There was no budget to offer reasonable accommodation for key informants who may have required additional support to participate in the interviews. | Where possible we have endeavoured to speak to Organisations of Persons with Disability (OPDs) and WROs to obtain insights into the opportunities and challenges that arise within the fisheries sector for these groups. |
| The research team has found been limited information obtained on specifically on sustainable seafood in both the academic and grey literature. | The research team has endeavoured to obtain additional findings or further information shared from KII's into the final report |
| The analyses did not review the OCPP programme activities in detail due to the complexity of the programme and the desire from the programme to focus on the national GEDSI context. As a result, the analysis does not address | The analysis focuses on the high-level themes that are being addressed including marine biodiversity and pollution. It highlights relevant interventions being led by other actors, including government actors, in these |

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| programme specific interventions. This limitation was experienced across all country analyses. This limitation also meant recommendations could not be specific to interventions within OCPP programmes. | domains of work to identify potential areas for synergy, or overlap with OCPP. The recommendations provide a steer on how new programmes can build GEDSI into programming from the start and suggested further research, alongside recommending to review or conduct risk assessments. |

# 3. Research findings

## 3.1. Country context

### Economic History

Ghana is one of the lower middle-income countries in Africa, having attained its status in 2011 largely driven by its oil discovery (ISS African Futures, 2024). This development raised hopes for accelerated and inclusive growth to combat poverty and inequality. However, substantial oil revenues alone have been insufficient to achieve these goals. Effective governance, including revenue transparency and fiscal discipline, were essential to ensuring macroeconomic stability and sustainable progress (World Bank, 2011)

By the time Ghana attained lower MIC status, it had made good progress toward the achievement of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) , but poverty reduction remained uneven, particularly between the North and South of the country (Oxfam, 2025). World Bank estimates indicated that while 2.5 million people in southern Ghana escaped poverty between 1992 and 2006, the number of poorer people or people living in poverty in the North grew by nearly a million (World Bank, 2011). The reason for these different poverty rates between the North and South of Ghana is likely due to a combination of factors, including the drier drought-prone regions in the North causing a loss of livelihoods and economic opportunities and the historical underdevelopment during and after the colonial era (Kambala, 2022). Northern Ghana and coastal regions like Volta, Central, and Western, including the fishing communities, remained among the poorest zones in the country (GSS, 2015; Teh et al, 2024) Successive governments invested in agriculture, social services, and social protection programmes such as school feeding and the Livelihoods Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) initiative. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist in sustainability, coordination, and effectively targeting the most vulnerable and marginalised (Oxfam et al., 2018).

### Coastal Geography, Population and Economy

Ghana's coastal region lies on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa and expands approximately 550 km wide and spans an area of 238,540 km$^2$ (British Geological

Survey, 2000). The coast is generally low-lying and is not more than 30 meters above sea level, and has over 90 coastal lagoons which are less than 5 $km^2$ in surface area (Avornyo et al., 2023). The coast is characterised by six major types of coastal ecosystems, including the sandy shore, rocky shore, coastal lagoon, mangrove or tidal forests, the estuarine wetland, and the depression wetland (Avornyo et al., 2023).

The coastal zone accounts for around 6.5% of the country's geographical area, but contains 39.1% (12 million) of Ghana's population. The land use along the coast is varied, with certain areas along the Eastern coast being used for 80% of Ghana's industrial firms (Avornyo et al, 2023), salt production and sand mining. Fishing serves as the primary economic activity in Ghana's coastal region, with a significant portion of the population relying on it for their livelihood. The industry contributes approximately 4.5% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), providing employment for around two million people. Annually, Ghana requires 880,000 tons of fish, yet local production only meets 420,000 tons, leaving a shortfall of 460,000 tons that is covered through imports (Lawson, Gordan and Schulchter, 2012). Due to heavy reliance on natural resources and ongoing environmental degradation, poverty remains a major challenge in many coastal communities.

Among those involved in post-harvest fisheries, poverty affects about 29% of the population (Lawson, Gordan and Schulchter, 2012). While this rate is lower compared to the food and export crop sectors, it remains a pressing concern. It is challenging to assess whether the 29% poverty rate among post-harvest fisheries workers is unique to Ghana or reflective of broader trends across countries heavily dependent on fisheries. In regional terms, poverty among small-scale fisheries workers in West Africa typically ranges between 30% and 50% (FAO, 2022), suggesting that Ghana's 29% figure, while serious, is comparatively low. When compared to Senegal, another major West African fishing economy where national poverty is approximately 38% and artisanal fisheries are similarly stressed by overfishing and environmental pressures (World Bank, 2019), Ghana's poverty rate among fisheries workers is slightly lower but faces uniquely acute challenges like the prevalence of illegal "saiko" fishing, which accelerates stock depletion (Environmental Justice Foundation, 2019). Thus, while Ghana's 29% poverty rate among post-harvest fisheries workers is not unusually high globally, the combination of intense foreign fishing pressure, high gendered concentration in post-harvest roles, and a lower national average poverty rate makes the persistence of fisheries-related poverty a more distinctive problem in Ghana.

Along the coast of Ghana, fishing is the main livelihood source offering jobs to several people across the value chain. The fisheries sector plays a pivotal role in the nation's socio-economic fabric, contributing approximately 4.5% to the GDP and supporting the livelihoods of over 2.2 million people, including fishers, processors, traders, and dependents (World Bank, 2020). Fisheries play a forward and backward link to other economic activities, with women playing key roles in the sector despite

the perception it is a male-dominated field. Despite its economic significance, the sector faces systemic challenges embedding gender considerations wishing the fishing sector (FAO, 2024)

**Governance and Legislation**

The governance of Ghana's fisheries sector is anchored in a complex institutional framework led by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD), established under the Civil Service (Ministries) Instrument 2013 (Civil Service (Ministries) Instrument, 2013). MoFAD oversees policy formulation and sectoral coordination, while the Fisheries Commission (FC), established by the Fisheries Commission Act 1993 (Act 457), serves as the primary regulatory body responsible for sustainable resource management, licensing, and enforcement (Fisheries Commission Act, 1993). The FC operates through divisions such as Marine Fisheries Management, Inland Fisheries Management, and Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS), supported by the Fisheries Enforcement Unit (FEU), which collaborates with the Ghana Navy and Marine Police (Asumda, 2023).

Key legislative instruments governing the sector include the Fisheries Act 2002 (Act 625) and the Fisheries Regulations 2010 (LI 1968), which mandate sustainable fishing practices, prohibit illegal methods (e.g., light fishing, dynamite), and outline penalties for violations (Fisheries Act, 2002). The National Premix Fuel Committee Regulations 2016 (LI 2233) govern subsidised fuel distribution to artisanal fishers, though this system has been critiqued for politicisation and inefficiency (National Premix Fuel Committee Regulations, 2016). Strategic Plans such as the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector Development Plan (2011–2016) aimed to stabilise fish production, enhance aquaculture, and curb illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing (Yakubu, 2022). However, implementation gaps persist due to weak enforcement, underfunding, and overcapacity in artisanal, semi-industrial, and industrial fleets (Asumda, 2023).

The sector's governance structure includes membership-based institutions such as the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen's Council, the National Association of Fish Processors and Traders, and the Landing Beach Enforcement Committee amongst others (Asumda, 2023).

Under MoFAD and FC, there is also a Fisheries Sector Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) and Action Plan 2017–2022. This Strategy has been produced to serve as the framework for promoting gender responsiveness in the fisheries sector. It seeks to build on existing gaps and proposes new strategic interventions to enhance greater accountability with advancing GEDSI and women's rights in all stages of the fisheries value chain, in line with Ghana's commitment to promoting this in decision-making and all socio-economic sectors. There are six main strategic objectives under the GMS (MoFAD and FC, 2016) including to:

1. Restructure MoFAD/FCs programme work and cooperation with stakeholders in the fisheries sector from a gender perspective;
2. Strengthen gender mainstreaming capacity at policy and implementation levels of the fisheries value chain;
3. Create an enabling environment to enhance the process of gender responsive fisheries management to ensure women and men have equal opportunities as fisheries decision-makers and co-managers;
4. Strengthen capacities of women and men fisheries associations including CSOs to solve problems through open and transparent communications, networking and shared decision making;
5. Improve the fisheries value (through technological innovation and infrastructures, finance and research) and provide post-harvest training and technical know-how to women and men engaged directly and indirectly in the fisheries sector;
6. Strengthen knowledge creation and information management of the fisheries sector through gender responsive monitoring and evaluation.

In addition to the GMS, successive governments have promulgated various forms of legislation to protect women and other marginalised groups, particularly in relation to GEDSI and GBV related issues. Ghana has ratified several international conventions aimed at combating GBV, including the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW (OHCHR,2024), the United UN Convention on the Rights of People with disabilities in 2012 (OHCHR, n.d.) and the Maputo Protocol. According to the Human Rights Institute at the University of Pretoria (2025), as of January 2023, Ghana had ten outstanding state reports and has not made a submission to the Maputo Protocol since its ratification. Ghana has made recent declarations to commit to send outstanding reports. Further key legislation and international instruments are outlined here:

- The 1992 Constitution**:** The Constitution provides for the rights and protection of vulnerable Ghanaians. For example, Article 17 (2) of the 1992 Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender among other characteristics. Similarly, Article 12 (2) and Article 27 deal with human rights regardless of gender among others and on property rights of spouses respectively.
- The Domestic Violence Act, 2006 (Act 732): The Act was enacted to address rising cases of domestic violence in Ghana, providing a legal framework for protecting survivors and managing cases, particularly for women and children, who are the primary survivors and victims of GBV. The Act also recognises male victims of domestic violence. It led to the establishment of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) within the Ghana Police Service to provide support and protection for victims.
- The National Policy and Plan of Action (NPPOA), 2008: This Policy and Plan was developed by the former Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to

guide the effective implementation of the Act. Under the coordination of the Domestic Violence Secretariat within the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP), the NPPOA outlines the roles of key stakeholders in combating domestic violence, including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse (Institute of Development Studies, 2016)

- The Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715): This Act is considered a noteworthy milestone in Ghana's human rights history, seeking to improve the livelihoods of people with disabilities and advance their ability to partake equally in society. It covers thematic provisions such as rights, accessibility, employment, and education for people with disabilities. However, it does not take into account any provisions towards non-discrimination, the gender dimensions of discrimination, the legal definition of disability, and the rights of children with disabilities, showing there are large omissions in the Act (Asante and Sasu, 2015).
- The Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651): The Act seeks to protect the rights of employees and government employment relations in the country. It provides for equal pay for equal work for all employees irrespective of gender, employment of People with disabilities, women, young persons as well as prohibition of forced labour among others.
- The Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560): The Act provides the legal basis and framework for the protection of the rights of the child, and the administrative and judicial system to ensure care and protection. It recognises various rights for children including welfare, non-discrimination, right to parental property, to social activity, to education and well-being as well as protection from exploitative labour, torture and degrading treatment.
- Human Trafficking Act, 2005: This legislation aims to prevent, reduce, and punish human trafficking, as well as provide for the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked persons. The Act defines human trafficking broadly, including the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, trading, or receipt of persons through coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation.
- National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage in Ghana 2017-2026: This plan is designed to combat and eradicate child marriage throughout the country. It was developed by the Ghanaian government, under the MoGCSP, in collaboration with UNFPA and UNICEF and its partners. It delineates strategies, interventions, and objectives aimed at preventing child marriage, safeguarding vulnerable children, and facilitating access to education, healthcare, and other vital services for married girls.
- Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill 2021. Ghana upheld the colonial-era law that criminalises adult consensual same-sex conduct in 2024, despite their commitments and obligations to human rights, including the right

to privacy for all. The bill imposes stricter criminal penalties for same-sex activities, raising the maximum prison sentence from three to five years. Additionally, it broadens the scope of criminal charges to include individuals who identify as LGBTQI+, queer, pansexual, or any other non-traditional gender identity, as well as those who support these communities. The legislation also seeks to penalise individuals or organisations that offer assistance, funding, or publicly advocate for the rights of sexual and gender minorities (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

## 3.2. Who are the most vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged people in coastal regions / communities in Ghana and why? (RQ1)

Marginalisation in fishing communities in Ghana take various social and economic forms, affecting diverse groups rather than a single homogeneous population. This section highlights key factors of exclusion in coastal communities where data is available. Small-scale fishers and fish workers are a vulnerable and marginalised group (EJF, 2021). A study by the USAID funded Feed the Future Fisheries Recovery Project in 2022 noted that children in fisheries are particularly vulnerable due to socio-cultural norms related to fishing and child labour; endemic poverty; low levels of awareness of the consequences of child labour and trafficking (CLaT); parental neglect; and inability to secure quality formal education. The study further identified female headed households as vulnerable and noted that poor and economically vulnerable households, especially those that are female headed, need preferential access to economic safety nets to prevent them from falling on their children for economic support.

Key Informants confirmed various forms of marginalisations of small-scale fishers who struggle to sustain themselves year-round, fish processors, traders, women, and individuals living with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or communicable diseases are also affected (Hen Mpoano, 2022). Other key informants mentioned divorcees, people with disabilities, women oyster pickers, young women assisting fish processors, and single parents as marginalised groups.

In coastal communities, marginalisation and disadvantage stem from various factors, including socio-cultural norms that limit access to resources and decision-making. For instance, women who own boats, fishing equipment, or finance fishing expeditions hold relatively more power but are still unable to go to sea due to cultural restrictions.

**Migrant Fishers**

Migrant fishers are among the most marginalised along Ghana's coast. Many come from neighbouring countries or remote Ghanaian communities, limiting their access to social services and legal protections. Research indicates that these workers often

face poor living conditions, exploitative labour arrangements, and social exclusion from host communities (Asiedu, 2022).

**LGBTQI+ populations**

LGBTQI+ individuals in Ghana face extreme marginalisation and discrimination and violence. Organisations such Human Rights Watch have noted attacks against LGBTQI+ individuals have become more is prevalent and has escalated in recent years. Risks to their physical safety may be heightened in coastal communities due to social exclusion and marginalisation. There is research available that suggests that limited access to healthcare widens health disparities for LGBTQI+ individuals in Ghana, as stigma and risk of harm prevents many from seeking testing or treatment for HIV and other health issues. (Gyamerah et al., 2021) (Acolatse,2024)

**Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities in Ghana face significant barriers to inclusion and quality of life (Baffoe, 2013). As mentioned earlier, Ghana signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007 and ratified the Convention by affirming its commitments to full human rights for people with disabilities in 2012. Ghana co-hosted the Global Disability Summit in 2022, which exemplified its growth in political commitment to disability inclusion in Ghana. Despite these advancements, inequality and discrimination against people with disabilities—especially for women and children continue to be pervasive and experienced across all segments of Ghanaian society (United Nations, Ghana, 2022). According to the most recent population and housing census by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana's population stands at approximately 30.8 million, with 8% living with a disability, marking a 5-percentage-point rise from previous figures (Global Disability Fund, 2025). Disabilities are more common in rural areas (9.5%) compared to urban areas (6.5%) Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The prevalence of disability is higher among females (8.8%) than males (6.7%), and more common in rural areas (9.5%) compared to urban areas (6.5%). Among the six domains included in the Washington Group Questionnaire (WGQ), difficulty seeing is the most widespread in Ghana (4% of the population) and difficulty in communicating is the least common (1%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).[4] Caution needs to be applied when interpreting this data as the accuracy of prevalence data is not guaranteed as there a could be underreporting due to social stigma, exclusion and discrimination attached to disability in Ghana, weak legal and regulatory structures in place to protect them, and traditional beliefs that exclude people with disabilities (Ocran, 2018). Little research exists that focuses

[4] The Washington Group Questionnaire (WGQ) short set on functioning is a tool used in national censuses and surveys, developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. The shift sought to take a human rights-based approach, locating disability at the intersection between a person's capabilities (limitations in functioning), with the environmental barriers (such as physical, social, cultural or legislative), that may limit their participation in society.

on persons with disabilities specifically in coastal communities. Commenting on the limited participation of people with disabilities, a Key Informant noted that the physical infrastructure in these areas—including fishing harbours, markets, and public spaces—it is unlikely that mobility needs are adequately accommodated. Environmental hazards such as flooding and coastal erosion pose disproportionate risks to individuals with disabilities. Economic opportunities are also severely limited, as traditional fishing and fish processing are physically demanding and largely inaccessible. Additionally, restricted access to assistive devices and rehabilitation services further exacerbates these challenges (Key Informant, 2025).

**Factors that contribute to marginalisation**

While this section has discussed markers of marginalisation with different identity groups, these identities will intersect with one another, creating varying levels of disadvantage. Intersectionality explores how our identities are nuanced and intersect with one another to shape who we are and what challenges we face throughout our lives and in different spaces. Appiah et al. (2020) has found that climate change and environmental degradation has an unequal impact across different social groups in Ghana, placing certain populations (particularly those with fragile health or limited financial means) at more risk of marginalisation, poverty, or disadvantage. According to Appiah et al. (2020), factors that contribute to marginalisation include:

- **Dependence on marine resources:** Communities heavily reliant on fishing and tourism related to marine resources are inherently vulnerable to environmental degradation.
- **Small-scale fishers:** These individuals often lack access to resources, technology, and alternative livelihood options, making them particularly susceptible to changes in fish stocks and regulations.
- **Low education levels:** Limited education can restrict access to diverse employment opportunities, increasing dependence on traditional, resource-based livelihoods.
- **Limited access to capital:** Lack of financial resources hinders the ability to invest in sustainable practices or alternative income-generating activities.
- **Geographic isolation:** Remote coastal communities may face challenges related to infrastructure, access to services, and market opportunities.
- **Gender:** Due to longstanding beliefs on gender roles, women often face challenges in participating in fishing activities and the capacity they do hold often is paid very little.
- **Having a disability:** Due to the physical nature of fishing and related activities, people with physical disabilities or difficulties are often marginalised from participating, due to inaccessibility.

### 3.2.1. Marine Pollution, Sustainable Seafood and Marine Biodiversity

Industrial vessels and fishing trollies, dwindling fish populations and high competition between fishers, some local fishers use illegal fishing methods to chase remaining fish stocks. This includes the use of light, dynamite and toxic chemicals, which have now become quite prevalent and cause irreparable damage to the marine population and the consumers (EJF, 2025). Fishers have resorted to illegal methods due to the heightened risk of falling into or further into poverty and being unable to meet the needs of their families. Illegal fishing methods and depleting fish stocks affect women's ability to earn money and can have drastic effects on their businesses, however they often do not have a say in the way this is being tackled and are left out of key decision making due to limited availability of time, gender norms about leadership and public participation (FAO, 2023).

Key Informants suggest that these conflicting and competing interests often result in tensions and conflicts amongst stakeholders. For example, oyster and clam harvesting is a "*major livelihood source for women. However, the fishermen also believe the presence of those creatures cause damage to their fishing nets near the lagoons, so they have adopted various measures to deplete their populations without regards to the impact on the livelihoods of the women on depend on them."* Key Informants also reported tensions and resistance they face from fishing communities especially on issues regarding sustainable seafood. The fishers perceive this to be attempts to take over or restrict their access to marine resources. Private developers of restaurants, hotels and related social facilities along the beaches have also come into conflict with fishers who believe their livelihood sources are being encroached upon. Unfortunately, marine land use planning is overlooked and there are no plans to guide the development and management on sustainable marine land use.

Key informants noted that some canoe fishermen throw waste including plastic sachets into the sea albeit on a very limited scale. This happens because there is poor management of plastic waste in the country, resulting in plastics being discarded haphazardly and ending up in drains or getting washed into the ocean when it rains. Key Informants noted that some communities misuse the ocean and beaches as rubbish dumping grounds and attempts to discourage communities to stop this practice has been met with some resistance.

It is well documented that plastic pollution and the accumulation of plastic waste on land and in waterways and oceans creates serious consequences on marine life and human health (Galloway et al, 2017; Neilson, 2018). In Ghana, the presence of microplastics and nanoplastics in the waters pose significant risks to aquatic life and ecosystems, subsequently affecting human health through the food chain. Research carried out at four beaches along Ghana's Accra-Tema coastline found plastics accounted for 63.72% of all debris collected (Van Dyck et al., 2016), exemplifying the extent of marine pollution from plastics. Hosseinian-Far et al., (2024) have examined the macro impacts of plastic pollution in Ghana across the ecological, social, and

economic pillars. The authors developed a Causes Tree, shown in Diagram 2 below, to illustrate the cascading impacts stemming from plastic pollution in Ghana. While the figure does not fully represent all the indirect impacts of plastic pollution, the study highlighted that water contamination influences the income of the fishing industry and extends beyond the economic effects by impacting broader ecological and social dimensions of life on land, such as people's livelihoods, health and socio-economic stability.

Coastal cities like Accra and Cape Coast face flooding as a result of clogged waterways and stormwater drains, primarily caused by plastic waste accumulation (Adam et al., 2020). The increased frequency of flooding leads to a loss of homes, agricultural yields and fishing infrastructure, which drives many families into poverty. Consequently, coastal communities are frequently forced to relocate to areas with limited resources and opportunities, leading to the disruption of social networks, loss of cultural heritage, and negative impacts on their livelihoods and security (Degue, 2024).

The loss of livelihood directly affects household incomes, placing women and children and men in positions of economic vulnerability and poverty, acting as a major driver for GBV (Feed the Future Ghana Fisheries, 2022). While GBV rates in Ghana are some of the lowest in the region, coastal fishing communities indicate that GBV is pervasive and driven by socio-economic drivers, such as a decline in fishery production (ibid). This shows that the increase of flooding and contaminated aquatic life from plastic pollution can indirectly and disproportionality affect women's livelihoods by exposing them to higher risks of experiencing GBV (Kulow, n.d.).

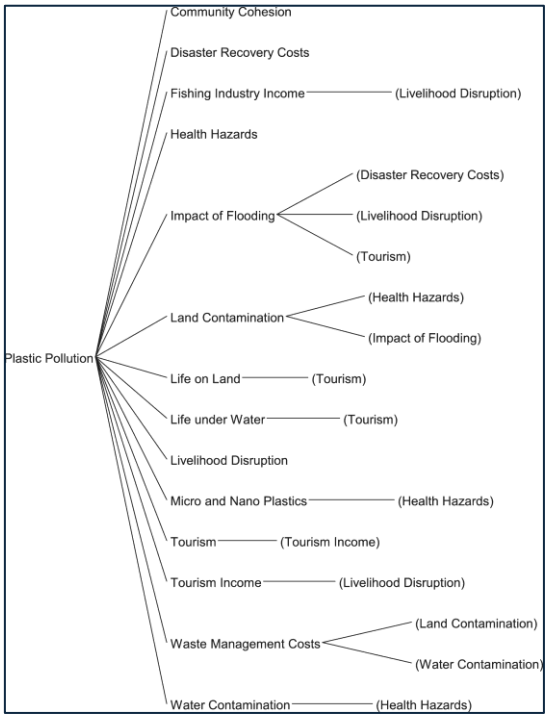


*Diagram 2 – Causes Tree (Hosseinian-Far et al.,2024)*

In Ghana's coastal zone, the poverty level is closely related to the nature of the coastal ecosystem, with people living in these regions often being subject to poverty due to the vulnerability to shocks from climatic and non-climatic sources. There has been a distinct decline in the key resources that they depend on for employment and livelihoods, for example fish, which further increases the incidence of poverty and their vulnerability. It has also led to food insecurity, poor access to basic infrastructure and have low access to capital assets to reduce their risks to shocks. The characteristics of such people living in poverty rely heavily on fish and other natural resources, meaning their living conditions and sanitation is very poor and they are often unemployed most of the year. These individuals are heads of households are often women, widows, divorced or husbands have migrated to fish in foreign waters, showing that poverty and gender is inherently linked in these areas (Lawson, Gordan and Schulchter, 2012).

### 3.2.2. The role of women in the fisheries value chain

Women play a key role in the fish value chain in the communities. Apart from involvement in actual fishing activities in the sea, they handle most of the other activities in the value chain and are even directly involved in clams or oyster harvesting in the lagoons. However, their participation and voice in decision-making is limited (FAO,2024). This marginalisation prevails in terms of leadership. A policy like the *Co-Management Policy for the Fisheries Sector (2020)* emphasises stakeholder collaboration, however, it lacks explicit mechanisms to ensure equitable representation of women, People with disabilities, and other marginalised groups in decision-making bodies (MoFAD, 2020). For instance, the policy's focus on "fisherfolk associations" often defaults to male-dominated groups such as the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC), sidelining women-led organisations such as the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA).

A USAID-funded project produced a Training Report on Women in Fisheries Decision-Making and revealed that women occupy fewer than 15% of leadership roles in co-management committees, citing socio-cultural barriers and limited access to formal education (USAID,2017) . One key informant confirmed that*: ''some women have accepted their fate this way and believe decisions about fishing is a man's thing and once their husbands are at the meeting there is no need for them to attend''.* Advocacy and women's empowerment training by CSOs is also met with resistance by some men in the fishing communities. A Key Informant noted "*we went to one community to train the women and a group of men stopped us. They claim we are going to make them lose control over their women".* These remarks emphasise the necessity of involving men when addressing the barriers to women's engagement in the marine management process. This will enable them to recognise the community-wide benefits of women's participation, which enhances household resilience and supports the development of a healthy and sustainable fisheries value chain.

A study found that women in a local fishing community in the Shama District in the Western Region were excluded from decision-making, exposing them to various challenges along the value chain and leaving them unable to influence decisions (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika et al., 2017). A USAID sustainable fisheries management project in Ghana (USAID, 2017) found that women who received training and participated in fisheries co-management gained confidence and engaged in advocacy against illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (Torell et al., 2019). They also supported a closed fishing season even before many fishermen accepted the idea. Including women in decision-making and providing capacity-building opportunities for all stakeholders helped strengthen community support and ensure enforcement measures does not threaten livelihoods or food security (ibid).

## 3.3. How are those most dependent on Ghana's marine and coastal resources at risk from future environmental degradation?

Environmental degradation is likely to have a significant impact on both people and marine and coastal resources, affecting livelihoods and increasing exposure to natural disasters and coastal erosion. This is discussed in section 3.3.2.

**Who is most dependent on marine and coastal resources in Ghana?**

This section overlaps with Section 3.2, as the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Ghana's coastal communities are also those most reliant on marine and coastal resources, which are increasingly at risk from environmental degradation. As previously outlined, environmental degradation, climate change, and resource scarcity pose significant threats to the livelihoods of these vulnerable groups.

**In what ways are these communities/ populations at risk from future environmental degradation?**

Along Ghana's coastline, climate change and coastal erosion have led to frequent flooding of homes and farmlands, resulting in lost livelihoods, reduced agricultural yields, and damaged infrastructure. This disruption hinders access to markets, healthcare, and education. A Key Informant confirmed that coastal erosion and tidal waves have also destroyed fishing equipment, including boats, nets, and outboard motors (Key Informant, 2025).

Additionally, increased flooding and heavy rainfall damage crops and farmland, further threatening food security and deepening poverty. As a result, many coastal communities are forced to relocate to areas with fewer resources and opportunities, disrupting social networks, eroding cultural heritage, and impacting both livelihoods and security (Degue, 2024).

Climate change is significantly impacting Ghana's fishing industry, a vital sector for the economy and food security. Rising ocean temperatures are driving smaller fish species further offshore in search of cooler waters, making it difficult for small-scale

fishers—who often lack the resources to travel long distances—to maintain their catch (Arizi et al., 2021).

Erratic rainfall patterns are also disrupting freshwater ecosystems, such as those in the Volta Basin, affecting fish breeding cycles and reducing availability. These challenges have severe economic consequences for fishing communities, as declining fish stocks increase operational costs, forcing fishers to spend more time and money at sea, reducing their earnings. This, in turn, raises fish prices, exacerbating food security concerns (Standen, 2025).

Fish is a key source of protein in Ghana, and declining stocks risk worsening malnutrition, especially in vulnerable communities that depend on it as a staple food. These challenges make sustainable fisheries management increasingly difficult, further straining an industry already burdened by overfishing and environmental degradation (Lawson, Gordan and Schulchter, 2012). Potential solutions include improved resource management, investment in sustainable fishing practices, and support for fishing communities to strengthen their resilience against the ongoing impacts of climate change (Lawson, Gordan and Schulchter, 2012)

## 3.4. What are the key issues in terms of SEAH for OCPP to be aware of in Ghana that are flagged through GEDSI analysis? (RQ3)

### Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)

Country specific literature on SEAH within Ghana has proven challenging to find. To date there has been limited research conducted specifically on SEAH, but despite this there is a wide acknowledgment in the sector that SEAH in Ghana is likely very common yet goes underreported. It is important to note that just because there is little prevalence data available, it does not mean this form of harm does not exist. Because of this, this GEDSI analysis will examine prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Children (VAC) as an indicator of where SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is likely to happen within OCCP in Ghana.

### GBV and SEAH Legislation

Gender-based violence legislation, including the **Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732)** and the **Human Trafficking Act 2005 (Act 694),** provides a legal framework for addressing GBV and exploitation. However, enforcement remains weak due to deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and a reliance on traditional dispute resolution. In the Western and Central regions, 85% of GBV cases are settled internally by chiefs or religious leaders, as victims often fear stigma or divorce if they report to the police. A key informant noted, *“Even women who are victims are unwilling to speak out for fear of losing their marriages. Sometimes, we hear of young girls being raped, but families do not report it due to stigma and concerns over the girl’s future marriage prospects.”*

### GBV-Country Context

Gender based violence remains pervasive across Ghana, primarily through intimate partner violence, harmful traditional practices, economic, abuse, and sexual assault (Alangea et al, 2018). According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), estimates indicate that approximately 30% of Ghanaian women encounter sexual violence at least once in their lives (GSS, 2015). This violence is normalised through engrained gender norms that position women as subordinate to men This creates barriers to reporting and intervention. Lack of economic independence exacerbates women's vulnerability with many enduring abuse due to lack of financial resources and limited housing alternatives (Alangea et al, 2018). Despite legislation and gender equality protections (outlined earlier in the report) implementation gaps, resource constraints, and deep- seated patriarchal attitudes impede meaningful process in addressing GBV throughout the country (Alangea et al, 2018).

### Underreporting

GBV related abuses and violations often go unpunished, so perpetrators are seldom deterred. Issues are often reported to traditional authorities and settled amicably (Hen Puano, 2022). A Key Informant confirmed that in a few instances where reports are made to the formal law enforcement agencies such as the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU), however those cases rarely proceed to prosecution (Hen Puano, 2022).The capacity of state institutions to enforce the laws for the protection of women and children including DOVVSU and the Department of Social Welfare is weak. Nevertheless, there are entry to points for OCPP to engage with other stakeholders to bring greater attention to these issues and encourage government to make enact provisions (or enforce existing processes) to make reporting safer.

### Transactional Sex within fisheries communities

The “sex-for-fish” phenomenon, where female traders engage in transactional sex with male fishermen to secure fish, is a stark example of gendered power imbalances exacerbated by poverty and cultural norms (Amponsah,2025). In one study, in selected fishing communities in Ghana (Tema, Apam, Axim and Dixcove) in the Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions of Ghana, 95% of respondents confirmed knowledge about the existence of transactional sex in fishing communities (Amponsah,2025).

Female fish processors, or “fish mammies,” frequently report sexual harassment by boat owners and middlemen in exchange for access to fish, credit or market opportunities. (Amponsah, 2025) Often times women are working in precarious conditions with limiting bargaining power, making them highly vulnerable to this practice (Hen Puano, 2022). A key informant also noted that this practice not only perpetuates women’s economic vulnerability but also heightens their exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections due to low condom use and misinformation

about sexual health. This also has a detrimental impact on women and girls especially young girls who go for fish at the landing beaches.

### Impact of Closed Season on GBV

Additionally, national policies such as the closed-season initiative, intended to replenish fish stocks, have unintended consequences that disproportionately affect women and children. During the one or two months of closed season, no fisherman goes to the sea and since this is their main source of livelihood, they are unable to earn any income or provide for their families (Ansah et al., 2024). Key informants noted that the resulting income loss during these periods has been linked to spikes in domestic violence, transactional sex, and exploitative labour practices involving children. Another informant shared that some fishermen even migrate to neighbouring countries such as Cote d'Ivoire for fishing activities leaving their wives and children behind. Another informant noted that parental neglect and economic hardship, especially during the 'close season' also push young women and girls out into the community in search of a living which increases their vulnerability and exposure to exploitation. In both cases there is increased risk of STDs, teenage pregnancy and a truncation of their education (Ansah et al.,2024).

### Child Labour

Child labour, exploitation and trafficking are also prevalent in the communities. The International Labour Organisation (ILO,2013) has documented how children in fishing communities are engaged in hazardous work, including deep-sea fishing, fish smoking, and processing activities and this has been confirmed in the Key informant interviews. Boys are also vulnerable to dangerous fishing practices, while girls face sexual exploitation, early marriage, sexual exploitation and transactional sex as noted above. Children in coastal regions are risk of being trafficked from inland areas or neighbouring countries to work in the fishing sector, where they may experience physical abuse, neglect, and denial of educational opportunities. In Ghana, child traffickers often target poor and vulnerable households and make financial offers in exchange for children's labour. Many times the families will negotiate an amount they will be paid and is considered agreed in advance since the transaction includes an agreed payment for their child's labour (USAID, 2022).

### Violence against Children (VAC)

VAC in Ghana manifests in various ways that significantly undermine the wellbeing and developmental prospects of the children affected. The Ghana Education Service (GES) has taken a number of actions towards abolishing corporal punishment in schools, including introducing Child Friendly Safe-School programming (United Nations, 2021). However, physical punishment remains culturally acceptable in many households. Ghana ranks second to Yemen in the world and ranks first in sub-Saharan Africa in the use of corporal punishment. Studies clearly indicate that corporal punishment is detrimental to children's development, causing negative outcomes that vary depending on the nature, extent and severity of exposure

(MoGCSP, 2018). A baseline research report produced by UNICEF Ghana 2013 found that 57% of a sample of children (age14-17 years) said they were beaten at home 'all of the time' or 'sometimes', while 34% said they were beaten at school within the last month. Economic hardship experienced in coastal regions further exacerbates the situation, as children may be subjected to hazardous labour conditions or trafficking (ILO,2013). Despite Ghana's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there are limited resources for child protection services and entrenched social norms that normalise physical chastisement of children (UNICEF, 2013).

The intersection of poverty, environmental degradation, and traditional gender norms creates specific challenges for addressing GBV as well as VAC and child labour in these communities. This economic strain can result in negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and sexual exploitation of women and girls, including boys (Tontoh, 2024). Studies have found that community-based protection mechanisms are often undermined by traditional power structures that prioritise family reputation over individual safety. It also emphasised that survivors in isolated fishing villages face significant barriers to accessing justice and support services, with limited availability of shelters, legal aid, and healthcare facilities equipped to handle cases of gender-based violence (HenPuano, 2022).

### 3.4.1. Safeguarding implications for OCPP Ghana

This GEDSI review has identified the following safeguarding considerations for OCPP:

**Unclear safeguarding arrangements across partner organisations**

The programme works with a range of diverse partners including Government agencies, consultancy companies, CSOs, academia and NGOs. The OCPP documentation for Ghana notes that some of the partners are developing safeguarding policies and an initial round of training is planned or has already been provided to partners. This is a positive first step. It will be useful for the OCPP partnership to agree a safeguarding framework across its partnership, so all partner policies can be benchmarked with the OCPP standards contained within the framework to ensure they are robust and meet the needs of the programme. At present, is unclear what safeguarding procedures these organisations have in place and what timescales each partner has committed to ensure a policy is developed. Unless there are clear arrangements in place it is unlikely that OCPP will become aware of any safeguarding related misconduct reported within partners organisations and have an agreed process of response.

It will be important for OCPP to take a different approach to safeguarding for the different partners and work with them to understand what arrangements they should have in place. For CSOs and small private sector initiatives, often due diligence can be used as an entry point to offer technical assistance on safeguarding as needed.

For universities and Government institutions, OCPP will need to use a different approach. This may include understanding the existing safeguarding procedures within Universities and Government departments, and taking a collaborative and 'positive influencing' approach to mitigate risk.

### 3.4.2. Safeguarding risks within the programme

**There is a risk that other forms of SEAH and safeguarding related misconduct may occur within OCPP funded activities.**

It is important for OCPP to understand that OCPP-funded personnel (including delivery partners) may regularly come into contact with marginalised individuals due to their work in communities, for example, through data collection and site visits. This increases the risk of safeguarding-related misconduct including SEAH targeted at the most marginalised community members. It is thus important that safeguarding procedures (including mechanisms for community members to raise concerns) are in place to mitigate the risk of SEAH and other forms of harm).

OCPP should work with partners to build understanding of sexual harassment as in many organisations this often goes unreported. Efforts should be made to ensure OCPP-funded staff are provided appropriate support if they have experienced sexual harassment and staff are trained to understand what constitutes sexual harassment and how to report any concerns.

**There are a small number of OCPP-funded activities where there is a higher risk of SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct.**

Scholarship / 'studentship' /mentoring programmes: The selection of students for scholarships, studentships, and mentoring programmes poses risks of SEAH and other forms of harm due to inherent power dynamics between professors, students, and supervisors, especially for female students. When selecting applicants for these initiatives, it is crucial that clear procedures are in place including transparency in the application process and there are accessible reporting pathways to raise concerns. There should be training for all staff who will come into contact with the students and a code of conduct should be signed by all staff.

Ghana/Senegal student platform. Efforts should be made to ensure this programme is safely managed, with participating staff and students agreeing on secure methods of interaction, particularly if the platform is online. There should be effective coordination between OCPP Ghana and Senegal Teams in the management and administration of the student platform to ensure all risks are fully managed.

**OCPP is working in sectors where there is evidence of high levels of GBV and child labour.** This is most notable in the fishing sector and higher education.

**Fishing sector**: There is evidence of both high levels of GBV and to a limited extent child labour within the fishing sector that OCPP should be aware of. This increases

the risk of safeguarding related misconduct amongst partners that the OCPP is working with including both in relation to women and children.

## 3.5. Who are the key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI and why? What work is already going on to address poverty and vulnerability and empower groups across OCPP areas (those interacting or dealing with pollution, seafood and biodiversity loss)? What lessons can be learned from this? (RQ5)

**OCPP stakeholder actions to address SEAH/ GBV/VAC**

Table 1 below includes stakeholders in the area of marine biodiversity, sustainable seafood and marine pollution as identified during the literature review and KIIs. The table provides further details on rationale for engagement and work on GEDSI that is currently undertaken by each of the organisations. There is likely considerable scope to engage and advocate for greater representation of more community-based organisations in these initiatives. Please note, this list is not exhaustive.

OCPP is working with academic institutions and development partners, so it is important to raise awareness of the improvements needed on GEDSI and develop strong multistakeholder partnerships to advocate for GEDSI transformative approaches.

## 3.6. Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholders in the context of marine biodiversity, sustainable seafood and marine pollution are diverse with complementary roles but sometimes fraught with competing or conflicting interests. Key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI and why were identified during KIIs (See table below). Multistakeholder dialogue and continuous training or sensitisation can improve knowledge and help to embed the attitudinal changes required to minimise conflicts and promote collaborative actions in addressing GEDSI issues in the marine environment.

| Stakeholder | On-going work on GEDSI related issues in pollution, seafood and biodiversity loss | Reason for engagement |
|---|---|---|
| Fisheries Commission | ▪ Landing Beach Enforcement Committee<br>▪ Overall implementation of the MoFAD's Gender mainstreaming strategy | ▪ Explore possibility of collaboration to curb child labour/trafficking, pollution, GBV, illegal fishing |
| DOVVSU | ▪ Support for GBV survivors<br>▪ Enforcement of punitive measures against perpetrators | ▪ Collaboration on DOVVSU capacity building and measures to encourage reporting by GBV/DV survivors |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Land use Planning Authority | ▪ Preparation of marine spatial plans and training of Metropolitan/Municipal and District (MMDAs) Planners on marine spatial planning | ▪ Land use planning for marine ecosystem restoration |
| MMDAs | ▪ Formulation and implementation of plans to promote GEDSI | ▪ Capacity building for mainstreaming of GEDSI and fisheries issues in district medium term plans |
| CSOs: Hen Mpoano, CEWEFIA, DAA and SICRIFISE | ▪ Work with fishing communities on a wide range of GEDSI issues | ▪ Possible implementation partners at the community level including training on alternative livelihoods and community level advocacy of GEDSI issues |
| CSO: Ghana Federation of the Disabled | ▪ Advocacy on the rights of people with disability | ▪ Possible collaboration to promote participation of people with disability in the fisheries value chain |
| CSO: Ghana National Plastic Action Partnership | ▪ Advocacy and community engagement on plastic waste | ▪ Collaboration to educate communities/fishers on plastic waste management |
| Universities with GEDSI/Marine ecosystem expertise | ▪ Research on marine ecosystems | ▪ Research on GEDSI and coastal pollution related issues |
| Traditional leaders | ▪ Application of traditional or customary procedures to cases of abuse | ▪ Campaigns for the elimination of cultural practices or norms harmful to GEDSI |

## 3.7. Lessons

**There is a need for a common understanding and vision for the sustainable seafood agenda amongst stakeholders**. Evidence from the KIIs reveal tensions between some stakeholder groups in the pursuit of sustainability. For example, mangrove restoration efforts are being thwarted by women fish smokers who cut and use the mangroves as firewood, an act fuelled by the perception that fish smoked with mangrove smell and taste better. Similarly, fishermen have resisted some marine restoration and management efforts claiming they are all attempts to curtail their livelihoods. There must be a sustained effort to ensure fisheries communities with varied interest and perspectives understand the value of healthy marine

ecosystem and the beneficial nature of a sustainable and equitable marine management process.

**It is important to consider working with men in the fishing communities to transform the harmful socio-cultural values and practices that perpetuate injustice to women.** Evidence from KIIs confirm a widely held view amongst men that they own the women including their bodies, a view that fuels GBV and continued exclusion of women in decision-making amongst others.

**Certain GEDSI issues such as disability inclusion are still peripheral to the mainstream discourse in fishing communities and requires external parties such as OCPP to raise the visibility of the issues.** Throughout the literature and discussions with Key Informants, issues and involvement of people with disabilities in the fishery sector is underplayed with some completely excluding them from high-risk nature of fishing activities. Little is known about the extent to which people with disabilities rely on capture fisheries for livelihood support (GSS,2023) and this is OCPP should consider undertaking more research with local community-based organisations

**Working with local institutions could be impactful in any attempt to promote sustainable seafood or address marine pollution issues in the coastal communities.** Interactions with Key Informants during the study points to their deeper knowledge of the issues, long experience working in the communities and the relationships they have developed with local communities over the years. These have enhanced trust and their ability to engage with local fisherfolk even on matters considered sensitive.

## 3.8. What data is available in-country that can be used for GEDSI analysis and what are the data gaps? (RQ6)

| Data source (including hyperlink where possible) | Institutional affiliation/ responsibility | What does it comprise/ why is it useful | Focus on any population or community? | Limitations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ghana Demographic and Health Survey https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR149/PR149.pdf | Ghana Statistical Service | Contains national level data on issues around teenage pregnancy, health seeking behaviours and STDs | Nationwide with a focus on the general population | Done once every 5 years Limited data on disability |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population Census Report | Ghana Statistical Service | Contains data on people with disabilities. | Nationwide with a focus on the general population | Does not include detailed data at community level and on disability |
| National GBV Statistics https://www.visualsforgender.org/national-gbv-statistics-dovvsu/ (May not have more recent national level data) | DOVVSU | Contains data on GBV cases | Nationwide but can also produce district level data with a focus on Women, children, Men | Does not often include recent national level data sets. Also, local level data do not reflect disability |
| Ghana Living Standards Survey | Ghana Statistical Service | Contains data on Child Labour. | General population but includes a dedicated Child Labour Report | Does not include community level data |

# 4. Conclusions

**The fishing value chain is characterised by GEDSI related violations and abuses often driven by culture and patriarchal relations, poverty and unemployment**. These issues further exacerbate conditions in the communities especially for women and children who are subjected to GBV/SEAH as well denial of socio-economic opportunities. **The prevalence is difficult to quantify due to lack of reporting mechanisms.**

The communities depend heavily or wholly on fishing but the depleting fish stock calls for a mind shift. Some key informants noted that some community members are currently not open to alternative livelihoods to fishing.

**Ensuring sustainable seafood, curbing marine pollution and enabling a healthy marine biodiversity whilst addressing systemic GEDSI issues will require a multi-stakeholder effort involving sensitisations and dialogue amongst stakeholder**s. Currently, primary stakeholders such as fishermen appear resistant to interventions that marine ecosystem protection and the empowerment of women. Socio-cultural beliefs have conditioned men in fishing communities to believe they own their women and have full control over their bodies, a belief system that makes women and children susceptible to GBV and sexual harassment and abuse.

GBV related abuses and violations often go unpunished, so perpetrators are seldom deterred. Issues are often reported to traditional authorities and settled amicably (Hen Puano, 2022). A Key Informant confirmed that in a few instances where reports

are made to the formal law enforcement agencies such as the DOVVSU, those cases rarely proceed to prosecution. The capacity of state institutions enforcing the laws for the protection of women and children including DOVVSU and the Department of Social Welfare is weak. Nevertheless, there are entry to points for OCPP to engage with other stakeholders to engage in collaborative work with community- based stakeholders to restore equity for marginalised groups within the blue economy.

# 5. Recommendations

This section sets out draft recommendations for OCPP, the CEFAS team and ALB delivery partners to consider within its current and future programming to ensure a robust and embedded approach to GEDSI. The recommendations will be amended and finalised following a workshop with the CEFAS team in April.

**Recommendation 1: Demonstrate a strong commitment to GEDSI within the OCPP**

- **Promote inclusive dialogue**. Consider steering committees and reference groups for ongoing dialogue and consultation that consists of a cross- section of stakeholders from the small-scale fisheries communities, with a sufficient representation of CSOs including WROs, OPDs and GBV providers. Organisations such as NAFTA, SICRIFISE amongst others could be engaged to help protect the rights of these groups through advocacy to address entrenched social norms and other factors that drive exclusion, marginalisation of women, children and other vulnerable groups.
- **The analysis has shown that there must be a concerted effort to ensure strong representation of women in these groups.** Simply engaging small fishing associations alone does not assure adequate representation of women, this must be a dynamic process where systemic barriers are removed to support meaningful participation of women. Do not underestimate the importance of engaging men in GESDI discussions as they must be sensitised to understand the value of women in the fisheries value chain.
- **Work with local authorities**. Engage local authorities to explore ways of enabling women's access to the administrative processes for activities such as obtaining fishing permits. Promote women’s involvement in the co-management Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and landing beach committees and ensure this engagement is sustained over time.
- **Build GEDSI into programming from the start**. For new programmes, ensure gender mainstreaming is embedded at project design stage and ensure there is sufficient budget to resource GEDSI activities across the programme life cycle (including reasonable accommodation budgets for People with disabilities). Identify key GEDSI objectives and integrate this into the Theory of Change. Agree gender disaggregated data to be collected, monitored, and embedded in the evaluation framework.

- **Consider undertaking further research on persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups within coastal communities,** as this is needed to address critical knowledge gaps that prevent effective policy interventions. This would help to ensure marine management planning process would be move inclusive of the needs of this underserved populations.

**Recommendation 2: Address safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme**

OCPP is currently working with a diverse range partners in a highly complex delivery environment. It is imperative that all partners have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures to prevent and respond to SEAH and other safeguarding related misconduct. It is vital to ensure that programme activities have been suitably risk assessed. To do this OCPP should:

- **Review what safeguarding procedures are in place for all partners** to safeguard both OCPP funded staff and partners, recognising that the approach will need to be different depending on the type of partner that is assessed and the frequency and level of exposure to vulnerable groups.
- **Review or conduct risk assessments of activities for the programme**. OCPP should identify and conduct a full risk assessment for all activities and prioritise areas of delivery that may be more high risk that could lead to SEAH or other forms of safeguarding related misconduct. These should include all activities that involve children and young adults, women and other vulnerable community members. The risk assessment process will ensure that OCPP is aware of activities where SEAH could occur to ensure risks are mitigated. There should also be a clear plan for ongoing regular monitoring and oversight. This is in addition to ensuring these risks are added to the programme risk register as appropriate.
- **Undertake further training and awareness raising of sexual harassment across all programme activities**. OCPP should consider working with a safeguarding specialist to consult with women staff at all levels about their experiences of sexual harassment related to the programme and identify strategies to mitigate and address these. This should also include volunteers, contractors, paid or unpaid. Targeted training should be included to so the nature of sexual harassment is better understood and there is clarity of how to report incidents of concern.
- **Endorse the CAPSEAH commitment and work towards compliance**. In 2024, The UK Government launched the Common Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (CAPSEAH, 2024) which aims to bring consistency of approach and promote shared values across the international aid sector to end SEAH. Other sectors are highly encouraged to adopt the principles this document endorses. CAPSEAH stresses the importance of zero tolerance to inaction toward SEAH, survivor support and strong preventative efforts reduce the

prevalence of SEAH. OCPP should consider the principles contained within CAPSEAH and consider beginning build small steps toward compliance over the duration of the programme. This document is a useful reference point to consider best practice standards toward SEAH that should inform and future programming and project activities.

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*The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).*

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