



West Africa Coastal Areas  
Management Program

# Building Social Resilience

IMPACT STORIES



WORLD BANK GROUP

The West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) recognizes that environmental and social systems are interconnected, and that the work it supports to restore and protect the rapidly eroding and flood-prone coastline also needs to be accompanied by an effort to support communities to better adapt to their changing environments.

Coastal communities in Africa depend on healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems for their lives and livelihoods. This is especially true for women. Globally, women comprise most of the workforce in the blue economy and therefore play a key role in ensuring a reliable supply of food from the ocean. However, women also hold the lowest-paid, lowest-status, and least-protected jobs, and lack access to markets, credit, training, professional bodies, and information on innovative climate adaptation practices. Adding to this inequality is the reality that women suffer disproportionately from climate impacts relative to men. This is because their livelihoods are dependent on fisheries, mangroves, and agriculture; because of social norms that lead to an inequitable distribution of power, resources, and roles such as childcare; and because climate stressors often lead to an increase in gender-based violence.



## About the West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program

The World Bank's West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) was launched in 2018 to enhance coastal resilience. It works with countries to better manage shared resources by fighting erosion, flooding, and pollution. The \$630 million program is currently in nine countries—Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Togo—although its regional engagements extend to all 17 countries in the region.

WACA is a collaborative effort that would not have been possible without the support of its financial, implementation, and programmatic partners. Its 11 regional institution partners are coordinated by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) to ensure that the work is harmonized and owned by the beneficiary countries. The World Bank and its partners are now exploring ways to scale WACA's results by boosting Africa's Blue Economy to generate blue foods and blue jobs, and to protect ecosystems for resilience.

### About this Series

This series of stories, which was funded by the Nordic Development Fund, PROBLUE, and the World Bank, showcases WACA's most impactful flagship projects in the

region to date from various perspectives. This publication focuses on examples of where WACA is working across borders to improve coastal protection.

### Publications in the Series

[1. Regional Integration](#)

[2. Coastal Protection](#)

[3. Cross-Border Investments](#)

[4. Social Resilience](#)

[5. Financial Scaling](#)

[6. Partnering with the Private Sector](#)

[7. Marine and Coastal Plastics Pollution](#)

[8. Growing the Knowledge Base](#)

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## Why WACA Focuses on Social Resilience

Being on the frontlines of climate change impacts means that communities are forced to play a role in local adaptation measures. Experience from across the World Bank portfolio shows that empowering communities by providing access to green jobs; implementing tailored measures to address the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly women; and giving these communities a role in designing and implementing such measures is an effective method for strengthening their resilience and making interventions more sustainable. When climate adaptation is led locally, it means that decisions are made by local people and institutions, and local knowledge is taken into account. However, only [10 percent of committed climate funding globally reaches the local level](#).

To address the challenge of local reach, WACA focuses on livelihoods and women's economic empowerment. Coastal women make up 60 percent of the beneficiaries of more than 1,000 WACA livelihood-focused microprojects across Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Togo. WACA also works to systematically engage coastal communities and civil society organizations to take an active role in making decisions on coastal resilience measures.



“ The ocean—which was our friend, the salt of our life—has become our enemy, eating away in its wake our houses, our lands, and our wealth. WACA has reconciled us with the sea.

— Alexis Aquereburu,  
Mayor of Aného, Togo.

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## Flagship Activity

### Improving Resilience by Focusing on Livelihoods

Supporting women's economic participation while building ecological resilience

West African economies have seen hard-won gains in gender equality over the years. However, such progress has not been matched with improvements in women's labor market outcomes; women's access to—and use of—productive assets and resources such as credit and land; and women's voice and agency. As an example, Ghana has improved gender outcomes in key sectors such as education and health, surpassing its peers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Women in Ghana also participate in the labor force at a higher rate. Despite these gains, women in Ghana—especially younger women—are more vulnerable than men in the labor market, in as much as [77 percent of women have vulnerable jobs, compared to 58 percent of men](#).

Across West Africa, women and girls are highly vulnerable to climate change, facing challenges in both climate adaptation and coping mechanisms. Their socially ascribed domestic roles and responsibilities, coupled with their concentration in agriculture, makes women disproportionate users of natural resources. This is also true in coastal areas, where women often depend on fish processing, mangrove use, agriculture, and plastics and solid waste management for their livelihoods. The WACA program offers the opportunity to transform the lives of coastal communities, with a focus on women.

## How the WACA Program contributes to solutions

WACA supported more than 1,000 alternative local livelihood initiatives in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Togo under the first WACA project (Table 1). For example, in Togo, 80 local women from the Gbaga Channel and Lake Zowla area benefited from training and equipment for the production and marketing of improved coconut oil, while 120 women market gardeners were trained and equipped in the village of Firkpui. Across the region, 60 percent of beneficiaries of livelihood initiatives were women, providing them with an economic safety net so that they are in a better position against climate shocks.

Table 1: Examples of WACA-supported livelihood activities

| COUNTRY               | LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Benin                 | Gardening; processing peanuts or palm nuts; growing rice; small-scale farming of fish and poultry; and breeding small ruminants |
| Mauritania            | Fish processing; growing fruit trees and vegetables; meat processing; sewing; and selling fish and meat                         |
| Senegal               | Fish processing; micro-gardening; and construction  |
| São Tomé and Príncipe | Construction of housing   |
| Togo                  | Producing and marketing improved coconut oil; and growing palm nuts, cassava, tomatoes, moringa, and peanuts                    |
| Côte d'Ivoire         | Breeding; agriculture; aquaculture; food processing; fish processing; food service; and soap production                         |

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**I will forever be thankful to the WACA project for changing not only my life but also the lives of my fellow villagers. I hope more women in the community can benefit from the project's invaluable support.**”

– *Yaye Alimatou Guèye, a former fish seller who started a small-scale farming business of vegetable crops with the support of WACA and the Government of Mauritania.*

Community participation is a key element of livelihood microprojects in WACA. For example, in Ghana, [an intensive community participation process](#) is identifying livelihood initiatives. Communities are involved from microproject identification, planning, and implementation to operations, maintenance, and monitoring (Figure 1 on page 5). Attention is paid to integrating women and other vulnerable groups in these processes.

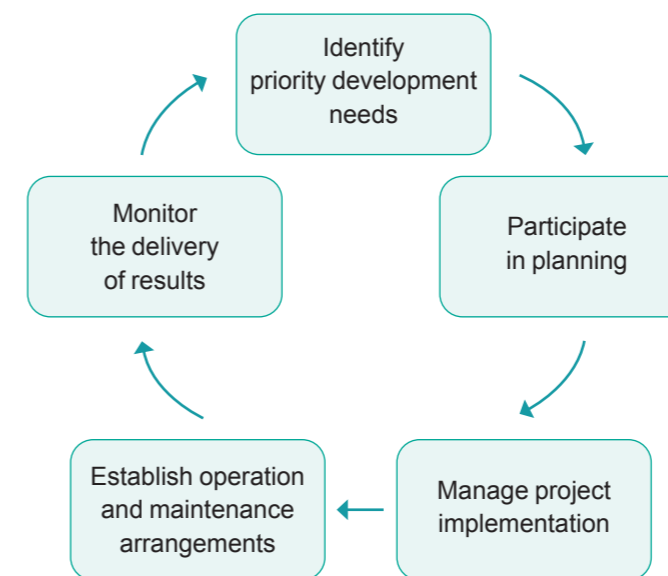


Figure 1: WACA's participatory approach to livelihood microprojects in Ghana

WACA has also partnered with the Africa Centre of Excellence in Coastal Resilience (ACECoR) at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. ACECoR, which focuses on the development of technical expertise of young African professionals, has set itself the target of training 120 graduates to postgraduate (Masters and PhDs) levels, in addition to hosting short courses for 260 professionals across Africa in fields relating to various topics of relevance to the region such as disaster risk

management and migration, fisheries science, integrated coastal zone management, and coastal and marine engineering. To date, the center has trained 60 graduates to Masters level and 30 graduates to PhD level. The inclusion of women is part of ACECoR's strategic objective, and the center saw 50 percent female graduates in the past two years (2021 and 2022).



## Next steps

Coastal areas consist of the natural capital on which local livelihoods depend. Green industries can provide opportunities to earn labor income while safeguarding natural resources. A job market assessment currently under way in The Gambia will identify economic opportunities available to the population living in the project area, beyond the life of the project. A selection of green industries (solid waste management; tree nurseries and mangrove restoration; and urban farming, including horticulture production and value chains) that have the potential to provide environmental services while mitigating environmental shocks will be identified.

The job market assessment is also evaluating the earning opportunities provided by local industries that are in demand, but are not necessarily linked to the green economy. Access to such opportunities would strengthen resilience by diversifying the livelihoods of the target population.

Improving women's jobs, skills, and voice can build their resilience and contribute to sustainability of interventions in the blue economy. WACA is developing a more robust approach for empowering women at scale in the blue economy that focuses on the following:



**Improve the gender focus of job market assessments** while using the results to inform community-led livelihood prioritization activities



**Leverage WACA's partnership with ACECoR** and identify and develop other strategic partnerships to address barriers to women's access to jobs



**Identify entry points for women's inclusion in national policy frameworks** for coastal zone management



**Strengthen women's participation and leadership across the board**, including in natural resource management groups, civil society platforms, female producer associations, and regional level committees.

## Flagship Activity

### Radio du littoral Coastal Radio Show

Amplifying the voices of coastal communities through a radio show

Coastal communities in West Africa are often isolated from each other, from local NGOs, and from government entities, making it difficult to share successes and lessons learned in the area of coastal resilience.

#### How the WACA Program contributes to solutions

To enable communities to share these stories while amplifying the voices of those most affected by climatic stressors, WACA supported the launch of *Radio du littoral* (Coastal Radio) in Togo in 2022. *Radio du littoral* broadcasts monthly programs on themes related to coastal degradation, the solutions offered by WACA, and the advantages for the communities, so enhancing the sense that the communities themselves hold the keys to solutions.

*Radio du littoral* serves to amplify stories of innovative frontline solutions that enhance community resilience. The radio program, which has spread to five WACA countries, sees journalists and experts travel to a new coastal location each month to record the shows. The journalists and experts meet with and interview members of coastal communities, as well as local and traditional authorities, to highlight the impacts of coastal degradation, raise public awareness, and discuss plans and share progress of WACA-supported coastal resilience measures. The program gives coastal communities the opportunity to express themselves, ask questions, and share their concerns. This allows for continuous engagement with coastal communities and creates a feedback loop to adjust activities as needed.

The quality of the radio content is made possible through training of African journalists on coastal management issues. As of March 2024, nearly 92 shows have been produced featuring interviews with environmental specialists, community members, and local authorities. These shows covered a variety of themes, including long-term coastal protection work; the sustainable management of community forests; the development of protected areas; marine submersion; pollution control; and gallery forest restoration. Many local radio stations rebroadcast the episodes in local languages, thereby further amplifying the voices of the people and the positive impacts of WACA's investment.

#### Next steps

*Radio du littoral* broadcasts will continue to share stories of resilience, provide a feedback mechanism, and amplify the voices of communities, including those of women. The World Bank is exploring how stories and lessons resulting from radio shows could be further disseminated at the subregional level via the WACA website and social networks, or in partnership with print and online media outlets. To expand its reach, the radio's producers are also creating short videos of beneficiaries, online podcasts, and news stories.



Community members of Aného, Togo, contribute to the radio show. © Madjiguene Seck/World Bank



Coastal Radio producer Marieme Mbengue conducts an interview for the show in Senegal. © Madjiguene Seck/World Bank

## Flagship Activity

### Laying Foundations for Locally Led Climate Action in Ghana

Empowering communities to take the lead in coastal resource management

Locally led climate action (LLCA) ensures that decision-making for adaptation choices is led by local people, knowledge, and institutions. However, locally led climate action approaches are lacking across the WACA region. Although civil society organizations (CSOs) are active in the region, their systematic, active, and coordinated engagement in coastal resource management is insufficient. This is sometimes due to the weakness of CSO administration, resource constraints, or membership structures that are not fully inclusive. Moreover, women are often sidelined in CSOs and rarely in leadership positions in other grassroots organizations such as Ghana's Community Resource Management Area groups. This points to a need for an LLCA planning approach that gives communities a stake in decision-making and is inclusive of vulnerable groups such as women.

#### How the WACA Program contributes to solutions

With WACA's support, the Ghana Coastal CSO Coalition was launched in 2023. In addition to representing the views of coastal communities, supporting knowledge-sharing, and performing a monitoring role, the coalition explicitly aims to involve women in line with the [Stakeholder Engagement Plan](#) for this project. The coalition is also represented on the project's steering and technical committees and is thus systematically engaged in design and implementation of project interventions.

WACA's approach to livelihoods microprojects emphasizes community control over planning decisions for livelihoods. With WACA's support, the successful initiatives in Ghana will be scaled up to involve citizens and CSOs in developing local coastal zone management and climate adaptation plans in a more systematic way.

## Outlook

### Sustaining and Expanding Impact

Communities that are actively involved in the planning and execution of resilience measures feel ownership and see more sustained results. WACA has generated local solutions for livelihoods, the majority being women's livelihoods, with prospects to further enhance women's jobs and voices. WACA intends to draw on these initiatives to intensify its approach to empowering women and locally led climate action.

#### Special thanks to our partners who have made WACA possible

Agence Française de Développement, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), European Space Agency, French Global Environment Facility, Global Environment Facility, Global Facility For Disaster Reduction And Recovery, Global Infrastructure Facility, Global Program on Sustainability, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Invest International, Korea-World Bank Partnership Facility, Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition (France), NDC Support Facility, Nordic Development Fund, Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility, Quality Infrastructure Investment Partnership, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), and the World Bank Group.



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