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Guarding the Sea, Pulling the Net, Salting the Fish: The Multiple Roles of Women in the Blue Economy



**Fiifi Edu-Afful and
Joana Ama Osei-Tutu**

KAIPTC Occasional Paper 57

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Abstract

This paper delves into the multifaceted roles of women within the Gulf of Guinea's (GoG) Blue Economy; examining their agency, resilience and evolving presence. Drawing on an amalgamation of existing literature and primary data collected in Senegal and Sierra Leone, the paper unveils the intricate tapestry of women's contributions to the GoG's Blue Economy. It probes the scope of their agency within this economic framework, explicates persistent barriers that hinder their full participation and illuminates how this landscape has undergone transformation over time. The analysis underscores that despite incremental progress witnessed over the years, the predominantly known role of women in this context remains centred around fishing activities. While myriad avenues exist within the Blue Economy, considerable disparities persist; necessitating concerted efforts to diversify women's engagement across these sectors. The study concludes by advocating for intensified initiatives to introduce and integrate women into these alternate sectors; acknowledging that this diversification holds the promise of amplifying women's impact and advancing equitable economic growth.

Keywords: Women, Blue Economy, Gender equality, Maritime, Fisheries.

Introduction

In Africa, the maritime domain plays an important role for many communities along the coast and on the land. Recognized as the 'new frontier of African renaissance', the Blue Economy is described as a range of economic activities related to oceans, seas and coastal areas that offer vast benefits for Sub-Saharan African countries.¹ The coast of the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) has a vast Blue Economy that includes both artisanal and commercial activities. These activities range from fisheries and coastal tourism to aquaculture, conservation efforts, shipping, and maritime transport.² The Blue Economy, by its function and role, has become a nectar of attraction

that appeals to many individuals, populations and economic activities of most African coastal communities. It has provided places of opportunity as its proper functioning makes it possible to generate growth and multiply the opportunities of the populations. The urban dynamic the Economy brings about is a powerful factor that influences development, social and political relations, and the structuring of space.³ Apart from these, the oceans, seas and coastal areas contribute to food security and poverty eradication, with nearly three billion people utilizing the oceans for their livelihood and 80 per cent of world trade being achieved using the seas.⁴ Thus, the Blue Economy holds a huge potential in wealth creation for GoG countries and remains an ocean of opportunity to advance gender equality. Women's importance and significance to this Economy should not be underestimated. Although their contributions are often unseen, more and more women dominate sectors such as aquaculture, fisheries, processing, trading of marine products, coastal tourism, and conservation activities, as well as drive innovation and growth in the Blue Economy.⁵

Despite their importance, the role of women in the region's coastal and marine resources has neither been fully valued nor fully utilized. Very often, their contributions go unnoticed as these are done on subsistence or artisanal level, in the informal economy, or are unrecognized.⁶ In the fisheries sub-sector, for instance, women play a pivotal role in post-harvest activities of the value chain, including processing, marketing and selling. However, gender norms entrenched in societal expectations have meant that women's contributions are not remunerated, under-valued or perceived as an extension of household duties.⁷ This inevitably leads to women being excluded from decision-making spaces within this sector.⁸ Furthermore, prominence is placed on commercial, high-value fisheries dominated by men in comparison to subsistence (small-scale) fisheries

¹"The Blue Economy: A New Frontier for Africa," United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2019, <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/43053/b11967894.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

²Lahsen Ababouch, "Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Context of Blue Economy, Background Paper," African Bank Development Group, 2015, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Events/DakAgri2015/Fisheries_and_Aquaculture_in_the_Context_of_Blue_Economy.pdf

³Vanora Benett, "EBRD Signs Up to Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles," European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, December 14, 2020, <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2020/ebd-signs-up-to-sustainable-blue-economy-finance-principles.html>

⁴"Blue Economy: Oceans as the Next Great Economic Frontier," United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, March 14, 2022, <https://unric.org/en/blue-economy-oceans-as-the-next-great-economic-frontier/>

⁵"Gender Integration in the Blue Economy Portfolio: Review of Experiences and Future Opportunities," The World Bank, January 1, 2022, <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/38232>

⁶Kirsten Bradford and Robert E. Katikiro, "Fighting the Tides: A Review of Gender and Fisheries in Tanzania," *Fisheries Research* 216, (2019): 79-88.

⁷Danika Kleiber, Leila M. Harris and Amanda C. J. Vincent, (2015), Gender and Small-Scale Fisheries: A Case for Counting Women and Beyond, *Fish and Fisheries* 16, no. 4, (2014): 547-562.

⁸"Gender Policies for Responsible Fisheries—Policies to Support Gender Equity and Livelihoods in Small-Scale Fisheries," New Directions in Fisheries—A Series of Policy Briefs on Development Issues, no. 6, FAO, 2007, <https://www.fao.org/3/a0990e/a0990e.pdf>; Sangeeta Mangubhai and Sarah Lawless, "Exploring Gender Inclusion in Small-Scale Fisheries Management and Development in Melanesia," *Marine Policy* 123, (2021): 1-11.

dominated by women.⁹ The risks associated with women's unmeaningful participation invariably endanger the long-term sustainability goals of an all-inclusive Blue Economy—one that is underpinned by equity.

Traditionally, men are seen as the main catalyst driving the Blue Economy; yet, the presence of women within this space has increased in the last decade.¹⁰ A Blue Economy that is male-dominated is vulnerable to reinforcing harmful stereotypes and creating unfavourable environments that make it even more difficult for women to excel. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the gendered inequality within the Blue Economy is based on the many differentiated assumptions made about the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men within the industry.¹¹ Further, there is still global unfairness regarding the treatment of and behaviours and attitudes towards women; particularly, in the maritime domain. Women working in this space are likely to face a variety of challenges, including sexual harassment, societal expectations and beliefs about their leadership capabilities, pervasive stereotypes such as that of the mother and the housekeeper, and a lack of mentoring and career development opportunities.¹²

As the 'noise' around the interconnectedness of the social and economic benefits of the Blue Economy grows and becomes louder, there have been incessant calls for gender equality to take centre stage and become an integral part of this economic opportunity.¹³ Such calls are not just to satisfy some narrow-minded 'box-checking' exercise but rather they are geared at dealing with the risk of worsening the existing inequalities.¹⁴ An inclusive Blue Economy is the sustainable usage of the ocean's resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs and ocean ecosystem health that places fairness and equity at its core.¹⁵ Consequently, it must consider the different needs and challenges faced by women

and men. Thereby when properly harnessed, it can considerably improve women's lives, create new jobs, enhance choices, and increase women's bargaining power within the communities.¹⁶

The current push for gender mainstreaming in the maritime sector is facilitated by the inclusion of specific targets in the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)—five of which aim to achieve gender diversity, equality and empowerment for all women and girls. Before the SDGs, there was the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) gender programme—'Women in Maritime'—that was launched in 1998 to establish an "institutional framework to incorporate a gender dimension into IMO's policies and procedures."¹⁷

Studies on the functions and responsibilities of women within the Blue Economy are constrained by limited sex-disaggregated data and a lack of understanding of the nuances among the differentiated roles that women play as consumers, workers and decision-makers. As the concept of the Blue Economy gains momentum, it has become apparent that there is a need to devise strategic approaches that guarantee gender and social inclusion. Through analysis of existing literature and primary data gathered mainly in Senegal and Sierra Leone, and complemented with data from Ghana, the paper illuminates the agency women have in this Economy, the barriers they face and how these barriers have shifted over the years. This paper provides a study of the opportunities and constraints that the Blue Economy offers for women within the GoG. The paper, therefore, asks: To what extent is the Blue Economy a masculine space and examines if and how women are involved in the transformation and the culture of the Blue Economy? It discusses these critical themes; focusing especially on the current and potential roles of women in the Blue Economy and how their position can be strengthened. To enlighten our understanding of the influence and

⁹Mangubhai and Lawless, "Exploring Gender Inclusion."

¹⁰Fiifi Edu-Afful, "Examining the Gendered Dynamics of Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea," KAIPTC – Danish Maritime Security Project, March, 2022, <https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Examining-the-Gendered-Dynamics-of-Maritime-Insecurity-in-the-GoG.pdf>

¹¹Dona Bertarelli, "The Blue Economy is an Ocean of Opportunity to Advance Gender Equality," United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, March 22, 2021, <https://unctad.org/news/blue-economy-ocean-opportunity-advance-gender-equality>

¹²Akua O. Britwum, "The Gendered Dynamics of Production Relations in Ghanaian Coastal Fishing," *Feminist Africa*, no. 12 (2009):69-85.

¹³Britwum, "Gendered Dynamics."

¹⁴Britwum, "Gendered Dynamics."

¹⁵See "What's the Blue Economy?," The World Bank, June 6, 2017, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2017/06/06/blue-economy>

¹⁶Joleen S. Kotze and Narnia B. Muller, "A Blue Economy for Women's Economic Empowerment: A Report Prepared for the Indian Ocean Rim Association," accessed September 14, 2023, <https://www.iora.int/media/24136/iorabeweereportfinalmay2019-min.pdf>

¹⁷"Women in Maritime: IMO's Gender Programme," Caralb News, August 03, 2021, <https://www.caralb.com/2021/08/03/women-in-maritime-imos-gender-programme/>

presence of women in the Blue Economy, this paper brings together recent discourses from the GoG and provides more insight into the contribution of women to the maritime domain, including but not limited to, maritime industries and seafaring communities. However, data from the field tilted the discussion more towards the fishing industry. In highlighting the roles of women, this paper illuminates the barriers mitigating meaningful and equal participation of women within the Economy.

Gulf of Guinea Women in Blue Economy

Most GoG countries predominantly fall under the income brackets of upper-middle-income and lower-middle-income groups. The study areas of Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone could be characterized as the upper bracket and lower income bracket, respectively. These countries' approaches to the Blue Economy vary and are shaped by their national policies on fisheries and aquaculture. For instance, technology and modernization innovation varies from Ghana and Senegal to Sierra Leone, which also affect the nature of employment available to women in these selected case countries.

In general, much as fish forms the core protein for food in many of the GoG states, many of the littoral states in the West African sub-region have different consumption levels. This notwithstanding, these littoral countries contribute to the Blue Economy through inland fishing, coastal tourism and the servicing of distant vessels. Besides, several of these countries are also assumed to handle a huge amount of fish through illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Women comprise nearly half of those employed in the fisheries sub-sector of the maritime domain globally and are actively engaged in the industry in countries along the GoG.¹⁸

Despite their significant contributions, as mentioned earlier, women remain underrepresented in decision-making and marine-related roles and face barriers to advancement in male-dominated sectors.¹⁹ Furthermore, their labour in the Blue Economy is disproportionately compensated, mostly

undocumented and commonly vulnerable to climate shocks.²⁰ In spite of this, the roles women play in various sectors of the Blue Economy become even more important given the vulnerability of their societies and economies. This vulnerability has been witnessed in the recent complications in the region due to rising sea levels, declining fish stock, forced migration, reduced food and water security, and natural disasters. All of these, invariably, have unexpected gender implications on both men and women. For example, for many GoG countries, the outmigration of men, religious and cultural differences and unequal social structures determine women's access to decision-making processes, which in turn, exacerbate gender vulnerability in many parts of the littoral states.²¹

The research began by looking at the multiple roles of women in the Blue Economy but during the data gathering process, it shifted more toward the fishing sector. This is where more women were situated and where access was possible to engage. There was a barrier to getting concrete disaggregated data of any sort on the number of women within even the fishing sector but it was the sector with the largest visible presence of women. The other roles that were identified during the research will be discussed later in the paper. In general, women fishers were found to contribute significantly to household income, food security, livelihood, and family nutrition and their economic contributions are often the backbone of family and community survival. Women participate considerably in paid and unpaid labour in commercial and small-scale fishing—often in jobs that include post-harvest processing, cleaning and selling.²²

It has been established that many of these countries that have small-scale fishing industries are able to support more women to achieve socioeconomic equivalence, which outperforms industrial fisheries.²³ A lot of the women in the GoG region are self-employed and suffer from shocks such as low wages, high livelihood insecurity and lack of social protection and social support.²⁴ Women, more than men, are dependent on the availability of fish for post-harvest economic processes and to feed their

¹⁸"Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Fisheries and Aquaculture", FAO, November 20, 2016, <https://www.fao.org/3/i6623e/i6623e.pdf>

¹⁹Jose A. Fernandes, "Climate Change Impacts, Vulnerabilities and Adaptations: Southern Asian Fisheries in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and East Indian Ocean," in FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 627: Impacts of Climate Change on Fisheries and Aquaculture: Synthesis of Current Knowledge, Adaptation and Mitigation Options, ed. Manuel Barange et al. (Rome: FAO, 2018), 281-303.

²⁰"World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/02/World-Social-Report2020-FullReport.pdf>

²¹Interviews with personnel in the Ghana and Sierra Leone navies, Accra and Freetown, November 15, 2022.

²²Allegra Saggese, "Sustainable Fishing and Women's Labour in the Blue Economy," IGC, March 15, 2023, <https://www.theigc.org/blogs/gender-equality/sustainable-fishing-and-womens-labour-blue-economy>

²³Oiha Krushelnyska, Toward Gender-Equitable Fisheries Management in Solomon Islands (English), (Washington, DC: World Bank Group), <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/467721468187800125/toward-gender-equitable-fisheries-management-in-solomon-islands>

families. Consequently, they are directly affected by the declining fish yield in the region, as West Africa over the last decade has experienced a 40 per cent decline in small-scale fishing revenue.²⁵ Such momentous trends echo the importance of addressing the challenges and protecting the interests of women workers in the fishing sector. These involvements must also favour the small-scale fishing sector, which, more often than not, is the principal employer of women in the region as opposed to the large-scale industrial fishing sector. Women's experiences in the fishing sector are guided by the nature and quality of their participation and the appreciation of their roles and contributions to the economy. Women's participation in the fisheries sector is diverse—they engage in a range of fishing activities such as the use of hand-operated gear including hooks, lines, traps, and scoop nets, seaweed harvesting and lagoon-based fishing, among others. Therefore, when fish is not available or easily accessible, it creates a great deal of hardship.²⁶

Multiple Roles of Women within the Blue Economy

Women's roles as professionals in the Blue Economy have included seafarers, port workers, maritime security professionals, policymakers, and shipping and logistics personnel, among others. In addition, they are involved in the management of marine resources, habitat and resource conservation, waste management, and ocean governance. These are critical roles for the ecological development of coastal communities and the global economy. Other non-traditional roles women occupy are in the tourism and aquaculture industries. These are exclusive of their traditional roles of managing fish stock within the fishing industry through selling, smoking and salting.²⁷

In as much as the evidence on the ground depicted women more in the fishing industry, within the security agency, women are playing significant roles to maintain the territorial integrity of the GoG. All navies within the GoG are male-dominated with females in these navies primarily assigned to desk or administrative-related

duties and not to command duties. Still, the Ghana Navy currently appointed its first female Commanding Officer of a naval ship and the Sierra Leone Navy has females as part of its weeklong patrols and other exercises at sea.²⁸ These milestones indicate the gradual painstaking efforts being made to increase women's representation in the maritime space.

In maritime administration, there is a growing presence of females in the sector though the percentage is generally low.²⁹ Females generally occupy administrative functions with some occasionally found in freight forwarding. The positions of these few females within the space are mainly mid or lower-level. Limited numbers are found in senior or decision-making positions and, as such, are not able to influence change. For instance, at the Sierra Leone Maritime Administration, there was just one female within senior management and she was the Director of Administration. Yet, positions such as network engineer, vessel operations, sailor, port master, security, and terminal manager are usually occupied by males. These positions are also traditionally viewed as physically demanding and unsafe for women. These are fuelled by traditional beliefs that have influenced work cultures.³⁰ Thus, most women do not apply or venture into such positions. However, in Sierra Leone, there was a female Port Master—the only one.³¹ For many of the women interviewed, choosing a profession in seafaring requires physical, mental and emotional preparations if one wants to succeed. Nevertheless, male domination of the seafaring profession presents a high barrier to entry for women who intend on working at sea.

As diverse as these opportunities are, the role of women in the Blue Economy and career opportunities are still dominated by the fishing industry as was evident during the engagement in the field. Irrespective of this, women in the GoG are working to distinguish themselves within the Blue Economy despite the dominance of the fishing industry as their 'catchment' area. Even within the fishing industry, there are other roles aside from the obvious 'catch and sell' that are not often discussed.

²⁴Margaret McMillan, Dani Rodrik and Claudia Sepúlveda, "Structural Change, Fundamentals and Growth," in *Structural Change, Fundamentals, and Growth: A Framework and Case Studies*, eds. Margaret McMillan, Dani Rodrik and Claudia Sepúlveda (Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2016), 1-38.

²⁵"Safety and Sustainability for Small-Scale Fishers in West Africa," The World Bank, May 16, 2016, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/05/16/safety-and-sustainability-for-small-scale-fishers-in-west-africa>

²⁶Interview with a head of fisheries, Accra, November 15, 2022.

²⁷Interview with maritime lecturer, Freetown, November 22, 2022.

²⁸Interviews with personnel of Ghana and Sierra Leone navies, November 15, 2022.

²⁹Interview with selected staff of the Maritime Administration, Freetown, November 16, 2022.

These functions, such as ownership of vessels and management of fisherfolk, have seen women expand their capacities and potential. However, within this fishing industry, women are still viewed through a gendered traditional lens and roles are ideally spelt out for men and women as shared by one fisherman:

The men, we go to sea because the sea is too dangerous for the women, and when we come back, everything we catch, we hand over to the women and they handle it.³²

Howbeit, in Sierra Leone it was discovered that women provide the bait, food and ice needed for the fishermen to undertake fishing expeditions. With the expectation that upon return, the women have first stake in the produce at a lower cost, before being offered to others to negotiate and buy. A local fishing expedition usually lasts about three hours with extensive ones lasting close to a week. Thus, materials provided for the team will last either duration and this can count towards the monies to be reimbursed by the women for the produce supplied. The proceeds from the catch are usually divided into three equal parts—a third to the owner of the boat, a third to the fishermen and a third toward the maintenance of the boat. Hence, there is a system in place that allows for order and sharing of profits once expenses have been deducted.

In all the communities observed and engaged, there are no traditional restrictions to women owning boats or vessels in the communities. Though men own most of the local fishing vessels, gradually, women are beginning to own some of these vessels. A female vessel owner asserted that she is not treated differently due to her gender but is quick to comment on her posture as an owner:

Fishermen are very rude... I have to stand like a man for them to respect me.³³

Therefore, despite women venturing out into the space of ownership, there is still a perception of being masculine to be able to operate and gain respect in this space. Nonetheless, in the areas of safeguarding the fish/catch, these are trusted with women as they are perceived as more protective and trustworthy to

ensure accountability and fairness.³⁴

Challenges to Women's Participation in the Blue Economy

Despite the significant contribution women make to the marine economic ecosystem, their labour is economically diminished. They frequently lack the same access to resources and benefits and are excluded from decision-making processes in comparison to their male counterparts.³⁵ The masculine optics of the maritime space contribute to its inability to accommodate the needs of men and women. This rigidity is further enhanced by the exclusion, discrimination and harassment, women face in the space.³⁶ The absence of gender inequality has led to limited access to education, training and employment opportunities, as well as, to a lack of representation in leadership positions. The absence of representation has also resulted in limited awareness of the opportunities for females in the Blue Economy.³⁷ Currently, it is estimated that women account for two per cent (23,000) of the global maritime workforce and they are largely employed in the cruise and ferries sector, often for Flags of Convenience (FOC) vessels. These positions are usually the lowest paid with little job protection. Besides, the females are younger and in minimal positions of power than their male crew mates. This again makes them susceptible to discrimination and harassment.³⁸ Moreover, in most instances, women find themselves dealing concurrently with gender-based challenges while adjusting to a gender-biased job environment.

The lack of employment opportunities in some countries begins with maritime education, as women are not allowed to enrol on some nautical courses. The women who do enrol, often opt for navigation and not engineering courses. Yet, post-training, some ship owners are unwilling to employ women despite their qualifications. This prejudice is what compels some women to lean towards 'softer' careers.³⁹ The underrepresentation of women in the sector also limits their ability to contribute to decision-making and policy formulation, potentially leading to a gender-blind approach to issues relating to the Blue

³⁰Interviews with Port Administration personnel, Freetown, November 15, 2022.

³¹Interviews with Port Administration personnel.

³²Interviews with fishermen in fishing communities, Freetown and Dakar, November 16 and December 4, 2022.

³³Interview with female canoe owner, Freetown, November 17, 2022.

³⁴Interview with female canoe owner.

³⁵Interview with civil society women, Freetown, December 4, 2022.

³⁶Edu-Afful, "Examining the Gendered Dynamics."

³⁷Interview with maritime lecturer, Freetown, December 4, 2022.

³⁸"Women Seafarers," ITF Seafarers, accessed March 5, 2023, [https://www.itfseafarers.org/en/issues/women-seafarers#:~:text=Women%20make%20up%20only%20an,of%20Convenience%20\(FOC\)%20vessels](https://www.itfseafarers.org/en/issues/women-seafarers#:~:text=Women%20make%20up%20only%20an,of%20Convenience%20(FOC)%20vessels)

³⁹ITF Seafarers, "Women Seafarers."

Economy.⁴⁰ Additionally, there is a lack of support and mentorship for women in the Blue Economy. Many women must rely on their initiative and resources to succeed in the industry, which can be very challenging.⁴¹

In the same vein, within the informal sector, women are hindered by further traditional narratives determined by gender roles and stereotypes. In Senegal, though stories were shared of women who owned and sailed vessels from Senegal to Europe, these vessels were acquired through family lineage and others simply broke the stereotype and raised the needed funds to purchase the vessel.

However, those who own the vessels are mainly owners on the ground and do not engage in fishing or seafaring.⁴² This inability is based mainly on perceptions and stereotypes as stated by some fishermen:

The sea is not friendly to women, nor do they have the energy or strength needed to undertake the tasks at sea.⁴³

The initial capital many women need to initiate ownership in the business continues to be a barrier to them having authority in the space. Even as female owners, some fishermen are unwilling to work for them “based on prejudice and lack of trust in their ability to manage the fishermen and the system.”⁴⁴

Within the traditional fisheries sector, many female workers experience several challenges. They are invisible and unrecognized mainly as a result of socio-cultural structures, which are reinforced, predominantly, by patriarchal needs. As a highly unregulated sector, women who work in the fisheries are also severely unremunerated. There is poor regulation of tenure, which at times, impedes their access to fish either as individuals or as groups. Women also have low access to credit, which leads to more production constraints for them than for men. Similarly, women do not have access to storage technology and cold transport and thus, face the risk of their yield becoming rotten and unprofitable. In recent times, fishermen are not catching enough fish to supply female fishmongers; therefore, there is competition among the fish buyers, which invariably,

has increased the sexual and gender-based violence to a large extent along the coast. For many of these women, the survival of their families depends on their ability to procure fish for sale—an occurrence that has increased the ‘sex for fish’ culture in many coastal states.⁴⁵

As pointed out earlier, the research sought to look at the multiple roles women play in the Blue Economy; however, engagement in the field narrowed the scope to the fishing industry as that was the primary area that has some semblance of data to engage with and also a sizeable number of women to interact with. The Blue Economy is diverse with multiple opportunities; however, the roles available to women are few and limited. The limited spaces that are vacant to women are entrenched with bottlenecks and gendered obstacles hindering the progression or attraction of more females. This coupled with minimal data on women’s involvement in the Blue Economy, either in the formal or informal sector in all countries visited, create a challenge to ascertain how much progress has been made.

The absence of gendered policy frameworks within the sub-region to govern the maritime domain continues to hamper progress. The Yaoundé Code of Conduct on maritime safety and security and other relevant regional maritime security initiatives for Eastern, Western and Central Africa, largely neglect to have a gendered voice in the declarations and obligations required of Member States. This minimizes not only the visibility of women and their roles in the domain but also the impact an insecure domain plays on the livelihoods of the women in the communities. The lack of acknowledgement of women’s roles in augmenting and enhancing maritime security, especially in the artisanal fisheries sector, is also evident in the drafting of policies and regional frameworks. These policies, such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy), draw great attention to the state and regional level involvement in the management of the maritime domain; yet, neglect the daily communal engagements that drive the community’s economy mainly sustained by women.

Helen Buni, who leads the Women in Maritime programme at the IMO said: “If women can’t be seen,

⁴⁰FAO, “Promoting Gender Equality.”

⁴¹Interview with navy officer, Accra, January 19, 2023.

⁴²Interview with civil society organization, Dakar, December 5, 2022.

⁴³Interview with fishermen, Dakar, December 5, 2022.

⁴⁴Interview with fishermen, Dakar.

⁴⁵Ifesinachi M. Okafor-Yarwood et al., ““Ocean Optimism” and Resilience: Learning from Women’s Responses to Disruptions Caused by COVID-19 to Small-Scale Fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea,” *Frontiers in Marine Science* 9, (2022).

they can't be applauded, and therefore they can't be seen as a resource."⁴⁶ This opinion resonates largely in the Blue Economy that is highly male-dominated. Many young ladies do not draw near to the field as "they see it as hard" or "they do not know the numerous opportunities available to them."⁴⁷ The Maritime University, to be established in Sierra Leone, intends to expose women to the diverse opportunities available to them in the Blue Economy.⁴⁸

Conclusion

There is huge potential for women in the Blue Economy. It is envisaged that the Blue Economy is expected to grow rapidly over the next few years with a significant increase in demand for skilled workers. Women have a vital role to play in the economy's growth and development. This paper sought to understand the gendered nature of the Blue Economy and how women are involved in transforming this culture. The Blue Economy within the GoG is transforming and women play a key part in this transformation. Acknowledging this transformative role begins with recognizing that the

domain is still very male-dominated. There is low documentation of women's involvement in the sector as most attention on the economy is on the fishing industry and women's involvement is usually centred on the informal sector. Thus, there is a need to expand the conversation of the economy and expand the data collected. There must be a deliberate effort within this sector to engage all actors and increase the pool of female capabilities to vie for positions. The IMO's Women in Maritime programme has the slogan "Training-Visibility-Recognition."⁴⁹ This is something that each Member State needs to adopt—not only to increase training for females in both the formal and informal sectors but also to increase the visibility of women in these positions and recognize the few females who are currently in the sector to encourage more women into the space. The diverse roles within the Blue Economy need to be opened up to females within the GoG, beyond the fishing industry. There needs to be a realization in Member States that women are not only linked to salting and selling of fishing in the Blue Economy but also to the other multitude of careers within the ecosystem.

⁴⁶"Spotlight on Women in Maritime Security," IMO, May 25, 2018, <https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/Pages/WhatsNew-1089.aspx>

⁴⁷Interviews with fishermen and academics, Freetown, November 25, 2022.

⁴⁸Interview with academics, Freetown, November 25, 2022.

⁴⁹See "Women in Maritime: IMO's Gender Programme," International Maritime Organization, accessed September 10, 2023, <https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/technicalcooperation/pages/womeninmaritime.aspx>

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About the Project

The five-year project on “Integrated Responses to Threats to Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Domain in West and Central Africa (2022-2026),” is being implemented through three key approaches; namely—research, dialogue and capacity building. The project is primarily aimed at promoting a safer maritime security domain in the Gulf of Guinea. Knowledge-based products highlighting key maritime security issues are part of the research outputs in an effort to raise awareness at the policy, technical and operational levels. Overall, the project seeks to contribute to strengthened regional approaches to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea through enhanced joined-up responses to shared threats.

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About the Centre

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