

# Pipelines and Promises: A Historical Analysis of Fishing, Oil Exploration & Poverty in Ghana's Western Region, 1970-2020

Boru Hatları Ve Vaatler: 1970-2020 Yılları Arasında Gana'nın Batı Bölgesinde Balık Avcılığı, Petrol Keşfi ve Yoksulluk Üzerine Tarihsel Bir Analiz

John Abbam Nyarko<sup>ORCID</sup>, University Of Cape Coast, Ghana, nimdehene@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This research examines the dynamics between natural resource extraction, particularly oil, and its impact on local communities in Ghana's Western Region. It addresses the persistent issue of poverty and socio-economic disparity despite significant oil wealth, raising questions about the equitable distribution of resource benefits. The study analyses historical and contemporary state policies, livelihood transitions in fishing communities, and the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequalities. Employing a historical, qualitative methodology, the research draws on case studies and community interviews to highlight the lived experiences of local populations amid oil-led development. Despite the establishment of laws such as the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, it reveals intended to promote transparency and inclusivity, local voices remain marginalised in decision-making processes. This research is significant as it sheds light on the complexities of the "resource curse," illustrating how oil wealth has not translated into improved living conditions for communities directly affected by extraction activities. By emphasising the need for participatory governance and environmental sustainability, the findings advocate for a re-evaluation of policies to ensure that the promises of oil revenues fulfil the developmental needs of local populations rather than exacerbate existing inequalities.

**Keywords:** Oil Exploration, Poverty, Ghana, Fishing Communities, Natural Resource Management

## Öz

Bu araştırma, doğal kaynakların çıkarılması, özellikle petrolden, Gana'nın Batı Bölgesi'ndeki yerel topluluklar üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Önemli petrol zenginliğine rağmen devam eden yoksulluk ve sosyo-ekonomik eşitsizlik sorununu ele alarak, kaynak faydalarının adil dağılımına dair soruları gündeme getirmektedir. Çalışma, tarihi ve güncel devlet politikalarını, balıkçı topluluklarındaki geçim geçişlerini ve eşitsizlikleri sürdürmeye devam eden sistemik engelleri analiz etmektedir. Tarihsel ve nitel bir metodoloji benimseyen araştırma, petrol odaklı kalkınma sürecinde yerel halkın yaşadığı deneyimleri vurgulamak için vaka çalışmaları ve topluluk röportajlarından yararlanmaktadır. Petrol Geliri Yönetimi Yasası gibi şeffaflık ve kapsayıcılığı teşvik etmeyi amaçlayan yasaların kurulmasına rağmen, yerel seslerin karar alma süreçlerinde marjinalleşmeye devam ettiği görülmektedir. Bu araştırma, "kaynak laneti"nin karmaşıklıklarına ışık tuttuğu için önemlidir ve petrol gelirlerinin, çıkarma faaliyetlerinden doğrudan etkilenen topluluklar için yaşam koşullarını iyileştirmeye dönüşmediğini göstermektedir. Katılımcı yönetim ve çevresel sürdürülebilirliğin önemini vurgulayarak, bulgular, petrol gelirlerinin vaatlerinin yerel halkın kalkınma ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacak şekilde yeniden değerlendirilmesi için politika gözden geçirilmesini savunmaktadır; mevcut eşitsizlikleri artırmak yerine.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Petrol Arama, Yoksulluk, Gana, Balıkçı Toplulukları, Doğal Kaynak Yönetimi

## STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The research presents key findings that highlight the intricate relationship between oil extraction and the socio-economic realities of fishing communities in Ghana's Western Region. Despite the influx of oil revenues, local communities continue to experience poverty and economic hardship. This paradox raises critical questions regarding the distribution of natural resource wealth and the efficacy of existing governance frameworks. The findings exhibit that a significant portion of the local population remains unaware of the financial benefits generated by oil extraction, often feeling alienated from decision-making processes that impact their lives.

Moreover, the study indicates that existing laws, such as the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, designed to promote transparency and equitable distribution of oil revenue, have not succeeded in bringing about the expected improvements in community living standards. The marginalisation of local voices in policymaking processes was prevalent, suggesting that policies are often developed and implemented without adequate input from the affected communities. This disconnection further perpetuates socio-economic disparities, thereby fueling discontent among the local populations.

Through qualitative interviews and case studies, the research reveals instances where fishing communities have experienced adverse impacts due to oil exploration activities. For instance, the disruption of traditional fishing grounds has led to decreased fish stocks, which are vital for the sustenance of these communities. With livelihoods dependent on fishing, the long-term implications of oil extraction threaten not only economic stability but also the cultural heritage tied to fishing practices.

While the study found that oil wealth is substantial, it is not without complications; in fact, it has given rise to what is often referred to as the "resource curse", whereby the expected economic benefits do not adequately filter down to local populations. Instead, decisions rooted in high-level political negotiations tend to concentrate wealth among a limited number of stakeholders, often sidelining the very communities that bear the brunt of extraction practices.

The analysis underscores a clear need for a paradigm shift in how natural resources are managed. Effective resource management must pivot towards a more inclusive model that prioritises community engagement, transparency, and sustainable practices. The research indicates that bridging the gap between policy intentions and community outcomes requires a robust framework for participatory governance.

The research firmly posits that the benefits of oil exploration in Ghana's Western Region have not equated to enhanced quality of life for local communities. The promise of oil wealth has largely remained unfulfilled, as prevalent socio-economic disparities and systemic barriers continue to hinder equitable development. The study advocates for a decisive re-evaluation of governance approaches within the realm of natural resource management.

Key recommendations include fostering inclusive dialogues that integrate local communities in the planning and decision-making processes related to oil revenue management. By actively involving community voices in governance, the state can ensure that oil-related policies reflect the needs and aspirations of those most affected by resource extraction. Furthermore, there is an urgent call for comprehensive policy frameworks that not only seek to manage oil revenues but also uphold the sustainability of local ecosystems and livelihoods, particularly in fishing communities.

The findings emphasise that participatory governance must be central to any approach aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of the "resource curse." Communities need to be empowered through education and access to information regarding their rights to resource wealth. This empowerment can serve as a basis for advocacy, enabling communities to challenge decisions that disproportionately impact their livelihoods.

Additionally, the research highlights the importance of environmental sustainability as a component of oil exploration and production. Solutions must not only focus on maximising profit from oil extraction but also consider the long-term health of ecosystems that communities depend on. By integrating environmental safeguards into oil exploration practices, Ghana can move toward a more responsible model of resource extraction that respects both the environment and the rights of local populations.

The research advocates for a transformative approach to natural resource management in Ghana that recognises the intertwined nature of governance, community engagement, and sustainable development. The conclusions drawn underline that the path forward must prioritise equity, transparency, and environmental stewardship to ensure that the benefits of oil wealth are genuinely reflective of the developmental needs of the communities in the Western Region. By placing the principles of equity, transparency, and sustainability at the forefront, it is possible to construct a framework that effectively addresses the intertwined nature of governance, community engagement, and viable development. Only through such concerted efforts can the promises associated with oil exploration be realised, turning the page on the challenges of poverty and inequality that have persisted despite Ghana's rich natural resources

## Introduction

The appropriability of natural resource extraction and its potential benefits for local communities in sub-Saharan Africa have become an increasingly crucial topic of discussion, particularly in Ghana (Atta 2018; Gary & Karl, 2003). The complex relationship between natural resource wealth and development is a central theme in economic and social studies, especially in nations abundant in hydrocarbons like Ghana (Adams et al., 2019; Oppong, 2015, pp. 143-45; Afful & Edu-Afful, 2015). This paper explores the contradictions and challenges inherent in pursuing economic growth through oil exploitation, focusing on how evolving state policies have historically influenced livelihood transitions in local fishing communities and examining the systemic barriers that persistently undermine poverty alleviation, despite promises of oil revenues.

The historical significance of the fishing industry in Ghana dates back to the early 18th century, with notable advancements in fishing practices beginning with the Fante fishers engaging in ocean fishing. The British Select Committee on West Africa recognised this importance, with Mr. Swanzy noting in 1842 that fishing, alongside salt, was a vital article of commerce between coastal and inland populations. Typically, fishermen on the coast preferred daytime trips, while those operating in lagoons fished around the clock. On moonlit nights, they often used unique methods to attract fish, employing broken bottles and metal to create musical sounds before casting their nets (Moloney, 1883, pp. 11, 18).

However, in the 21st century, crude oil plays a vital role in modern life, serving as an essential fuel source that underlies global developmental needs and aspirations. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, it has emerged as the primary energy source, forming the backbone of industrialised nations and critically contributing to everyday manufacturing and production needs (Suleman, Ennin & Iledare, 2023, pp. 1-2). Anthropogenic activities related to oil extraction for energy and transportation have significantly transformed land use, propelled by growing populations and rapid socioeconomic changes (Biney et al., 2024, p. 2).

Ghana's Western Region has long been a cornerstone of the country's commercial economy, credited for its wealth of natural resources, including gold, cocoa, timber, and diamonds. Since the establishment of the railway in 1903, this region has been pivotal in Ghana's development journey (Daily Graphic, 2011, p. 18). However, the anticipated benefits of resource exploitation have often been elusive, leaving the Western Region grappling with persistent poverty (Ghana Statistical Services, 2015, p. ix, 7).

The dawn of the 21st century ushered in a new era for the region, primarily driven by the discovery of commercial oil reserves in the Jubilee Field in 2007. This breakthrough shifted Ghana's economic dynamics and raised considerable expectations for improved livelihoods. Nevertheless, the actualities of oil-led growth have been fraught with challenges, including environmental degradation, socioeconomic inequalities, and a stubborn persistence of poverty.

Historically, Ghana's economic trajectory has been intricately linked to the extraction and management of its abundant natural resources. From its colonial roots in cocoa and gold to contemporary efforts aimed at diversifying the economy through oil and gas, Ghana's path provides valuable insights into the rewards and risks associated with petroleum development. While oil was presented as a vehicle for transformative economic change, the anticipated benefits have rarely manifested uniformly. Many local communities, particularly in the Western Region, find themselves sidelined in this oil-driven growth narrative, posing significant questions about the fairness and equitability of resource wealth distribution (Gyampo, 2016; Ackah et al., 2019; Ogbé, Rød & Halvorsen, 2023).

The oil boom in Ghana exemplifies the "resource curse" phenomenon, which posits that nations endowed with rich natural resources often experience slower economic growth, corruption, and conflict (Andrews, 2021, p. 359; Ovadia & Graham, 2022). In the Western Region, this curse is evident, as oil wealth has not substantially alleviated poverty in communities directly affected by extraction. A small elite has disproportionately enjoyed the economic promise of oil, while many locals continue to grapple with longstanding socioeconomic issues. A report by the African Development Bank underscores the significance of oil revenue to national income. However, persistent disparities in wealth distribution challenge the core objectives of poverty reduction and community upliftment, making this study particularly essential.

This historical analysis, therefore, aims to critically assess two fundamental questions: (i) how fishing communities have resisted or adapted to policies, including migration patterns, protests, or informal economic strategies, and (ii) why the promises of oil wealth have not achieved their intended infrastructure and poverty alleviation despite oil revenues contributing to national GDP? By critically examining how historical patterns of underdevelopment and marginalisation affect current poverty outcomes and the socio-economic implications for local communities, the paper will shed light

on how resource management, governance, and community participation intersect to shape development outcomes and the actual impacts on local livelihoods. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for Ghana but also for other resource-rich countries that aspire to leverage their natural endowments for sustainable development.

## **1. Methodology**

The paper employed a historical, qualitative approach, utilising a multifaceted method that combined documentary research, archival research, and oral sources. This approach sought to ensure local agency and the realities of the subject matter. Primary sources included government documents, colonial records, newspapers, documents from the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Bank, as well as oral interviews. These selected documents aimed to ensure accurate and verifiable information, enabling an understanding of the significance and meanings professed by situating the documents within their historical contexts.

Selected sources were subjected to source criticism to enhance authenticity, reliability and bias of sources through external and internal criticism to ensure accuracy. This approach enables the interpretation and synthesis of findings into a coherent, historical narrative, allowing for a rigorous and contextual understanding of the past (McCulloch, 2017). Documentary research and oral history informed the paper. Documents from government organisations, agencies, and international bodies were sourced to contextualise the subject matter and serve as cross-references to corroborate facts, identify discrepancies, and avoid the possibility of over-reliance on a single perspective or a biased account. The documents were retrieved from the official websites of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, and the Parliament of Ghana. The secondary sources were obtained from Google Scholar, the JSTOR database and the internet.

Oral history was conducted through fieldwork interviews, which involved direct observation and interaction with witnesses and participants. The participants were sampled from the towns of Abuesi in the Shama District and Brawire in the Axim, Nzema East Municipal Assembly, between January 10 and 12, 2025, using a purposive sampling technique. The fieldwork involved interviewing adults engaged in fishing, either as fishermen, settlers, or processors, who lived in areas where oil had been discovered, to ensure firsthand observation of the environment. This method allowed for the confrontation of assumptions with practical evidence. It sought objective ‘truths’ by engaging directly with the participants.

The fieldwork was more empirical, involving active data collection rather than relying solely on existing documents. The fieldwork helped to provide additional contexts and first-hand data that documents alone may not reveal (McCulloch, 2004, pp. 34-35). In the use of the interviews, a questionnaire was used to gauge the opinions of the people within the studied areas. The interviews were conducted in the local dialect, Fante, to enable participants to express themselves freely and provide a vivid understanding of the investigated subject. The interviews aimed to obtain information on the subject matter, describe the phenomena objectively, and interpret the findings critically. The questionnaires aimed to achieve uniform observation by focusing attention on some significant aspects of the study’s object—i.e., poverty was categorised into ‘ohia’ and ‘ahokyere’—to isolate the problems and gather precise data.

In analysing the collated data, the researchers focused on reconstructing and explaining the subject matter within a specific context. The authors utilised thematic and comparative analysis in interpreting the sources, as this approach helped identify recurring themes related to fishing, oil, poverty, Shama/Abuesi, and Axim. The thematic analysis helped to create focused arguments and insights within the broader case study. The comparative analysis enabled the assessment of uniqueness and commonalities between the two towns, allowing for broader conclusions and highlighting specific local factors. The combined approach of analysis provided a rigorous avenue for chronology and building analytical arguments.

## **2. The Coastal Economy before the Exploration of Oil.**

### **2.1 Fishing in Ghana**

The global fishing industry stands as a colossal economic sector, boasting a valuation of approximately \$689 billion and generating annual revenues estimated at \$240 billion. Within this vast landscape, Asia emerges as a significant player, contributing a substantial \$133 billion each year, while fish landings alone add another \$80 billion to the mix. In terms of household incomes derived from marine fisheries, the figure reaches around \$63 billion annually (Advocate Staff, 2017; Business Research Company, 2025).

In Africa, the fishing and aquaculture sector is equally notable, employing roughly 12 million people and making up about 1.3% of the continent's GDP, with a generation of more than \$3 billion every year (FAO, 2014). Women represent a significant demographic in this workforce, accounting for over 26% of those employed, with more than half involved in processing and about 4% working directly as fishers (FAO, 2014, pp. 4-5). The diversity of species, including the Dipnoi, Mormyridae, Polypteridae, and Chromicles, reflects the rich fishing heritage of Africa (Moloney, 1883, p. 4). In West Africa, common catches comprise an impressive array of species like sharks, mackerels, swordfish, and flying fish, further illustrating the region's marine bounty (Moloney, 1883, p. 10).

Focusing on Ghana, fishing plays a central role in the economy and sustenance of its people along its extensive 1,522 km coastline and the numerous lakes and rivers dotting the landscape. The sector is a cornerstone of employment, integrating roughly one-tenth of Ghana's population into its workforce (ATFALCO, 2012, p. iv). Fishing is not merely a profession; it is a vital component of national food security and economic stability. Fish constitutes the primary source of animal protein in the Ghanaian diet, with per capita consumption averaging between 20-25 kg. This is significantly higher than meat, with fish making up about 60% of the protein intake among Ghanaians, indicating its nutritional importance (Odotei, 2002, p. 1).

Historically, the coastal communities have long held fish in high esteem, particularly for their medicinal attributes. As early as the 15th century, the liver of fish such as bonito and dolphin was utilised in traditional medicine, believed to be effective against ailments like dysentery when prepared with wine (Odotei, 2002, p. 29).

The fishing sector in Ghana is characterised by a diverse range of activities, from artisanal fishing to semi-industrial and industrial fleets. Since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1471 at the Gold Coast, marine artisanal fishing has maintained its crucial status within coastal communities (Odotei, 2002, p. 31). Notably, marine fisheries have historically dominated the sector, representing about 80% of total fish production prior to European intervention in the 15th century. Today, artisanal fishers continue to account for over 65% of the national catch, supporting the livelihoods of 1.5 million people. The fishing industry significantly contributes to Ghana's economy, accounting for approximately 4% of the nation's GDP and 11% of the agricultural GDP (Bank of Ghana, 2008, pp. 1, 8).

Marine fishing activities in Ghana can be classified into three main domains: industrial deep-sea fleets, inshore vessels, and canoe fisheries, commonly known as artisanal marine fisheries (Odotei, 2002, p. 1). The expansive marine coastline, stretching 550 kilometres from Aflao in the east to Half Assinie in the west, is essential for sustaining the livelihoods of coastal communities, helping to alleviate poverty through various fishing-related endeavours. Artisanal fisheries alone employ over 100,000 fishermen, alongside countless others in supporting roles such as selling, processing, and canoe construction (Odotei, 2002, p. 1).

Fishing was localised and engaged largely by the indigenous people. However, as the 20th century approached, Ghanaian fishermen began venturing into international waters, starting with Fante fishermen targeting the coastal regions of Benin and the Ivory Coast. By 1916, their reach extended to Nigeria, and by 1920, Ghanaian fishermen expanded into Liberia and eventually ventured as far as Senegal and the Republic of Congo by the 1940s. By the mid-20th century, Ghana had cultivated a semi-industrial presence in international fishing, utilising vessels equipped with modern technology (Moloney, 1883, p. 4; Odotei, 2002, p. 49). This industry proved so pivotal that by the dawn of the last decade of the 20th century, Ghana boasted over 8,000 canoes, signifying the deep-rooted reliance on fishing as an economic activity and cultural hallmark for its people.

## 2.2 Life Before Oil: The Case of Brawire and Abuesi.

In the decades preceding oil exploration that shaped the two case-study coastal communities, both towns, Brawire of Axim and Abuesi of Sima, thrived as proud fishing communities. Canoes lined the shores like sentinels of the sea. Each morning, fishermen set out before dawn guided by stars and sea lore passed down through generations. The ocean was not just a source of food—it was a source of wealth and a spiritual partner in the rhythm of daily life. Women played a critical economic role in smoking and trading fish that fed not only local households but markets as far as Sekondi, Kumasi, Takoradi and Accra.

According to Opanyin Odum Arhin of Abuesi, before the exploration and production of oil, the fisheries business was very lucrative and boomed, so fishermen were too busy to take money from their sales, and the community was known as "sika rebu dan," to wit, "money is breaking the house." Elders conducted rituals to honour the sea gods and

taboos restricted fishing on sacred days, ensuring balance between humanity and nature. Life was hard, but it was theirs, rooted in custom, trust and the bounty of the Atlantic.

Additionally, according to Grace Armana, the Konkohemma of Brawire, before oil exploration, libations were poured into the sea to catch fish. She asserts, “We used to offer a cow as a sacrifice to the sea god, which helped us in catching species such as ‘nkan’, ‘safo’ and ‘aduan’. Whenever we had a catch or struggled with a bumper harvest, the chief farmer would levy the fishermen to buy the items for the sacrifice, as this helped in the bumper harvest.”

Prior to oil exploration, the level of poverty in the fishing community was negligible; however, with the advent of oil production, nearly 90% of the fishers have been pushed into adverse living conditions. Fishermen used to have bumper catches, such that sometimes the canoes could not contain them; hence, they would sometimes abandon the catch. However, with the advent of oil production, the catch becomes very difficult, and it is challenging to catch a full canoe. Before the oil spill, fishermen usually had a catch of between 150 and 200 fish tubs, but today, even getting 50 of them is a sign of sheer luck (Odum Arhin, interview, on January 11, 2025; Grace Armana, interview, January 12, 2025)

### 3. History of Oil Exploration

The exploration for oil began in the late 19th century by the colonial administration, particularly in 1896. This culminated in the drilling of wells between 1896 and 1903 by the West Africa Oil and Fuel Company. However, they were unsuccessful due to limited geological understanding and the lack of appreciation for seismic data. With the presence of onshore oil and gas seepages found in Ghana, between 1909 and 1925, there was the influx of various international oil firms on the shores of the Gold Coast, which included the French company, Société Française de Pétrole (SFP), which drilled six onshore wells between 1909 and 1913 striking oil at 10-17 metres depth, producing 7 barrels of petroleum per day (Colonial Office, 1910, p. 17).

Additionally, between 1923 and 1925, the African and Eastern Trade Corporation (AETC) dug two wells in the onshore area of the Tano basin and discovered a substantial amount of heavy oil, light oil, and gas at different depths. In 1950, the Gulf Oil Company was granted an onshore Tano license, drilling four wells at Bonyere, Epunsa and Kobnaswaso from 1956 and 1957. These activities implied that between 1896 and 1957, Ghana saw seventeen onshore wells dug in the onshore Tano basin. The Nkrumah Administration continued, albeit with little change, until his overthrow, which marked a shift in the nature of exploration.

Nonetheless, beginning in 1967, the focus shifted from onshore exploration to offshore exploration, where the National Liberation Council partitioned the continental shelf into twenty-two blocks and granted licenses for them. The possibility of discovering commercial quantities of oil began under the National Liberation Council in 1968, when the military junta drew up oil agreements to attract investors into the exploration field, leading to the signage of the contracts with four companies—Signal Exploration and Development, Occidental Ghana Inc, Amoco Ghana Exploration Company, and Jack Grynberg and Associates, a subsidiary of the Standard Oil of California (Ghana News, 1968, p. 3; Ghana News, 1975, p. 3).

The agreements required these companies to begin drilling wells in January 1969 to a depth of 12,000 ft within 18 months of the agreement’s signing; thus, in 1970, Signal/Amoco Group, an American consortium, discovered oil (The New York Times, 1970, p. 15). It led to the discovery of the Saltpond Oil Field in the Central Region. The reality of the oil discovery led the Acheampong Government in August 1974 to outline plans for establishing a lube oil plant and a bitumen plant during an interaction with Agip Ghana Limited, a state-owned enterprise (Ghana News, 1974, 6). To the government, these plants were relevant because they lubricated the wheels of agricultural productivity, generated additional revenue, and reduced the drain on the government budget.

To demonstrate its commitment to oil exploration, the Acheampong Government granted duty-free tariffs to oil companies importing machinery. Additionally, the National Redemption Council liberalised the oil exploration agreements, allowing Shell International to prospect a total land area of 11,000 square miles in the Voltaian Basin. Beginning in 1975, the Government of Ghana initiated oil drilling at Cape Three Points in the Western Region under the Mobil-Zapata Philips company, while Amoco-Signal explored in the Saltpond area (Ghana News, 1975, pp. 1-2).

The slow pace of drilling during this period was attributed to the global market shortage of rigs. Between January 1974 and January 1978, Ghana struck oil off the coast of Akyeamfour (Saltpond), named ‘Bonsu’. On Wednesday, January 11, 1978, three wells had already been dug, producing about 3,000 barrels of oil daily. With the discovery of

oil in Saltpond, the Acheampong administration entered into a thirty-year agreement with Agri-Petro (Ghana) for the drilling and production of oil (Ghana News, 1978, p. 1; Plänitz & Kuzu, 2015, p. 8).

Oil exploitation was expected to mark the genesis of 'serious' economic activities. With the discovery of oil in Akyemfour, the Ghanaian government began to intensify its efforts to find commercial quantities of oil. According to the 1981 US Department of Energy Report, Ghana had the highest potential of oil as its offshore potential lay in the shallow waters; thus, in 1981, through the aid of the World Bank Energy Funding Programme, a survey by Geophysical Services, an American Company, was conducted and collected seismic data for exploration (Ghana News 1984, p. 5).

Between 1979 and 1983, Philips Petroleum discovered that the South Tano held a good amount of gas and condensate. After acquiring data on the exploration and production of hydrocarbons offshore Ghana, the PNDC established the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (Ghana News, 1982, p. 7). In December 1983, the PNDC Government through its Secretary for Fuel and Power, Mr. Appiah Korang, signed a 22 million Canadian dollar grant agreement under the Petro-Canada International Assistance Corporation (PCIAC) with its Chairman, Mr. Peter Towe, to explore for oil and gas off the Tano Basin around Half-Assinie, which was to commence in February 1984 (Ghana News, 1983, p. 7).

Through the assistance of the Canadian Government, valued at \$23 million via Petro Canada International Assistance Corporation, the GNPC was able to acquire extensive 2D seismic data in the offshore Tano/Cape Three Points Basin in March 1984. Hence, in July 1984, gas was discovered in South Tano #5 well. In 1986, the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) and the Diamond Shamrock International Petroleum Company of the United States signed an agreement for the commencement of onshore oil exploration in the Keta Basin, which covers an area of 2,262 square kilometres, stretching from the eastern border of Ghana to the Ada area (Ghana News, 1986, p. 12).

After a return to democracy, exploration and production of the Saltpond Field resumed, reaching an all-time high of about seven thousand barrels daily in 2004 (International Energy Studies, 2015). With Canadian assistance and data, drilling of shallow wells in the Onshore Tano Basin commenced. By 1994, the GNPC had drilled three wells over the South Tano Field and three other rigs, in addition to other infrastructure, to facilitate the rapid development of the Tano Fields. The exploration activities were championed by NUEVO, Dana, Hunt Oil, and Fusion Oil and Gas (Ghana Oil Watchdog, 2009).

After this, there was a shift in focus from shallow water to deepwater exploration in the Western Region, such that between 1999 and 2003, Ghana had drilled four deepwater wells, which proved the existence of an active petroleum system in the deepwater. Thus, between 2003 and 2007, the various companies of Kosmos Energy, Anadarko, Tullow Oil, and E.O. Group began to explore deepwater. By June 2007, they struck high-grade oil in the Mahogany-1 well in the West Cape Three Points License, which became the most significant discovery. Since then, there have been over thirty more discoveries, including the Sankofa, Tweneboa, Gye Nyame, and Hyedua (McCaskie, 2008, p. 319).

Kosmos Energy, an American upstream oil company, made the discovery possible. The estimated quantity of the discovered oil was approximately 700 million barrels, and the gas reserves were 800 million cubic feet (Sakyi et al., 2010, p. 58). The 'black gold' was discovered in August 2007, located about 60 km seaward of the Western Region in the South Atlantic Ocean. It has recoverable reserves of about 1.8 billion barrels (Bawumia & Halland, 2017, p. 9). The discovered oil field was named 'Jubilee Oil Field' as it was discovered during the fiftieth anniversary of Ghana's independence. Tullow Oil PLC, an Irish entity, developed the Jubilee Oil Field.

## **4. Discussion and Analysis**

### **4.1 Life in the Shadow of Oil, 2007-2020.**

With the commercial discovery of oil came the hope for economic transformation, poverty alleviation and rapid development. The discovery evoked hopes for accelerated economic growth and social development through the provision and availability of jobs, as well as poverty alleviation in the Western Region. For example, the West African Gas Pipeline Company commissioned a six-unit classroom in a basic school for the Abuesi community on May 24, 2007 (Yamikeh, 2007).

The discovery of the oil initially had a significant impact on fishing, with fish catch declining from 800,000 metric tonnes in 1993 to less than 500,000 metric tonnes in 2006 (Bank of Ghana, 2008, p. 2). Fishing's contribution to GDP slumped from GH 135.26 million in 2006, with exports of 60,000 metric tonnes (i.e., approximately US\$80 million). In response to this reality, the Ministry of Fisheries was established in 2005 to oversee and manage fisheries. The creation

of the separate ministry had little impact on fish production, as total fish landings increased from 405,444 metric tonnes in 2005 to 406,785 metric tonnes in 2006 (Bank of Ghana, 2008, p. 8). Interestingly, in 2007, the fishing sector grew from 3.9% to 4.5%, generating over \$1 billion in revenue despite total production slumping further from 406,785 metric tonnes to about 372,000 metric tonnes. This situation culminated in the Ghana Government importing fish worth \$260 million in 2007 (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2011, pp. 6-13).

The dwindling catch of fish prompted the Ghanaian government in 2007 to initiate aquaculture production, resulting in 5,590 kilograms of fish produced in 2008 (Statista, 2023). To demonstrate its commitment to oil bringing wealth and development, the Presidency of John Evans Fiifi Atta-Mills, beginning in November 2009, approved a Local Content and Participation Policy aimed at encouraging local content participation. The Policy accordingly is to “grow the economy to achieve accelerated development of industrialisation rapidly” and that it is “anticipated that the development of the oil and gas industry will be a source of accelerated growth, poverty reduction and general prosperity to the people of Ghana” (Aferi, 2011, p. 26). A critical aspect of the Policy was the ambition to achieve at least 90% local content and local participation in all aspects of the oil and gas industry value chain within a decade.

Between 2006 and 2010, when Ghana had not begun producing oil, agriculture’s share of GDP increased from GH 5.415 billion to GH 12.910 billion. Of this, the fishing contribution increased from GH 448 million in 2006 to GH 1.001 billion in 2010 (Ghana Statistical Services, 2015, p. 4). However, oil production commenced in December 2010 under the presidency of Prof. John Evans Atta-Mills (January 7, 2009—July 24, 2012), producing 186.3K tonnes. By the end of 2010, Ghana had produced 1,181,088 barrels of oil (Daily Graphic, 2008, p. 1; PIAC, 2017, p. 17).

As production began, scholars and policy analysts began to send cautionary messages that the expectations needed to be toned down. Darkwah, in her work, “The Impact of Oil and Gas Discovery and Exploration on Communities with Emphasis on Women,” admonished that the mere discovery of oil and gas should not be a cause of celebration as it poses great challenges, especially for the country to local communities and women who live in areas of oil exploration. The benefits of black gold in the Global South are illusory due to rent-seeking and corruption, the core of the resource curse. There is also a correlation between oil and conflict, argues Darkwah, particularly where there are inadequacies in the allocation of revenues accrued from oil, especially when local communities near the oil reserves are disadvantaged (Darkwah, 2010, pp. 1-4).

In January 2011, the field commenced full-scale production, producing 24.1 million barrels, for which Ghana earned revenues of \$444.1 million. With the full-scale production, the Government of Ghana enacted the Petroleum Revenue Management Act 2011 (Act 815), which aimed at ensuring the overall management of petroleum revenues based on “sound and sustainable fiscal policies that transcend political regimes” (Daily Graphic, 2011, pp. 1-3). Petroleum revenues are, therefore, distributed across four distinct vehicles under the Petroleum Revenue Management Act 815 of 2011 to ensure prudent oil revenue management: the Annual Budget Funding Amount, the Ghana Heritage Fund, the Ghana Stabilisation Fund, and the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (Parliament of Ghana, 2011). The Act’s promulgation stipulated that funds are distributed in the following percentages: 40%, 9%, 21%, and 30%, respectively.

Additionally, to ensure transparency and accountability of petroleum receipts, the Minister in charge is to publish the records of petroleum receipts in the Gazette and at least two other state-owned daily newspapers within thirty calendar days after the end of the applicable quarter. The information will also be published online and presented to Parliament on the date of the Gazette publication (Parliament of Ghana, 2011, p. 7). Under Act 815 of 2011, the Government of Ghana established the Ghana Petroleum Fund (GPF), which serves as the collective umbrella for the Ghana Stabilisation Fund and the Ghana Heritage Fund. The Petroleum Fund can only be disbursed to the Consolidated Fund and should support the national budget.

Through the Act, the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC) was established, mandated to publish the semi-annual and yearly reports of the petroleum funds on September 15th and March 15th, respectively, each year. The Committee was established in May 2012 (PIAC, 2013, p. iv). However, on February 28, 2011, Ghana experienced a dangerous act in its marine waters. A supply vessel from Nigeria, the Spirit River, discharged toxic oil waste into the sea in Essipon. The incident resulted in the Ghana Government, through the Western Naval Command, impounding the vessel. The vessel also discharged a large volume of highly toxic liquid slops in tote tanks into the drain that runs down the hill to the Essipon community despite the presence of a discharge centre at Nyankrom in the Shama District (Daily Graphic, 2011, pp. 1, 3).

Additionally, due to the pressure on existing infrastructure, particularly in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, the Ghana Government, on March 3, 2011, launched the second phase of the Strategic Action Land Development (SALD) Plan in the Ahanta West District in collaboration with the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) to create an estimated 30,000 jobs by the close of 2016. The Plan aimed to create an urban-rural community module for a town, incorporating both residential and commercial spaces. The Plan further sought to establish twenty communities, which would feature schools and social centres as their primary components and promote eco-tourism. The selection of the Ahanta West District was influenced by its being home to the Bulk Oil Storage Facility at Atwereboanda and a proposed oil refinery at Pumponie by Arabian Gulf Oil Limited (AGOL) (Daily Graphic, 2011, p. 64).

Subsequently, in 2012, Ghana exported 26.3 million barrels of black gold, earning \$541.6 million. Between 2011 and 2015, oil production steadily increased from 24.1 million barrels to 37.4 million barrels, implying a more than 50% increase in production level. Consequently, between 2011 and 2015, Ghana earned approximately \$3.2 billion in oil revenues (Ministry of Finance, 2015, 21). As oil revenues trickled in, they formed a significant part of the government's total expenditure, averaging 7.2% from 2011 and 2015. Petroleum revenues have been invested in twelve designated sectors. Between 2011 and 2015, the Government invested GH 745.009 million of petroleum revenues in road and highway projects, GH 70,214 million in educational infrastructure, and GH 72,156 million in water resources, works, and housing (PIAC, 2016). The discovery and production of oil led to oil becoming the country's second major export after gold in 2012.

Additionally, with the onset of oil production, fisheries grew at a rate of -8.7%, with their contributions to GDP reaching GH 952 million in 2011. This represented a decline of approximately GH 49 million compared to 2010, before steadily increasing to GH 1.249 billion in 2013 (Ghana Statistical Services, 2015, p. 4). This steady increase can be attributed to a rise in total fish production, which increased from approximately 384,000 metric tonnes in 2011 to 413,000 metric tonnes in 2013. This growth was largely due to a tripling in aquaculture production between the periods, from 10,500 metric tonnes in 2011 to 32,512 metric tonnes in 2013 (USDA, 2011, p. 2). Between 2010 and 2013, marine fish production increased from 305,000 metric tonnes to 314,868 metric tonnes (USDA, 2022, p. 1).

Interestingly, despite the agriculture's share of GDP increasing significantly from GH 12.190 billion in 2010 to GH 20.232 billion in 2013, the fisheries' contribution in terms of percentage declined from 2.3% in 2007 to 1.4% by 2013, implying a decline of nearly two-fifths in contribution (Ghana Statistical Services, 2015, p. 5). However, between 2011 and 2013, fisheries' contribution to GDP increased from GH 427 million to GH 492 million, a 15% increment.

Environmentally and ecologically, the sea that once sustained these communities has grown increasingly silent with the commencement of offshore oil production in the nearby Jubilee Field, as fishermen have begun to notice a disturbing decline in their catches. Many attributed this to the intense seismic surveys that preceded drilling, as well as the sound of the machines. Waters that once teemed with anchovies, sardines and snappers grew mysteriously barren. Some fishermen reported sailing farther for smaller hauls, often returning with only a third of their usual catch.

Suspicion also grew around oil waste discharge spotted offshore and the occasional dead fish floating ashore, fuelled fears of contamination. With these changes and observations, the coastlines and their nearby communities began to transform, with erosion accelerating in some areas, pushing the sea closer to homes and threatening houses and coconut groves that had stood for generations and centuries. For the communities of Brawire and Abuesi, the sea was no longer the familiar partner they had known—it had become unpredictable, tainted and untrustworthy.

Furthermore, during a focus group discussion with elders, youth, and women of Abuesi in the Shama District, it emerged that certain fish species, such as herrings, 'ntatere', and 'nkokore', have gone extinct. There has been no government or community communication since the 2007 discovery regarding the community's development. The only negotiation they have had was with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture, which dwelt on the issue of the close season. The presence of the light around the rigs has significantly affected the volume of fish, as fish are drawn to light and heat.

Socioeconomically, the consequence of oil exploration was swift and disorienting, as fish stocks dwindled and the economic heart of the communities began to falter. According to the Chief Fisherman of Abuesi, fishermen who once returned with canoes heavy with catch now came back empty-handed or barely even after buying highly-priced fuels. This assertion was corroborated by some women fishmongers, who smoked, salted and sold fish. To the women, the decline in catch has resulted in fish shortages, forcing them to price the fish exorbitantly in order to make for the fuel and their daily living and the low yields have also forced many to seek alternative livelihoods such as petty trading,

‘prostitution’ and migration of youths to other places to engage in illegal mining; others have been forced to end their marriages as the means to cater for the family is no longer sustainable.

These migratory trends have largely been attributed to the exclusion from employment opportunities, as many of these jobs require formal training, which the coastal communities lack. The high rate of unemployment has led to frustration and the abandonment of dreams, as many young people have migrated in search of better employment opportunities. This reality is affirmed by the Ghana Statistical Service’s report, which posits that 8.1% of marine farmers in the region have migrated (Ghana Statistical Services, 2023, p. 18).

In contrast, many people have migrated from Akosombo, Kumasi, and Accra to the region, securing employment opportunities due to the presence of companies such as TICO, Ghana Gas, and Armani. At the same time, the coastal inhabitants have drifted into unemployment and idleness due to their lack of access to employment opportunities, deepening the growing sense of marginalisation and depopulation of the coastal communities.

For households dependent on daily fish income, survival has become precarious due to the rising cost of living, which is driven by the influx of oil-related businesses and oil contamination in the sea. Food and fuel prices, especially premix, have substantially increased, and a shortage has been experienced as a few elites have ‘hijacked’ the sale of premix fuel, affecting fishermen’s ability to even go to sea.

The communities have asserted that there was no proper stakeholder communication on the ramifications of the oil exploration on the fishing industry. If they had been well aware, they would have either resisted or engaged in deliberate negotiations before the exploration. They recount how they had managed to get closer to the rig location and had a good catch. However, their vessels were apprehended, and the fish were offloaded back into the ocean. To them, the reduction in catch is largely attributed to the presence of the light and the rig location.

Again, the Thermal Plant’s operations affect the volume of catch because fish are difficult to find when hot air is released into the sea. The fishing communities are largely disappointed because, according to them, the exploration of oil was meant to make outboard motors affordable and premix fuel easily accessible. The perception is fueled by the thought that the oil companies would have supplied outboard motors, rather than the Government directly, which is usually entangled with partisan politics. Unfortunately, these hopes have been dashed as they are unable to afford premix fuel, which has been politicised and is found in the custody of non-fishers, whom they call ‘akrakyefo’—the elites.

In November 2013, the Minister of Finance proposed four priority areas for oil revenues: expenditure and amortisation of loans for oil and gas infrastructure, agricultural modernisation, road and other infrastructure, and capacity building (including oil and gas) (PIAC, 2015, p. 49). Since the commercial operation of the Jubilee Fields, Ghana has seen the number of licensed companies in the oil sector increase to 130 in 2014. There has also been a rural-urban migration in Sekondi-Takoradi in search of elusive jobs in the oil industry. This phenomenon has led to a labour shortage in the agricultural sector, with dire consequences for food security and domestic food prices (Djebali, 2020, pp. 161-163). For instance, Abuesi, a well-known fishing community, has seen its youths migrate to Mpohor to engage in illegal mining. According to opinion leaders, the number of migrant youth exceeds one thousand young people aged between 18 and 35.

With the fluctuation in fish production and its growth, between 2011 and 2013, the Government of Ghana during the presidency of John Dramani Mahama in 2014 passed the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2014, which sought to amend the Fisheries Act 2002 (Act 625) to give effect to international conservation and management obligation to combat illegal fishing as well as in 2015, passed the Fisheries (Amendment) Regulation, 2015 (LI 2217), which sought to regulate the registration of fishing vessels and granting of license to vessels to fish in Ghanaian waters (Parliament of Ghana, 2014/2015). These measures served to curtail overfishing of the main species, especially tuna, and to improve the volume of aquaculture production as a result of offshore oil drilling (ATFALCO 2012, p. 1).

In response to the challenges posed by the distribution of oil funds and their developmental impacts, the Petroleum Revenue Management Act has undergone several amendments, beginning with the passage of the Petroleum Revenue Management (Amendment) Act, 2015 (Act 893) in 2015. The Amendment Act of 2015 provided for the allocation of funds to the Ghana Infrastructure Investment Fund for infrastructure development, as well as the disallowance of “any borrowing against the petroleum reserves” (Parliament of Ghana, 2015, p. 2). With the amendment, the utilisation of oil revenues stipulates that the revenues from oil should be channelled towards twelve priority areas. The Ghanaian government also embarked on an aggressive aquaculture initiative by launching the National Aquaculture Development

Plan, which envisioned a production of 100,000 metric tonnes by 2016. Additionally, it secured a World Bank grant of US\$50 million to address these challenges (ATFALCO, 2012, pp. 6-8).

In 2015, the Ghana Government disbursed GH¢59.4 million for agricultural modernisation, despite initially allocating GH¢38 million, as well as GH¢483 million for roads and other infrastructure (PIAC, 2015, p. 49). Other infrastructure included education, energy, water, transport and health sectors. Despite the disbursements and allocations, none of the constructed and rehabilitated roads were found in the explored coastal communities near the oil exploration centres. For instance, the Government spent GH¢5 million on the Adjoa coastal community near Apowa to build a sea defence; another sea defence at Ngyiresia at a cost of GH¢3.2 million, construction of a health centre at Nsawora in the Western Region at a cost of GH¢20,045 and the upgrade of Shama Health Centre to a Polyclinic at a cost of GH 62, 063 (PIAC, 2015, p. 50-56).

Of the disbursed amount of over GH¢2.2 billion in 2015 under the ABFA allocation to the health sector, the amount expended for the Western Region was less than GH¢1 million (PIAC, 2015, p. 56). Of the total utilisation of the ABFA for the works and housing sector, at GH¢40.6 million, a little over thirty per cent was allocated to the entire Western Region. Interestingly, zero was disbursed for fisheries and aquaculture infrastructure in the region (PIAC, 2015, pp. 58-59). This reality is despite Jubilee Fields paying the Ghana government US\$185 million in royalties in 2015.

In spite of these hurdles, the region received some benefits from the Ghana Government due to the production of oil, such as the construction of a fishing harbour at New Takoradi, which signed some fishers in Axim, Infuma (Dixcove) under the Fishermen Life Insurance Scheme in 2015; Axim saw the establishment of a fishing landing site (Ministry of Finance, 2015, pp. 75-77). The communities of Axim received a new ambulance station. Meanwhile, the Shama District and Nzema East were organised and educated on oil spillage contingency planning and response. They completed the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the oil and gas sector (Ministry of Finance, 2015, p. 115).

On August 17, 2016, another major field discovery was made: TEN Field (Tweneboa-Enyenra-Ntomme), the second major production field, which produced over 15% of Ghana's annual oil production. Between 2010 and 2016, Ghana produced over 193 million barrels of oil, earning over US\$3.4 billion (PIAC, 2017, pp. 16, 27). Following the amendment, the Annual Budget Funding Amount (ABFA) was pegged at 70% in 2016, with a minimum of 25%. The Ghana Government allocated \$98.38 million to ABFA, the lowest allocation since 2010. Although the priorities had been expanded to twelve, the period from 2014 to 2016 focused on the previous priorities that Parliament had approved for 2011-2013.

In 2016, the allocation for agricultural modernisation stood at GH¢27.7 million, with road and infrastructure spending valued at approximately GH 200 million (PIAC, 2017, p. 39). While road and other infrastructure have been the criteria with the highest spending since 2011, agriculture modernisation has received the lowest expenditure. The GH¢27.7 million indicated a drop in allocation by over GH¢30 million compared to 2015; thus, between 2011 and 2016, the total disbursement of oil revenues to agriculture stood at GH¢238.67 million, representing a paltry 7% of the total allocation (PIAC, 2017, p. 46). In that year, no single allocation was made to roads in the Western region, nor to fisheries or aquaculture in the region. The discovery of oil appears to have alienated people from having a say in how revenues are used for development, leading to issues.

According to the Metropolitan Development Planning Officer of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, the environment of the fishing communities needs improvement, especially as the community is plagued by social vices and the atmosphere is polluted by smoking. He went further to say that their level of education is lower than average, making it difficult for them to get out of the poverty bracket. He described poverty as a situational phenomenon that needs improvement.

Between 2017 and 2019, the Annual Budget Funding Amount (ABFA) received \$936 million and dispensed \$501 million on various projects. Out of the \$501 million, about half was allocated to education, specifically Free Senior Secondary School. At the same time, thirty-seven per cent was apportioned to roads and other infrastructure, with agriculture receiving a little over one-tenth. The PIAC has also conducted sixteen regional and one hundred twenty-three district engagements, resulting in eighteen reports. These engagements have focused on informing citizens about the management of the revenues earned from the sale of petroleum.

Nonetheless, the first universal benefit accrued from oil production by the coastal communities was the Free Senior High School Policy in 2017, for which the government spent GH¢196.38 million to support the policy and an additional GH 6 million to offer scholarships (Ministry of Finance, 2018, p. 26). The Brawire and Abuesi communities have also

benefited from educational scholarships provided by oil companies, such as Tullow Oil. According to C. Arhin, beginning from 2017, Tullow Oil Ghana has provided about 100 academic scholarships to students who completed either JHS or SHS each year. Between 2017 and 2018, the region benefited from the revenues, as the Kojokrom-Tarkwa railway lines were rehabilitated. The Bia East District also saw the construction of a six-unit classroom block at Sikafremogya D/A Primary School, a kindergarten block in Effia Kwesimintsim, and the rehabilitation of another six-unit classroom block at Akyease Primary (Ministry of Finance, 2019, pp. 36-39).

Furthermore, the region also achieved its share in the health sector. For instance, the Ghanaian government constructed health facilities at Asawinso, Prestea-Huni Valley, Akaaso, and Boikrom. It also did bitumen surfacing of Shama Town Roads in 2018 at a cost of GH¢2,854,235.32; upgraded Esiama Town Roads at a cost of GH 18, 380.08, reconstructed the Fijai bypass at a cost of GH¢655,262.67, dualised the Kansawurodo bypass at a cost of GH 11,818,643.50 and the construction of the Ainyinase Junction-Kwesikrom Feeder Road at a cost of GH¢149, 399.80 and the asphaltting of the Axim roads (Ministry of Finance, 2017, p. 92; Ministry of Finance, 2019, pp. 40-44).

Additionally, the Government began constructing sea defence walls in Shama and Axim. The oil companies, especially Tullow Ghana and West African Gas Pipeline, have also built schools and expanded school facilities at various levels, which has increased enrolment. One of such assisted schools is Takoradi Secondary School (TADISCO). The fisheries sector has been largely affected by oil exploration. By 2014, the fisheries sector's contribution to Ghana's GDP stood at 1.33%, and by the end of 2020, the contribution had declined to 0.96%. Of this, the marine subsector had slumped from 0.79% in 2014 to 0.61% in 2020; the inland subsector also experienced a dwindle from 0.39% in 2014 to 0.21% in 2020, while the aquaculture subsector maintained its share of GDP of 0.15% despite growth volatilities (Fisheries Commission, 2024, p. 2). Between 2014 and 2019, the fisheries subsector of agriculture experienced a continuous decline, dropping from 1.33% to 0.88%, as the subsector's growth improved from a decline of 23.3% in 2014 to a growth rate of 1.7% in 2020 (Fisheries Commission, 2024, p. 4).

Although oil production impacts their livelihood and survival, as they struggle to make a catch, the community of Abuesi has received five educational scholarships. However, the modalities are not precise, depriving the primary beneficiaries of the coastal communities of the benefits. The limited and competitive nature of educational scholarships has alienated the fishing communities, as the multidimensional poverty rate exceeds 40%, and the recipients of these scholarships often come from outside the fishing communities.

The focus group in Abuesi, during our interaction, advocated for a shutdown of the lights by the oil companies for even a month each year, especially during the lean season, to allow them to have enough catch, as most of the fish are within the enclaves of the rigs. However, they understand that such a demand is impossible, having interacted with oil companies like Ghana Gas, which have informed them that shutting down the lights would increase the company's financial expenses and debts. In response, the communities argued that the agreement and promise made to them stated that they would be given \$300 each month. Others would be given loans to venture into other businesses, provided they adhere to certain conditions.

According to Honourable Nicholas Atta, Assemblyman for Abuesi, one of the draconian impacts of oil exploration on the fishing activities is the pollution of the sea, such that there had been pollution due to a faulty pipe by Ghana Gas, causing the death of about six people after eating contaminated fish. For them, the mitigation of these consequences is best offered in the form of heavily subsidising premix fuel, as they are forced to buy petrol and diesel to pump their outboard motors, which are expensive to acquire and damage their machinery.

Additionally, the fishing communities experience environmental pollution due to congestion in the District and Municipality. The communities lack recycling waste plants, which has increased the level of methane, resulting in high rates of kidney issues. According to a participant in Abuesi, the repairs of the plants by Ghana Gas resulted in health conditions, such that more than six people died and more than twenty people experienced complications from the spilled oil into the ocean.

The acquisition of premix fuel sometimes takes six months for fishermen, which hampers their work. For instance, according to a participant in the focus group, they used to purchase a gallon of premix for GH¢50, but when the elites hoard the premix, they sell it at GH 100, which is too expensive for them to afford. The fisher folks in the understudied communities advocate for free electricity, a proposal they have been advocating for since 2008, to compensate for the hardship they face due to the toll of exploration on their survival.

However, the interviewed women urge for the availability of job opportunities and other employable skills to cushion them. To the women, the provisions of tools are unsustainable, and showing videos on how to preserve fish is beneficial, but they also need other employable skills, as fishing is a seasonal activity. This is necessary because they are not experiencing 'ohia'<sup>1</sup> but rather 'ahokyere'.<sup>2</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The quest for economic growth through oil exploitation in the Western Region of Ghana reveals a complex landscape marked by contradictions and challenges. While the discovery of oil in the Jubilee Field sparked significant expectations for enhanced livelihoods and economic prosperity, the reality has often fallen short of these aspirations. Despite the considerable revenue generated from oil extraction, local communities have frequently remained marginalised, with the benefits accruing primarily to a limited elite rather than being distributed equitably among the population. These aspirations remain a mirage despite over a decade of oil exploration and exploitation, as most indigenes have yet to reap tangible benefits. Residents of oil-producing communities remain hopeful about experiencing socioeconomic development.

The ongoing struggle against systemic poverty amidst oil wealth underscores the critical need for inclusive governance and participatory decision-making processes. The findings articulate that while the Petroleum Revenue Management Act of 2011 aimed to promote transparency, real progress hinges on the active involvement of local communities in discussions related to their resources and futures. The voices of affected populations must not be drowned out by state and corporate interests; instead, they should be integral to shaping policies that govern resource management and development initiatives.

In conclusion, for the promises of oil-led development to be realised in the Western Region, a concerted effort is needed to address the disparities in wealth distribution, enhance community participation, and ensure environmental sustainability. Only through a holistic approach that prioritises inclusivity, accountability, and environmental stewardship can the true potential of Ghana's natural resources be harnessed for the benefit of all its citizens, transforming them from passive bystanders to active participants in the narrative of their own development.

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1 Poverty

2 Lack of certain needs.

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