

## Changing Seasons - Changing Industries: Part 4

Dear Friends,

This is the concluding part of my series "Changing Seasons - Changing Industries", which began in September 2021. This series has covered the ways that the changes in seasons and industries have had a significant impact on the lives of people in my sub-region, particularly Akrampa and its environs.

This article discusses the fishing industry in Ghana. One might ask, '*How does fishing affect Akrampa, if Akrampa's people are basically agrarian, people that live on the land, and do not depend on the river or the sea?*' As a matter of fact, many people in Akrampa live on the yield of the sea and the rivers, because not everyone in Akrampa is a farmer. It is interesting to note that the 'global climatic change' is being felt here in Ghana, also. Akrampa is not too far from the coast and therefore the fishing industry, and those interested in that economy, are concerned about the sustainability and dependability of the yield from the sea.

As long as there is a body of water, particularly moving water, such as streams and rivers, with the necessary conditions in it that can sustain, particularly aquaculture, fish become a necessary economic product for the survival of the people living off that water/sea. Some people in Akrampa fish in the streams and rivers around the town, not only for domestic consumption, but in quantities such that they can sell at the local market. Some of the fish that come from the streams and rivers are, **tilapia**, **catfish**, and **mudfish**. Sometimes, certain types of crabs are also obtained from the riverside.

I can say that as far back as 1996, the climate had already been changing. When Pastor Jimmy Madsen visited Akrampa he asked to see the source of the **drinking water** for the people. What we saw was so nauseating and disturbing that Pastor Jimmy promised to get them clean pipe-borne water for domestic use. *Years before* the visit, the 'source of drinking water' had been a **flowing stream** that was fairly clean, because it carried away debris from the trees (leaves, twigs, etc.). What Pastor Jimmy and I saw in 1996 was a small stagnant pool, filled with all kinds of unpleasant indescribable things. No wonder the people were always sick and attending the local health facility.

In retrospect, it is clear that because the trees were losing their foliage, the intensity of the sun on the stream caused the volume of the water to reduce from a flowing stream to a stagnant pool of filth. The dead tree branches and leaves had dropped into the stream and there were also dead and decomposing reptiles and rodents which produced a strange stench. Yet that is where the people fetched water for the homes, to drink and cook their meals. **All of this was before clean pipe-borne water was brought to the town for the first time in 1999.** The stream that used to produce fish for the market and for the homes lost its waters as a result of the change in the ecology of the environment. A clear loss of food on the table for the homes and earning power (money) for other needs, for survival.

The fishing industry, whose main source is the sea, is a huge problem. The yearly average yield from the sea has been dropping at an alarming rate. When I was a little boy, back in the early 60's, at times I would visit the seashore to watch the fishermen come in from fishing. Sometimes the fishermen would freely share fish that they had brought home to sell because they caught so many fish that it was considered a good community gesture. They used dugout canoes, then, with wooden paddles to go out onto the seas. But now *some* fishermen do so with outboard motors instead of paddles.

In those days, they didn't have to go far to fish. Now they have to go farther out into the sea. It is a scientific fact that as the temperature of the sea waters rise, the fish also tend to seek cooler, deeper water, where the small canoes cannot reach, even with the outboard motors. Currently, the yield is so poor that the frustration that has built up is not only a community concern but national concern. Now, with the dwindling stock in the sea, the local fisherfolk and their traditional wooden dugouts have to contend with huge trawlers using huge engines and massive nets. Suffice to say, the canoes can only go as far as their strength to paddle or small engine will allow, while the huge trawlers go much further. It has become the practice by some of the trawlers to also fish in the **shallow** places that canoes can only reach, thus depriving the local fishermen of any reasonable catch. The nets that some of the trawlers use are designed such that they catch even the smallest fish, a clear breach of the law.

Trawlers have engaged in widespread illegal fishing, called *Saiko*, in Ghana's waters. *Saiko* is a destructive form of illegal fishing that is fueling the collapse of Ghana's coastal fisheries on which over 2.7 million people depend for their livelihoods. The failure of these illegal industrial trawlers to report huge catch volumes to the state is decimating the 'small pelagic' fish populations which are reserved for local communities. Small pelagic fish are a critical food staple across West Africa and component of catches of small-scale fishers, like those of Akrampa. They include species such as anchovies and sardinella that are usually found in coastal, inshore waters. There is now a grave risk that Ghana's fisheries will soon collapse. The consequence to all is that those of Akrampa and others whose livelihood depends on the fishing industry, become very exasperated and confused.

The Ghanaian government, in an attempt to sustain fish life and stock, established a period whereby by no fishing is done. The ban which is termed as the **closed season** covers canoe and inshore (artisanal) fishing as well as industrial fishing. Artisanal fishers are to observe the ban from May to July. Industrial fishers are also included in this ban. This ban, which is regulated by the *Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture*, continues to be very worrisome to fishermen and women who depend on the Fishing Industry for their livelihood. Whenever the *Ministry for Fisheries and Aquaculture* comes up with a directive to temporarily ban fishing (meant to safeguard the fishing industry by aiding in the recovery of fish populations), there is always a public outcry that comes mostly from the fishing communities. The ban is a local attempt to address the depleting stock of fish, but it is never a happy period when the time comes for the enforcement of the two-month ban.

I sincerely hope and pray that leadership of the global community will continue to find a common solution to this shared challenge which has huge global repercussions to all livelihood and sustenance.

Pastor Ben Wilson