

The Socio-economic Challenges and Opportunities of Ghana's Coastal Communities: The Cases of Ada and Keta



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Introduction

Ghana has a coastal line of around 560 kilometres along which Ada and Keta are partly located. Ada is a community in the south-eastern of Ghana, where the Volta River meets the Atlantic Ocean. Keta is also situated in the south-eastern of Ghana and hinges on the Gulf of Guinea, near the Atlantic Ocean that is close to the mouth of the Volta River. Under the Ramsar Convention (1975), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1999), included Keta-Anlo Lagoon on the list of Wetlands of International Importance,

indicating its prominence as a protective area, with a view to protect its ecological processes, flora and fauna for the wellbeing of Ghanaians. Despite the serene environment and socio-economic potentials offered by these coastal communities to the government and peoples of Ghana, failed political leadership and indiscriminate human activities including climate change have conspired to expose these areas to dire challenges. In that light, this article examines some of the challenges and opportunities identified in the communities through the prism of sustainable development.

Challenges in the coastal community of Ada

One dominant challenge facing the community of Ada is sea erosion. Sea erosion poses not only a threat to human lives and property but also distorts the coastal ecosystem, thereby undercutting human existence, biodiversity and farming lands. Closely connected with these phenomena is the estimated 20% rise in flooding activities across the community, which had rendered most of the social facilities along the shores defective (Srivastava and Pawlowska, 2020). Furthermore, it is argued that part of the endemic challenges in this community encompasses homelessness, unemployment, flooding and destitution that has compelled the majority of the residents to migrate to other regions of Ghana for sustenance. The implication of these challenges is that human existence and communal development, which are critical to the sustainable development of the nation, are severely stymied.

Another threat is the destruction of endangered species. According to Appeaning (2019), nesting sites of marine turtles together with the habitats of migratory birds (including natural sites used by tourists and traditional fishermen) are being depleted. Furthermore, the local fledging coconut industry which provided some employment and social security for the people's welfare has also been destroyed (Appeaning, 2019).

The next challenge is the absence of creative solutions and visionary leadership at the national and community level to initiate and implement sustainable strategies to stem the aforementioned threats (Ofori, 2020). The hesitancy in the political leadership of Ghana to provide novel financial resources, logistical and social infrastructure to stem the degrading coastal communities have intertwining implications for the sustainability of the communities and country at large. As a coastal community, Ada is rich in biodiversity resources and thus holds key to

protecting the ecological and economic fortunes of the area.

Opportunities in the coastal community of Ada

One potential opportunity offered by this area is rural tourism. This coastal community can be transformed into a rural tourist area, encouraging a well-maintained structural environment, improved infrastructural and economic diversification. By these propositions, the central and local governments of Ghana should frame a comprehensive plan, including zoning, transportation, sustainable infrastructure, historic heritage protection, development and investment so as to rebuild the community. Thus, from the development perspective, tourism revenue may be mobilised to minimise poverty among the local community by stimulating business projects and job creation opportunities; that is in principle, compatible with biodiversity conservation, local services and through enhanced education, empower the local people to advocate for the protection of the natural environment (Vadi and Schneider, 2014).

The view that the fishing industry holds potential opportunities for the welfare of this community and Ghana as a whole, is incontestable. The fisheries sector contributes 3% of the total national GDP and 5% of the GDP in agriculture, whilst the estimated commercial value is pegged at 200 tonnes with projected revenue of US\$0.316 million respectively. This means that a vibrant and viable business case exists for the government to invest in the operations of the local fishing community by providing them with training and resources to establish sustainable social and economic ventures. With the right investments and diligent supervision by the Fisheries Ministry, the government can implement sustainable programmes geared to save the shorelines as well as reclaim eroded parts of the coast, in a bid to harness national sustainable development.

Challenges in the coastal community of Keta

In Keta, the challenges are predominantly marine and coastal pollution including illegal sand-winning. A large section of the coastal plain is replete and choked with plastic wastes, debris from collapsed thatch buildings and decomposed sea creatures, whilst most of the people resort to illegal sand-winning activities to supplant their erstwhile defunct fishing profession (Srivastava and Pawlowska, 2020). Coupled with this threat, the erosion of the shoreline has equally damaged the ecological system of the community by decimating parts of the biological

diversity which constitutes a major source of health and economic wellbeing for the people (Srivastava and Pawlowska, 2020). Also, with growth in the population, human activities have intensified pressure on the coastal area to erode vestiges/treasures of the UNESCO heritage site (Srivastava and Pawlowska, 2020). Furthermore, overfishing too has led to the collapse of small communal businesses, and as a result created hundreds of job losses, denying the people a stable means of livelihood (Srivastava and Pawlowska, 2020).

Another challenge is the destruction of flora and fauna along the coastal area. The flora and fauna regulate the circulation of oxygen as well as absorb carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, thereby protecting the health of human beings, the vegetation and livestock. However, the persistent erosion of the shorelines coupled with damaged vegetation has disrupted the climatic conditions; and as a consequence, thwarted the agricultural activities in those communities. There is also the threat of ocean noise emanating from indiscriminate human activities, which also has partly contributed to disrupting the lives of marine mammals. Thus, these activities have severely undercut the socio-economic fabric of the people. Notwithstanding the challenges above, opportunities also exist in the community to be harnessed for the people's economic and social fortunes.

Opportunities in the coastal community of Keta

Keta offers opportunities for aesthetic values for which it is famed. This means that with the requisite investments, the UNESCO protective sites in this community can be refurbished and developed into beneficial economic uses so as to create income-generating employment opportunities to support the people socio-economically. With the heritage sites transformed into commercial and social ventures, other regeneration schemes – the building of new hospitals, schools and roads – can be embarked upon to further boost the community's developmental needs.

The cultivation of seaweed presents a favourable opportunity to be explored to create ready-made employment, particularly for the women in both Ada and Keta respectively. Seaweed contributes significantly to carbon sequestration and has the potential to generate rapid financial turnover by producing 2,500 tonnes of seaweed within 3 months per year in tropical regions (Vásquez et al. 2013). This is a prospective opportunity for the government to contemplate with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); in order to engage scientific views and

research partnerships arrangements- with local/foreign organisations- to preserve the shorelines and consequently establish local businesses in the affected communities. There is increasing evidence that natural habitats, including wetlands, dunes, seagrasses, coral and oyster reefs, and mangroves not only reduce the risk of coastal flooding and erosion, but also can be converted into commercial ventures as sources of employment for a community. Thus, the government should direct the Tourism Ministry to build up recreational and hospitality infrastructures in the coastal communities, as a development strategy to attract local, national, regional and foreign travellers to visit those places. By preserving the Ada and Keta communities, the tenets of sustainability, human dignity and national development will be partly realised.

Sustainable Development and Regional Studies: Future prospects for Ghana's Coastal Communities

The Sustainable Development Goals 14 and 15 (life below water and life on land respectively) relate to the challenges of Ada and Keta, because these coastal communities are in the throes of a sustainable quagmire with the majority of the people deserting them for want of sustainable livelihood. No human society will thrive to achieve its developmental objectives without protecting the health and natural resources, especially the coastal regions in them. This means that the government of Ghana “should develop measures of inclusive wealth to inform policy and track progress towards sustainability. Measures of inclusive wealth may be supplemented by science-based environmental sustainability standards for critical natural capital that cannot be effectively substituted by forms of capital” (UN Environmental Programme, 2021:119). The interplay of science-based and inclusive wealth as strategies to promote sustainability requires that creative national policy and logistics are deployed creatively to save and transform the coastal communities speedily. Similarly, the government needs to adopt novel actions to “conserve biodiversity such as reserving the net loss of habitat, halting overharvesting of fish, reducing pollution and slowing the spread of invasive alien species will help nature adapt to climate change” (UN Environmental Programme, 2021:110). Thus, there is an urgent need for the government to fuse sustainability especially of the coastal communities into the national development agenda; as well as seek expertise at home, from the regional studies community or from foreign sources, so as to stem the challenges.

Regional Studies

As an institution/organisation with a broader spectrum of academics who are engaged in consultancy services, research and related academic endeavours, there are mutual opportunities to be exploited for the wellbeing of Ghana and regional studies. For example, experts in the conservation of coastal places could reach out to the ministries of Minerals and Natural Resources including the Ministry of Regional Integration, with proposals to help Ghana resolve the challenges surrounding the coastal places. Again, experts with strategic prowess in the development and management of heritage sites and fisheries can also render technical advice, with a view to helping Ghana develop and expand the fisheries industry into a vibrant economic venture; thereby minimising social inequalities in the affected communities. These are some of the sustainable benefits which can be harnessed mutually for the benefit of Ghana and the regional studies community as a whole.

Conclusion

This article examined the challenges and opportunities of Ada and Keta coastal communities of Ghana through the lens of sustainability. It contends that existing policies and structures should focus critically on the coastal communities as a strategy to draw them into the national development agenda. This calls for a more cross-sectoral strategy for achieving sustainability, where development policy and human rights are freed from parochial thinking thus freeing space to embark upon holistic developmental projects beneficial to all Ghanaians, regardless of their region and status. Sustainability is no longer an issue of compliance with a set of principles but rather a strategic and operational effort. This calls for a visionary and creative leader who is able to integrate sustainability into national policies, and by extension, empower local communities to implement programmes to promote sustainability at the local level. Although successive Ghanaian governments have constructed some sea-defence walls within the erosion/flood-prone areas of Ada and Keta, these projects are woefully inadequate and lacked the decentralised governance to ensure that reclamation projects are realised.

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