

Hen Mpoano

Lets' protect and save Ghana's Coastlines

Newspaper Article by Kofi Agbogah.

Director, Hen Mpoano



Saturday 15th October, 2016

Lets' protect and save Ghana's Coastlines

A GNA feature by Lydia Asamoah/Kofi Agbogah

Accra, Oct. 15, GNA - "It all started around 12 midnight. The pressure from the waves was so intense that everyone had to run for their life.

"As I speak now, my boat, outboard motor and nets have all been carried away. I do not know what I will do to survive because I have nothing left to lean on," Adzi Raka Tetteh, a victim of the recent tidal destruction at Jamestown in Accra could not hide his frustration as he recounted the event."

"A mixture of desperation, anguish and sorrow was the mood in the area as residents stood in groups, wondering how they were going to pick up the pieces."

Extreme tidal events along the coast of Ghana in the months of April and September did considerable damage to private and public infrastructure and underscored the vulnerabilities of many shorefront communities to coastal hazards, which would only become more severe and frequent due to changing climate and rising sea levels.

The wave events and destruction that followed have necessitated a rethink and national deliberations to examine institutional arrangements in place to plan for and respond to such hazards and occurrences, which are predicted to occur with higher frequencies.

The changing climate has the potential to adversely affect various sectors of the Ghanaian economy including, health, agriculture, forestry, environment, among others.

Other studies have shown that African countries to be the most vulnerable, especially their fisheries and coastal livelihoods.

News Reports

Recent news reports indicated that violent 'tidal waves' that swept through parts of the coast of Ghana left in their trail damage to the livelihoods of hundreds of fishermen, with storms destroying homes, fishing boats, outboard motors, fishing nets and other equipment of fishermen in the Greater Accra, Volta and Western Regions.

The disaster that occurred left many fisher folks dejected and government officials as usual paid sympathy visits to victims of one misfortune or another.

It is good to show sympathy to community members who have experienced misfortune through no fault of theirs. Showing concern is human and the government cannot be faulted for doing that.

It is important, however, to identify and carry out appropriate interventions in such vulnerable coastal communities instead of waiting for those areas to be under serious threat before any interventions are undertaken.

Coastal Flooding

Sanwoma ((also known as Ankobra) is one of over a dozen communities facing such a situation. This village is always knee-deep in water and floods twice daily at high tides.

The entire community would be gone or underwater at some point in the future.

During moon tides water levels as high as 0.7 meters gets inside schools and bedrooms and since 2014, seven people have drowned at night due to the unexpected high flood.

An old woman died three months ago sleeping in her bed when water invaded her room and she couldn't get out to save herself.

Mr Frank Kofigah, a resident of Fuveme, another such community on the Keta strip, says it is the fifth time the disaster has occurred in the area this year.

"A few dozen years ago, the sea was about 5km from the the village but today it is less than 5m. During high tides, the sea could move several metres inland and the recent wave event washed away about 30 houses including the only school in the village".

Early Warning

We could predict with a high level of precision when high tide events would occur, and days when such flooding is most likely. Informing people of those periods when risk of flooding is highest could be provided to the coastal public, disaster relief and response agencies and district authorities to better prepare when such flooding events strike.

With good weather forecasting this information could provide the framework for an early warning system where high risk areas could be advised to evacuate and fishermen advised to move boats and other equipment to safe areas.

Mitigation and Coping Strategies

Coastal communities cannot afford to lose more lives and the situation is not going to get better as the sea level continue to rise.

Sea defence walls or relocation or soft approaches are possible ways of mitigation.

Sea defence: Shoreline protection works could protect private and public infrastructure. They are: appropriate in places where high value real estate, large populations and public infrastructure are at risk and the cost benefit is positive, but unlikely to be affordable in all places for all communities, so alternative solutions are necessary.

In some areas the presence of the structures have led to loss of fishing livelihoods and where the structures are defective, they have been overtopped by waves and hanging in the middle of nowhere.

Relocation

Various options could be considered for the short and long terms while emergency relocation of entire communities has been proposed for some vulnerable areas.

As land tenure and other socio cultural considerations are a constraint to such relocation, government and district assemblies needs to collaborate with the traditional leaders to fashion the way forward.

Soft Engineering

This involves the application of soft measures such as tree and other vegetation planting efforts, beach nourishment, beach cleaning, and construction setbacks, where there is a policy for communities to leave a reasonable distance between the high water mark of the tides and the settlement construction or any public infrastructure.

Challenges

Meanwhile, the main challenges identified with coastal protection include weak institutional capacity in public institutions at the district and national levels; lack of political will and interest; inadequate funding; limited knowledge and information of local communities, data standardisation and difficulty in integrating data from other institutions as well as turf protection.

Also identified were the need for strategic coordination between institutions relevant to coastal management and strengthening the Statutory Planning Committees at the district level to take responsibility for coastal management issues.

A recommended imperative for the National Development Planning Commission to the district assemblies was to highlight coastal management issues and expand their spatial planning function to cater for coastal management.

Barriers to coordination

However, there appears to be significant barriers to coordinated action against coastal erosion and flooding issues in Ghana.

These include the lack of integrated and standard information shared by the key actors; budgetary constraints for the coordination activities; absence of buy-in from local communities and territorial differences among Ministries, Departments Agencies; weak regulatory and planning frameworks which cause a lack of integrated views and policies on coastal management.

Also, research findings have focused on specific hotspots, but are not generally considered by the political decision makers at national and local levels. Institutions like National Disaster Management Organisation who are in charge of emergency actions are clearly left out of coastal disaster planning and preparedness until after a disaster event and they clearly lack resources to do any coordination.

What We Can Do

We need integrated approach to solving such natural shocks and must begin to look at big picture issues which require the collaboration of key stakeholders within the public and private sectors and civil society organisations and traditional authorities in capacity building programmes.

There is the need for the development of new policies and regulatory frameworks to protect the coast; as well as financing coastal protection and investments in public awareness and sensitisation.

There is also the essence of teaching communities to combat coastal erosion and adapt to climate change are much more social and environmentally adequate measures.

Policies

Integrated coastal management policies and practices seems not to be very developed in Ghana. It is imperative to develop a strategic coordination between institutions relevant to coastal management and establish a vision on coastal management.

Way Forward

Considering the list of actions and potential investments needed to combat coastal erosion and flooding in Ghana, it is imperative to create a national forum or coordination mechanism related to coastal protection planning and investment.

The government, traditional authorities, civil society organisations and private sector could work together towards the realisation of this objective.

As a first step, contiguous coastal areas could begin working together on such common issues as coastal erosion and flooding by invoking the relevant sections of the Local Government Act 462 and the National Development Planning Commission Act 480.

Conclusion

Generally, there is a strong opinion out there for the need to set up an interagency group to focus on integrated coastal management programmes, as the issues confronting Ghana's coast are enormous and complicated than one single line agency could handle under the current legal and institutional arrangements.

While details of such a programme together with institutional and legal framework should be among the priorities of government, the setting up of such working should have the authority and mandate from the President and if possible housed under the office of the Vice President.

There is the recognition that the most expensive investments of the country are within the coastal zone and most importantly, more than 30 per cent of Ghanaians live on six per cent of coastal lands where climate change stressors including flooding, sea level rise and coastal erosion wreak havoc with high frequency.

The time to take action is now!

GNA

<http://www.ghananewsagency.org/features/lets-protect-and-save-ghana-s-coastlines-109033>

<

.

•