



## ADVANCING COASTAL RESILIENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GHANA'S OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS DISTRICTS

### POLICE BRIEF

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### Key Message

We cannot pretend to know what is best for Ghana's coastal communities. We cannot even claim to have the perfect plan. But here is the undeniable truth: oil and gas exploration has left a trail of environmental destruction, depleted fisheries, and livelihoods hanging by a thread. It's deepened inequalities and scarred the landscapes that sustain millions.

The time for action is now. Coastal communities need more than ideas. They need systemic empowerment, transparency and a voice at the table. And so we are proposing the Coastal Community Redress Platform a baseline mechanism for providing participatory tools and inclusive policies and foundation for justice and resilience.

### Background

Ghana's coastal regions, home to vibrant fishing communities and biodiverse marine ecosystems, are under siege from the unchecked expansion of oil and gas activities. The very livelihoods that sustain millions are being eroded by industrial pollution, habitat destruction, and shrinking fish stocks. While the oil and gas sector promises national economic growth, its benefits remain concentrated among political elites and corporations, leaving coastal communities marginalized and struggling to survive. This systemic exclusion reflects a power imbalance that prioritizes profit over people and the environment, perpetuating cycles of inequity and ecological harm.

Efforts to mitigate these impacts have been fragmented and insufficient. Weak enforcement of critical policies, such as the National Fisheries Co-Management Policy and Environmental Management Policy, has enabled oil companies to operate with little accountability. Violations of environmental and human

rights, displacement, loss of fishing grounds, and exposure to hazardous conditions, are met with silence or resistance from regulatory bodies. Corruption and elite capture compound the problem, spreading the spoils of oil revenues among the few while leaving vulnerable communities to bear the brunt of its devastating consequences.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have long fought to amplify the voices of fisherfolk, women, and youth, demanding justice and environmental protection. However, without systemic reforms and robust mechanisms to address grievances, the imbalance remains entrenched. This project seeks to disrupt this status quo by equipping communities with the tools and platforms needed to demand accountability, advocate for their rights, and reclaim agency over their livelihoods and environment. The time for action is now

Current grievance and redress mechanisms are inadequate to address the systemic challenges posed by oil and gas production. Marginalized groups lack access to effective channels for reporting violations, seeking justice, and participating in policy implementation. Without inclusive, participatory governance, these challenges will continue to erode social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

### Project Overview

This project is a bold response to the environmental and social injustices facing Ghana's coastal communities, whose livelihoods are threatened by the unchecked expansion of oil and gas operations. By establishing a Coastal Coalition and Community Redress Platform, the initiative seeks to empower marginalized groups, including fisherfolk and women, to reclaim their agency and actively participate in decisions that impact their lives and environment. Anchored in transparency and accountability, the project leverages technology and grassroots mobilization to address systemic inequities and advance coastal resilience.

The platform bridges the gap between local grievances and national policymaking, ensuring that the voices of vulnerable communities resonate in governance frameworks. By integrating tools like TIMBY (This Is My Backyard) and fostering collaboration among civil society organizations (CSOs), traditional leaders, and policymakers, the project creates a unified front to address violations of environmental regulations and human rights. This initiative embodies the principles of participatory governance, advancing equity and sustainability in Ghana's oil and gas districts.

### Key Activities and Achievements

#### 1. Consultative Review of Grievance and Redress Mechanisms

The project convened local stakeholders, including fisherfolk associations, women's groups, traditional leaders, and CSOs, across five oil and gas districts: Ellembelle, Jomoro, Ahanta West, Nzema East, and Shama. This review uncovered significant gaps in grievance mechanisms, including weak accessibility, regulatory failures, and systemic exclusion of marginalized groups. By fostering dialogue among diverse stakeholders, the project identified actionable recommendations to enhance transparency, accountability, and policy enforcement.

#### 2. Community-Based Training on TIMBY Mobile Application

Over 100 community members, 60% of whom were women, received training on the TIMBY mobile application and instant messaging tools. This innovative approach empowers communities to document

and report environmental violations, human rights abuses, and impacts on livelihoods in real time. The training not only equipped participants with digital skills but also fostered a culture of collaborative action and accountability, enabling communities to actively contribute to advocacy efforts.

### **3. Establishment of the Offshore Redress Portal**

The Offshore Redress Portal was launched as a groundbreaking grievance platform integrated with TIMBY mobile application. This system allows communities to report, validate, and track grievances while ensuring transparency and real-time communication. By serving as both a monitoring and advocacy tool, the portal amplifies community voices and pressures stakeholders to uphold environmental and human rights standards.

## **Key Challenges Addressed**

### **1. Elite Capture and Marginalization**

The entrenched dominance of elites in oil revenue distribution and decision-making continues to exclude vulnerable groups. This project actively counters this by prioritizing the voices of fisherfolk, women, and youth, ensuring equitable representation and resource allocation through participatory tools and mechanisms.

### **2. Weak Enforcement of Policies**

Despite Ghana's robust environmental and fisheries policies, enforcement remains a major hurdle. The project introduces independent monitoring systems and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen regulatory oversight and hold stakeholders accountable for violations.

### **3. Lack of Transparency**

Opacity in oil and gas operations fosters corruption and environmental harm. The Offshore Redress Portal and TIMBY application address this by enabling real-time documentation, reporting, and validation of grievances, providing communities with an accessible and transparent mechanism for advocacy.

### **4. Fragmented Stakeholder Engagement**

Lack of coordination between CSOs, traditional leaders, and government agencies has weakened advocacy efforts. The project builds a cohesive coalition that unites stakeholders under a shared vision for justice, amplifying their collective impact on policy and governance. By tackling these systemic issues, the project creates a pathway for more equitable, transparent, and inclusive governance in Ghana's oil and gas sector

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **1. Institutionalize the Offshore Redress Platform**

Incorporating the Offshore Redress Platform into Ghana's national oil and gas governance framework is essential to ensuring marginalized communities have sustained access to justice. The platform aligns with key principles enshrined in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which

emphasize the state's duty to protect human rights and provide effective remedies for harm caused by business operations. Institutionalizing this mechanism will uphold Ghana's commitments under international frameworks such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), specifically Article 24, which guarantees the right to a healthy environment.

By embedding this grievance mechanism into national policies, Ghana can set a precedent for participatory governance in the oil and gas sector. The platform's ability to provide real-time reporting, independent validation, and transparent resolution processes ensures that environmental and human rights violations are addressed effectively. Institutionalization would also enhance the country's compliance with its obligations under the Paris Agreement by ensuring local voices are central to climate-resilient policy implementation.

## **2. Strengthen Policy Enforcement**

Weak enforcement of existing policies has allowed systemic environmental violations and human rights abuses to persist. Strengthening the enforcement of the National Fisheries Co-Management Policy and the Environmental Management Policy for the Oil and Gas Industry is critical to addressing these challenges. This aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, which calls for strong institutions to promote peace, justice, and inclusive governance.

Ghana's regulators must adopt stricter monitoring and accountability frameworks to ensure companies comply with both national policies and international standards, such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. These principles underscore the need for businesses to respect the rights of affected communities, ensuring safe access to resources and protecting livelihoods. Enhanced enforcement mechanisms would also uphold commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) by mitigating the adverse impacts of oil activities on marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

## **3. Promote Regional Scaling and Advocacy**

The success of this project offers a replicable model that should be scaled across Ghana's oil and gas districts and extended to other West African nations. This aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which calls for the sustainable management of Africa's natural resources to benefit all citizens. Regional expansion of the Coastal Coalition and Redress Platform would also strengthen Ghana's leadership role in advancing Goal 6 of the AU's African Mining Vision, which emphasizes community participation and environmental stewardship in resource governance.

By fostering cross-border collaboration, the project supports international frameworks like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), ensuring coastal resilience and reducing vulnerabilities to climate change impacts. Scaling this initiative would also align with the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) by promoting transparent governance and community-led monitoring of marine ecosystems in the oil and gas enclaves.

## **4. Prioritize Gender and Social Inclusion**

Women and marginalized groups bear disproportionate impacts from oil and gas activities but are often excluded from decision-making processes. Integrating gender-responsive approaches into governance frameworks aligns with CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which call for equitable participation in policy development and resource management.

This recommendation also supports SDG 5, which advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and SDG 10, which emphasizes reducing inequalities. Prioritizing inclusion ensures that affected communities have a platform to advocate for their rights, enabling a fair distribution of resources and benefits. By institutionalizing gender-sensitive approaches, Ghana can strengthen its alignment with global human rights principles and lead the way in advancing equity in resource governance

### Conclusion

This project exemplifies how participatory governance, digital tools, and coalition-building can transform coastal communities into active stakeholders in oil and gas governance. By institutionalizing these mechanisms, policymakers can address systemic inequities, protect livelihoods, and promote sustainable development in Ghana's offshore regions. Bold leadership is needed to ensure that these gains are preserved and scaled for long-term impact.

### Acknowledgement

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### Disclaimer

This acknowledgment is made in good faith and reflects the contributions and support of all listed organizations and stakeholders. It does not necessarily imply endorsement of the project's outcomes, methodologies, or subsequent applications by the mentioned organizations