Women Merchant Mariners: Empowering West African Women to Go to Sea

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Abstract
History and literature regarding women seafarers suggests that women represent about 2% of the world’s maritime workforce, with an insignificant number coming from West Africa which is the focus of this research. As a result, the main aim of this research is to identify women seafarers’ challenges with respect to employment on-board ships and how to provide sufficient solutions to empower more women in West Africa to go to sea. A qualitative assessment was made through in-depth interviews with 10 women seafarers. Women seafarers were interviewed to identify the challenges they face in the male dominated world of seafaring, their opinions on seafaring careers and the reasons why they have chosen a seafaring career. The results were collated and analysed qualitatively. The findings revealed that the most significant challenge faced by West African women seafarers is the problem of recruitment and retention on-board ships due to the lack of national shipping companies and national gender equality legislations. In addition, there are no effective initiatives or measures to empower women to go to sea in West Africa despite the fact that it is being practiced in other African regions such as South Africa. The concluding section makes some suggestions as to how more women from West Africa can be empowered to choose seafaring careers as well as a suggestion for further research.

Keywords: Women Seafarers, Challenges, Recruitment, Encouragement,

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Women Standing at the Helm
The sea has been regarded as a male domain for centuries. Some of the women who went to sea before the twentieth century sailed as the wives or mistresses of captains; others were smuggled on-board by seamen or officers (Cordingly, 2002). However, there has been an increasing trend of women seafarers on merchant ships indicating the entrance of more women to a traditionally male dominated profession. Starting from the twentieth century, more women have been employed on merchant ships, generally on cruise/passenger ships. However, these women do not generally work in the marine department of vessels where navigation or engineering operations take place but work mostly in the service sectors such as hotel and catering sections (Kitada, 2010). Research conducted by Wu (2005) revealed that women on cruise ships are under-represented in ship-operational sections (deck, engine and radio departments) compared to the service sectors.

In addition, according to the Seafarers’ Rights International Centre for advancing the legal protection of Seafarers (SRI), about 1.5 million seafarers daily work on a worldwide fleet of over 100,000 ships that transport over 90% of world trade (SRI, 2013). Women seafarers represent a very small percentage of this figure. Furthermore, current statistics of the International Transport Workers Federation indicate that women make up only an estimated 2% of the world’s maritime workforce (ITF, n.d). In this figure, 94% of women are employed on passenger ships (with 68% on ferries and 26% on cruise ships) and 6% are employed on cargo vessels. 51.2% of women on cruise ships come from OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, 23.6% from Eastern Europe, 9.8% from Latin America and Africa, 13.7% from the Far East, and 1.7% from south Asia and the Middle East (Belcher et al., 2003).

Despite these diverse estimates and figures, the presence of women seafarers remains largely invisible, as there have not been any regular surveys conducted to monitor women’s participation in shipping.
Moreover, the above figures suggest that there are very few women seafarers in Africa, particularly in West Africa. Among the very few women in West Africa who rose to high ranks in the seafaring hierarchy is Captain Beatrice Vormawah, who became the first African female ship captain taking full command as master and sailing Ghana’s ships on international voyages (Capper's, 1996). As the first African female captain, Vormawah went through a lot of challenges during her cadetship including lack of facilities for women on-board. She had to work very hard in order to prove that she could do it. However, the barriers have now been broken for women to go to sea (IMO, n.d.).

1.2. Statement of the Problem
The main motivation for this research is that most women face discrimination in getting into seafaring jobs. For example, in some countries, Maritime Education and Training (MET) institutions are not allowed to recruit women for nautical courses. Women tend to enroll in engineering rather than navigational courses. Even once trained, they may have to face prejudice from ship owners who do not want to employ women (ITF, n.d.). Citing myself as an example, I was passionate about the seafaring career and as such, I was motivated, though a Cameroonian lady, to pursue a course in Nautical Science at the Regional Maritime University (RMU) in Ghana. After I graduated, I sent several applications to various shipping companies and my applications were all turned down because all the companies were not interested in recruiting women on-board ships. However, I had the opportunity to go on board a South African training ship as a deck cadet.

This study, therefore, seeks to identify women seafarers’ challenges with respect to employment onboard ships and ways to provide sufficient solutions for more women in West Africa to go to sea.

1.3. Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this research are to identify the challenges that West African women seafarers face with respect to recruitment on-board ships and further to find ways of overcoming these challenges so as to empower more women in West Africa to choose seafaring careers. Specifically, the research seeks to establish the following:

- Reasons why women choose seafaring careers.
- Factors acting as barriers for women to pursue seafaring careers.
- Policies or measures to empower women to go to sea in West Africa.
- Various views on seafaring careers

1.4. Scope of the Study
Women can work on-board ships in different sections including as cooks, stewardesses, cleaners and hotel staff on passenger ships. However, this study focuses on getting more women in West Africa to take up positions in the operational sections of merchant (cargo and passenger) ships such as cadets, officers/ engineers and captains. Additionally, the study focuses on merchant ships and does not include military ships. It deals with ships sailing international voyages of more than 500 gross tonnage and does not include offshore or supply vessels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Shortage of Officers
The Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and the International Shipping Federation (ISF) manpower study provide a comprehensive evaluation of the worldwide demand and supply of merchant seafarers. The 2010 study estimated the global supply of officers to be 624,000 and the global demand for officers to be 637,000, representing a shortage of 13,000 (2%) officers in 2010 and predicted an intensified shortage of officers by 2020. Moreover, the study indicated supply difficulties for current and future senior management level officers, particularly engineers in the Far East and Indian Sub-Continent, which are the main suppliers of seafarers(BIMCO & ISF, 2010). When compared to the exceptional increase in orders for new build ships, which has been the situation since the 2004 boom in the shipping market, the shortage will only be aggravated. These increasingly sophisticated new ships must be manned by competent seafarers who are expected to operate them in a
safe, secure and environmentally sound manner once they are delivered (IMO, ILO, BIMCO, & ISF, 2008). Due to these market forces and the associated shortage of ship officers, women seafarers have recently been attracting more attention than ever before to serve as a solution to the shortage of officers to operate the world’s fleet (Popescu & Varsami, 2010). Moreover, most shipping companies are encouraged to recruit more women due to this shortage of male seafarers (Sohyun, 2010). This is because the training of female cadets is considered an important approach to increase the number of qualified officers available to the shipping industry and thus contributes towards resolving the present shortage of qualified seafarers.

2.2. The International Maritime Organisation’s Initiatives
In response to the global demands in the seafaring labour market, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) launched the "Go to Sea!" campaign in 2008, through the Regional Conference on the Development of a Global Strategy for Women Seafarers, held in Busan, Republic of Korea in April 2013. Moreover, the conference adopted a slogan: "Go to sea TOGETHER” in order to promote women seafaring (IMO, 2014). Furthermore, in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of IMO's capacity-building and gender program for women in the maritime sector, a video entitled "Women at the Helm" was produced by IMO (IMO, 2013). The IMO promotes both government and industry to provide men and women with equal access and opportunities for maritime training, jobs and employment and there should be facilities on board ship, which are suitable for women. Additionally, the IMO Integrated Technical Cooperation program has led to six regional women support networks established for the purpose of capacity building for women in the maritime sector. These networks have provided a practical vehicle for local issues to be addressed by the regional groups (IMO, 2012). However, there has not been any significant initiative to promote West African women seafarers apart from the regional seminar for women maritime managers from West and Central Africa, which took place in November 2013. The seminar was conducted in French with 26 participants from Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Madagascar, Morocco, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia. Demand for this course has continued to grow over the past three years; however, there is insufficient funding to meet the demand (IMO, 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY
This study employs the qualitative method of research, utilizing an in-depth interview approach in gathering data. The qualitative method of research is used because it allows the researcher to create rich, in-depth data (Oakley, 1981). Additionally, the population of women seafarers is very small, thus ruling out any possibility of a statistical analysis. Furthermore, quantitative research methods highlight the measurement and analysis of fundamental relationships between variables rather than the exploration of meaning and experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Quantitative research, therefore, is not particularly applicable to this study because the themes cannot be explored convincingly with quantitative methods. In addition, in-depth interviews are considered appropriate for the research because they permit researchers to elicit people’s own accounts, meanings and interpretations as the interviewer is more passive in the role of a listener and the informant is more active as a speaker (Johnson, 2001). Moreover, according to Burgess (1982), in-depth interviews provide the chance for the researcher to search deeply, to disclose new clues to secure accurate, inclusive and vivid accounts that are based on personal experience and to open up new dimensions of a problem. Due to the nature of this research, qualitative methods, especially the in-depth face-to-face interview, could really count in feminist terms and generate useful knowledge (Maynard, 1994). Hence, it has become the paradigmatic ‘feminist method’ (Kelly, 1990).

3.1. Population and Sample Size
The targeted population of the study comprised of women seafarers, particularly from West Africa. In all, 20 respondents were sampled for the study using a purposive research sampling method. Moreover, the sample of 20 was chosen because it will give an accurate basis of generation of information over the whole population of women seafarers in West Africa.
3.2. Methods of Data Collection
The primary method employed in data collection for this project was in-depth audio-taped interviews. In addition, other methods such as telephone interviews and e-mail interviews were used as alternatives where necessary. Furthermore, the researcher’s personal experience as a woman seafarer was used as a contributing source of data. The secondary sources of information were obtained predominantly from books, articles, journals and internet.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
The data gathered during the interviews was analysed qualitatively. The data were transcribed and grouped under the subheadings in which the interview questions were designed and analysed after coding manually using the organising principle for qualitative coding as described by Babbie (2001). A total of 10 interviews (6 from West Africa, 2 from Europe and 2 from Asia) were conducted and analysed out of a targeted number of 20. The study could not reach out to women seafarers from all West African countries. This is due to the unavailability and insignificant number of women seafarers in West Africa. In analysing and discussing the findings gathered, the study gave priority to the words of the interviewees in an effort to allow issues important to them to appear and to be fully reflected.

4.1. Background Information
The background information of women seafarers who partook in this study are shown in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Number of Years at Sea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>12yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>11yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>8yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>8yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Cadet</td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>4th Officer</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>13 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>15yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Cadet</td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>4th Engineer</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>2yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Cadet</td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the women that were interviewed for this research are single or divorced, with no children. This seems to agree with the reason why, generally, some women are indifferent when it comes to seafaring because they see it to be a threat to their families and home life. Furthermore, when it comes to social class of women seafarers’ respondents; the term, ‘Upper class’ refers to Captains/Chief Engineers, ‘Middle class’ refers to Officers/Engineers and ‘Lower class’ refers to Cadets/Trainees. Table 1 indicates that all of the women seafarers from Asia and Europe who participated in this study fall into the upper class income level as most of them are
currently captaining a ship or have captained a ship before. On the other hand, the majority of the women seafarers from West Africa fall between the lower and middle class income groups as most of them are cadets or officers. Additionally, table 1 indicates the ages of respondents that are currently seafarers and those who have had experience at sea. The majority of respondents (40%) are between 20 and 30 years of age; 30% are between 31 and 50 years and the remaining 30% are between 51 and 58 years of age. This gives an average age of 37 for the women seafarers who participated in this research.

4.2. Reasons for Choosing a Seafaring Career
In order to empower more women in West Africa to take up seafaring careers, it is important to look at some of the reasons why women choose careers at sea. As a result, women seafarers who participated in this study were asked why they chose careers at sea. Based on the responses, most women go to sea because they want a more challenging job and also to prove to their male counterparts that they are equally up to the task. Furthermore, seafaring jobs bring out strength and boldness in women making them more strong and courageous as compared to other women who work on land. As stated by two women seafarers:

During my time, I was told women couldn’t do it, so I was determined and wanted to prove them wrong.

I want a more challenging work and I also want to be different and stronger than other women who work on land.

Additionally, some women choose seafaring as a career because they want to travel and explore new places as one female captain stated: “I chose this career for love of adventure and travel”. Other women choose seafaring jobs because they are inspired when they see other women seafarers. One Ghanaian female fourth officer said: “I was inspired as a child when I saw a female captain at the Tema port.” Moreover, women from countries such as India and Cameroon where there were no women seafarers initially, chose to go to sea in order to become the first so as to open the way for others. As stated by two female seafarers from these countries respectively:

When I started, females were not going to sea in India, so I felt as being the first female at my company and I should pioneer something for other women to follow. This career is something that has given me some identity than any other career.

I chose a seafaring career because I want to become the first female Cameroonian captain as there has not been one yet.

4.3. Views on Seafaring Careers
The women seafarers who were interviewed were asked to give their opinions on whether seafaring jobs are actually good jobs for women to take based on their experience. This question was asked in order to ascertain whether it is worth empowering more West African women to take seafaring jobs. The general response was that working at sea was a rewarding and empowering experience. One female captain stated:

I think it is a great place for a woman to go. It is so exciting to be at sea. You see new countries; you get to go and be out there on the oceans and see the sun rise, sunset, the stars, the constellations. It is very rewarding, there is a lot of power being at sea, you have the ability to have the courage to drive the ship which is part of the transportation industry and that transportation is what makes commerce work and that is what brings all the goods and services. In fact it is a great industry, so it is great to be part of that. Women should want jobs in the maritime industry.
In addition, some women went as far as stating the qualities that women seafarers possess as a female officer from Ghana stated: “They are courageous and very self-sacrificing and when given the right support and encouragement, they will succeed with flying colours and make their nations proud.” Apart from the women seafarers who have a positive view on seafaring, non-seafaring women who work ashore, see seafaring as a positive place and think that women should take advantage of the profession. As the President of WISTA (Women’s International Shipping and Trading Association) Ghana stated:

I think that it is one area that women are not really there. I think that it is a good area and women should take advantage of that profession. Actually, going to sea is not easy for a woman and when a woman takes up that challenge, she learns a lot and she herself is filled with confidence and grows up with a broader knowledge because seafaring jobs will take her out into other areas such as coastal, international and even at the port and she tends to learn a lot. Moreover, apart from benefiting in terms of the economy, that is the salary to take care of your family, seafaring is one area that involves a lot of foreign exchange for any country and I think that women should be part of such a thing.

However, other women see seafaring as a very short term job that frequently shifts to a shore-based career after reaching the captain’s rank. As one female captain said:

Actually, seafaring is a very short term career. Most women and men do it for about 15yrs to 20yrs and then shift to shore side. Also at a point you feel stagnant. For example, am sailing as a master, I don’t see any step further, if am not planning to shift then I will find myself stagnant at this level or at this rank but if I go ashore, I can go further. It is actually a short term because when you become a master you have reach the ultimate level on-board the ship now you have to shift to keep on moving.

4.4. Challenges Faced by Women Seafarers
Indeed, few women seafarers have been hired onboard ships, and those who have made it to the top have tended to endure considerable challenges and discrimination from male colleagues as well as from shipping companies during the recruitment processes. It is essential to look at the experiences of women who are already established in seafaring careers and identify some common issues. This section focuses on the experiences and challenges of women seafarers during their quest for a career at sea.

4.4.1. Challenges with Recruitment On-board
It was noted in the literature reviewed that most shipping companies today are opening their doors for women due to the shortage of male officers. In order to find out if this is the case in West Africa, women seafarers from West Africa were asked how accessible it was for them to get a ship. However, the responses were disappointing as most of these women went through tough times finding a ship to sail on as cadets. Some of them had to go as far as paying shipping agencies to find them ships to begin their careers at sea as cadets. Besides, some of the West African women attended several interviews and performed better than male candidates but were dropped from the list of selected applicants, solely because of their gender. Some shipping companies went as far as telling them that they do not take women on-board their ships because there are no facilities for women on-board. Three female cadets from West Africa said:

It was very difficult for me; I had to pay money to different agencies to get one for my cadetship training.

Yes, right now I have gone to sea for four months about a year ago, I’m still here all because I am a woman, the shipping companies don’t want to take me because they don’t have facilities for women and other things.
I had six months sea time and I need six more months to complete my cadetship training. I have gone to several interviews and perform very well; in fact, I was among the best candidates that were selected. Only for the recruiting officer to call and told me that he is sorry, he cannot take me because the company does not employ women on-board their ships.

However, women from other parts of the world like the U.K. and India do not face these difficulties in gaining access to ships because their government have put in place gender equality legislation. As stated by two female captains from the U.K. and India respectively:

At my time in the U.K, there was this national equality Legislation that says employers have to employ women to take the same role as the men. So, I was given the opportunity to be employed to take one of those roles. It was this national legislation that allows me to be taken on the ship.

Actually it was not difficult for me because of the national legislation that encourages Indian flagged ships to employ women on-board, but of course there were some doubt as in whether I will perform well as the first female to be employed by my company.

### 4.4.2. Challenges On-board

Even after going through difficulties just to get a ship, most women face diverse challenges whilst on-board. These challenges include racism and isolation which are common problems for both men and women seafarers. However, women tended to face more challenges than their male colleagues, some of which compromised their training. A female fourth officer from Sierra Leone noted:

There are always challenges especially for women. Women got different types of challenges than men and as a woman you should be prepared to face so many challenges. It was very challenging for me on one of the first ships I was on, the captains view women on a ship as some kind of bad luck so, I was not allowed on the bridge, or to be seen anywhere around him, was not allowed to do anything. This restricted my training. I ended up spending more yes as a cadet because I couldn’t learn anything to qualify me as an officer. It was not easy at all.

### 4.4.2.1. Sexual Harassment

Majority of the women interviewed for this research mentioned sexual harassment as the major problem they have encountered on-board. Furthermore, sexual harassment is inevitable due to the fewer number of women on-board as compared to their male counterparts. Some women seafarers have become so familiar with sexual harassment that they now refer to it as “the usual thing”. They reported different strategies used to deal with the harassment including avoiding, befriending the wives of and reporting their harassers. Three women from Ghana stated:

Yes, the usual thing sexual harassment. I tried to avoid the guys who tried to harass me by not being with them in a confine place alone and stop dressing in a sexy way not to expose any part of my body.

I would say it was sexual harassment, though it was subtle moves. I brushed it off and sometimes what I did was to befriend their wives if I knew them, thereby keeping them at bay for fear that I may talk.

Harassment and racism; with harassment I reported when I could not take it any longer but with the racism I just endured till the end.
4.4.2.2. Promotion and Salary Discrimination
Today it is very easy for women to move up the ranks in a seafaring career as compared to the past where women were hugely discriminated against in terms of promotion and salary. The attitude today largely depends on competency and confidence, whether the candidate is a man or a woman. This is particularly so with shipping companies in Europe. As all the women seafarers from Europe interviewed for this research said that it was not difficult for them to gain promotions as they were up to the task and had not experienced any discrimination in terms of salary. As noted by two women from this region:

It was not that easy and it was not that difficult. All you need to do is to just focus on doing your job well and they will promote you as far as you are due for promotion and competent. I have been able to be promoted based on my performance.

Even though there was some level of scepticism in the beginning but when they realised I was up to the challenge I was given my due.

However, most women in West Africa and Asia still face a lot of discrimination when it comes to promotion often because their male colleagues do not want to receive orders from a woman. Three women from Ghana, India and South Korea, respectively described their difficulties:

Promotion was difficult for me, as most of the men are not happy when a woman gives them command on the ship, there’s always that fear that she will soon start commanding me and give us orders if she is promoted.

It was difficult for them to promote me. It entails a lot of hard work and determination. At one stage I had wanted to change and do something else then I said to myself, I must become a captain first.

Promotion was not difficult for me. At least I was lucky because I heard from my female colleague; she faced lots of difficulties getting promotion because the shipping company did not want her to progress from the third to second officer.

4.4.2.3. Relationships with Male Colleagues
The majority of the women seafarers said that they had cordial and respectful relationship with their male colleagues. One female officer said her male colleagues came to like the idea of women on board as she explained:

There are advantages to be a woman on-board. I think we women have to look for those advantages, we bring in different perspectives to the ship that men like because it is more balanced. I can say that the men get use to me and they like having women on-board and as we get more women, it became easier for other women to join.

However, there were few cases where women had difficulties with their male colleagues due to cultural and religious differences. As one woman said:

Generally, it was ok. Just that some had religious and cultural issues on having a woman on board. Some did not want to use the same washing machine and drier that I use, because I am a woman.

4.5. Measures/Policies to Empower West African Women to Go to Sea
The West African Women seafarers who took part in this study were asked if there were any policies or measures in place to empower women in West Africa to go to sea as it is being done in other regions such as South Africa and India. The general response was that there are no policies or measures in place to empower women to take up seafaring. The lack of policies to empower women in
West Africa into the seafaring careers is also recognised by the President of WISTA Ghana, as she stated:

When you look at South Africa, the Government and Transnet is encouraging more women to go to sea but in West Africa you don’t see that. I’m very happy that you want to do this project because WISTA can do just that much because WISTA is for maritime and there are a lot of women organisations but WISTA is for maritime so, we need to be pushing that agenda. Now we have WISTA in Nigeria, we need to start WISTA in Cameroon.

4.6. Ways to Overcome Women Seafarers’ Challenges
Since this research seeks ways to empower more women in West Africa to take up seafaring jobs, it is important to find out, from women seafarers themselves, how these problems could be overcome. Most of the women interviewed noted that the problems could only be overcome if the number of women, taking part in the actual running of the ship increased so as to balance the gender gap on-board. In order to achieve this, more female students must be admitted into nautical and engineering courses at maritime institutions. As two women stated:

It has to be a very long term plan by introducing more women on-board especially on cargo ships not only as stewardesses. This is because if there are only 2 females out of 25 men, then there is a problem. At least balancing the number will help to solve the problems.

It goes back to access, every country is different, and every shipping agency is different. They have to provide women access, space available, sea training to be able to go to sea and do the job right. Women need to be trained because you cannot just work on the ship without being trained and right now women don’t have the opportunity to gain access to the ship so we need that first. Moreover, women need support from legislation, I got support from legislation.

Furthermore, the flag States should adopt legislations on gender equality and should monitor and interact frequently with woman on-board their ship each time the ship comes to the port. There is also a voice that IMO could further encourage the flag States with this, as one respondent described:

Port and flag state must encourage more shipping companies and vessel owners to employ more females. I personally think IMO must tighten their laws to protect the female seafarer’s image. And the Port and Flag States must be more concern about every single female on board their ships each time the ship comes to port. They should have a way of interacting with them frequently and not wait for reports from victims before doing something about it.

In addition, it is important for women seafarers to talk to younger women to educate them about seafaring and that it is not just for men. This could be done through the media or through conducting research on women seafarers. As one noted:

We are very few in the industry and I think we have to talk to many women to join. This can be done by using the media, through research just as you are doing to create the awareness about few women in the industry.

Furthermore, there will be more women in seafaring if training is made easily accessible to female cadets because this is currently the major challenge. Once a woman becomes an officer and is confident enough she can deal with the other issues such as sexual harassment and male chauvinism.
Moreover, some women seafarers said that more women will be encouraged to take up seafaring jobs when legislation is in place to protect them. As stated by one female officer from Ghana:

More women can be encouraged by putting the right legislations in place to protect the females from any type of abuse and harassment and when the seafaring career is not seen as one for prostitutes.

5. CONCLUSIONS
The findings regarding the reasons why women choose seafaring careers suggest that most women, particularly women in West Africa, go to sea because they want a more challenging job and also to prove to their male counterparts that they are equally up to the task. This is because in West Africa, seafaring jobs are often associated with masculine norms as physically challenging, and therefore, only for men. Moreover, some West African women seafarers choose to go to sea in order to become the first so as to open the way for others. Furthermore, most women seafarers and non-seafarers view seafaring as a good job as it is an area which strengthens the economies of most countries. Also, women seafarers possess good qualities that make others admire the profession.

In addition, it can be said that women seafarers’ challenges have been reduced due to the initiatives of international organisations to encourage more women to go to sea. Most shipping companies in Europe and Asia now employ women on-board their ships due to the presence of national gender equality legislation on national ships. This legislation has created opportunities for women sailing on-board ships. However, the situation in West Africa has a different picture. It is still very difficult for women to be recruited on-board ships due to the lack of national ships and gender equality legislation. All of the national shipping lines in West Africa that existed before and employed a number of women on-board, such as the Black Star Line of Ghana, have collapsed. Furthermore, some of the few shipping companies that recruit in West Africa do not take women, mainly because of lack of facilities on-board for women. Hence, the most significant problem faced by West African women is the process of recruitment on-board ships. Moreover, there are no effective initiatives or measures to empower women to go to sea in West Africa despite the fact that it is being practiced in other African regions such as South Africa.

When it comes to women seafarers’ challenges on-board, most women are no longer faced with issues of promotion and salary discrimination as they are principally assessed based on their performance and competency. Apart from cultural and religious issues which hamper relationships between women seafarers and their male colleagues, most women who were interviewed in this research have a cordial relationship with their male counterparts. However, all the women seafarers who participated in this research have experienced sexual harassment at work. Women tend to be vulnerable in this context, mainly due to the unbalanced male-to-female ratio on board ships.

One suggestion to deal with such women seafarers’ challenges on-board would be to employ more women as seafarers and balance the male-to-female ratio.

6. Suggestion for Further Research
Future research could build upon what emerged from this study in order to focus more carefully on national employment equity legislation of West African States, and the training practices of maritime institutions in West Africa with respect to the training of female cadets for seafaring careers.

7. RECOMMENDATION
Since there are no national shipping lines in West Africa, it is important that the various States in West Africa, in their capacity as Flag States together with the IMO, negotiate with ships flying their flags to employ women on-board by way of tonnage tax reduction. This is particularly so with Liberia as one of the top ship registration countries under the FOC (Flag of Convenient). Moreover, it will be possible that they establish gender equality legislation as part of the best practices to encourage shipping
companies to employ more women on-board. They should also establish or strengthen their employment legislation to discourage harassment of all forms, particularly sexual harassment.

When recruiting people for seafaring jobs, shipping companies should not focus on gender but should appreciate the competence of a person or look at who is the best person for the job. Furthermore, they should consider the advantages and privileges of having women on-board and recruit more women as this will help to reduce the challenges of women seafarers on-board as well as providing a solution to the shortage of officers. Issues including sexual harassment stretching from verbal sexualised comments to physical assault should be effectively addressed by companies to ensure the continued retention of existing women seafarers and the recruitment of women seafarers in the future.

Women seafarers in West Africa should try to discover what it takes to be a woman in a man's world and succeed through education, knowledge, and experience. In addition, they should develop what are typically regarded as “male strengths or assets” to be accepted or promoted, while retaining their valuable female characteristics. Both assets should be used wisely and appropriately, bearing in mind that some strengths, which are typically very feminine, if utilized appropriately, could be assets amidst the “man’s world” of seafaring. Moreover, West African women seafarers should mentor other women into the profession.

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