
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**From Local Content To Shared Maritime Value: An Institutional Governance Framework for Meaningful Participation and Corporate Responsibility in Ghana's Keta Port Development****Elikplim Kwabla Apetorgbor***Energy, Finance, Policy and Sustainable Development Expert Independent Power Generators, Ghana and PhD in Petroleum and Energy Studies student of University of Cape Coast***Corresponding Author:** Elikplim Kwabla Apetorgbor, **E-mail:** elikplimapetorgbor@gmail.com**| ABSTRACT**

The proposed Keta Port is one of Ghana's most consequential greenfield maritime projects. Properly structured, it could expand trade capacity, strengthen regional transit corridors, stimulate the blue economy and support industrial development in the Volta coastal zone. However, the project also concentrates material risks around fishing livelihoods, coastal access, land, cultural heritage, employment expectations, public infrastructure and community-state relations. This article develops an implementable governance architecture for translating local-content expectations into verifiable domestic value, credible participation and commercially disciplined corporate responsibility. It uses an integrative review and institutional-design method, drawing on the Keta Port project and environmental record, Ghanaian legislation, international lender standards, responsible-business-conduct guidance, infrastructure procurement practice and recent research on port-community relations, local content and coastal livelihoods. The paper rejects two narrow interpretations of local content: informal entitlement allocation and simple headcount quotas. Instead, it treats local content as a lifecycle system for domestic value retention and capability accumulation across project preparation, financing, procurement, engineering, construction, concessions and operations. The proposed architecture comprises nine interdependent elements: enforceable legal and contractual obligations; verified skills, enterprise and livelihood baselines; transparent recruitment and succession systems; competitive local procurement and supplier upgrading; substantive ownership, finance and technology transfer; rights-based fisheries, land, cultural and environmental safeguards; continuous engagement, grievance and remedy; additional and outcome-focused corporate social responsibility; and public performance reporting supported by independent assurance. The analysis also introduces a four-part classification that separates compliance, impact remedy, local content/shared value and discretionary CSR; a five-stage local-value ladder; a phase-gated implementation sequence; and a scorecard for employment, Ghanaian value added, women's participation, supplier performance, livelihood restoration, grievance closure and integrity. The central argument is that credible local participation is not a concession to political or community pressure. It is a project-control mechanism that can lower delay, conflict, fronting, reputational exposure and financing risk while improving the durability of national and local benefits.

| KEYWORDS

Keta Port; local content; meaningful stakeholder engagement; social licence to operate; corporate social responsibility; blue economy; port-city interface; Ghana; project governance; supplier development

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1. Introduction

Ports are not merely transport facilities. They are institutional platforms that influence trade costs, industrial location, logistics productivity and the competitiveness of entire economic corridors. In emerging economies, a new port also changes the allocation of land, access rights, environmental exposure, public investment and commercial opportunity. The distribution of

costs and benefits must therefore be treated as a core element of project design rather than as an afterthought to engineering and construction (World Bank, 2025a; UNCTAD, 2025).

The Keta Port Project embodies this dual character. The Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority's draft environmental assessment outlines a multi-purpose development involving breakwaters, dredging, terminals, storage areas, access roads, utility systems, a fishing harbour, ship-repair facilities and wider port-city infrastructure. The project area is equally a lived coastal economy: it includes landing beaches, artisanal fishing, fish processing and trading, salt-related activities, settlements, tourism and recreation, shrines, cemeteries and a shoreline already exposed to erosion and flooding (GPHA, 2025a). The development should therefore be governed as a long-term territorial and economic transformation programme, not as a stand-alone marine works contract.

Project momentum accelerated in 2025 and 2026. The 2026 State of the Nation Address reported that Cabinet had considered the designs and feasibility work and had requested an implementation roadmap from GPHA. In June 2026, GPHA announced that the environmental permit had been obtained, the administration block was about 70 per cent complete, and 42 domestic and international investors had expressed interest ahead of engagement and shortlisting (Republic of Ghana, 2026; GPHA, 2026a, 2026b). These developments suggest movement from extended planning towards transaction preparation. They do not remove the need for rigorous decisions on demand, phasing, financing, procurement, social safeguards and institutional accountability before irreversible commitments are made.

As project visibility rises, expectations concerning employment, contracts, ownership, compensation, community investment and political recognition will also intensify. Without agreed rules, these issues are easily collapsed into a single contest over benefits. Five practical questions then dominate: who receives reliable information; who is trained; who gains access to employment and procurement; who carries project-related losses; and who verifies delivery of commitments. Informal nomination lists, elite intermediation, opaque subcontracting and ad hoc donations can turn participation into a source of distrust. By contrast, verified evidence, contractual obligations, capability development, due diligence and independent assurance can align inclusion with bankability.

This article asks how a greenfield port in Ghana can institutionalise local content, meaningful participation and corporate responsibility while protecting affected people, preserving procurement integrity and strengthening project delivery. It makes four contributions. First, it consolidates fragmented legal, tender, procurement and engagement requirements into a port-specific governance framework. Second, it separates mandatory duties and impact remedy from discretionary CSR. Third, it defines local content as an integrated system linking jobs, procurement, ownership, finance, management and technology transfer. Fourth, it provides practical tools for GPHA, prospective investors, contractors, local government, traditional authorities, civil society and affected communities.

The approach is intentionally pragmatic. It does not endorse politically determined quotas or assume that every work package can immediately be delivered locally at acceptable cost, quality and safety. It establishes the conditions for ambitious but evidence-based targets to be negotiated, priced, contracted, monitored and progressively increased as domestic capability develops.

2. Methodology And Analytical Scope

The study adopts a qualitative integrative-review and institutional-design approach. The evidence base brings together five categories of material: the Keta Port environmental and project record; Ghanaian legislation on ports, procurement, labour, land, investment, local government, information and environmental protection; standards commonly applied by development financiers and responsible investors; contemporary guidance on port reform, quality infrastructure, ESG and disclosure; and peer-reviewed research on local content, stakeholder participation, social licence, megaproject risk, coastal livelihoods and corporate responsibility.

The review is current to 26 June 2026. Priority is given to primary official materials and recent peer-reviewed work, while established theoretical sources are retained where they remain analytically necessary. Doctrinal interpretation is used to identify the source and hierarchy of obligations. Comparative synthesis is used to identify transferable good practice. Institutional design reasoning is then applied to convert broad principles into concrete governance mechanisms.

The article is conceptual rather than econometric. It does not estimate causal effects or recommend a definitive local-content percentage because the final concession model, engineering design, package strategy, workforce forecast, financing terms, affected-person census and verified supplier capacity are not yet fully available in the public domain. This is not a minor limitation. Numerical promises made before these inputs are known are more likely to become political commitments than enforceable commercial obligations. The framework is therefore designed to guide the next stage of data gathering, market testing, negotiation and transaction structuring.

3. Keta Port as a strategic and distributional institution

The investment case for a new port must ultimately be demonstrated through cargo demand, corridor strategy, competitive positioning, phasing, financing and operating efficiency. Yet commercial viability and social legitimacy are inseparable in practice. A project that cannot maintain lawful land access, safe relations with host communities, continuity of fishing activity or effective grievance management may incur stoppages, security expenditure, contractor claims, financing concerns and reputational loss. Equally, a project that replaces competition with politically allocated opportunities may compromise cost, quality, safety and lender confidence. Meaningful participation is therefore a delivery control, not a communications accessory (Franks et al., 2014; Moeremans & Dooms, 2025; OECD, 2025a).

Table 1. Project transition signals and their governance significance

Current signal	Evidence available by June 2026	Governance implication
Strategic direction	Cabinet considered the design and feasibility work and requested an implementation roadmap.	Commercial, environmental, social and domestic-value <u>workstreams</u> should be integrated in one sequenced development plan.
Environmental approval	GPHA reported that the Environmental Protection Authority had granted the project permit.	Permit conditions and the ESMP should be converted into contractor clauses, monitoring requirements and disclosed commitments.
Local institutional platform	The administration block was reported to be approximately 70% complete, with an operational target of January 2027.	The facility should serve as the <u>recognised centre</u> for disclosure, registration, grievances and stakeholder engagement, not simply as an office.
Investor market interest	GPHA reported expressions of interest from 42 Ghanaian and international investors and an intended shortlisting process.	Local-content, beneficial-ownership, technology-transfer and social-performance requirements should be designed before bidders are selected.
Regional economic ambition	The port is presented as a transit, logistics and industrial hub connected to regional corridors.	Host-area participation must reinforce, rather than weaken, national and regional competitiveness.

Three distributional characteristics are especially important. First, benefits are often dispersed across the national and regional economy, whereas adverse impacts are concentrated around the project footprint. Shippers, inland producers, consumers and investors may benefit from lower logistics costs, while fishers and nearby households absorb disruption to access, safety, traffic, land or amenity. Second, benefits and burdens operate on different time horizons: construction work may be temporary, while coastal, land-use and livelihood effects can endure for decades. Third, the most visible opportunities are not necessarily the most transformative. Casual labour and small service contracts matter, but long-run value is more likely to come from certified skills, maintenance capacity, logistics enterprises, professional services, terminal operations, cold-chain systems, finance, technology and managerial succession.

These characteristics support a governance model that protects people directly affected by the project without confusing rights-based remedy with competitive opportunity; recognises host communities without excluding the wider Ghanaian economy; and permits international specialist participation where capability is unavailable while requiring genuine Ghanaian workshare and knowledge transfer.

4. Conceptual foundations

4.1 Stakeholder legitimacy, salience and social licence

Stakeholder theory challenges the view that infrastructure governance should account only for shareholders and contracting parties. Workers, suppliers, communities, public authorities, users and ecosystems are affected in different ways and possess varying degrees of power, legitimacy and urgency (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997). For a port authority, this means that stakeholder identification cannot be confined to formal leaders or the most vocal actors. It must include rights-holders, fishers, women processors and traders, youth, persons with disabilities, land users, businesses, transport operators and vulnerable households, including groups with limited political access.

A social licence to operate is not equivalent to a permit and does not imply that communities can approve or veto every technical decision. It refers to the continuing quality of trust and acceptance surrounding an operation. Recent port-sector research shows that perceived economic, social and environmental effects, together with the quality of engagement, influence local acceptance (Moeremans & Dooms, 2025). Formal authorisation and social legitimacy are therefore complementary: law creates authority, while transparency, impact management and procedural fairness sustain the conditions for stable operation.

4.2 Local content as domestic value and capability formation

Local content is often measured through nationality percentages or employee counts. A more economically meaningful definition focuses on the value retained in Ghana through labour, goods, services, ownership, finance, management, technology, knowledge and productive linkages. This shifts attention from the address on an invoice to the substance of domestic contribution. A locally registered intermediary may add little Ghanaian value if it simply passes through imported services. Conversely, an internationally led specialist contract may make a substantial domestic contribution through Ghanaian engineering, apprenticeships, fabrication, research partnerships, supplier upgrading and management succession.

Experience from Ghana and other resource sectors suggests that local-content rules produce stronger outcomes when they are supported by market development, entrepreneurship, technology transfer, collaborative partnerships and capable public institutions (Ablo, 2015; Gbadago, 2025). Prescriptive requirements by themselves do not guarantee learning. Research on Ghana's solar photovoltaic industry, for example, found limited knowledge and skill transfer where the surrounding industrial and learning ecosystem remained weak (Edze, 2025). The policy objective should therefore be competitive capability accumulation, not preference for its own sake.

4.3 Corporate responsibility, shared value and additionality

Corporate social responsibility is strategically useful when it addresses material community needs and reinforces project performance. It becomes problematic when every form of social expenditure is placed under the CSR label. Compliance with legislation, permit conditions, occupational safety, pollution prevention, compensation and livelihood restoration is mandatory where applicable; these actions are not charitable contributions. Shared value occupies a separate space because it links core business performance with improved local outcomes. Examples include a cold-chain system that raises fishing incomes while expanding service activity, or supplier development that improves both enterprise capability and contractor performance (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Recent Ghanaian studies show that top-down CSR portfolios can diverge from community priorities and weaken trust when companies report activities rather than outcomes valued by beneficiaries (Mohammed et al., 2024; Dzage et al., 2024). The appropriate response is neither unrestricted community demand nor unilateral corporate discretion. It is a transparent process of needs assessment, lifecycle costing, outcome definition, maintenance planning and participatory prioritisation.

4.4 Quality infrastructure, bankability and governance

Quality infrastructure extends beyond technical specifications. Current international guidance emphasises lifecycle value, resilience, environmental and social sustainability, governance, transparency and the mobilisation of private capital on credible terms (African Development Bank Group, 2025; World Bank, 2025b, 2026a). These considerations are directly commercial. Financiers and insurers increasingly expect an environmental and social management system, structured engagement, accessible grievance channels, climate and nature-risk management, labour safeguards and traceable supply chains (IFC, 2012, 2025a; Equator Principles Association, 2020; TNFD, 2023).

Ambiguous, unfunded or politically allocated local commitments can undermine bankability. Contractual precision offers a better route. Definitions, baselines, targets, evidence standards, reporting intervals, audit rights, corrective measures and remedies should be incorporated into tender documents, EPC agreements, concessions, operating licences, financing covenants and approved environmental and social plans.

5. A four-part classification of project obligations and benefits

Many disputes in major projects arise because obligations and benefits are placed in the wrong category. Communities may describe compensation as CSR; sponsors may present compulsory mitigation as generosity; political actors may treat procurement as an entitlement; and contractors may use donations to deflect attention from access restrictions or livelihood losses. A four-part classification should therefore be applied before any commitment is negotiated or announced.

Table 2. Classification framework for project obligations and social benefits

Category	Decision question	Illustrative application to Keta Port	Governance treatment
A. Compliance	Is the action required by legislation, a permit, labour standard or contract?	Occupational safety, pollution prevention, statutory disclosure, traffic management and environmental monitoring.	Mandatory project cost; enforceable and subject to audit.
B. Mitigation, compensation and remedy	Is the measure necessary because the project causes or contributes to loss, restriction or risk?	Land compensation, replacement fishing access, livelihood restoration, cultural-heritage procedures and repair of damage.	Rights-based and impact-linked; it must not be presented as CSR.
C. Local content and shared value	Can core expenditure or operations create durable Ghanaian capability or mutual project-community value?	Apprenticeships, supplier upgrading, cold-chain systems, logistics SMEs, local professional services and technology transfer.	Contractual programmes and targets, conditioned by safety, quality, cost and capacity.
D. Additional CSR	Is the initiative genuinely additional to A–C and supported by transparent needs and value assessment?	Scholarships, cultural initiatives, community facilities and public-health programmes.	Discretionary or negotiated portfolio with disclosed lifecycle cost and outcomes.

Non-Negotiable Distinction

Compensation, lawful land acquisition, pollution control, worker protection and livelihood restoration must never be presented as CSR. Treating mandatory remedy as philanthropy weakens rights, obscures project costs and converts enforceable duties into discretionary charity.

6. Integrated governance architecture for shared maritime value

1. Evidence Verified skills, suppliers, livelihoods and impact baselines	2. Contracting Obligations embedded in tenders, EPC contracts, concessions, permits and plans	3. Capability Skills, standards, finance, supplier development and technology upgrading
4. Rights and voice Livelihood protection, inclusion, engagement, grievance and remedy	5. Assurance KPIs, public scorecards, ownership checks, audit and corrective action	6. Shared value Competitive project delivery, durable domestic value and continuing legitimacy

Figure 1. Shared maritime value governance cycle. Evidence informs contracts; contracts enable capability; rights and voice preserve legitimacy; assurance drives corrective action and durable shared value.

6.1 Legal and contractual embeddedness

Ghana does not currently have a dedicated local-content regulation for port development comparable to the petroleum regime. The Keta Port model must therefore be built from existing statutory mandates and transaction-specific instruments. Relevant sources include the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority Law, the Public Procurement Act as amended, the Labour Act, the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre Act, the Local Governance Act, the Right to Information Act, the Land Act and the Environmental Protection Act 2025 (Republic of Ghana, 1986, 2003a, 2003b, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2025).

The absence of a single statute does not justify ambiguity. It increases the importance of transaction design. Each package should define Ghanaian ownership, beneficial ownership, locally based enterprise, Ghanaian value added, eligible expenditure, employee categories, geographic tiers, joint ventures, technology transfer and verification requirements. Local-content plans

should form binding contract schedules and should flow down to subcontractors. Environmental and social obligations should likewise be incorporated into the project ESMS, contractor ESMPs, construction management plans and concession conditions.

International standards also become operational when they are incorporated by financiers, insurers or contracts. The IFC Performance Standards, Equator Principles, World Bank Environmental and Social Framework, OECD due-diligence guidance and UN Guiding Principles can therefore move from persuasive good practice to enforceable project requirements (United Nations, 2011; IFC, 2012; OECD, 2018, 2023; World Bank, 2017).

6.2 Verified baselines and geographic tiers

Targets must be derived from a verified baseline of skills, enterprises, livelihoods, education, certifications, equipment, financial constraints and existing market capacity. Registration alone is not proof of qualification. A credible database should capture documentary evidence, certification expiry dates, trade-test results, tax status, HSE systems, ownership, assets and performance history. A parallel livelihood baseline should record fishing access, seasonal activity, landing and processing patterns, income sources, vulnerable groups and cultural sites before construction changes local conditions.

The meaning of local must also be settled in advance. A single undefined quota can trigger competition among directly affected settlements, the wider Keta–Anlo–Ketu coastal economy, the Volta Region and Ghanaian firms elsewhere. A tiered model can recognise proximity and impact while preserving competition and access to the capability required for successful delivery.

Table 3. Recommended geographic tiers for participation and policy targeting

Tier	Definition	Primary policy use
Tier 1: directly affected and host communities	Settlements whose land, access, fishing activity, public services or daily life is directly affected.	Priority engagement, impact-related measures, entry-level opportunities and targeted training under objective eligibility rules.
Tier 2: Keta–Anlo–Ketu coastal economy	Municipal and district economies closely connected to the project labour and service market.	SME development, accommodation, transport, fisheries value chains, local services and community investment.
Tier 3: Volta Region	Regional firms, TVET institutions, professionals and supply networks.	Medium-skill and specialist services, training partnerships and regional industrial linkages.
Tier 4: Ghana	Ghanaian-owned or controlled firms, workers and professionals nationwide.	National local-content targets in finance, engineering, professional services, manufacturing and major contracts.
International market	Foreign OEMs, financiers, marine contractors and specialist providers.	Used where domestic capability is unavailable, with defined Ghanaian workshare, training and technology transfer where feasible.

6.3 Transparent employment, apprenticeships and succession

Employment is the most visible benefit and one of the most sensitive project interfaces. A credible system separates communication, eligibility, selection, contracting, training, performance management and grievance. Traditional leaders, assembly members, political actors and youth representatives may help distribute information and validate outreach, but they should not choose employees. Legal responsibility for competent and safe recruitment remains with the employer.

Before mobilisation, contractors should publish an occupational demand forecast by phase, role, indicative number, duration, minimum qualification and employing entity. A verified skills register should be followed by open vacancy notices, documented screening, trade tests where appropriate, written employment terms, HSE and community-relations induction, confidential worker grievance channels and transparent promotion criteria. Large recruitment exercises should include independent observation and records capable of audit.

The objective must extend beyond short-term entry-level work. A structured workforce pathway should connect foundational skills, safety certification, trades, port and maritime competencies, professional disciplines and management succession. Each critical specialist role should have a named Ghanaian understudy, mentoring plan, competency milestones and a realistic transition date. Training performance should be assessed through completion, certification, placement, retention and

progression rather than attendance alone. Gender-responsive recruitment, sanitation, transport, safeguarding and work design are also necessary to prevent women from being confined to low-value service functions (ILO, 2024a).

6.4 Competitive procurement, SME development and anti-fronting

Procurement is likely to be the largest channel through which project expenditure can retain value in Ghana. It is also exposed to inflated pricing, artificial fragmentation, fronting, politically connected ownership, weak execution and delayed payment. The policy objective should be competitive domestic value, not protected inefficiency. The procurement strategy should disclose a rolling 12–24 month opportunity pipeline, classify packages by market readiness, provide supplier briefings, diagnose capability gaps and apply qualification, insurance and bonding requirements proportionate to risk. Contract lotting should be used only where technically and economically sound.

Supplier development should cover quality systems, HSE, financial records, bid preparation, equipment planning, mentoring, consortium formation and access to working capital. Payment terms and milestone structures are particularly important for SMEs. Any domestic preference must remain within the applicable legal framework and must not displace minimum requirements for safety, technical performance and value for money (Republic of Ghana, 2003a; World Bank, 2024).

Beneficial-ownership and economic-substance tests are essential. Warning signs include nominal Ghanaian shareholders with no real control or financial exposure; pass-through invoicing; foreign control of staff and bank accounts; no local premises, assets or employees; undisclosed related-party transactions; repeated direct awards; and paper joint ventures that exclude the Ghanaian partner from technical work, governance, profit and learning. A substantive joint venture should demonstrate shared decision rights, defined work scope, financial participation, integrated personnel, risk sharing, access to information, fair profit allocation and measurable capability progression.

Table 4. Five-stage local-content value ladder

Stage	Primary objective	Illustrative evidence of progression
1. Employment access	Provide safe, transparent and fair access to work.	Verified person-hours, written contracts, fair selection, HSE outcomes and retention.
2. Domestic procurement	Source competitive goods, works and services in Ghana.	Ghanaian value added, successful package delivery, prompt payment and performance ratings.
3. Capability accumulation	Build durable skills, standards, finance and enterprise systems.	Certifications, apprenticeships, upgraded firms, working-capital access and repeat contracts.
4. Ownership and management	Create substantive participation in governance, risk and economic returns.	Beneficial ownership, voting rights, local workshare, management succession and profit participation.
5. Economic transformation	Develop innovation, industrial linkages and exportable capability.	Local manufacturing, research and development, technology absorption, port-service clusters and regional market expansion.

6.5 Substantive ownership, finance and technology transfer

Local participation can take the form of equity, joint ventures, concessions, employee schemes, community enterprises or development trusts. Ownership can deepen value retention, but symbolic equity without funding, governance rights, dividends or understanding of risk may worsen mistrust. Any proposed local or community ownership arrangement should therefore be subjected to independent feasibility, valuation, financing, governance, tax, liquidity and risk assessment.

Community benefit entities should never substitute for lawful compensation or public revenue. They require clear beneficiary rules, independent trustees, audited accounts, conflict-of-interest controls, investment policy and transparent distribution. Municipal or public development vehicles may support industrial land or shared infrastructure where they possess a lawful mandate and procurement discipline. For complex port assets, substantive capability and governance should take precedence over ceremonial shareholding.

Technology transfer must be converted into a defined work programme. Contracts should identify the knowledge domains to be transferred, participating Ghanaian personnel, training hours, access to systems, co-delivery responsibilities, intellectual-property

boundaries, competency assessments and transition milestones. Foreign specialists should be retained where necessary, but every recurring function should be reviewed for progressive localisation over the life of the contract.

6.6 Fisheries, land, culture, climate and nature safeguards

The project area's dependence on fishing and coastal resources requires a specialised governance response. Research on Ghanaian port communities shows that port expansion can restrict canoe landing, reduce access to fishing space, complicate gear movement and interrupt livelihood continuity (Ayilu, 2023). Recent reviews also identify access constraints, pollution, displacement, conflict, gender inequality and livelihood vulnerability as recurring blue-economy risks in Ghana (Ansah & Oduro, 2025). These issues cannot be addressed through generic consultation alone.

A fisheries and livelihood technical group should bring together fishers, women processors, fisheries agencies, coastal engineers, marine ecologists, social specialists, local government and project designers. It should validate seasonal patterns, landing points, navigation routes, safety zones, processing needs and cumulative impacts. Alternatives and mitigation should be co-designed before marine works restrict access. Where residual losses remain, compensation and livelihood restoration should follow lawful and rights-compatible processes, and success should be measured against baseline income, access, productive assets and resilience.

Coastal climate and nature risk must be integrated into engineering and financing. Keta's exposure to erosion, flooding and ocean change calls for scenario analysis, adaptive design, sediment and shoreline monitoring, and safeguards against transferring risk to neighbouring communities. PIANC's Working with Nature approach supports early alignment of environmental objectives with engineering, while TNFD guidance promotes systematic identification of nature-related dependencies, impacts, risks and opportunities (PIANC, 2018; TNFD, 2023, 2025). Local knowledge should inform design, but it cannot replace robust coastal modelling and independent technical review.

Cultural heritage, shrines and cemeteries require confidential mapping, agreed protocols and effective chance-find procedures. Gender analysis should extend beyond workforce statistics to the differentiated effects on fish processing, trading, unpaid care, safety, sanitation and access to finance.

6.7 Meaningful engagement, grievance and remedy

Meaningful engagement is an ongoing due-diligence process, not a sequence of ceremonial meetings. It requires timely and understandable disclosure, inclusive stakeholder identification, dialogue before decisions are effectively closed, feedback on how input influenced outcomes, documented commitments and accessible remedy (Buhmann et al., 2025; OECD, 2025a). Information should be provided in English and Ewe where appropriate and through channels suited to people with limited literacy, mobility or digital access.

The stakeholder engagement plan should specify objectives, stakeholder groups, issues, methods, frequency, responsible officers, disclosure materials and decision points. Separate sessions may be required for fishers, women processors, land users, youth, businesses, persons with disabilities and workers to reduce power imbalances. Traditional authorities and political parties have legitimate roles in social cohesion and information dissemination, but no single institution or faction should monopolise the engagement process.

A project-level grievance mechanism should accept complaints in person, by telephone, digitally and through confidential channels. It should acknowledge complaints promptly, triage urgency, protect against retaliation, investigate fairly, issue reasoned responses, provide an appeal route and analyse recurring causes. Worker grievances should be managed separately from community complaints. The mechanism must not restrict access to courts, regulators or other lawful remedies. Depending on the harm, remedy may include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, guarantees of non-repetition or other corrective action (OHCHR, 2024).

6.8 Additional, strategic and outcome-focused CSR

A credible CSR portfolio must be additional to compliance and mitigation, aligned with municipal development priorities and material community needs, and selected through disclosed criteria. Potential pillars for Keta include fisheries and blue-economy upgrading; TVET and employability; SME and entrepreneurship support; coastal resilience and sanitation; public health and safety; heritage, tourism and place-making; and digital inclusion.

Proposals should be screened for strategic fit, additionality, beneficiary reach, gender and vulnerability, capital and recurrent cost, maintenance responsibility, environmental footprint, measurable outcomes and political-capture risk. A prominent building with no operating budget may deliver less value than cold-chain infrastructure, certification, working-capital access or sanitation that directly supports livelihoods. CSR reporting should therefore distinguish expenditure and activities from outputs, outcomes and asset sustainability.

6.9 Governance, public scorecards and independent assurance

A representative Port–Community Local Content and Social Value Council can provide a stable forum for disclosure, review and escalation. It should not distribute jobs or contracts, set compensation, replace regulators or interfere with tender evaluation. Its role should be limited to validating baseline processes, reviewing aggregate scorecards, tracking commitments, monitoring inclusion, overseeing the effectiveness of grievance systems and recommending corrective action.

Membership should be balanced among GPHA and project sponsors, local government, traditional authorities, fishers, women, youth, businesses, civil society, relevant technical agencies and independent professionals. The terms of reference should provide for fixed tenure, transparent nomination, conflict declarations, recusal, confidentiality, publication of minutes and sanctions for intimidation or misuse of information.

Public reporting should emphasise auditable performance rather than promotional narratives. Contractors should report monthly, the sponsor should issue quarterly public scorecards, and an independent assurance provider should test definitions, samples, beneficial ownership, value-added attribution, recruitment processes, grievance data and corrective actions. International ESG frameworks may support disclosure, but community-facing scorecards must remain concise, intelligible and relevant to local concerns (IFRS Foundation, 2023a, 2023b; GRI, 2021, 2025a, 2025b; IFC, 2025b).

7. Risk-control architecture and measurable performance

The framework has value only if it changes behaviour, incentives and decisions. The principal risks and proposed controls are set out below, followed by a core performance scorecard. Targets should be fixed only after baseline verification and market testing, and they should be recalibrated at defined project gates.

Table 5. Principal governance risks and priority controls

Risk	Practical manifestation	Priority control
Expectation inflation	A belief that every resident will receive a job, contract or payment.	Publish phase-specific demand forecasts, eligibility rules and explicit non-guarantee statements.
Information failure	Late, inconsistent or unofficial communication fuels rumours and mobilisation.	Use one recognised information channel, a disclosure calendar, an issue log and a rapid-correction protocol.
Elite capture	A narrow group controls information, recruitment, contracts or benefits.	Open applications, representative oversight, conflict declarations and independent observation.
Capability mismatch	Local firms receive packages they cannot safely, technically or financially execute.	Pre-assessment, supplier upgrading, graduated package size, proportionate security and mentoring.
Fronting	Nominal Ghanaian ownership conceals foreign control or pass-through invoicing.	Beneficial-ownership checks, substance tests, audit rights, corrective action and sanctions.
Livelihood disruption	Marine or land works restrict fishing, processing, markets or cultural access.	Baseline evidence, alternatives assessment, co-designed mitigation, compensation and outcome-based restoration.
Political-cycle instability	Rules change with leadership and weaken trust or investment.	Contractual commitments, a public charter, multi-stakeholder review and independent assurance.
Cumulative effects	Port works, roads, settlement growth and coastal processes interact beyond the site.	Associated-facility review, spatial planning, climate scenarios and regional monitoring.
CSR substitution	Donations are used to avoid legal duties or impact remedy.	Apply the four-part classification, separate budgets and verify additionality.

Table 6. Core local-content and social-value scorecard

Domain	Illustrative indicator	Formula or evidence
Procurement	Ghanaian value-added ratio	Eligible Ghanaian value added ÷ total eligible contract expenditure × 100, supported by invoices, payroll and verified workshare.
Host-area procurement	Tier 1–2 eligible spend	Verified value added attributable to host and coastal suppliers, rather than registered address alone.
Employment	Host-community labour ratio	Verified Tier 1 person-hours ÷ total project person-hours × 100.
Gender and inclusion	Women in skilled and supervisory roles	Women's person-hours in skilled and supervisory grades ÷ total person-hours in those grades × 100.
Skills	Training-to-placement conversion	Trainees placed in relevant work within the agreed period ÷ trainees completing the programme × 100.
Succession	Critical-role transition coverage	Specialist roles with approved understudies and achieved milestones ÷ total critical roles × 100.
Supplier development	Supplier completion rate	Local suppliers completing contracts satisfactorily ÷ local suppliers awarded contracts × 100.
Payment	Prompt-payment performance	Valid invoices paid within the contractual period ÷ valid invoices due × 100.
Livelihoods	Restoration effectiveness	Affected households or groups achieving agreed income, access and resilience outcomes against the baseline.
Engagement	Commitment closure	Commitments completed on time ÷ commitments due × 100, with documented evidence of decision feedback.
Grievance	Resolution quality and recurrence	Acknowledgement and closure times, appeal rate, satisfaction, repeat complaints and retaliation incidents.
Integrity	Fronting and conflict control	Ownership exceptions, undeclared conflicts, sanctions, audit findings and closure of corrective action.
CSR	Outcome and asset sustainability	Beneficiary outcomes, utilisation, maintenance, satisfaction and lifecycle funding.

8. Commercial, Financing And Delivery Implications

The proposed architecture is pro-investment because it improves transaction quality. Verified stakeholder and livelihood baselines reduce uncertainty over land, labour and social claims. Transparent recruitment and procurement limit political interference and contractor exposure. Supplier upgrading enlarges the pool of capable bidders and can reduce lifecycle cost where domestic maintenance and services replace repeated imports. Effective grievance systems identify problems before they become stoppages or litigation. Measurable commitments strengthen lender due diligence and sustainability reporting. A trusted port–community interface also supports continuity after construction.

The model also disciplines local expectations. Local preference cannot justify unsafe performance, inflated prices, corruption or technically unqualified contractors. Community equity should not be offered without valuation and risk analysis. Package fragmentation should not create interfaces that increase delay and cost. Targets should be linked to verified capacity and accompanied by development programmes for packages that cannot yet be localised. This balance is fundamental because an uncompetitive port cannot sustain local benefits.

For concessionaires and EPC contractors, local-content requirements must be priced and planned during bidding. Tender documents should provide a reliable data room, minimum obligations, evaluation methodology, reporting templates and consequences for underperformance. Bidders should submit costed local-content and social-performance plans that are evaluated alongside technical and financial proposals. Winning commitments should then be translated into contract schedules, milestones and performance security so that bid-stage promises do not remain marketing statements.

For government and GPHA, the fiscal exposure extends beyond the capital cost of construction. It includes contingent liabilities, weak demand assumptions, interface infrastructure, unplanned social commitments and possible future operating deficits. Local-value obligations must therefore be aligned with the commercial model, concession risk allocation and lifecycle affordability. Public responsibilities, investor obligations, contractor duties and discretionary community-investment budgets should be disclosed separately.

9. Phase-gated implementation roadmap

Implementation should commence before investor selection is complete. The requirements with the greatest influence are those embedded in the transaction architecture, rather than commitments negotiated after contracts have been executed.

Table 7. Recommended implementation sequence

Period or decision gate	Priority actions	Decision output
0–30 days	Create an interim technical working group; confirm the stakeholder map; establish an official information channel; adopt confidentiality, data and conflict rules.	Authorised governance and disclosure protocol.
0–45 days	Begin verified skills, supplier, livelihood and access baselines; map work packages, associated facilities and coastal interfaces.	Baseline report and combined opportunity-impact register.
30–60 days	Prepare the Local Content Plan, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, grievance procedure, fisheries protocol and scorecard methodology.	Draft project standards suitable for transaction documents.
45–75 days	Hold supplier and TVET readiness forums; define finance partnerships; constitute the fisheries and livelihood technical group.	Capability-development and livelihood workplans.
60–90 days	Approve Council terms of reference; publish the first commitment tracker; validate a Local Content and Social Value Charter.	Public governance platform and verified commitments.
Investor shortlisting and procurement design	Issue definitions, minimum obligations, bid schedules, beneficial-ownership forms, evaluation criteria and draft contract clauses.	Comparable, costed and enforceable bidder commitments.
Financial close and pre-construction	Complete the affected-person census and restoration plans; finalise baselines and targets; appoint independent assurance; disclose approved plans.	Conditions precedent and implementation-ready systems.

Period or decision gate	Priority actions	Decision output
Construction	Require monthly contractor reports, quarterly public scorecards, workforce and supplier audits, grievance and fisheries monitoring, and adaptive coastal management.	Verified performance, escalation and corrective action.
Commissioning and operations	Transition temporary workers and suppliers, implement management succession, monitor port-city effects, and refresh targets and the CSR portfolio.	Durable operational local value and continuing legitimacy.

9.1 Immediate data requirements

- Confirmed project phase, indicative or final footprint, associated facilities and implementation schedule.
- Procurement and concession strategy, package list, indicative award dates and proposed contractor obligations.
- Workforce-demand forecast by occupation, skill level, phase, employer and duration.
- Environmental permit conditions and approved environmental and social management commitments.
- Land requirements, affected-person census status, livelihood studies and compensation or resettlement instruments.
- Fisheries-impact assessment, navigation and coexistence plan, landing-access design and seasonal construction constraints.
- Existing stakeholder commitments, grievance records and safeguards for personal and commercial data.
- Verified local enterprise, skills, TVET, finance and certification information, including identified capability gaps.
- Cargo, corridor, phasing, demand and financing assumptions required to test affordability and bankability.

10. Discussion

10.1 Theoretical contribution

The framework extends local-content analysis beyond sector-specific regulation into greenfield port governance. It conceptualises local content as an institutional chain. Evidence identifies realistic opportunity; contracts allocate responsibility; capability programmes make targets achievable; rights and voice protect legitimacy; and assurance converts commitments into accountable results. Failure at any stage creates predictable weakness. Quotas without capability encourage fronting. Engagement without feedback produces consultation fatigue. CSR without additionality can displace rights. Reporting without assurance generates claims that cannot be trusted.

The four-part classification is especially useful where community expectations, project impacts and political narratives overlap. The five-level value ladder also moves analysis from static participation to dynamic transformation. Employment and procurement are necessary starting points, but they are not the endpoint of development.

10.2 Policy contribution for Ghana

Ghana's experience with sector-specific local-content regimes offers valuable lessons, but petroleum percentages should not simply be transferred to ports. Marine works, terminal equipment, civil construction, logistics, digital systems and local services have different technologies and supplier structures. Package-level market testing, transparent geographic tiers and progressive targets are therefore more defensible than a single headline quota.

The Keta Port case also supports a broader policy reform. Ghana could adopt a national guideline for local content and social value in major infrastructure, covering definitions, beneficial ownership, supplier development, gender inclusion, technology transfer, public scorecards and independent assurance. A national framework would improve consistency across transport, energy, water and industrial projects while allowing sector-specific adaptation.

10.3 Practical value for communities and investors

For communities, the framework redirects negotiation away from discretionary favours and towards systems: published opportunity pipelines, evidence-based targets, open applications, clear impact remedy, grievance standards and auditable outcomes. This reduces dependence on intermediaries and makes commitments more resilient to political transition.

For investors, the framework creates a more predictable social-performance environment. It clarifies which actions are mandatory, which commitments are competitively evaluated, where capability development is required and which initiatives remain discretionary. That clarity can reduce open-ended claims, strengthen lender confidence and improve local legitimacy.

10.4 Limitations and future research

The framework should be validated and refined when final designs, financing arrangements, concession terms, permit conditions, workforce forecasts and supplier data are available. Future empirical work should estimate local multipliers, map supplier readiness by package, model fisheries and shoreline effects, and measure changes in community trust over time. A longitudinal dataset linking engagement quality, grievance patterns, local-content performance, schedule outcomes and project costs would materially strengthen African port-governance research.

11. Priority policy recommendations

1. Adopt a Keta Port Local Content and Social Value Policy before investor selection and incorporate its requirements into every relevant transaction document.
2. Complete independently verified labour, enterprise, livelihood and coastal-access baselines before fixing numerical targets.
3. Apply the four-part classification to separate compliance, impact remedy, local content/shared value and CSR in budgets, public communication and reporting.
4. Require each bidder to submit a costed local-content execution plan, beneficial-ownership disclosure, supplier-development programme and technology-transfer schedule.
5. Operate transparent recruitment and supplier-registration systems from the project office, with independent observation and accessible grievance channels.
6. Create a fisheries and livelihood technical group and complete access, coexistence, mitigation and restoration plans before marine construction begins.
7. Establish a representative Port–Community Local Content and Social Value Council with strict role boundaries and conflict-of-interest controls.
8. Publish quarterly scorecards and commission annual independent assurance covering domestic value, livelihoods, grievances, integrity and CSR outcomes.
9. Direct CSR towards material and measurable priorities, especially fisheries value chains, skills, sanitation, coastal resilience and enterprise capability, rather than ad hoc donations.
10. Review and raise targets at defined project gates as Ghanaian capability, standards, finance and technology absorption improve.

12. Conclusion

The Keta Port Project could become a major national asset and a catalyst for economic diversification along the Volta coast. That result will not arise automatically from physical construction. Large infrastructure creates durable public value through institutions as much as through dredging, concrete and equipment. The decisive issue is whether project preparation converts legitimate expectations into fair rules, productive capability, protected livelihoods and commitments that can be independently verified.

The proposed architecture rejects two opposing failures: a technocratic model that views communities only as sources of risk, and a patronage model that allocates jobs and contracts through political discretion. It instead proposes a commercially disciplined social compact. Directly affected people receive rights-based protection and meaningful voice. Capable Ghanaian workers and firms gain transparent access to opportunity. Investors receive clearer obligations and lower social uncertainty. The state obtains a stronger basis for measuring domestic value and public benefit.

The immediate priority is therefore not the announcement of an arbitrary quota. It is the establishment of verified evidence, enforceable transaction rules, competitive procurement, capability systems, fisheries safeguards, representative governance and independent assurance from which credible targets can be derived. A port is constructed not only in water and concrete, but also in trust, capability, lawful process and shared prosperity.

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Declarations

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Core Proposition

A greenfield port should be assessed not only by cargo throughput, vessel calls or construction completion. Its public value also depends on whether project expenditure develops Ghanaian capability, affected livelihoods are protected, participation is credible, commitments can be audited and the port-city-community relationship remains legitimate throughout the asset life cycle

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Data availability: The materials used are publicly available or contained in the underlying Keta Port local-content and CSR training manual. Project-specific targets should be updated when verified engineering, procurement, labour, livelihood and financing data become available.

Author contribution: The author conceptualised the framework, synthesised the evidence and developed the policy, governance and implementation recommendations.