

Q&A

Interview with Mamayawa Sandouno, President of the NGO ADEPEG-CPA, Guinea Conakry, and member of ICSF

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Can you tell us a bit about how women fish processors in Guinea have organized?

The historic struggle of women fish smokers in Guinea has been to organize locally and to be recognized nationally.

Starting in 1985, with support and advice from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Government of Guinea initiated a pilot project to establish several Economic Groups of women fish-smokers.

Subsequently, with support from an NGO, ADEPEG-CPA, and through education programmes, awareness-raising campaigns and lobbying activities, several local-level associations and co-operatives of women fish smokers were established.

In February 2008, a major milestone was reached with the establishment of the National Union of Women Fish Smokers, under the Interior Ministry. Some 30 associations and co-operatives are formally associated to this new National Union, grouping together around 1,000 women fish smokers. The challenge now is to establish further local associations and co-operatives, and to associate these with the National Union.

What are the major challenges for women fish processors where you work?

Securing sufficient quantities of good quality fish at the right price to smoke is a major challenge. Another challenge is adding value to processed fish, including aspects such as packaging and presentation of the product, degree of

smoking, and storage. We need to find ways to access and expand trade in national and regional markets, in the EU and USA. We also need to promote learning through the exchange of experiences with counterparts in other countries, on a South-South basis.

What initiatives have women taken to deal with these issues?

Women are organizing in various ways. One important initiative has been to open up credit to groups of women smokers, under a scheme of the African Development Bank. Some women have used this to purchase vessels, others to purchase improved fish smoking kilns.

A particular initiative worth highlighting is the Japanese-supported project to construct a new artisanal fish landing quay at Boulbinet. Boulbinet is the most important fish landing centre in the capital city, Conakry, established during the colonial era, and an important fish smoking centre. There are two associations of women fish smokers here that group some 200 women. Alongside the quay two hangers are to be constructed to house “bressage” fish smoking kilns as well as cold storages.

Following an initiative in 2006 to establish a regional network of fishworker organizations and media professionals, radio journalists in Guinea have broadcast several programmes of interviews with women fish smokers. These interviews have enabled women to highlight their problems, concerns and demands at national level.

What are the important changes that have taken place in the last two decades with respect to women in fisheries?

Women’s organizations have been established and strengthened. There’s been a capacity-enhancement among women with respect to fish-processing. There are better educational opportunities for women smokers and these women are now sending their children, even their daughters, to school. Finally, international exchanges have taken place, regionally with other West African countries, and internationally. 