

# Q & A

**Interview with Micheline Dion Somplehi (39), fish seller/processor at Abidjan, leader of the cooperative AVEPFFA (Association of Women Fresh and Smoked Fish Traders) and Coordinator of Women's Programme of CAOPA (African Confederation of Small Scale Fisheries Professional Organizations)**

By **Katia Frangoudes** (Katia.Frangoudes@univ-brest.fr), Member, ICSF

**Where are you from and when did you start working as a fish processor?**

I am from a fishing family in Abidjan. I took to fish processing because my family couldn't afford to pay for my further studies. In 2002, I stopped studies and joined my mother as a fish processor. Later on, I set up a small fish business.

**Why did you start fighting for the rights of fish processors?**

Until 2002, women fish processors in Abidjan were working as individuals. Most were migrants. Many had lost husbands to war and had to work to support their families. Working conditions were very bad. I decided to help organize these women. In 2010, we established an association of women fish sellers and processors, and I became the chairperson.

**What difficulties did you face as an activist?**

Initially, my husband couldn't understand my activism. Neighbours asked why he allowed me to spend time working as an organiser. I had to convince him that my work benefitted not only others but also myself as a fish processor. My mother lost her eyesight because she used a bad oven to dry fish, and had to stop working. Now my husband is more supportive.

**Please describe your main struggles.**

We first fought for better working conditions and tried to facilitate the integration of migrant women locally. But as an association we could not undertake commercial activities. Therefore, in 2012, we joined AVEPFFA and created a Women's Section there. I am the Chair of the Women's Section and also AVEPFFA's Administrative Council. Our participation in the International Day of Artisanal Fishers in 2012, organized by CAOPA in Abidjan, gave us visibility at the national level. This helped us get finances for an FAO oven, which meant better, smoke-free working conditions, and greater processed fish production.

**What are your current priorities?**

We need finances for more ovens to manage increased processing during peak season, to be able to sell fish during the low season. We need to do more about improving working conditions. We also need more fish supplies during low season and improved fish packaging for better prices. We would like to register our cooperative society. 🇳🇮