

A new space

Excerpts from the report of the Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa

Fish processing and trade have a long tradition in the West African region. Processed fish products—dried, smoked, salted or fermented—are eminently suited to local tastes and cuisines, and provide a rich source of nutrition, even in remote regions.

Activities related to fish processing and trade have significant livelihood, social and cultural implications. They provide diversified marketing and employment opportunities within the fisheries sector, especially to women of fishing communities. They contribute to food security, especially of the poorer sections of society.

Trade in these products is mainly through informal networks. These dynamic and diversified networks, although able to respond to demands for fish products through the region, are constrained by poor transport infrastructure, problems at borders, tariff barriers, poor market facilities, lack of access to market information, among others.

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has been working in collaboration with fishworker organizations and NGOs in the West African region since 1986. Several workshops have been organized by ICSF in countries of the region, as in Senegal, Ghana and Togo, to discuss issues of concern to artisanal fishworkers.

A long-standing demand of the women of fishing communities in the region has been to work towards enhancing regional fish trade. This demand was further reiterated at the workshop on *Fisheries, Social Analysis and Organizational Strategies in Africa* organized by ICSF in Ghana in August 1998. Participants in the workshop included representatives of

NGOs working with fishing communities, as well as representatives of fishworker organizations from nine African countries, including six countries from the West African region. To better understand and address these issues, a study on *Problems and Prospects of Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa* was undertaken.

It is against this background that the *Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa* was organized from 30 May to 1 June 2001, followed by the *West African Processed Fish Fair* on 2 and 3 June 2001.

These events were organized by ICSF in collaboration with the Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisans du Senegal (CNPS) and the Centre de Recherches pour le Developpement des Technologies Intermediaires de Pêche (CREDETIP). They were supported by the FAO-DFID Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Project (SFLP). There were a total of 64 participants from 13 countries in the West African region, that is, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mauritania. While there were two to three delegates from most countries, there were larger delegations from the host country, Senegal, and from Benin and Mauritania.

Participants

Participants included representatives of artisanal fishworker, fish processor and trader organizations, and of governmental and non-governmental organizations working with, and providing support to, artisanal fishing communities in the region. In addition, participants included representatives of the FAO-DFID Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Project (SFLP), DFID, UK, FAO Regional Office for Africa, as well as

fisheries departments officials from countries of the region—members of the country-level National Co-ordinating Units (NCUs) instituted by the SFLP project. Also represented were organizations working with fishworkers from Mozambique and France.

The workshop provided the space for women fish processors and traders, together with their supporters, to discuss some of the issues affecting their livelihoods, in a focused way. It was significant that while each group stressed the support that needs to be extended by policymakers and development organizations, they also stressed the vital role and responsibility of fishworkers and their communities in this process, advocating the need for a participatory approach. The need for forming strong associations at the community, national and regional levels was forcefully articulated.

It was evident that, given the right support and policy environment, these dynamic women can develop stronger linkages with each other, giving a boost not only to intra-regional trade, but also to regional food security, diversified and sustainable livelihoods in the artisanal fisheries sector and to regional integration.

Statement from the Workshop

Fish is important for food security in the West African region and artisanal fish processors and traders contribute in important ways to a better distribution of fish within the region. Fish processing and trading at the artisanal level are of great social, cultural and economic significance in the region.

Fish processing and trading activities provide employment and income to hundreds of thousands of people, especially women, and are crucial to sustaining livelihoods within fishing communities in the region.

Recognizing this, we, the representatives of fishworker organizations and NGOs from 12 countries of the West African region—Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Nigeria—participating in the above

workshop, commit to work together to sustain and promote artisanal fish processing and trading activities within the region.

To achieve this, we are aware that participatory action is required at the level of fishing communities and professional organizations, at the level of NGOs that work to support fishing communities, as well as at the national, regional and international levels.

We call upon governments as well as sub-regional, regional and multilateral organizations to support fish processing and trading activities in the following ways:

1. Fish trade

- a) Facilitate the speedy implementation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) programmes that aim to promote intra-regional trade, especially those that relate to:
 - reducing and simplifying complex customs and trade formalities;
 - eliminating taxes imposed on artisanally processed fish products traded within the region;
 - minimizing difficulties in trade arising from the use of different currencies within the region and working towards a common currency.
 - Publicize these measures through the media, through notices put up at checkpoints and at government offices;
- b) Reduce the number of customs and police checkpoints and stop the harassment of women traders;
- c) Improve transport facilities within the region by: constructing proper roads connecting fishing and processing centres to important markets; improving and renovating rail routes, and building new ones; facilitating the availability of cargo vessels for transporting processed fish within the region, both along sea and river routes;

- d) Assist associations of women traders to obtain and operate their own vehicles for fish transport;
- e) Create and support banks providing micro-credit, and make credit available at low rates of interest to women processors and traders;
- f) Facilitate the dissemination of information on markets, prices, and trade regulations through local radio and other mass media, and improve telecommunication infrastructure in the region;
- g) Use market taxes to improve facilities within markets, to provide shelter and access to vending space, to improve sanitation and water supply, and to create storage space for fish products;
- h) Create central markets for processed fish within each country.

2. Fish processing

- a) Recognize the right of processors from fishing communities to processing sites on beaches through appropriate arrangements such as land titles, to prevent their displacement through activities like tourism;
- b) Ensure amenities like storage facilities, water, sanitation and power supply at processing sites, as well as childcare facilities;
- c) Provide training in improved methods of fish processing, packaging and storage, to ensure better product quality;
- d) Promote appropriate technology for greater fuel efficiency, in ways that reduce the health hazards faced by women processors;
- e) Facilitate access to land to be managed by women processors as woodlots for fuel supplies;
- f) Facilitate availability of credit at low interest to women processors.

3. Access to fish supplies

- a) Given that artisanal fish processing activities in the region are centrally

dependent on artisanal capture fisheries and a sustainable resource base, to protect the interests of the artisanal capture sector and improve the fish resource base in the following ways:

- Implement current fisheries legislation, put in place effective monitoring, control and surveillance measures, restrict destructive trawling activities and regulate the indiscriminate use of monofilament nets, ring seines and beach seines, especially in the inshore zone;
 - Reduce the number of foreign vessels operating under fisheries access agreements and other arrangements, especially those targeting pelagic species, and ensure that these vessels observe the terms and conditions of the agreement, and do not engage in piracy and other illegal practices;
 - Use mass media to develop awareness among fishing communities about fisheries management measures, and to facilitate training and exchange programmes on these issues.
- b) Ensure adequate and appropriate infrastructure at landing sites, including insulated boxes, refrigeration and storage facilities, to reduce wastage and post-harvest losses.

We recognize the need for local and regional level organizations, and commit to work together on these issues. We call upon governments, sub-regional, regional and multilateral organizations, as well as NGOs, to support us in this process. 3

The Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa was held at Centre Social, Derkle, Dakar, Senegal, from 30 May to 1 June 2001