

# A Health Check

**Going by the experience of Senegal's fishing communities, there is urgent need to promote decent working conditions in west Africa's artisanal fishing sector**

In mid-July 2008, the Galician Association of Women Shell Collectors (AGAMAR) hosted an international Forum on Risk Prevention and Workers' Health in the Fishing Sector (Foro Internacional de Prevención de Riscos e Saúde Laboral no Sector Pesqueiro). Apart from the different representatives of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), participants included various artisanal fishing organizations from India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, South Africa, Uganda, Guinea, Senegal, Guadeloupe, France, Canada, Honduras and Spain, who shared their experiences and concerns on the issues that affect their fisheries, communities and livelihoods.

Dao Gaye, a fisherman leader from Senegal and President of the Conseil National Interprofessionnel de la Pêche Artisanale au Sénégal (CONIPAS, the National Inter-professional Artisanal Fishing Council of Senegal) made a presentation on "Health and Working Conditions in Artisanal Fishing in Senegal". He began by emphasizing, "If we add to the 60,000 Senegalese fishermen, women fish processors and traders, wholesale fish merchants, exporters, carpenters and transporters, our sector accounts for more than 600,000 people who depend on fish for their livelihoods. And, it is thanks to artisanal fish catches that every Senegalese is able to consume 27 kg of fish per year. Our fish contributes to improving nutrition and public health."

Dao Gaye asserted: "As in Spain, our sector must face a future full of challenges. Like you, we are confronted with declining fish resources, rising fuel prices, and are offered ridiculously

low prices for our fish, which are then sold on your European markets...But we must also face the massive arrival of newcomers in our sector, of people who have fled the countryside because there is no future for them there; more than ever, artisanal fishing has become the last recourse for many Senegalese. This massive arrival of newcomers in our sector has had a dramatic impact on the living and working conditions in our communities. The over exploitation of the resources has worsened, while incomes have decline because more fishermen must share whatever fish we can catch...The fishermen must also go farther out to sea, which increases the risks of fishing activities."

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"At sea, all the fishermen are exposed to the abrupt changes of the weather, and have to confront changes in temperature, the rain, high winds and very strong waves. Indeed, our pirogues are open-decked, and we really do not have a place to shelter from the inclement weather. Fishermen, especially those new to the profession, are not always well-trained to face these difficult weather conditions. Thanks to public awareness campaigns and also because of frequent accidents that result in loss of life, the use of life jackets is increasingly being accepted by the fishermen. There are also regular sea weather bulletins on

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EL HADJI COUME



Unloading of fish from *pirogues* off M'bour town, Senegal

For them too, working conditions are difficult and precarious, and questions of health are central to their concerns. First and foremost, there is the general exhaustion that results from housework and providing care to the family as much as by the fish-related work; tiredness is their daily bread. That has an impact on their health conditions. I must say here that in several Senegalese villages, because of tourism development projects, the processing sites have been pushed away from the beaches: the smoke, the smells, are apparently not attractive for tourists. The women must leave earlier to reach the sites where they process the fish, which increases the costs of transport.”

“Even when the processing is done close to the beaches, health and hygiene conditions remain an important issue for the women since they have to work close to wastewater from the trucks, amongst garbage dumps that litter the beaches, breathe smoke all day long, and suffer from the lack of toilets. All these influence the health of the women.”

“I must also talk about our children. Some of them have been involved in artisanal fishing from the age of ten. They go fishing on the pirogues. Sometimes up to a third of the crew is of school age, and little girls help with fish processing. In spite of remuneration, the working conditions are difficult and can compromise the schooling and health of the children who face night-work, accidents and risks of drowning. Our fishermen families are also affected by AIDS. Crowded conditions and migration leads to risky sexual behaviour. Infected fishermen pass on the disease to their wives, and the entire community becomes a victim of this plague.”

### ILO Convention

Dao Gaye concluded: “Although advances are being made at the international level on the issue of safety at sea, for example, through the International Labour Organization’s Work in Fishing Convention, much remains to be done at the national and local levels to improve the health and working conditions of our fishing communities.”

the radio, which make it possible to better prepare for the fishing trips.”

“In some cases, particularly for migrant fishermen, the fishing trips last for long periods and the pirogue becomes not only the fishermen’s working place but their home. In Senegal we have what is called ‘mothership fishing’ (*bateaux de ramassage*), where a collecting boat takes on board 40 pirogues and their crews—about 200 people, mainly from the region of Saint Louis—to fish outside Senegalese waters. The voyage lasts several months and the living conditions on board are horrendous: only a few litres of water are given per day to each fisherman, and this must be used for washing and drinking; working hours are very long; food is rationed and not very varied; and the crowded conditions on board are unbearable. These conditions affect the health of the fishermen. Despite this, sanitary and medical equipments are reduced to the bare minimum.”

Dao Gaye then highlighted the plight of women in the artisanal fisheries sector: “Without the women, artisanal fishing cannot exist. As pillars of our sector, they are present on all the landing beaches, waiting for the arrival of the pirogues. They are present at the fish-processing sites, and many of them go far to sell their products.

## CONIPAS

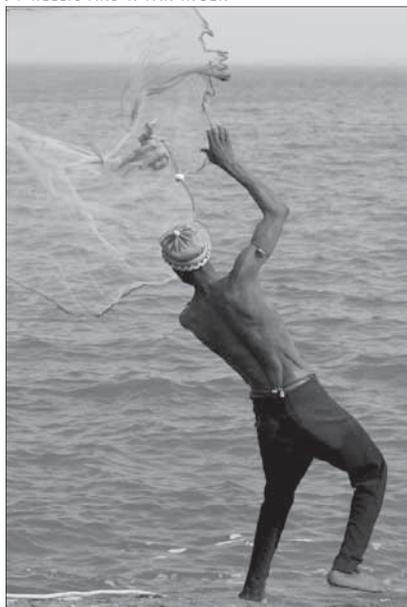
The Conseil National Interprofessionnel de la Pêche Artisanale au Sénégal (CONIPAS, the National Inter-professional Artisanal Fishing Council of Senegal), created in 2003, unites the five organizations from the artisanal fishing sector in Senegal:

- (1) Fédération Nationale des GIE de Pêche du Sénégal (FENAGIE-Pêche, the National Federation of Economic Groupings of Independent Fishermen);
- (2) Collectif National des Pêcheurs artisanaux du Sénégal (CNPS, the National Collective of Senegalese Artisanal Fishermen);
- (3) Fédération nationale des Mareyeurs du Sénégal (FENAMS, the National Federation of Senegalese Fishmongers);
- (4) Union Nationale des GIE de mareyeurs du Sénégal (UNAGIEMS, the National Union of Economic Groupings of Independent Fishmongers); and

- (5) Fédération nationale des femmes transformatrices de produits halieutiques et micro-mareyeuses du Sénégal (FENATRAMS, the National Federation of Women Fishery Product Processors and Petty Fish Traders).

The objective of CONIPAS is to intervene on issues such as resource management (regulation of access to resources, etc.), working conditions (safety at sea, etc.), professionalization and improvement of performance in the processing and marketing sectors. Together with the Mauritanian artisanal fishing organization FNP, and the Guinean artisanal fishermen's union UNPAG, CONIPAS will organize a regional meeting of artisanal professionals, at the end of 2008, in which professionals from 10 west African countries will discuss, amongst other things, how to promote decent working conditions in west Africa's artisanal fishing sector.

J F HELLIO AND N VAN INGEN



Artisanal catches contribute to Senegal's per capita fish consumption of 27 kg

### For more



[www.icsf.net/SU/Bk/EN/5](http://www.icsf.net/SU/Bk/EN/5)

**ICSF Guidebook: Understanding the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007**

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/papers/maritime/c188-brochure.pdf>

**ILO Work in Fishing Convention: Decent Working Conditions, Safety and Social Protection: Working in Fishing Convention No.188**