

the appreciation they receive for this from the community, has strengthened their self-confidence. They do not, any more, hide their ambition to gain knowledge and skills and even a more equal partnership in the fishing enterprise. They feel less inhibited now to raise issues in the community, that are controversial but need to be addressed for the sake of the future of the community, such as the relationship between boat-owners and crew, (un)sustainable fishing practices and internal divisions within the community. They also feel less reluctant now to publicly confront men of their community who tend to stereotype women, and they can even expect the support of other men in this. The *VinVis* network has proved to be an important base on which women of fisher communities have been given the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and insights. Crucial for its existence has been the finding of a common orientation and the opportunity to set its own agenda and priorities.

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## France and Senegal

### A male-dominated agenda?

*The female workforce in the canning industry in Brittany, France, and in Dakar, Senegal : A review of the Master's dissertation of Babacar Diouf*

**By Alain Le Sann of the *Collectif Pêche et Développement*, France and a member of ICSF**

In 1989 and 1990, a young Senegalese student conducted a comparative study of the canneries of Southern Brittany, France and Dakar, Senegal. The processing plants were located in fishing harbours, in areas with few other industries. He noted that in both places women had to take up the low-grade jobs. Their work at the plant was seen as a continuation of the domestic work of preparing the fish.

The development of the canning industry in Dakar is an aspect of the 'délocalisation' or relocation process pursued by Breton industrialists, in the early twentieth century in Europe, and after the Second World War in Senegal. At first women workers were from fishing families. Their workload varied seasonally as they had to cope with the volumes landed by their fathers or husbands. The activities, and the way they were organized, were similar in Brittany and in Dakar.

However, the status and the career of women workers were seen to be very different in Dakar and Brittany because of the contrasting cultural, social and economic contexts. In Dakar, a number of first generation women workers used their savings to take up some trade, for instance, selling the fish caught by their husbands. Only the second generation got involved in union activities to obtain better working conditions, in terms of salaries, job security, etc. In Brittany, on the other hand, women workers had joined the fight in large numbers as early as in the 1920s.

Nowadays the gap between conditions in Dakar and in Brittany has somewhat narrowed, but the respective social and economic context still differs widely. Women workers in Breton are in charge of most of the domestic chores, apart from their normal work at the plant. Their Senegalese counterparts, in contrast, can rely on the extended family system. A large part of the household work is carried out by daughters or other female members of the family, sometimes by a servant. By entering a salaried occupation, women workers in Dakar improve their status, all the more so when the husband is polygamous.

Their position is seen to be further strengthened during times of economic crisis, that leave their husbands with uncertain means of subsistence or outright joblessness. Salaried employment becomes, therefore, very attractive and women stick to their job using every available means, in particular by spacing childbirth. They invest their savings to help their daughters get into some commercial activity. In Brittany, women workers tend to leave their job at childbirth and try to get back to work at the plant only after the children have grown up.

Babacar Diouf noted some common aspects of trade union activities in Dakar and Brittany. The aim, in all cases, was to get salary increases and improved working conditions, not for a greater recognition of 'qualification'. Yet the recognition of women as 'qualified' workers is an essential prerequisite if gender biases and the sexual division of labour has to be challenged. While men undertaking relatively simple, low-grade jobs may be considered qualified, women carrying out fairly complex tasks, requiring great skill, are not considered qualified. Could it be due to the fact that union leaders, both in Dakar and in Brittany, are, most of the time, men?

It is now ten years since the Senegalese student completed his research. It is worth revisiting the themes

he studied, in particular to find out to what extent the deepening crisis and changing gender relations are impacting on the life and livelihoods of women workers in the processing sector.

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## Europe/ Spain

### For there to be a future...

*Women shellfish gatherers in Spain are getting organized to protect their resources and to improve their livelihoods*

**By Cristina Lòpez Rodríguez of the Women's Committee of Ecodesarrollo Gaia, La Coruña, Spain**

50-year old Eulalia is a shellfish gatherer in a Galician *ria* in north Spain, with hardly any education. Her health is in a fragile state aggravated by the problems specifically resulting from her profession as a shellfish gatherer. She was not aware of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development that took place at Rio in 1992, or of the Agenda 2,1 which deals with the most pressing problems of today and attempts to prepare the world for tomorrow's challenges by advocating sustainable development and the participation of all. In her small, hard and humid world of the shore, no information arrived about such an important event.

For Eulalia's 28-year old daughter Maruxa, pursuing an education was not easy. Nevertheless, despite the family's precarious social and economic situation, at 18 she managed to complete her school certificate studies. In a labour market that provides few options for the young, she decided to follow in the footsteps of her mother and take up shellfish gathering. It was not easy for her to adapt, and for a while she resisted, rebelling and telling herself that she wanted something better and far removed from the deprivations suffered by her mother, which she had witnessed from an early age. But, finally, she accepted her fate and gradually, not only did she take it up wholeheartedly, but, for the love of her mother and for the sake of her future, she chose to involve herself in improving the conditions of her profession. She is now struggling to find solutions to the problems faced by the sector.

Maruxa is an active member of an Association that defends the social and economic interests of women

shellfish gatherers. She is aware that this militancy is not easy and that it needs a lot of strength and dedication, but she is ready to follow it through. She knows all the basic laws that apply to the shellfish sector: the Galician Fisheries law, the Galician Co-operatives Law, the norm governing the establishment of Associations. She knows everything about Fishermen's *cofradías*, about decrees that regulate the extraction of molluscs, about fishing and shellfish licenses (PERMEX), about decrees governing fishing gears and trade, about the penalty regime, etc.

Maruxa did hear about Agenda 21 and, of course, she understood the references to marine pollution, and to the need to protect the oceans, to make rational use of living resources, and to improve the dignity of the people who depend on the sea. She understood the great importance of promoting education, training, and awareness among users, officials, fishermen, women and youth in order to achieve sustainable development and to deepen the traditional understanding of the environment. She understood the importance of social and cultural values and of teaching respect for the resources. She understood very well the role of women in this world. She knows that she is not alone, that there are many Maruxas in this world who are fighting for the same dream. She knows the strength that can come from linking together women from around the world with the same problems for finding appropriate collective solutions.

In the last Assembly of the Association, Maruxa spoke. With all the participants applauding, she spoke convincingly and passionately about the need to be fearless, to participate, struggle, learn, and clearly establish the role of women.

From the back row, and although she did not understand some of the things so enthusiastically spoken by her daughter, Eulalia felt proud of her and felt that in some way things were going to change for the better in the work from which she and her generation had reaped more suffering than benefit.

In the depths of her thoughts Eulalia heard the voice of Maruxa saying, "...it is fundamental to recognize and strengthen the role of women in fisheries and in the integrated development of the community, as well as their participation at all levels of the decision-making that affects the sector.... We will also work towards the day when women shellfish gatherers take up managerial positions in the fishery..."