

## FROM AFRICA/Sénégal

### Women as leaders

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The CNPS (Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisans du Sénégal), established in 1987, is a movement born of the artisanal fishing communities in Sénégal. It comprises fishermen and women fishworkers—artisanal fish processors and fishmongers. Through an internal struggle in CNPS, women have today come to occupy roles and responsibilities they did not have at the beginning of the movement. The process of their empowerment and the strategies they used need to be acknowledged for two main reasons:

First, it highlights the fact that the women's representation in CNPS did not come from a strategy aimed at opportunistically 'feminising' the decision-making process. In many cases, in order to get funds more easily from their Northern partners, movements, organizations and, sometimes, governments, make a show of publicly 'involving' women but without really wanting them to participate in the decision-making process.

Secondly, in this way, women's actions can be considered as 'a movement inside a movement'. Since the beginning, CNPS has been internally revolutionised by women—a women's movement within a social movement of the fisheries sector. While at one level, women have struggled inside the movement to get access to decision-making processes, at another level, they have dynamised the movement and have facilitated a thematic evolution of CNPS, raising vital issues to be integrated into the national agenda of the movement.

The movement has become more political as a result of women's demands. CNPS has evolved thematically and now takes a wider view to include issues like the resource crisis, fisheries access agreements, the problems of tourism and the land law regime.

In an African context, still dominated by the idea of 'projects' and oriented towards short-term demands, this is an innovative approach. Unlike co-operatives and more recently GIEs (Economic Interests Groups) that have come up in the Senegalese fishery sector,

CNPS has a longer-term political perspective, thanks to the women's movement. Since 1992, women have taken an active part in the debate on fisheries access agreements. This is a historical event in the sense that women, whose work is traditionally confined to tasks in the post-harvest fisheries sector, were not seen to have an interest in the debate on fisheries resources. For the Senegalese government and for a lot of Senegalese, this debate was seen to be a debate for intellectuals or ecologists only. The CNPS was often accused of being manipulated by environmental organizations like Greenpeace. This was a strategy used by the government to make CNPS lose its credibility. But it was also a way for public authorities to deny the existence of a resource problem.

Women have helped focus attention on fisheries access agreements. It was the CNPS' women's cell's meeting in Hann in 1992 that first proposed the idea of boycotting the funds available as financial compensation from fisheries access agreements between Senegal and third countries. The last agreement signed between Sénégal and the European Union has been an opportunity for women to demonstrate their militancy and their strong will to fight against the access of foreign fleets to Senegalese resources. Their protest against the content of this agreement reinforced CNPS' credibility and also widened the social visibility of CNPS, thanks to the public debate on the agreement. The campaign led by women against this agreement allowed the usually marginalized artisanal fisheries sector to become the focus of a wide public debate.

Similarly, the issues arising from the development of tourism in coastal areas have progressively found their place on the agenda of CNPS, as a result of the action of women. This debate on access to land for fishing communities, 'sandwiched' between tourist complexes and polluting industries in coastal areas, has also given to CNPS its political dimension. The fact that this issue was brought to the forefront by women in the movement surprised a lot of observers of Senegalese sociocultural realities. Even women, traditionally marginalized within the fishery sector, are often not aware of the importance of their role. Most of the time, women fish processors are considered as 'housewives' or 'unemployed' (these are the terms used on Senegalese identity cards).

Since the sexual division of labour in the artisanal fisheries sector has given to women the role of processing and selling fish, this makes them the 'natural enemies' of tourism. Women are the first to be exposed to the threats of tourism and the occupation of the coastal zone. The conflict between tourism and fisheries permanently exposes them to the threat of being thrown out of their working places on the beach.

The negative impacts of the development of tourist villages in the Petite Côte region in Sénégal and, more recently, tourist camps in the region of Saint Louis (see next write-up), make it imperative for women fish processors to go beyond their traditional issues of concern, such as access to credit or infrastructural needs for their activities. The fight is not only to defend their source of revenue. It is also a fight for their status. Fish processing is also a way of 'social survival'. Thanks to the revenue from their activities, they participate in social and economic life—in fishing villages, women actively share the family's financial responsibilities.

In 1990, for the first time, women from CNPS questioned the tax system that paralyses the processed fish trade. They requested that the issue be put on the CNPS Congress' agenda in 1991 and 1994. The commonly highlighted problems in fish trade were earlier restricted to access to credit or limits to trade due to transport difficulties. CNPS then began to realize that taxes constituted administrative barriers for the development of the processed fish trade. A study was made with ICSF support, followed by a seminar for fisherpeople in Kayar. Representatives from the administration, from the finance department and from the department of fisheries, were invited to this seminar. CNPS thought it important to associate public authorities because it was aware that this issue was also a political one. This was one of the more practical initiatives taken by CNPS. Today, most of these taxes do not exist any more.

All these issues have been put on CNPS' agenda as a result of women's requests, which shows that their level of mobilisation is higher than that of men. How can that be explained? I think that, being more exposed than men to the consequences of public policies, women feel the need to react more.

Women have been involved in CNPS right from the time it was created. This would be usual in a sector

where women pre-finance fishing activities and where they play such an important role in post-harvest activities. But despite that, and the fact that they have politicised the movement through their requests, they were not involved in decision-making processes. For 7-8 years (from 1987 to 1994), there were women's cells in villages and a national executive committee of women. But during the CNPS Congress in 1994, they demanded to be part of the National Executive Committee of CNPS, where only fishermen were represented. That was made effective at the next general assembly in 1995.

Since then, they have taken an increasingly active role in campaigns and in lobbying outside the country. The general assembly held in 1998 brought together a larger number of women's representatives. Though they are now in the CNPS Executive Committee, they have decided to retain their local cells. If these cells were earlier seen as a way of putting women in a 'ghetto', this is not the case any more. On the contrary, the local cells have become a source of getting better empowered in the sense that the women can still discuss internal matters but, at the same time, are able to keep networking with a movement to which they have belonged for more than 11 years.