

Africa/ Senegal

Support our Trade

Statement from the Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa

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 fish processing centres to important markets in the region; improving and renovating existing rail routes and building new rail routes; 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 rates of 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 organization, 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.