

# TRUTH IS LIKE SHADOW IT CANNOT BE BURIED

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## Organizational strategy and problems

I cannot express the immense joy and great honour I feel today, for we fishermen of Senegal never thought that one day we would be able to put forth our ideas and make our voice heard.

One of the priorities of the national collective is to establish a solidarity network with fishermen's organizations on all the continents with the support of an international collective. We in Senegal are encouraged by the fact that our organization is young, but with its political weight we have begun to see some results in the government's attempts to improve its policies and carry out some projects. That shows us that in order to meet our objectives we have to be solid and representative. For this reason we have for two years concentrated all our efforts on working at the grassroots level by holding series of meetings. I would like to take advantage of this occasion to express my gratitude to the International Collective, which has encouraged us with all kinds of support, especially by facilitating the exchange of experiences among fishermen from different villages, regions and countries.

The International Collective's approach to the exchange of experiences has given us the idea of working at the West African regional level in order to then share our experience with unorganized African fishermen. An organization has to move in one direction or another; if it does not advance, it goes backward: We have been inserted into Senegal for 20 years, and, if we look at our results, we have not progressed. For that reason, since 1987 we have begun to run our organization ourselves. The process has gone through the following stages:

- October 1987: First national meeting of Senegalese fishermen. At this meeting a standing committee was elected to prepare the assembly of November 1988.
- November 1988: General Constituent Assembly and inauguration of the National Collective of

Senegalese Fishermen, with its headquarters at Hann Pechures. Today, our organization has some 1,800 members. We have published documents in the Woloff language and two issues have already come out. After government agents evaluated our officers, we created our own organization for the following reasons:

- First, the organizations we had belonged to the government, which could dissolve them when ever it wanted. That is what happened to the cooperatives.
- Second, we should have a trade union to represent the interests of a sector as large as fishing, because serious problems exist such as credit.
- Third, the government's policy works against us fishermen. To understand that, one only has to look at the government's system of credit for artisanal fishermen, which is managed largely by the agricultural credit system. This system exploits the fisherman who in the process is reduced to someone who merely uses equipment. In order to get credit, the fisherman must make a down payment of 20% of the cost of the equipment ordered and then make monthly payments. By the last payment, the fishermen are in a situation in which the equipment (usually a motor) is used up and they cannot save another 20% for a new motor, without paying an interest rate of 14.5%.

The present system is horrible as far as we are concerned, but when a person does not have what he sees, he is content with what he has. Indeed, the fishermen who wish to avoid agricultural credit have no other chance, because the government refuses to pardon the debts of fishermen taken on after agricultural credit.

The motorization program has had enormous financial problems from the 1980s up till now. Perhaps for this reason and the country's economic problems, the leaders of the country have been led to put into effect a

policy so harmful for fishermen. The present interest rate on credit of 14.5% is too high. For some officials of the program and even for the Ministry, the problems of the motorization program are due to we fishermen not paying back our loans. The government is largely responsible, since by not paying attention to what the real actors say, it puts these fishermen in such a difficult situation that they cannot pay back the loans. Moreover, we have been good payers.

Take, for example, the sudden rise in the price of motors in 1984 and 1985. During those years, prices jumped, according to the horsepower, from 168,000 to 260,370 Senegalese francs for an eight horsepower

motor (64% rise); from 255,600 to 394,370 for a 25 horsepower motor (54% rise), and from 425,000 to 550,290 for a 40 horsepower motor (29% rise).

The motors whose price rose were for fishermen who had already had made down payments in their cooperatives. Once the motors arrived, besides raising their price, the motorization program obliged the fishermen, after having made down payments to their cooperatives, to pay the remainder in cash in order to receive the motors. This has led to a slowdown of activities since 1984 on the part of some of us who had only two choices: become a crew member on a boat belonging to someone richer, or stop working.

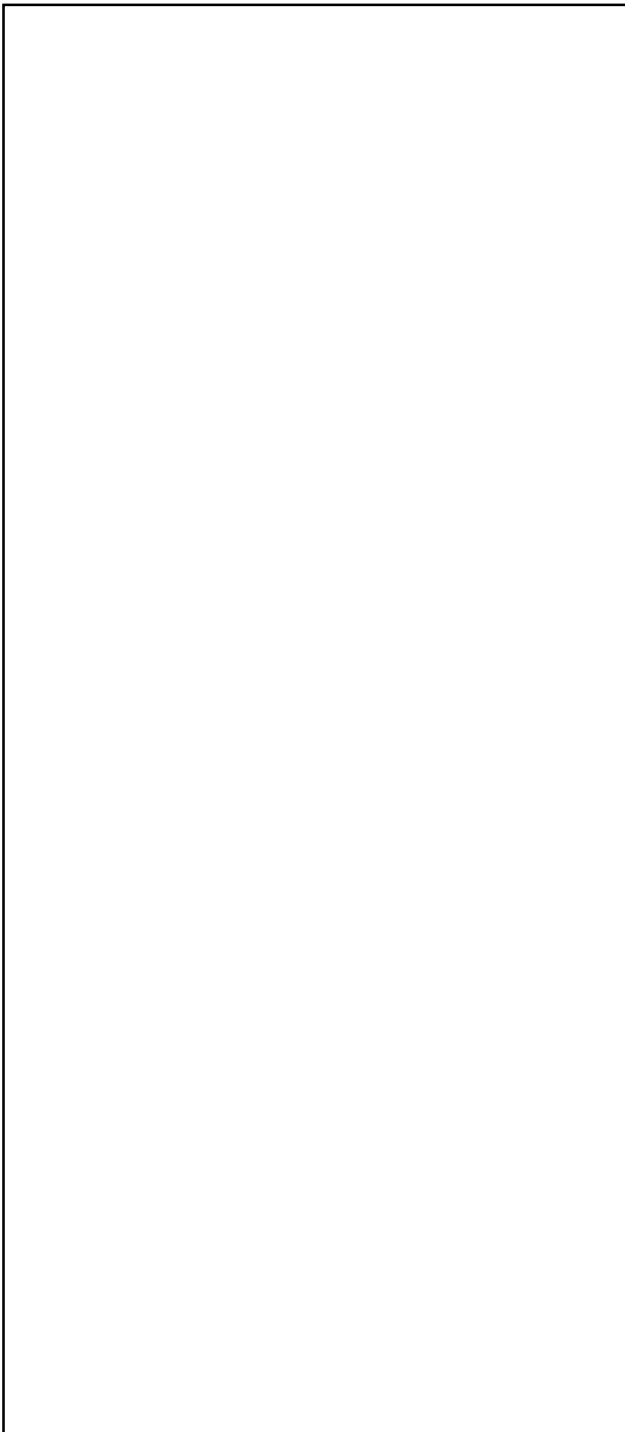
Moreover, the government owes money to a lot of fishermen who never got their motors, because their down payments were never returned to them. I was named by our organization to assess the government's debt to us. The results of my study will come out in the newsletter we publish in the Woloff language.

Besides the problems we have in obtaining the equipment we need, we face the damage caused by industrial fishermen. The Senegalese government presently allows certain small, medium-sized and large vessels to fish illegally in areas reserved to artisanal fishermen. Allowing these boats into our area poses several problems. They exploit resources, which are the very sustenance of our lives. They destroy our nets. Fatal accidents are caused when dug-out canoes collide with industrial boats. We have begun a study on the accidents at sea in collaboration with Aliou Sall, which should give us the basis to plead our case to the government.

These problems give rise to our organization. Only fishermen are allowed to belong; no one else.

Our objective is unique: build an organization on the grassroots and the rest will be easy. We are sure we can accomplish a great deal if we have a solid organization. For example, with our experience and perhaps the help of experts in the field, I am sure we will be able to create a popular bank for fishermen located in the fisher villages.

We hope to take advantage of occasions like this to inform those who fund projects in our countries. They should know that our governments make demands in our name but work against us. I would like you to listen to me carefully, because I am a fisherman from Guet Ndar, Saint Louis. I know what I am talking about and what I have experienced. I was sent by the government during the 1960s as part of a group of some 20 fishermen to train fishermen in Benin. The government no longer remembers that. Worse still, I have been forbidden to attend meetings of cooperatives for the last three years because of my ideas. Now I can once again put forth my ideas through our own organization. Truth,



like a shadow, cannot be buried. Since we have the truth, nothing today can discourage us from organizing for a better tomorrow for fishermen.

### Our capacity to mobilize

Our organization mobilizes fishermen through a campaign based on our newsletter, which has widespread circulation. The main thrust is to make fishermen aware of the problems we have in common: exploitation by banks, problems caused by industrial fishermen, and especially our safety at sea. This work of grassroots organizing is made possible by planned regular on-site visits in fishing areas by a delegation of our members. There are also monthly meetings of the officers to guide the activities of the organization.

### Actions carried out besides presenting grievances to the government

Assistance given to returnees from Mauritania: more than 80% of the fishermen working in Mauritania were Senegalese. After the conflict between these two countries, these fishermen were thrown out of the country. Since we have members licensed and operating in Mauritania, when they returned to Senegal, the National Collective of Senegalese Fishermen went to their respective families to provide them with foodstuffs.

### National reconciliation between fishermen from Guet Ndar and Kayar

The villages of Guet Ndar and Kayar are the foundation of artisanal fishing in Senegal. For reasons con-

nected with access to resources by two communities with different fishing techniques, these two villages were in conflict for many years. The government took advantage of this situation to further divide these two communities which its fears. The National Collective of Senegalese Fishermen tried to reconcile the two villages and succeeded on October 21st, 1989. This national meeting was historic. Participants included the Minister of Fisheries, the chief fishery inspector, the chief of police, and the prefect and the governor of the region. This meeting, held at the initiative of and organized by the National Collective of Senegalese Fishermen, was the only meeting of fishermen at which the Minister of Fisheries participated, even though it was held around 90 kms from Dakar.

