

## From Africa/ Senegal

### Talking shop

#### *A report of the Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa*

The *Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa* was held from 30 May to 1 June 2001, followed by the *West African Processed Fish Fair* on 2 and 3 June 2001.

These events were organized by ICSF in collaboration with the Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisans du Senegal (CNPS) and the Centre de Recherches pour le Developpement des Technologies Intermediaires de Pêche (CREDETIP). They were supported by the FAO-DFID Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Project (SFLP). The objectives were as follows:

To enable artisanal fish processors and traders to:

- identify common problems in relation to fish processing and trade at the regional level;
- make their problem visible to, and to influence, policy-makers and the general public;
- exchange fish processing technologies and establish better trade networks;
- learn about support services (information, credit and technology resources) available within the region.

A total of 64 participants from 13 countries in the West African region, that is Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, participated in the workshop. Participants included representatives of artisanal fishworker, fish processor and trader organizations, and of governmental and non-governmental organizations working with, and providing support to, artisanal fishing communities in the region.

Also participating in these events were representatives from the SFLP, the DFID, UK, the FAO Regional Office for Africa as well as fisheries departments officials from countries of the region. Also represented were organizations working with fishworkers from Mozambique and France.

The workshop provided the space for women fish processors and traders, together with their supporters, to discuss some of the issues affecting their livelihoods, in a focused way. According to the delegates from Mauritania, artisanal fish processing was a relatively new activity in their country. They highlighted the lack of road infrastructure in Mauritania that made it difficult to transport fish products. They also drew attention to the massive presence of foreign trawlers along Mauritania's coasts, and the negative impact on fish resources.

The delegates from Senegal, among other things, spoke of the need to sensitize decision-makers to respond better to the expectations of women traders. They pointed to several problems faced by women processors and traders in Senegal, including lack of infrastructure and equipment for fish processing and product storage; declining access to land for processing sites at beaches, with the development of tourism; administrative obstacles due to numerous local taxes and harassment by the police; and competition faced by the domestic artisanal sector from foreign fleets, following the fisheries access agreements signed between Senegal and the European Union.

The delegate from Sierra Leone spoke of the negative impact that political and social instability in her country had had on social and economic life, and on artisanal fish processing and trading activities. She expressed the hope that the current period of peace would last.

The delegate from Guinea Conakry drew attention to several problems faced by women processors and traders in her area, including inadequate supplies of firewood; high customs duties; high cost of product transportation; and political instability that made it difficult to access several markets in the region.

A delegate from Nigeria spoke with great passion about high post-harvest losses in the riverine fisheries of her area due to extreme paucity of financial means and inadequate equipment for processing and storage.

Participants from Cote d'Ivoire drew attention to the progressive depletion of fish resources and the difficulties in procuring fish for processing. While processors with access to capital were able to purchase fish from the harbour, most women could not afford this. The efforts of women processors to ensure supplies by advancing money to fishermen were not always successful, as the tendency was for fishermen to sell the fish elsewhere if they got a better price. Women also pointed to problems due to customs duties and local taxes: many processors prefer to stay in the village and sell to wholesalers at low prices rather than negotiate the various checkpoints encountered on the way to the market.

Participants from Ghana, Togo and Benin spoke of the depletion of fish resources, largely a consequence of trawling activities in inshore areas, and the impact on the artisanal capture and processing sector.

They also pointed to the high cost of procuring fish to process and the fact that even though many of them pre-financed fishing trips, there was no guaranteed access to fish caught. They also referred to difficulties in obtaining credit.

Participants discussed ways that their problems could be dealt with. It was noteworthy that discussions focused not only what governments or other organizations could do to support their work, but also what they needed to do themselves. They spelt out their own responsibilities in this process.

It was evident at the workshop that, given the right support and policy environment, these dynamic women can develop stronger linkages with each other, giving a boost not only to intra-regional trade, but also to regional food security, diversified and sustainable livelihoods in the artisanal fisheries sector and to regional integration.

### **We need support not charity**

Several policymakers participated in the session on the third day of the workshop. Dr. N'Diaga Gueye, Director of Fisheries, Senegal, while congratulating the organizers and participants of the workshop, dwelt at length on the future of the fish processing sector. Making a case for the modernization of the sector,

he said that one cannot have one foot in the middle ages and another in the third millennium. He stressed that the children of women fish processors must not feel that they are condemned to live in the same conditions as their parents and must be sent to school. "If I had the money to invest, I would not put it into dryers or drying areas, but I would set up schools for the children", he commented.

In response, Ms. Thérèse Senghor, a fish processor and a member of the women's wing of CNPS, Senegal stressed that women fish processors were not unaware of the importance of schooling for their children. Underlining the need to support the work of women fish processors and traders, she said it was, in fact, their work as fish processors that enabled them to earn money for schooling their children in a dignified way and not through charity.