

REVIEW

An Evaluation of the Roles of Women in Fishing Communities of Dakar, the La Petite Côte, and Sine Saloum

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This report is based on a research study undertaken in September 2011 among 12 fishing communities. It compares and contrasts the conditions facing the Senegalese women of Dakar, La Petite Côte and Sine-Saloum, who trade and process fish. The study documents the central role played by women of Senegal's fishing communities in the processing and trade of fish landed by artisanal fleets. Findings from the study were presented at a gender workshop with women from fishing communities in March 2012. The recommendations from this workshop were then incorporated into the report.

The study recorded an increase in the numbers of women involved in trading and processing, even as the type of fish traded and processed has changed from species such as grouper and croaker (*capitaine*) to the less expensive sardinella. It found that men do not earn enough and that women's income is essential to meet the costs of basic necessities such as providing for their children—a situation that leaves little to save or reinvest in business.

The study also found that women have little or no access to the formal credit system. This affects their capacity to invest in fish when there is a sharp seasonal increase in price. Technology has helped to somewhat reduce investment costs, especially transportation costs, as women now use cell

phones to find out about the type of fish landed and the price and quantity, before they travel to the markets. However, the lack of access to formal credit, combined with a scarcity of alternative jobs, often leads to dire situations.

The study found women processors to be better organized than both the long-distance and petty traders. However, even these women's contribution to the family and household is hardly ever acknowledged. Women processors' organizations are demanding identification cards as the first step towards gaining due recognition for women in the processing workforce. Improving leadership capacities as well as organizational and communication skills are viewed as important priorities. One of the key suggestions from women in the fishing communities was for outreach aimed at building leadership at the community level. The women also wish to acquire accounting, numeracy ability, business development and management skills. According to the study, many women feel that a women's bank might be an appropriate solution for their problem to lack of formal credit. In some cases, women's groups have successfully paired with NGOs to develop schools and processing centres.

The research and the workshop raised a number of important questions such as the incomplete facilities provided by NGO financing, ambiguities about whether women are consulted prior to project implementation, and lessons learnt from projects in other areas. The study recommended that skills development for women in the areas of language, technology, leadership and conservation be encouraged and that the marketing of fish be improved through better product handling, packaging and labelling. ■



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

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