

**West African artisanal fishing communities:  
*Facing up to the future***

*Regional Workshop, 1 – 5 December 2008  
Conakry (Guinea)*

Organized by  
Union Nationale des Pêcheurs Artisans de Guinée – UNPAG  
Conseil National Interprofessionnel de la pêche artisanale du Sénégal – CONIPAS  
Fédération nationale des Pêches de Mauritanie – FNP – section artisanale

*Facilitated by the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements*

# West African artisanal fishing communities: Facing up to the future

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## 1. International context in which the meeting took place

Preparatory national workshops were held in November 2008 in the eight participating countries, during which the following elements were recalled to give an outline of the international context in which this meeting of the professionals was taking place:

- In October 2008, men and women coming from the small scale fishing communities all over the world met in Bangkok, at the time of the Conference of FAO on small scale fisheries, and at the workshop of the civil society which preceded it, to discuss the issues for sustainable small scale fisheries. This world event made it possible to raise awareness with many decision makers and stakeholders, including from West Africa.
- These last years, West Africa small scale fishing communities are increasingly recognized for their contribution to the installation of responsible fisheries, in particular:
  - Their role in the supply of a protein rich food, so important in the context of current food insecurity;
  - The methods of fishing used, as well as the small size of the artisanal fishing require, comparatively, less fossil energy (fuel) and makes them potentially more able to face the energy crisis, provided they receive appropriate support;
  - The methods of fishing used are, in general, less destructive than those of industrial fishing.
  - The coastal communities constitute a social and cultural pillar of coastal populations in the West African countries. It is essential to maintain this social fabric, particularly to avoid the migrations undertaken under perilous conditions.
- However, in spite of these advantages, the survival of the communities of African western artisanal fishing depends on the capacity of the organizations which represent them to intervene on complex issues and to make concrete proposals to decision makers

Taking into account these various elements, the organizers felt it was the ideal moment today for the West African professionals, men and women, to work out together concrete proposals which could be relayed to decision makers, integrated in the fishing policies and the programs and governmental and non-governmental bodies.

Three issues were identified by the organizers of the meeting, -UNPAG, CONIPAS and FNP, on which the professionals were invited to share views and proposals:

1. To promote a sustainable exploitation of the resources, whilst protecting the artisanal fishing sector rights of access to the resources
2. To ensure that the trade of the artisanal fishery products generates sustainable benefits for the communities
3. To guarantee decent working conditions for the workers of the sector, men and women, at sea and onshore.

## *2. Echos from the debates during the workshop*

### *First topic*

To promote a sustainable exploitation of the resources, whilst protecting the artisanal fishing sector rights of access to the resources

The following issues relating to this topic were raised at the workshop

- The vulnerability of the communities of artisanal fishing comes partly from the lack of recognition of their rights of access to the resources. These rights are often informal, and, in a context of increasing competition for the coastal resources, the small scale fishing communities are often marginalized to the profit of industrial fishing fleets, whether they are local or foreign.
- The lack of transparency in the way the foreign industrial fleets, Asian and European, are granted access to West African waters (licences, authorizations of fishing, etc), the lack of accountability in the way the compensations granted to the governments are constantly denounced by the professionals
- The industrial fishing fleets, national or foreign, active in coastal waters where artisanal fishing sector operates use non-selective and destructive fishing gears, not compatible with the protection of a fragile coastal ecosystem.
- Industrial operators, as well as some small scale fishing operators, practice illegal fishing, using prohibited gears, or, in the case of industrial trawlers venturing in the coastal area normally reserved for artisanal fishing. All that has important negative consequences on the resources and the coastal communities.
- Management systems of the access to the resources of fishing are being discussed and put in place. In parallel, a network of marine protected areas also develops. Although these have an impact on the access of the artisanal fishing communities to the resources, they are not always consulted.
- The access to the terrestrial coastal areas becomes also an issue, with the development of tourism (which moves the zones of transformation of fish), of exploration/oil exploitation, etc

### *Second topic*

#### **To ensure that the trade of the artisanal fishery products generates sustainable benefits for the communities**

The following issues relating to this topic were raised:

- The improvement of the first sale price is an important issue for the fishermen, especially in a context where the inputs (fuel, etc) are becoming increasingly expensive.
- The necessity to improve the quality of the artisanally processed products, an activity carried out primarily by the women of the sector, to improve the possibilities of marketing (including to more distant markets) has been raised. Obstacles are not only technical but also include illiteracy, in particular for the women; the lack of public services (sanitation, evacuation of waste) etc.
- The regional trade of the artisanal fishery products in West Africa is particularly important for food security. However, there are many obstacles to the reinforcement of the regional trade: costs of transport, harassment during the transport, etc
- The West African artisanal fishery products are also sold on international markets, like the EU. The European sanitary and traceability standards (including a new system of catch certification to prove the legal origin of fish), the existing ecolabels standards are difficult to satisfy and can become non trade barriers for artisanal fishery products.

### *Third topic*

#### **To guarantee decent working conditions for the workers of the sector, men and women, at sea and onshore**

The following issues relating to this topic were raised:

- Safety at sea remains a crucial issue. Reduction of resources means that fishermen need to go further at sea, taking more risks. Changing weather conditions are also observed in some cases.
- The working conditions in the fish processing sites affect the health of the women fish processors - lack of sanitation on the sites, damage caused by the inhalation of the smoke, etc
- The tiredness, felt as much by the crews (longer trips at sea) as by the women fish processors (they often have also to do all the housework and look after a big family, sometimes, the processing sites have been moved away, so the distance to cover to reach their working place has increased, etc) make fisher people weaker and vulnerable to the diseases.
- The incidence of the VIH/SIDA is important in the coastal communities but remains difficult to address, either through preventive or curative solutions.
- Child labour is a reality in several countries of the region. Their young age increases the accident risks and moves them away from school.

### **3. Professionals Joint recommendations and proposals adopted**

#### **3.1. Recommendations**

We the participants of the Conakry workshop, representatives of artisanal fisherfolk/fishworkers, NGOs, etc, from Republic of Guinea, Ghana, Senegal, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Togo, Liberia, Gambia, and Guinea Bissau, urge the professional artisanal fishing organisations to ensure that:

- The decisions taken at Conakry as regards governance and internal communications are taken up by and induce changes within their (professional) organizations; and
- Immediately on their return, they take up their commitments to provide feedback to their members, organisations and national institutions on the workshop.

We further recommend that:

- Professional artisanal fishing organizations are actively and effectively involved in the definition and implementation of the Sub Regional Fisheries Committee (SRCF) projects;
- A committee is established to follow up on outcome of the workshop;
- A Regional Artisanal Fishing Organisations Confederation be established;
- The relationships between the West Africa Network of Journalists for Responsible Fisheries (REJOPRAO), the professional organisations and their partners are formalized; and
- Support is provided to the professional organisations from those countries that have recently joined this initiative, from Liberia, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Guinea Bissau, ~~started in 2006 in Nouadhibou?~~

In order to ensure the future prospects of their communities, professionals from the artisanal fishing sector have made proposals in the following areas:

- For communication amongst professionals to be improved;
- For the rule of law and the respect of international commitments to be promoted;
- For participation and co-management to be more widely adopted;
- For coastal resources to be protected and access rights to be respected;
- For pollution to be combated;
- For hygiene to be improved;
- For trade in artisanal fishery products to be developed; and
- For decent working conditions at sea and on shore to become the norm.

## **3.2. Proposals**

Professionals from the West African artisanal fishing sector, men and women, meeting in Conakry, from December 1st to 5th 2008, made the following proposals towards ensuring a sustainable future to their communities:

### **Improve communication amongst professionals**

In order to remove obstacles to communicating, which obstruct the establishment of strong relations between professionals, a communication system between the professionals must be set up, which enables the professionals, men and women of the various countries concerned, to communicate with each other within their means, in their own language and in a suitable format. In particular, better use of new communication tools amongst professionals is essential to defend their rights.

### **Promote the rule of law and respect for international commitments**

- Campaigns must be carried out by and for the professionals so that the laws are effectively applied by our States, and respected by the fishermen, in particular with regard to resource access conditions; access to and protection of the artisanal fishing zone; allocation of fishing permits and licenses; the registration of pirogues and other vessels, etc;
- Campaigns aimed at greater transparency in the development and the implementation of our fishing policies are necessary;
- The professionals must lobby their governments to review national legislation so that they integrate international commitments of importance for artisanal fishing, such as priority access rights to resources (derived from the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries), measures to fight Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated fishing (derived from the international Plan of Action against IUU), measures to fight the pirates who attack the fishermen at sea, etc. A slogan coined by professionals to be used this end is “illegal fishing is a crime against fishing communities”. The professionals should organize awareness raising campaigns in their respective countries on this issue for decision makers at national level and for their international partners, such as the EU;
- Awareness must be raised with our states to avoid excessive administrative burden for the professionals when dealing with the licenses and fishing permits; and for market access conditions, including for the women fish processors, etc which are obstacles for performing their daily work.

### **Improve Participation and Co management**

- The Fishermen’s Organizations - the Federations, the Co-operatives, the Professional organizations-, and other associations active in the field of the artisanal fishing urge their respective States to improve their involvement in the development of fishing policies, in the implementation of the fisheries management plans, including the management of marine protected areas, etc

### **Ensure that artisanal fishing access rights to the coastal resources (marine and terrestrial) are respected and protected**

- Campaigns must be organized aimed at updating the laws concerning the definition and the protection of the zones reserved for artisanal fishing, so that the artisanal fishermen's current and future needs in terms of access are taken into account;
- The professionals must mobilize and press their governments to take the necessary measures to prevent industrial fishing from operating illegally in the zones reserved for artisanal fishing;
- Awareness must be raised in the fishing communities on the dangers and the environmental impacts of using explosives and destructive fishing techniques.
- Awareness must be raised with the fishing communities to ensure that marine protected areas are respected as well as the nurseries, especially the mangroves areas;
- There should be serious reflection on the concept of biological rest periods to ensure the objective of resource regeneration is met, and that the difficulties for the artisanal fishing sector to implement it are addressed.
- Proposals must be discussed and developed with the professionals to introduce new materials for boat building - fiber glass, plastic, aluminium, etc, in order to improve hygiene aboard the pirogues, quality of the products, and to contribute to the fight against the deforestation of the coastal areas;
- Professionals must promote the replanting of mangroves for regenerating the coastal environment;
- Campaigns should be undertaken aimed at opening up property rights for women (to become, for example, owners of their own production units) to facilitate regular supply of artisanally processed products;
- Training, information and awareness raising campaigns must be organized for the women from the fishing communities on the issues of sustainable fisheries and access to resources, in order for them to be better involved in resource management. The professionals have coined a slogan to be used to raise awareness against juvenile fishing and processing: "If you kill a small fish today, you can't hope for a big fish tomorrow".

### **Fight against pollution**

- Awareness needs to be raised with municipalities and fishing communities about the negative impacts of using plastic bags which pollute the coastal area;



- Awareness must be raised with the decision makers about the dangers generated by oil pollution
- Awareness must be raised with fishing communities so that they don't throw their rubbish in the sea.

### **Improvement of hygiene**

- Professionals must be supported to improve the healthiness and cleanliness of the fish unloading and fish processing areas to ensure better handling of the fish products destined to consumption and better living conditions for the fishing communities.

### **Improve the trade of artisanal fishery products**

- There is a need to help fishing communities explore and develop possibilities for contact between the professionals of fish producing countries and countries where demand exists in order to improve the supply of fish to their populations.
- Professionals need to push decision makers to engage in an in-depth debate on the concrete implementation of the ECOWAS provisions concerning the freedom of movement of the goods and the people in the region, as it doesn't exist at the moment;
- Campaigns should be undertaken to stop harassment on the road (check points) of the professionals, particularly women, who transport their products for the regional market;
- Women fish processors from the region should network to keep each other informed of opportunities to market their processed products in the region;
- Research should be undertaken to document the real costs of transport, including the taxes existing in the various countries of the region, and findings made available to the network of professionals in order for them to discuss how to limit the negative role of the intermediaries;
- With the aim of facilitating intra-regional trade meetings should be organized by the professionals in each country with the services concerned (Customs, Police force, Gendarmerie, National Forestry Commission and the central administrations);
- Training and experience sharing should be organized on the various processing technologies for improving the hygiene and quality of the processed products;
- Possibilities should be explored to extend the markets for artisanal products towards Asia and America;
- Awareness raising campaigns and training courses should be undertaken with the fishermen on the importance of complying with quality standards during fishing

operations, which is indispensable for generating value addition for the regional and international markets and to protect the consumers;

- Artisanal fishing professionals should be informed and trained about how to improve the marketing of their fish products;
- To put in place new adapted infrastructures that allow for the production of artisanally processed products that meet hygiene and sanitary requirements
- To campaign for regional harmonization of fish marketing measures applied to international markets
- To create a (weekly, monthly) information review for the professionals, on the regional markets for artisanal fish products, including use of existing web sites like WATH, ADEPA etc.

### **Guarantee decent working conditions at sea and on land**

- Training of the fishermen concerning safety at sea;
- Look for sources of funding for navigational material for fishermen (reflectors/beacons, GSP, Radar);
- Equip the pirogues materials for extinguishing fires aboard boats in distress;
- Make compulsory the wearing of life jacket by the fishermen
- Raise awareness with the fishermen and their families about their living conditions
- Establish autonomous dispensaries in the fishing centres
- Create an artisanal fishing section in maritime training schools
- Make the registration of all fishing vessels compulsory
- Organize weather forecasting service easily accessible by fishermen before leaving for the fishing trip
- Implement awareness raising programmes on HIV Aids and establish a voluntary testing centre.
- Creation by the professionals of a voluntary benevolent fund to be used by the families of fishermen who died at sea
- Creation of a savings programme to assist victims of accidents at work
- Assure the education and qualification of our children to ensure the future of artisanal fishing

- Strengthen participative surveillance, which in the past has made it possible to reduce collisions with industrial boats and the loss of life
- Raise awareness about the importance of fishermen wearing life jackets amongst fishermen and their families.
- Increase the use of communication means at sea, with families on shore, to improve safety of fishermen,
- Promote campaigns for HIV/AIDS testing in fishing communities, especially amongst expectant mothers
- Improve smoking installations in order to reduce and channel smoke, affecting as it does the health of women fish smokers and their children, using suitable types of wood that produce less smoke.
- Establish nurseries for children on fish processing sites to keep them away from processing sites, and places where injured people can be treated. Support should be requested from the states for this.
- Train children in fishing techniques to make them proficient fishermen whilst respecting their rights and ensuring decent working conditions for them.

### **3.3. Common Position on fisheries partnership agreement negotiations between the EU and West African countries**

On the occasion of the workshop held in Conakry, Republic of Guinea, from December 1-5 2008, entitled “Facing up to the Future: proposals of West African artisanal fishing organisations for sustainable fisheries”, we, the representatives of professional artisanal fisheries organisations from Mauritania, Sénégal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Republic of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana have adopted the following common positions on the establishment of fisheries partnerships agreements between the European Union and our countries:

#### **Access to resources, fishing possibilities and duration**

- The ex ante/ex post evaluations undertaken by the European Commission should be made publicly available in our countries prior to the start of negotiations on a new agreement or on the renewal of an existing agreement protocol. These evaluations should not only provide information on the state of the fish resources, eco-systems, and their state of exploitation but also on the value of EU fleet catches, so that our countries and our organisations can evaluate whether or not these agreements are good value for money for us. Up to now, information gathered by us indicates that the financial compensation and payments made by EU boat owners only represent a very small proportion of the value of the fish caught by EU fleets.
- Coastal demersal stocks that are already in a state of overexploitation, such as cephalopods and shrimps, must be reserved for national fisheries, notably the artisanal fisheries sector.
- A fisheries partnership agreement with the European Union must not allow European boats to access overexploited stocks, in any way whatsoever, including through the transfer of vessels or the establishment of joint enterprises, including through the framework of an Economic Partnership Agreement, through the investments provisions;
- Surplus stocks that are not full exploited may be exploited by EU boats;
- In terms of the levels of fishing possibilities granted through partnership agreements, a better evaluation of the fishing capacity of European vessels must be made, taking account not only of the gross registered tonnage (GRT) but also of other elements like the engine power, in accordance with the International Convention on Tonnage Measurement of Ships. This is necessary to ensure that fishing effort is effectively restricted, and to reduce the risks of overfishing.
- Vessels that can harm the ecosystem through the use of excessive engine power must be prohibited.
- The use of gears by European boats that are non-selective and that have a detrimental impact on the environment, e.g. mono filament or multi monofilament, should be prohibited.

- The duration of the agreement should be reduced to not more than three years.
- Evaluations should be scheduled during the course of agreements in order to review their terms and to ensure that they comply with the third country fishery development plans. Annual Joint committee meetings should be open to the artisanal fishing sector representatives, and should include a review of the number of licences to be renewed, based on an independent stock assessment, and with a view to ensuring sustainable exploitation of the resources, whilst ensuring respect for artisanal fishing access rights.

### **Financial compensation – Lack of transparency**

The financial compensation in future partnership agreements must be invested in sector development activities, in particular: research, surveillance, training, infrastructure, development of artisanal and coastal fisheries, processing and adding value to fisheries products etc.

The main problem today is lack of transparency.

There is a total lack of transparency both in selection of priority areas to be supported by the financial compensation and in the use of the compensation monies. We, the professionals, have no idea how this financial compensation is used.

As regards the amounts that may have been allocated to development of artisanal fisheries, we have not been informed or consulted about any such use of these funds in developing our sector.

Conditions for total transparency need to be put in place for fishery partnership agreements, both in terms of drawing up plans for the use of the financial compensation and in the way these amounts are subsequently spent. Transparency and provision of information must not only be for the benefit of the professionals but also for informing public opinion.

In terms of participation, up until now we have been accepted as observers at the negotiations, but we have not been allowed to take full part in discussions, something we deplore. Furthermore, often we do not have access to all the information we need to make our participation effective.

### **Landings**

- All catches must be landed at our national ports;
- In order to improve benefits from the agreement, provisions should be reinforced within the agreement for financing port facilities, post harvest processing and transport facilities;
- The authorities responsible for controls must have the power to demand that all EU vessels land their entire catches in port for control purposes. Control points at sea have proved ineffective;

- The obligations concerning the quantities to be landed for supplying the local market must be respected;

### **Fishing zones, biological rest periods, meshes**

Mention of the fishing zones, biological rest periods and mesh sizes should not be made in the technical annex of the agreement. Rather it should merely specify that these are in compliance with national regulations of the third country.

Experience has shown that once these elements are included in an agreement, there is little room for flexibility. Thus when management measures such as additional biological rest periods have to be taken urgently to safeguard resources, it is difficult to have them respected by European boats.

### **Forming joint enterprises**

The agreement must favour the formation of joint enterprises for processing and value-adding activities. Joint enterprises that could result in overfishing and destruction of our stocks and our marine environment should not be allowed.

The creation of joint enterprises between artisanal fishermen in our countries and European artisanal boat owners whose boats do not trawl and use dragnets should be promoted.

### **Observers on board**

Often the observers are not taken on board and their independence vis-à-vis shipowners is not guaranteed.

The partnership agreements must include means for funding training and appropriate remuneration for observers. The agreements could also provide the basis for initiating a discussion on how to ensure that corruption and cronyism between observers and shipowners is avoided.

