

West African artisanal fishing sector: a proactive force for sustainable fisheries

Rome, March 5th, 2009.

Small-scale fisheries were the focus of attention of Governments participating in the twenty eighth session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries, COFI, who discussed how to follow up on results of the World Conference on Small Scale Fisheries (4SSF), held in Bangkok, Thailand, October 2008.

A statement was issued by small scale fishing organizations, present at the event as observers, highlighting the importance of their sector, and calling for a Special Chapter to be included in FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries on small scale fisheries. They also advised that COFI should consider setting up a Sub Committee devoted to Small Scale fisheries, and/or develop Technical Guidelines or International Plan of Action (IPOA) on small-scale fishing, which should be elaborated by FAO and its members through an inclusive process involving small-scale fishers and civil society.

Mamayawa Sandouno, from Guinea, a member of the ICSF¹ recalled that these demands were made by civil society during the FAO 4SSF Conference. *'Civil society organizations insisted there that development efforts in the fisheries sector, including in our West African countries, should be geared towards guaranteeing the freedom, the well-being and the dignity of all men and women working in the artisanal fisheries sector'*, she said

During the official debate, some ACP² delegations highlighted the importance of the small-scale fisheries sector for their countries. *'Small scale fisheries and their development are the very essence for developing countries like Mauritania'*, said the Mauritanian delegate, whilst the delegation from Guinea declared that small-scale fisheries were at the centre of the government's fisheries policy. On behalf of the SADC countries, South Africa proposed that a special chapter be included in the Code of Conduct to deal with securing sustainable small-scale fisheries.

The European delegation emphasized that priority access should be for the coastal states, *'whilst there was a need to exploit sustainably the surplus stocks in the EEZ'*. The EU also highlighted that it was open to a technical consultation on small scale fisheries and the revising of existing guidelines, such as those relating to the contribution of small scale fishing to poverty alleviation and food security, but was against any new development of the code.

Gaoussou Gueye, Vice President of the Senegalese artisanal fishing organization CONIPAS³ and member of the CFFA⁴ delegation to COFI said that, in his view, the crucial issue that needed to be addressed in this debate is the right of artisanal fishermen to have a priority access to the resources they depend on for their livelihood: *'Our right to priority access should be better recognized and protected by*

¹ *International Collective in Support of Fishworkers*

² *African, Caribbean and Pacific countries*

³ *Conseil National Inter-professionnel de la Pêche artisanale au Sénégal*

⁴ *Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements*

our governments. The participation of our artisanal fishing communities in the management of the ecosystems is also crucial for the future of fisheries’.

Resource access rights are a key issue for future fisheries relations between ACP countries and EU. The EU is currently launching a review of its Common Fisheries Policy, which is likely to see a reorientation of its external policy, including Fisheries Partnership Agreements (FPAs) through which EU fleets gain access to ACP waters.

Dao Gaye, president of CONIPAS and one of the founder members of the WFFP⁵, recalls that a joint position was taken by the West African artisanal fishing organisations on these FPAs: *‘Professionals demand that foreign fleets should not have access to resources on which artisanal fisheries depend, whether through fisheries agreements or through private licensing, and should certainly not be allowed to use non-selective and otherwise destructive fishing gears’.*

Sid’ahmed Sidi Mohamed Abeid, president of the Mauritanian artisanal fishermen organisation, also present at COFI in the WFFP delegation, highlights that *‘In reality, since 2006, when professionals from the artisanal sector, both men and women, met in Mauritania, we have become a proactive force on several issues - fisheries agreements, trade issues, the fight against illegal fishing, and the need for transparency. We are looking for constructive dialogue with our governments, and with inter-governmental and international bodies active in our sector’.*

Crucial for him and his colleagues present at COFI is a better organization of the professionals. Sid’Ahmed concludes: *‘Last December, in Guinea, professionals from nine West African countries decided to put in place a confederation of West African artisanal fishing organisations. With the support of our regional and international partners, this initiative will strengthen our voice and our weight in the decision making process’.* Some of their international partners, such as EED⁶, CFFA and ICSF networks will unite their efforts to make sure this message gets to the EU so that ACP small scale fisheries concerns are taken on board in the context of the CFP reform, to be finalised in 2012.

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⁵ *World Forum of Fisher Peoples*

⁶ *German Church Development Service*