



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Coastal Fisheries Initiative

Promoting sustainable
fisheries in coastal areas

CFI Talks 5 | Knowledge Sharing

Empowering women in fisheries value chains
31 May 2023



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Brief Report



1. INTRODUCTION

The event facilitator, Mr Philip Townsley, Science to Policy Expert at the CFI Global Partnership Project (CFI-GPP), introduced the 5th edition of CFI Talks as a series of webinars organized by the Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI) to encourage discussion and experience sharing on sustainable coastal fisheries management. He passed the floor to Ms Fatou Sock, Chief Technical Advisor of CFI-GPP, who welcomed participants and pointed out that a key component of the CFI Programme, coordinated by FAO and financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is the sharing of information, experiences, good practices, and lessons learned on governance of coastal fisheries and the strengthening of fisheries value chains, with the aim of making them more sustainable and more profitable for the benefit of the communities that depend on them. She recalled that small-scale fisheries occupy an important place in the global economy and help boost national economies by creating job opportunities, especially for women and youth.

According to FAO statistics, production from small-scale fisheries accounts for 40 percent of global catches and small-scale fishers and fish workers represent 90 percent of people involved in fisheries value chains around the world, 40 percent of whom are women. The role and work of women along the value chains of fishery products are very important and must therefore be more visible and better recognized. This is why FAO, UNDP, WB, UNEP, CI and WWF, with the support of the GEF, through the CFI Programme, and the support of the Ministries of Fisheries and/or Environment of six countries (Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Indonesia, Peru and Senegal), support organizations in fishing communities, in particular women seafood processors and fishmongers, in order to improve their working conditions and livelihoods, strengthen their organizational structures, and promote their social integration.

To strengthen fisheries value chains and to improve the socio-economic conditions of women, it is essential that they be well integrated and better represented in decision-making processes. This begins with recognition and enhancement of their skills, but also with sustained strengthening of their capacities. CFI Talks 5 helped to better understand how the work of empowering women in fisheries value chains is essential to achieving sustainable fisheries. Ms Sock hoped that this sharing of knowledge and experiences will make it possible to advance reflection on the role and challenges of women in the value chains of fishery products, particularly in the sub-sector of artisanal fishing.

The presentations from CFI West Africa, CFI Latin America and CFI Indonesia were followed by a panel discussion where participants had the opportunity to interact with the speakers and presenters. After this interactive session, Mr Townsley took over to wrap up the webinar and provide a summary of the interventions. Ms Sock brought the session to an end and thanked all the presenters, organizers and participants, who had the occasion to discover: 1) the strategies to strengthen gender mainstreaming implemented in artisanal fisheries in West Africa; 2) the impact of the CFI West Africa project in strengthening organizations of women seafood processors in fishing communities; 3) the impact of efforts undertaken in Latin America to empower women through initiatives supported by scientific research; and 4) the example of Indonesia in overcoming the challenges regarding the diversification of women's livelihoods in fisheries value chains.

2. GENDER STRATEGIES IN FISHERIES IN WEST AFRICA: OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

Katya Neves, Assistant FAO Representative in Cabo Verde, took over to present the experience of CFI West Africa in developing a gender strategy for the fishery sector in Cabo Verde, which is one of the first countries in the sub-region to develop such a strategy. In West Africa, fishing is male dominated. Women are mostly responsible for post-capture, low-paid tasks such as fish processing and selling, as well as household chores and childcare. Statistics, especially statistics for fisheries, commonly fail to capture these women's contributions and engagement. This invisibility leads to a lack of voice in decision-making venues, and women are also the most likely to be left behind in national policies. Consequently, women in fisheries are likely to be trapped in vicious cycles of poverty, informality, and social injustice.

Although some women own their own fishing vessels, they have limited access to resources, especially in the case of women who are not related to fishermen. Most women fishmongers, particularly the street vendors, work in informal conditions. They lack social protection and often have low levels of education. Many of them are illiterate. In the case of Cabo Verde, many elderly women continue selling fish into their old age because they don't have social protection and they cannot afford to stop working.

In Cabo Verde, fisheries are the most important economic sector, contributing to 80 percent of national exports. The latest census indicates that it employs more than 70 000 people. Women play a crucial role, making up 86 percent of fishmongers. Fish remains extremely important to food security and nutrition, with annual consumption of an estimated 11.2 kilos per capita.

Since Cabo Verde's independence in 1975, equality between women and men has been upheld as one of the fundamental principles of human rights. Cabo Verde soon understood the importance of gender equality as a crucial condition for the country's development and economic growth. It's very important to emphasize that despite the principle of gender equality being enshrined in the Constitution, its effective application has been, and still is, a great challenge for governments. Cabo Verde is committed to gender equality at the international level by adopting the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).

With the support of CFI, and under the leadership of the Ministry of the Sea, Cabo Verde has developed its first National Gender Strategy for Fisheries, which aims to ensure the effective and active participation of women in decision-making, facilitating their access to and control of resources and benefits and valuing their contributions. To develop the gender strategy for fisheries, the process started with an inception phase in August 2021. This was followed by an assessment of existing gender mainstreaming in fisheries policies and projects. The implementation phase is ongoing with the organization of national capacity building workshops for fishery stakeholders, including fishmongers and fisher associations. The Ministry of Family, Social Inclusion and Development, which is the head of all gender policy in the country, has incorporated gender mainstreaming in its new cycle of programming for the next four years. The Ministry of the Sea has also adopted the gender strategy as part of its programme.

CFI is supporting the implementation of some of the prioritized actions in the gender strategy, providing technical training for more than 100 men and women, fishers and fish vendors and others in the sector so they can manage their own businesses and start new enterprises in other areas. Some programmatic training remains to be done before the end of this year. There is an agreement signed with the National Directory of Fisheries and Aquaculture, which is targeting the institutional level. Another one was signed with the National Gender Institute to support the private sector and companies working in fisheries to implement a gender equality plan. CFI has the country's commitment and is pushing forward with the National Gender Strategy for Fisheries.

3. STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS OF WOMEN SEAFOOD PROCESSORS IN WEST AFRICA

In Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, many coastal communities depend on artisanal fishing for their livelihoods. In this value chain, women play a key role as harvesters, vendors, and processors. But they face many challenges, including the lack of modern working facilities and equipment, insufficient access to credit and the market, informal working conditions, and underpaid and dangerous work, among others.

Ms Maria Dacosta Moniz, CFI West Africa fisheries consultant, took over to present the outcomes of the project in Cabo Verde in terms of organizational strengthening of women seafood processors. A diagnostic study was carried out in 2019 and 2020 of women's organizations at the pilot sites. This study has demonstrated that fishing associations are composed of both men and women. But the role of women is often limited to positions such as secretary and treasurer. These organizations show a certain dynamism but with weaknesses in their operations and functioning. Most associations do not have public utility status, which does not allow them to benefit from certain rights and tax advantages.

Most associations work informally. They do not have financial autonomy and face many organizational weaknesses. They don't have regular meetings. Members do not regularly pay dues. A limited number of women have received training. They do not have access to credit. The CFI West Africa project has worked to strengthen the organizational capacities of women beneficiaries, particularly in terms of simplified accounting, business creation, guidelines on artisanal fishing, governance, and financial management, among others. The project has contributed to strengthening women's skills in good hygiene practices, processing, and marketing of fish products. The project helped the women to improve their salting/drying technique and supported them to become members of the National Fisheries Council. The project also supported them to obtain health certification and to promote their processed products on the local market.

Dr Diomande Labla, value chain specialist from CFI West Africa, continued with the presentation by sharing the outcomes of the project in Côte d'Ivoire in terms of the strengthening of women fish processors' organizations. In Côte d'Ivoire, there are four cooperatives bringing together a total of 546 women who practice fish smoking at the two pilot sites of the project in Côte d'Ivoire. These cooperatives use a simplified organizational form. Among the challenges faced by these women are lack of knowledge of how to run a cooperative, lack of female leadership, poor knowledge of financial management and difficulties in accessing loans to finance processing and selling activities, not to mention the lack of improved equipment for preserving fish products.

To strengthen their capacities, CFI West Africa carried out training workshops for the benefit of 181 actors on gender equality, fish smoking technology with FTT ovens, and access to market and credit. Following the workshops, the women were able to integrate the National Union of Cooperative Societies in Côte d'Ivoire and the National Federation of Cooperative Societies, which includes 22 women's organizations who operate in the fisheries sector.

Mr Aliou Diouf, value chain specialist from CFI West Africa in Senegal, completed the presentation by sharing project outcomes in terms of organizational strengthening of women seafood processors. In Senegal, women fish workers are organized into Economic Interest Groups (GIEs, in their French acronym). The GIE is a legally recognized form of organization. It must be composed of at least two partners. No maximum membership is imposed and there is no minimum start-up fund. There are 150 GIEs at the level of the nine Local Artisanal Fishing Councils (CLPAs, in their French acronym) in the Saloum Islands, the project's pilot site in Senegal, bringing together 2 000 women. The current trend is to form large organizational entities, such as local unions and federations, to increase the possibilities of seeking funding and partnerships.

This flexible form of organization allows Senegalese women to participate in the economic development of seafood value chains and in environmental management. Thanks to this organizational dynamic, women also occupy a prominent place in the field of resource management and environmental preservation. They take an active part in the reforestation and rehabilitation of 300 hectares of mangroves, which was initiated by the CFI West Africa project in Senegal. This dynamic also allows them to set up community self-financing mechanisms such as solidarity funds.

4. THE IMPACT OF EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN IN LATIN AMERICA TO EMPOWER WOMEN THROUGH INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Ms Virna Cedeño Escobar, CEO and co-founder of two biotechnology companies for sustainable development: Concepto Azul in Ecuador and Incabiotec in Peru, took over to share the experience of CFI Latin America in empowering women to play a transformative role as leaders in the development of businesses that make it possible to build and establish societies that are based on science and values.

In Latin America, there are many stereotypes that have often limited women to activities traditionally assigned exclusively to them. Productive activities that somehow involve tools based on science and technology are restricted specifically to men. The economic dependence of women has undermined their condition and reduced their access to credit. They often need the authorization of a male figure to engage in some activities. Household responsibilities have also reduced women's opportunities to access education. It has been shown that where women are able to participate more fully in economic development, the benefits extend to the entire family, improving its health, educational levels, and the condition of the children. So, when women improve their conditions, they also improve the life of the family and, therefore, society in general.

Concept Azul has been working to make it possible to transfer technology to local communities and women have demonstrated their capacity to be a pillar in overcoming the above-mentioned limitations not only in Latin American countries, but also in other countries. In that sense, the CFI

has made an important contribution in terms of training in marketing, administration, and finance, with the aim to contribute to the socially and environmentally sustainable economic development of fishing communities in Peru and Ecuador, and women in those communities. It provided significant support to fishing communities to set up intensive family shrimp aquaculture units that allow water recirculation to reduce the impact of damaging discharge into the natural environment. Women have played a leading role in these activities. Many community leaders have been trained to manage these intensive family productive units based on aquaculture. This process generates composting and alternative foods, reducing the exploitation of marine species and empowering women to play a more active role in economic activities that involve technological innovation.

Real education can transform societies. Introducing fishing communities with little or no access to formal education to biotechnology can have a significant impact on their life and the preservation of natural resources, thanks to a 6-month training cycle that enables them to manage the resources in a sustainably and environmentally friendly way and which contributes to restore and preserve their ecosystems. This has contributed to strengthening women's economic independence and their position in the community.

5. LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION FOR WOMEN IN FISHERIES VALUE CHAINS IN INDONESIA: OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

Adipati Rahmat, CFI Indonesia project manager, showcased experience in livelihood diversification for women in fisheries value chains. In the project areas in Eastern Indonesia, fisheries value chains and the business system have traditionally not involved women. Dr Rahmat gave the example of Anissa, a CFI beneficiary who lost her home in a fire. The CFI trained Anissa and her fellow women as a group, providing them with a set of cooking tools to help them develop their livelihoods. This has not only restored their economic independence, but also their mindset and their creativity. Thanks to CFI support in generating sustainable livelihoods, the women are no longer underestimated by men, because they have jobs and important roles in their communities as seafood processors. Anissa and other women now travel often as speakers and influencers for others in their district.

Business activities in the coastal areas of central-eastern Indonesia in general are related to small-scale capture fisheries. Fishers and fish processors face challenges in running their businesses due to the low skills of the community members and the lack of tools, which means there is almost no added value created. The lack of skills as well as the lack of equipment are the biggest barriers for women, even though there are women that also go out to sea to fish.

CFI Indonesia is targeting these issues with the support of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF), the district government, and a training center for women. The project assisted them by providing cooking and processing equipment as well as training sessions so they can learn about certification standards, how to brand their products and how to get their products to market. As part of the training, the project also set up a small competition between women's groups to increase their motivation.

6. WRAP UP AND CLOSING REMARKS

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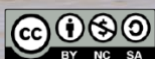
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