

Snapshots of Women's Roles in Senegal's Fishing Industry: Then and Now

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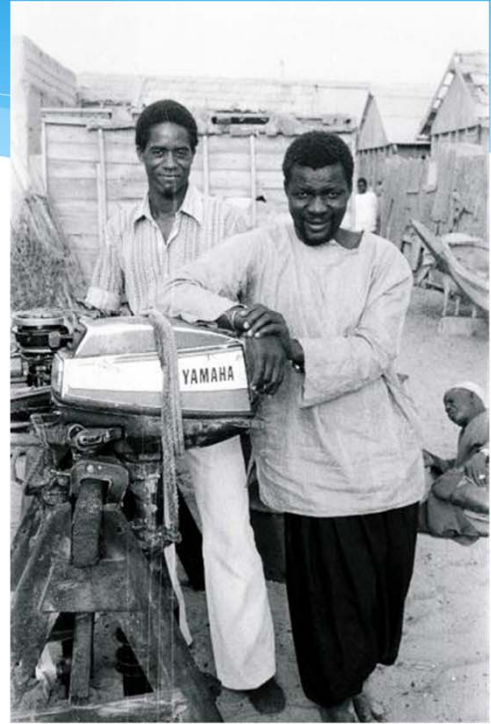
In 1981, I spent a year in Guet N'dar, Saint-Louis, talking to the traders and processors of fish. Last September, I was able to spend two weeks visiting 12 fishing communities mostly along La Petite Cote and Sine Saloum to learn about the needs and values of the women involved in the fishing industry. Since I had not been here for 30 years, some of the changes were striking, but what was also interesting were those things that are the same. Today, I will be showing you some photos of the past and some from September to show you what I noticed. I hope that the photos will make you think about what you consider important so that as the workshop progresses, your views can be recorded.

Basic equipment—*Pirogues*



Since we are interested in everything associated with fishing, it is important to acknowledge the basic necessities. The pirogues launch and return, lining the beach when at rest. A casual look suggests that there may be more large pirogues than in the past and probably a greater use of purse seines and gillnets.

Engines



Outboard motors also are important for fishermen and so important to the women who buy the fish. In the past, some women would loan money to fishermen (often their husbands or sons) to buy motors. I heard that fewer women do so now because doing so does not mean that they are given preference in buying the catch.

Awaiting the *Pirogues*



Women still wait on the beach for the return of the fishermen to buy fish to sell.



Although many of the species I saw in September were familiar from my long ago journey, I heard that fish is often scarce and expensive. I noticed also that the “noble” species seem to be less plentiful. Sardinella was processed in the past, but now it predominates in the local markets.

Changes: Sizes of Fish Being Sold



While these are different species, so comparing the size is not really fair, I was surprised to see very small sardinella now being processed. When I was here before, children were allowed to take the few fish of this size that were landed and they would make miniature fires in a tin can to roast and eat them.

Chain of Cold



An effort to keep fish fresh and reduce loss has been in place for many years. In the summer of 1981, fishermen used ice boxes that fit into the pirogue. One-ton Peugeot trucks were popular and ice was piled on top of the fish. In September of 2011, refrigerated trucks appeared to be more common.

Strong & Intelligent Women



Thirty years ago, as tradition dictated, wives and mothers of fishermen were said to be the buyers and sellers of the catch. However, change was beginning even then. Foreign fishing trawlers and modern gear (purse seines and small mesh sizes, larger pirogues, larger motors) were already affecting the availability and therefore, the prices of fish. Both traders and processors complained that the prices of raw fish were high. When I returned in September, I heard the same complaints. However, some women were very successful in 1981, the banabana (on the right) owned 5 trucks of various sizes. She was well respected in the community and took care to buy product not only from her fishermen sons, but also from the smaller scale traders on the beach and in the local market. In September, I was fortunate to meet some other women who are successful traders and processors. You, I am sure, know why women's economic success is important—for families, communities, and the nation.

Uses of Incomes— Importance of women's work

WOMEN

- * Education
- * Health care
- * Every day clothes
- * Consumer goods
 - * Refrigerator
 - * Television
 - * Bed
 - * Cell phones
- * Trading/processing expenses

MEN

- * House
- * Electricity
- * Children's clothes for celebrations
- * Sheep for holidays
- * Some other food
- * Fishing expenses

Stated expectations about what married men and women should pay for have not changed very much in 30 years. Then, as now, reality was not always the same as what was agreed was the "rule." Men commonly do not have enough income to pay for all the expenses of all their wives and children. Women told me that "they have to help them." Even if men's incomes increase, they do not necessarily offer additional help to their wives. What has changed since my first trip to Senegal is the numbers of consumer goods available and desired. In the past not everyone had electricity, for example, and telephones were very rare (imagine, no cell phones!). This demand for consumer goods, of course, means that more people in a household have to work for the money to make such purchases. What is the effect on your business of that? [E.g., longer hours, more competition] There is another important point: while there are women who buy fishing gear, pirogues and pay for fuel, they generally put their purchases in the name of their husband. This disguises the importance of women's roles in the fishing industry.

Buying Fresh Fish



Because of the high costs of buying a fisherman's whole catch, in the old days, women formed groups to buy a whole boat load which they then divided up and sold individually. As today, some women stayed on the beach to sell, others went to the local market, others put their portion into basins with ice to take (or send) inland to sell. Processors tended to buy fish that was already starting to spoil or was considered less desirable because of its size or type, so the price to purchase the raw product was lower.

Traders dividing the catch



- * Members of the women's group divided the fish into even piles
- * A young man tossed a woman's marker on each pile
- * When fish was scarce, some women were not allowed to buy a share

The groups that women formed were sometimes very informal and often based on their neighborhood friendships. Sometimes the groups were just for buying fish, but often the same group was also a tea group or a *naat* (savings club). Today, buying as a group of traders seems to be less common. Also, I heard that tea groups are no longer common, nor are big celebrations for a child's baptism or marriage. Do you think that is true? Why? [Women either too busy or with insufficient income to regularly share tea expenses with friends. Leaders discourage large expenditures on celebrations, the money is reserved for business expenses.]

Households: Co-wives or Sisters



In the “old” days, at least in Guet Ndar, women tended to live with their mothers and sisters. Now, more commonly, co-wives live in the same household with their husband. Has this change affected the formation of neighborhood-based groups? For example, girls who grew up in the same neighborhood and lived there as adults had a circle of people they trusted and some became leaders who started trading or savings groups. It did seem that women traders today are not well-organized. Rarely do they have the opportunity to take workshops or otherwise improve their business skills and opportunities.

Organizing



If young women move to a different neighborhood when they marry, do they still create informal organizations? How are these formed? It seems that there are more formal organizations now, many nested (smaller groups are part of a larger organization) but fewer informal groups. How are the leaders chosen? Some leaders have a vision and are willing to take responsibility. What are some of the important characteristics of a leader? What makes an organization successful? What are the benefits of organizing?

Secheries



Women who work as processors tend to be better organized than the women who are traders. They work independently, but the women will help each other turn the fish and they share their knowledge with young women new to the occupation. This cooperation may lead to the willingness to organize. Since dried fish can be stored longer than fresh and because buyers often buy from multiple processors, these women are often not as competitive as the traders. The cement basins for fermenting fish still exist, but most now use plastic basins that are lighter and easier to clean out.

Modern Secheries



In some cases, the process of drying of fish has been modernized. What do these photos show that you think would be beneficial to your business (or the business of the processors in your community)? [Tables for drying the fish.]

Traditional Processing



Despite the organizations of women processors, there are some women who continue handling fish in the same way as their mothers and grandmothers. Do you see any problems illustrated by this photo? What do you think would have to change for the products to be exported?

Smoking Fish



How about these photos? What do you think the women here need?

Some Improvements



What improvements do you notice? Problems remain—the design of the ovens was not perfect and the facilities are insufficient for the numbers of women who want to use the area.

Needs: Fuel (For Smoking)



In 1981, wood was available for smoking. In the communities I visited in September, cardboard was used. Neither fuel is good for the human health or for the environment since smoke inhalation causes lung disease and other problems, the cutting of wood can ruin forests, and the burning creates black carbon that contributes to global warming. Cardboard may be a better choice than wood since it is a recycled product, but some of the inks and the chlorine used to whiten the paper can release heavy metals or toxins.

Needs: Access to Fresh Water



Access to fresh water continues to be a problem in many communities. In the past, children helped keep an eye on their families' buckets that were waiting in the line for the public faucet to be turned on. Today, while many processors and traders pay for water to be delivered, or pay to use a faucet, others use unclean well-water and salt water dipped from the ocean. Ice and easily washed pans are also needed by traders. Toilets, shade, and a ground cover that can be easily cleaned are also high on all women's list of needed infrastructure.

Preparing Exports



I was surprised when I saw shark being prepared for export in 1981. One man bought only sharks fins that he took to Dakar for a flight to Hong Kong to be used in the Chinese delicacy Sharks fin soup. Today, shark is still prepared for export. These photos show important differences in how the product is handled. [Does anyone want to comment?]

Export



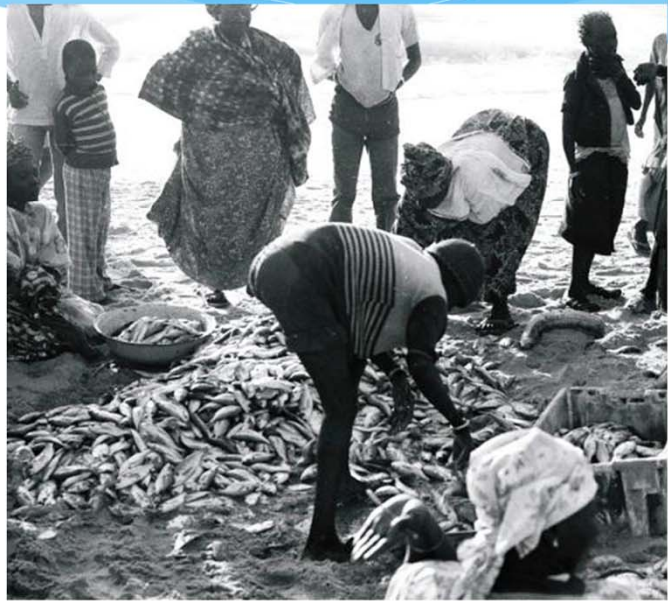
Octopus



Cymbium

The Japanese like octopus and have contributed to modernizing the handling of this product and also have paid for some modern facilities.

Women Traders—Beach



Do you notice any differences in the handling of product depicted by these two photos?

Male Traders—Beach



Before September, I had not met any men who sold fish on the beach. I heard that men have easier access to funds due to inheritance laws, tax rates as well as credit and therefore can outcompete many of the women for desirable fish. Similarly, the traders from Burkina Faso and Togo whose countries subsidize their purchases. These latter also tend to purchase juvenile sardinella, which is not good for the health of the resource.

Need: Timely Access to Funding

- * Some communities have mutual savings banks (mutuals) that provide credit in a timely fashion
- * Others are criticized as having:
 - * High interest rates
 - * Complicated paperwork
 - * Delayed access to funds

Why are some of the “mutuals” more effective than others? What determines the different interest rates? (Do they make sure their borrowers understand what the interest rate is?)

Project—Planning



Desired infrastructure:

- * Freezer-cold storage
- * Location for processing
 - * Tables, basins, ovens, fuel
- * Clean water and ice
- * Financing
- * Shade and ground cover
- * Toilets
- * Trucks and roads
- * Pirogues and safety equipment (esp., shellfish harvesters)

Projects Interrupted



It seems that many international development projects focus on improvements in processing infrastructure. All too many are incomplete or unused. In cases in which women's organizations with strong leaders collaborated with the donor NGO, projects were completed and well-designed. In Yoff and Bargny, for example, they have managed the construction of grammar schools and in Niodior, they managed the construction and operation of a successful processing facility for syrup made from local fruits. The leaders were also able to encourage their members to contribute the necessary matching funds.

Other Projects



Point Sarene



Yoff

Where women are not given direct control in the design and the construction of the projects relating to their business, failure often results.

Diversification



A store opened by one organization helps a few young people, and other communities sell their waste products that are then transformed for use in agriculture. Several people mentioned that they want to learn to transform their waste to fishmeal, fuel or powdered seashells themselves so they could gain more of the benefit. Food items such as couscous, peanut brittle, *fataya* have been made for sale since I was here last. Soap making is also being discussed by some.

Needs: Workshops and Technology

Technology

- * Cell phones
- * Transportation
- * Internet
 - * Training needed?
- * WWF community radio
- * Television

Workshops

- * Literacy
- * Business planning
 - * Accounting/numeracy
 - * Interest rates
- * Improvements in product handling
- * Packaging and labeling

Women's associations, Fenagie and other NGOs and the Senegalese government offer professional training workshops that selected women attend to learn business-related skills as well as literacy in French, Wolof, and/or Serer. Who attends these? How are they recruited? Is there any follow-up or help to put into practice what has been learned? Is there any long-term extension work? Some women talked about how much they learned at the workshops, but said that they were unable to follow through with the best practices that involved costs such as purchasing of hair nets, gloves and coats.

Resilience



Despite the challenges Senegalese women must overcome, I was very happy to find a joy still expressed in music and dance.

Acknowledgements



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