



Innovation for sustainable oceans in Africa: Artisanal fishing communities at the forefront

The majority of the 12.3 million Africans, men and women, who depend on fishing for their livelihood are from the artisanal fisheries sector. They provide income to millions of families in Africa. With fish accounting for up to 50% of the protein intake in sub-Saharan Africa, by making fish available at low prices for more than 200 million people in Africa, artisanal fisheries sector contributes greatly to the food security of the continent.

As all the countries work to rebuild their social and economic fabric after the Covid 19 pandemic, the African Confederation of Professional Organisations of Artisanal Fisheries, CAOPA, wants to take the opportunity of the 2020 World Oceans Day to highlight how appropriate investments in resilient African fishing communities, in a way that maximises their contribution to food security and nutrition, can help rebuild a fairer and sustainable relation between human kind and the oceans.

The COVID-19 epidemic, and the measures taken to combat it, have been very challenging for the African artisanal fisheries. From the fisherman to the fish processors and fishmongers - most of which are women-, all the people active in the artisanal fisheries value chain are negatively affected by the current crisis. The restrictions imposed in most African countries to the assembling of people, the circulation of people and goods, and the closing down of traditional markets for artisanal fisheries products, are making access to fish difficult to the neediest. Because of the lack of facilities and equipment, maintaining the hygiene to fight the epidemic is also complicated on board of the pirogues, in fish landing sites, processing sites and markets.



This crisis should be an opportunity to improve long term sanitary, working and living conditions for men and women in the African artisanal fishing sector, including through innovations. Improved fish processing techniques, like the FTT oven, allows the women fish processors to work without the smoke harming their health. The final product is of better quality, keeps longer, travels better and fetch better prices. This new technology, coupled with the use of solar energy, can diminish the use of wood as fuel. Developing the use of solar energy can help provide much needed electricity to fishing communities, including on board fishing canoes. The growing use of various telephone apps provides opportunities for artisanal fishers and women fish processors to connect better with their customers, but also to receive key information about the weather, to be located at sea for better safety, to provide information about their catches for co-management purposes, etc.

But innovations are not only technological. The gathering of men and women professionals in local, national, regional and pan African level artisanal fishing organisations is providing them a unique opportunity to make their voices heard by decision makers. Armed with the compass of international guidelines to develop sustainable artisanal fisheries, organised African fishing communities are ready to mobilize for the sustainable management of the world's oceans.

Happy World Oceans Day 2020!