

## Module 13///Innovative Activity Profile 3

### Gabon: Strengthening the Participation of Fisheries Communities in New Marketing Opportunities<sup>1</sup>

This project for strengthening the participation of fisheries communities in Gabon in new marketing opportunities is part of the a community project covering other activities and funded by the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP)<sup>2</sup> with its objective of improving the services provided to fish processors by Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). This Innovative Activity Profile focuses on the second phase of the project, initiated between March 2005 and October 2006 and designed to improve the marketing situation of two communities.

**What's innovative?** Strategies for fisheries communities to participate in new marketing opportunities in a gender-sensitive, pro-poor way were developed using a methodology that combined poverty, gender, and value chain analysis, along with an assessment of market opportunities and risks. The approach moved beyond household analysis to include community and intrahousehold processes and impacts.

A participatory approach was adopted to develop and implement the work plan,

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<sup>2</sup> The SFLP is a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (DFID) and 25 participating countries in West and Western Central Africa.

beginning with an analysis of marketing opportunities as well as poverty and gender issues (SFLP 2003) in two communities, Ebel Abanga (continental fisheries) and Milembié (coastal fisheries). Although this Profile focuses on activities in Ebel Abanga, it provides information on an innovative funding arrangement for Milembié, which is soon to be extended to Ebel Abanga.

Ebel Abanga has an estimated 300 artisanal fishers, men and women, of whom 10 percent are members of the fisheries association with which the marketing intervention was undertaken—the Union of Stakeholders in the Ebel Abanga Fishery (UPEA). The three fish collectors belonging to the UPEA are among its wealthier members. They have outboard engines; moving between three lakes and on the Abanga River from one fishing camp to another, they collect fresh fish and transport it (mostly on ice in insulated plastic boxes) for sale to 15 fishmongers (traders; some are members of UPEA) at the landing site in Ebel Abanga. The different water bodies (the lakes and the river) in the fishery are used differently by women and men. Women limit their fishing activities to one of the lakes, Lake Otsaghe.

#### Gender Strategy (Second Phase)

The development of a gender-responsive and poverty-focused marketing action plan was the key objective of the project's second phase. Gender issues in the organization of UPEA had been addressed in the first phase, and women were members of the UPEA management committee when the second phase started. As UPEA was the main stakeholder in implementing the marketing action plan, the presence of women on the management committee made the discussions and preparations for the action plan easier in terms of women's participation in decision making. However, a significant range of issues remained to be addressed in the project's second phase, including access to markets, control over UPEA resources, participation in decision making, capacity to resolve certain constraints within the value chain, information sharing, and deciding who would get training. The most important gender issues that were identified were addressed in the action plan, with clear targets for improvement:

- Access to decision making at the household and association levels.

- Access to bank services and credit (depending on poverty category) influencing the means of production (motorized canoes, type of gear, and support for other income-generating activities during low fishing season).
- Relationship between fishmongers: no collaboration among female fishmongers.
- Relationship between male collectors and female fishmongers: female fishmongers take the burden of marketing losses.
- Poor skills and networks for negotiating contracts.
- Women's lower literacy status (wealthier men and women had a higher literacy status).

### **Innovative Features**

The activities in Ebel Abanga had two significant innovative features. First, a combined poverty, gender, and value chain analysis, along with an assessment of market opportunities, was used to plan strategies to strengthen the participation of fisheries communities in new marketing opportunities in a gender-sensitive and pro-poor way. The analysis paid attention to the risks entailed in pursuing new market opportunities and in the possible increased vulnerability of the households, spouses, and individuals involved. For example, a greater investment in fishing gear and other equipment could mean a higher risk of defaulting on loans, since collaboration and cooperation with new players in new markets could result in high losses if no fish were sold or if agreements were not respected on both sides (the problem of dealing with new players with whom there are no established links). A second innovation in the approach is that it moves beyond household analysis to an analysis of community and intrahousehold processes and impacts.

The same activities were conducted in Milembié, where additional funding from CIDA and the government supported a simultaneous investment to assist fishing and postharvest activities. A landing platform was built, ice silos were provided, and fishers and postharvest stakeholders were trained to improve fishery productivity and the quality of the produce. The Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme assisted with the analysis and interventions to ensure that gender and poverty issues were

integrated. The same partners are interested in providing similar facilities to the community of Ebel Abanga.

### **Benefits and Impacts**

The second phase of the project began by addressing women's participation in UPEA and its management committee and by building the capacity of UPEA members in general and more specific the capacities of female members to participate more efficiently in fishing and processing. The next activity involved implementing the marketing action plan. Agreements were discussed and concluded with collectors and at the final market destination. Within UPEA, agreements were reached on transport and collective marketing arrangements that would ensure that poorer groups participated. The final activity involved organizing quality control and marketing of the produce, which in the first instance was salted *Heterotis* sp. Marketing opportunities identified in towns included restaurants and supermarkets. The option of supplying fresh fish (*Shilbe* spp.) to Libreville market was considered but was more complex to pursue, because a research partner was needed and a cage structure had to be set up to ensure the quality of the fish before they could be transported live to Libreville. UPEA chose to start with marketing salted *Heterotis* in the nearby markets in Ndjolé, and the more distant markets of Oyem and Bitam which lie close to the Cameroon border.

### ***Ebel Abanga fisheries***

Within UPEA, new skills have been acquired by both male and female members as a result of their participating in planning and implementing the project activities. The analysis of the way in which marketing activities are organised, and how changes would affect different groups enabled all members to experience a different way of viewing development. The UPEA and other stakeholders involved in the marketing are listening to each other's points of view, becoming aware of the different obstacles and constraints they meet in improving their business, and are starting to collaborate and change the way they relate to one another through the implementation of the marketing plan. Women participate equally in all actions. Non-UPEA members might sell their fish to the association or purchase fish from the association, but their participation ended there.

Only UPEA members continued in implementing the rest of the marketing plan, in processing, and in collectively organizing the marketing. Finally, the UPEA was able to mobilize and motivate members who had lost interest in the association.

### ***Milembié fisheries***

The quality of fish is determined by access to ice, access to good conditions for storing and packing fresh fish, as well as hygiene at the landing sites. The funding provided by CIDA, the government fisheries department, and the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for improved facilities and training was complemented by other activities to improve marketing opportunities, especially for disadvantaged stakeholders.

### ***The fisheries department and the partners***

The fisheries department and other partners have adopted new ways of looking at issues of poverty and gender in fish marketing. The integration of gender concerns into the action plan provided a practical way for the fisheries department to introduce gender into the development of fisheries.

### ***Households***

Male and female actors, including poorer individuals and households, participate in the activities, although it is too early to demonstrate household-level impacts, including a clear improvement in income. The marketing of salted *Heterotis* needs be monitored over a longer period to evaluate not only the impact on household income during the different seasons but also the status of the species to ensure responsible use of this resource.

### **Lessons Learned and Issues for Wider Applicability**

A number of factors influence the capacity to add value to existing activities, and they differ among fishers, collectors, and fishmongers.

Among collectors, the most important factors are:

- Control over their own capital (the importance of a revolving fund, which they control themselves and which does not bind them to delivering fixed quantities of fish).

- Marketing know-how.
- The capacity to undertake the marketing by him or herself.
- Access to ice.
- Ownership of the means to fish: an outboard motor, boat, and insulated containers.

Among fishmongers, the most important factors are similar but include access to information on prices and control over transport.

Table 1 below summarizes lessons learned about the methodology used and evidence of changes in gender relations in Ebel Abanga.

In addition to the learning on gender equity and gender relations, it is important to hold discussions on access to credit, both for poorer marketing actors and other producers, to improve their negotiating power and help them better meet the needs of the other actors in the value chain.

### **References**

SFLP (Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme). 2003. *Kit de formation à l'approche genre*. Tools and methodologies available at [http://www.sflp.org/fr/007/kit\\_genre/kitformation.htm](http://www.sflp.org/fr/007/kit_genre/kitformation.htm).

### **Further Reading**

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**Table 1: Lessons on the methodology and evidence of change in gender relations in Ebel Abanga**

Methodology	Changes in gender relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A combination of poverty profiling and gender analysis provides more comprehensive information on vulnerability, which can then be used to evaluate and select intervention strategies (both productive and reproductive, time use by gender, and access to and decisions over benefits from livelihoods strategies).</li> <li>• The gender concerns identified in the way the community-based organization is functioning make an important contribution to the action planning process.</li> <li>• The analysis of product marketing opportunities reveals the constraints and blockages in marketing transactions between different actors. The actors can be detailed in terms of gender and poverty issues, and risks can be defined.</li> <li>• In developing an action plan for a selected marketing opportunity, risk is assessed by taking account of different actors' capabilities and gender, and corresponding risk reduction activities are included (for example, support services, training, or risk reduction through contracting or subsidies).</li> <li>• <b>National level:</b> Decision makers look at developing value chains and practical tools to do so.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women participate in the management of the Union of Stakeholders in the Ebel Abanga Fishery (UPEA).</li> <li>• Women gain access to information (transparency as action point).</li> <li>• Women are not engaged in low-value activities with low pay and poor conditions of work compared to men.</li> <li>• Women's reproductive work is taken into account and valued.</li> <li>• The action plan includes training for both men and women in fishing and processing (criteria for choosing participants).</li> <li>• The action plan is tested, and equipment is provided to mixed-sex groups, to reduce risks for increased financial investment in an activity and ensure that investment decisions are taken in a transparent way, involving male and female actors at the household and community organization levels.</li> <li>• Through collective action and built-in guarantees (subsidise and set up contracts), reduce the risk that no sales will be made. The action plan improves collaboration between female fishmongers and prevents female fishmongers from bearing the brunt of the marketing losses.</li> <li>• Entry barriers for disadvantaged (poor, female) actors are reduced. Fishing grounds are accessible to women and the poor who use less motorized equipment; reduce limitations imposed by household tasks, which reduce the time for women to pursue income-generating activities and UPEA initiatives; improve access to other income-generating activities such as logging and agriculture (limited by institutional barriers and administrative procedures).</li> </ul>

*Source: Author.*