

AQUACULTURE

Overfishing threatens food security, but aquaculture provides an answer for women in Senegal

Kayar, on the west coast of Senegal, is an artisanal fishing community with livelihoods in canoe fishing, artisanal processing of fish products and fish retail. The processing side of the sector — gutting, smoking, and filling cans — is mostly occupied by women, who make up 85% of the processing industry.

However, these women are vulnerable to precarious livelihoods as overfishing is causing dwindling fish supplies. Many do not have alternative sources of income nor the facilities to invest in seeking new fishing grounds or methods. Access to fishing operations on the high seas is rarely available to women, who are not welcome on the boats. Neither can many stay away from the family home for long periods as they have children and other domestic responsibilities.

A more sustainable and efficient method of fishing is therefore integral to bolstering the community's struggling economy and stabilizing the women's financial security.



Project launch workshop

Fish farms: accessible, simple, affordable

Tackling this problem head-on is WADAF (the West African Association for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries) which has been working alongside other organizations in the community of Kayar to equip women fish processors with a greater variety of skills. The aim is to strengthen their self-sufficiency in the face of fish scarcity and their resilience to climate change.

The training is based around aquaculture. Twenty-five women learn how to farm fish like tilapia and catfish in concrete fishponds. The ponds are operated from a mini borehole, which is powered by solar energy, meaning lower water and electricity bills. The low-cost investment makes the project much more accessible to women who do not have disposable income or access

to family finances. Later it is possible to upgrade the ponds with special oxygenation features and lighting systems that are also solar-powered.



Experienced fish-farmers lead training

The initiative is designed to be hands-on, and trainees visit established fish farms to witness a working project in action. It is here that they learn how to construct the ponds as well as make fish feed from leftover braised fish residue and local horticultural products, making it cost-effective and eco-friendly.

Access to enough fish feed remains the biggest challenge as fish farming relies on it but teaching farmers to produce it sustainably at low cost is key to solving the issue. Profitability is at the heart of aquaculture and fish farming.

“We now know how to raise fish and make fish food. Fish farming could be a solution to our difficulties in accessing raw materials. Our wish is that processors and fishermen can create fishponds in their fields.”
— **Maty Ndao, President of Kayar Women Fish Processors**



Environmentally harmful practices are replaced with eco-friendly alternatives

The women are taught about climate change and the impact the fishing sector has on the environment. Fish processors regularly use the leaves and branches from the Casuarina (Ironwood) trees nearby to braise and smoke fish, which has led to severe deforestation over time. Part of the scheme involves replanting new trees where the old ones have been removed, restoring and protecting the local biodiversity.

Women fish farmers lead the industry into a more sustainable future

The success of the project has attracted strong support from other artisanal fishing professionals and small-scale farmers in the region, many of whom wish to begin fish farming in their fields. These farmers and the women in the project share tips and stories through a WhatsApp support group, enabling more peer-to-peer learning.

Without a doubt, the project's greatest strength is promoting gender equality by making women the principal actor in the scheme. By increasing the dignity and independence of one of the fishing sector's most vulnerable groups, the project becomes a gateway to a more robust economy and a more equal society.

With tools that will combat food security and grow small businesses, the fisherwomen of Kayar are leading the way to more environmentally sustainable livelihoods and a healthier fishing sector.



Fermentation of fish in suitable tanks



Practical work in the artisanal production of fish feed



End of training. Women received their diploma



Visitors posing in front of the fish farm

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