



The Prime Minister of Senegal opening the Forum of the Regional Marine and Coastal Conservation Programme for West Africa (©PRCM)

Discussing catch reconstructions in Senegal

By Dyhia Belhabib

If I had to summarize my previous journeys in Senegal in one word, I would certainly use 'denial' for the first trip, 'hope' for the second, but many words for my last visit to Dakar last November when Dr. Daniel Pauly and I represented the *Sea Around Us* Project at the Forum of the Regional Marine and Coastal Conservation Programme for West Africa (*Programme Régional de Conservation de la zone côtière et Marine*; PRCM). The description of the Forum that can be found on the PRCM website underlines the importance of this event (www.forumprcm.org).

The theme of the Forum was 'Investing in coastal and marine conservation for the wellbeing of populations', and as suggested, its goal was to put forward ideas about the use of nature with a view to improve the wellbeing of people relying on it. Many different stakeholders were

present (e.g., NGOs, professional fishers, scientists, decision-makers) and were eager to discuss sustainability and conservation.

I was delighted to meet again our collaborators and colleagues from Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Morocco, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, as well as from the Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) countries, notably Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. On a lighter note, a young man from Tanzania presented his journey as he biked from Chile to Tanzania, raising awareness about the environment and funds for Tanzanian students along the way. He also reminded me that I am not the only person in this world who needs a visa to go to conferences and talk about issues and potential solutions for a sustainable use of the ocean. After all, if fish needed a visa, the issue of illegal fishing would

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The author presenting her results on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fisheries in West Africa (©PRCM)

not be that bad. Illegal fishing was actually one of the topics of the Forum, and our colleague Duncan Copeland talked about how to implement efficient, non-expensive solutions to tackle illegal fishing. While some Mauritanian representatives claimed that illegal fishing was no longer as significant as it was in the past, a representative from Guinea-Bissau stated that the coastal waters of "Bissau looked like Hong Kong at night", referring to the lights of the industrial fishing boats illegally venturing into artisanal fishing grounds at night. Afterwards, I was not able to make up my mind between 'content' — as 'admitting' is the first step towards 'healing' — or 'sadness' — as the issue of illegal fishing is now so important, that being politically correct is no longer an option.

The presence of journalists made for a great opportunity for the *Sea Around Us* Project to share our knowledge of West African fisheries with the public, and to emphasize the implications of our catch reconstruction work. For example, I had the opportunity to clarify some points such as "women's catches are not substantial, therefore, it is not an important activity". Indeed, one can argue that if this activity allows women to be financially independent and provide their households with food, then, it is of

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Our mailing address is UBC Fisheries Centre, Aquatic Ecosystems Research Laboratory, 2202 Main Mall, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6T 1Z4. Our e-mail address is seanotes@fisheries.ubc.ca. All queries, subscription requests and address changes should be sent to Frédéric Le Manach, the *Sea Around Us* Project Newsletter editor.

The *Sea Around Us* Project website can be accessed at www.seaaroundus.org and contains up-to-date information on the Project.

paramount importance, regardless of the volume of the catch (especially if vulnerable species are targeted).

"Bissau looked like Hong Kong at night"

At the end of the day, the Forum was a very productive experience for the *Sea Around Us* Project, as NGOs, research institutes, and regional organizations were eager to use and work with the catch reconstruction results. Indeed, they all agreed that looking at the impact of local small-scale fisheries, filling data gaps, and contributing to capacity building in the region is an important process. For example, we discussed catch reconstructions with representatives from Morocco (who were keen to work with us) and from the FCWC region (with whom we recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding), as well as with traditional community representatives such as the Imraguen, who constantly remind us of the reasons why we are fighting to save our oceans.

After the Forum, Daniel and I had the honour of having an informal lunch with his Excellency the Minister of Fisheries of Senegal, Haïdar El Ali, who informed us of his decision to invite the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society to act in Senegal. It was pleasant to have a conversation with him as he seemed to be a person who is deeply driven by conservation. As we came back from Dakar, we also learned that Senegal had just arrested illegal Russian fishers despite diplomatic pressure from Russia. This action was backed by numbers the *Sea Around Us* Project estimated with colleagues from USAID and many other Senegalese organizations 



Dr. Daniel Pauly answering a question regarding the estimation of errors in the fisheries catch reconstructions (©PRCM)

The *Sea Around Us* Project is a scientific collaboration between the University of British Columbia and The Pew Charitable Trusts that began in July 1999. The Pew Charitable Trusts work around the world to establish pragmatic, science-based policies that protect our oceans, wild lands and climate. Pew also sponsors scientific research that sheds new light on the dimensions of and solutions to the problems facing the global marine environment.



The authors (center and right) at the 6th ordinary session of the conference of Ministers of the Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (courtesy V. Koutob)

Fostering collaboration in the Gulf of Guinea

By Viviane Koutob and Duncan Copeland

As part of the 'Marine Conservation Research, Collaboration and Support in West Africa' project, the *Sea Around Us* Project was invited by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) to present some catch reconstruction materials, methods and results. One of the objectives of this project was to develop a strong collaborative relationship between the *Sea Around Us* Project and key regional stakeholders. This included a wide engagement with — and support for — governments, research institutes, and NGOs. Thus, on December 11-13, about forty people from the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and representing Member States, local partners, research institutes, and regional projects attended to the 6th ordinary session of the Conference of Ministers of the FCWC in Cotonou, Benin. We presented the methods and results of several catch reconstructions in the region.

Overall, the results of the catch reconstructions were welcomed by the participants. Civil society stakeholders and country representatives of Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin showed great interest in having the *Sea Around Us* Project reconstruct their catches with a view to help them manage their marine resources. Although most reconstructions are already done for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC) countries, a partnership is currently being signed between *Sea Around Us* Project and the Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation Among African States Bordering the Atlantic (ATLAFCO), to improve the available data and develop collaboration opportunities among its Member States .

Note from your Editor!

In the March-April 2013 issue of the *Sea Around Us* Newsletter, you read an article on the then ongoing deep-sea negotiations in Europe. On December 10th, the European Parliament eventually rejected the proposition of the Commission to phase-out deep-sea bottom trawling and allowed this practice to continue for, at least, the next five years. But — because this story is not complicated-enough — a few Members of Parliament got confused with the meaning of 'yes' and 'no', and voted for it to continue although they publicly took position against it. They notified the European Union, but the vote cannot be undone, although it would have changed its outcome! Interestingly, it also seems that the majority of deep-sea fish retailers are exiting this market, fearing that the nearly one million people who signed a petition asking Members of Parliament to forbid this practice would go to other brands. The future will tell us whether such a market-based move without any binding regulations is viable... so stay tuned!

