



Research Paper

## Socio-Professional Association and Organization of the Actors of the Fishing Industry in Ivory Coast: Case of Acofipfip

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### ABSTRACT

The production and marketing of fishery products in Ivory Coast are largely dominated by informal practices. There is a lack of organization in the fishing sector which hinders the development of activities inherent to this sector. However, attempts to get together in associations or cooperatives, which have generated much enthusiasm among stakeholders, have had mixed results. This study analyzes the impact of the Abidjan Cooperative of Fishmongers and Processors of Fishery Products on the organization and improvement of the living conditions of its members. Documentary research and surveys allowed to obtain the data for the study. The SPHINX, EXCEL, ARCGIS and WORD software allowed the processing of the collected data. The results obtained show that the ACOFIPFIP contributes considerably to the organization of the cooperative's actors, to the improvement of the members' living and working conditions and finally to the empowerment of the members.

**KEYWORDS:** Cooperative; Fishmonger and processor; Fishery products

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### I. INTRODUCTION

According to the FAO (2018, p. 4), people in developing countries consume relatively little fish, but fish protein makes up a larger proportion of their diet than people in developed countries. In Ivory Coast, fish is the primary source of animal protein consumed by the population. Per capita consumption is around 17 kg/capita/year (DPH, 2016, p. 12). Like other economic sectors, there is a massive presence of women in the fisheries sector in Ivory Coast. They are mainly involved in processing, distribution and marketing activities. According to (K.P ANOH, 2000, p. 69)), women working in the fisheries sector in Ivory Coast are faced with many problems among which we can highlight the difficulties of financing, supply and marketing of fishery products. The constraints that these women actors have to face have aroused in them a solidarity which is manifested by the setting up of cooperatives in their respective fields of activity. In Ivory Coast, there are socio-professional associations in the fishing sector, bringing together fishermen, fishmongers, importers of fishery products etc. These cooperatives are little known and their real contribution to the organization of the actors concerned has been the subject of little scientific work by researchers. The result is a lack of awareness of the role and importance of the cooperative movement in the fisheries sector in Ivory Coast. According to the FAO (2014), fisheries cooperatives contribute to food security, poverty eradication, and promotion of collective action, empowerment of members to respond to environmental and socio-economic changes. The objective of this study is to show the role of cooperatives in the organization and improvement of living conditions of actors in the fisheries sector in Ivory Coast. This study focuses on the ACOFIPFIP (Abidjan's cooperative of fish mongers and processors of fishery products) based in the municipality of Attécoubé. The hypothesis of this study is that the various activities carried out in the context of the operation of the cooperative contribute to the improvement of the working and living conditions of its members.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Framework of the Study

The ACOFIPFIP (Abidjan's cooperative of Fishmongers and Processors of Fishery Products) was created on November 11, 2012. It follows the change of statutes of ASEFRESFI (Association of Sellers of Fresh and Smoked Fish of Abobodoumé). The cooperative has more than 1650 members. Table 1 shows the distribution of members according to areas of activity.

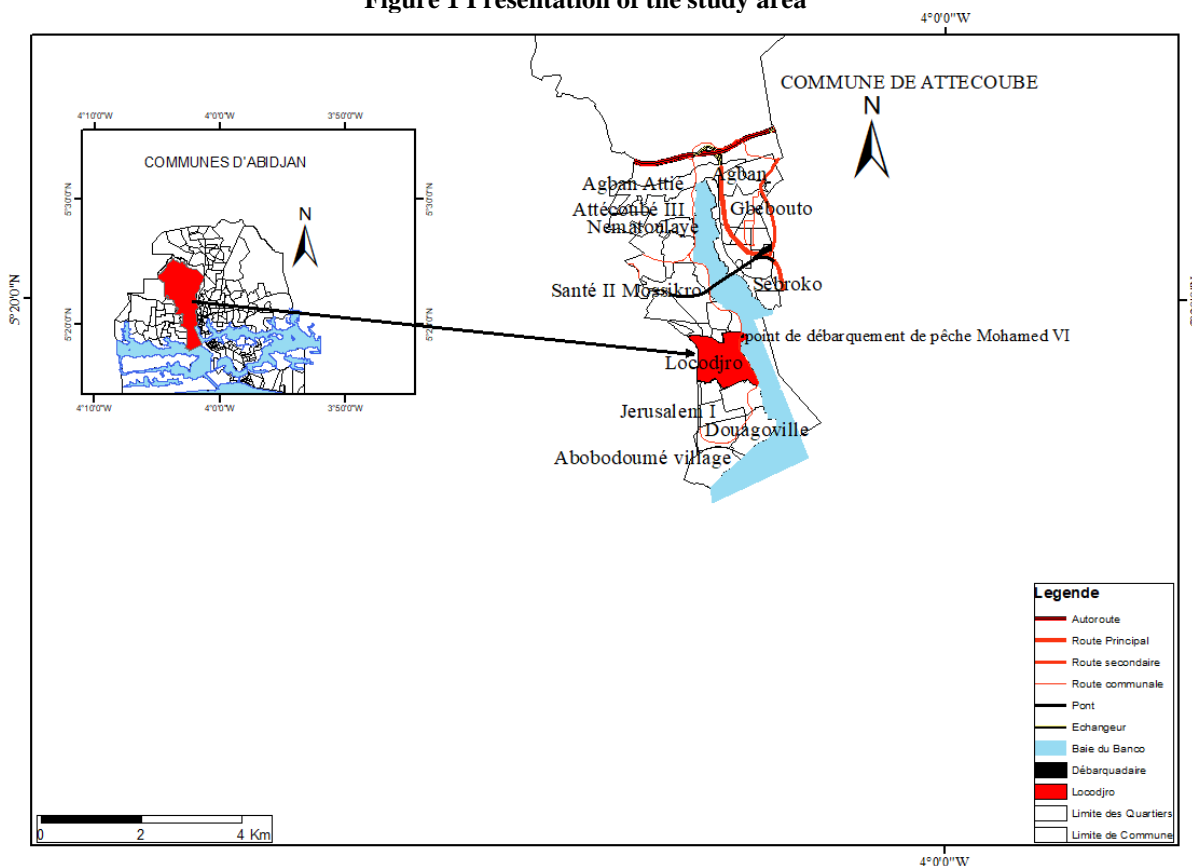
**Table 1 Distribution of cooperative members by areas of activity**

Fields of activity	Employees	Frequency (%)
Fishmongers	898	54,42
Processors	350	21,21
Cateresses	46	2,79
Loaders	251	15,21
Cutters	105	6,36
Total	1650	100

*Source: Our surveys, 2020*

It carries out its activities at the Mohamed VI landing stage of Locodjro in the municipality of Attécoubé. Formerly installed in Abobodoumé in a precarious and insalubrious environment, they have benefited for several years from modern infrastructures and equipment offered by the Moroccan cooperation. The landing stage of Locodjro is therefore the anchor point of the ACOFIPFIP's activities. It serves as a reception, conditioning and ventilation space for fishery products by the cooperative. Figure 1 shows the geographic location of the study area.

**Figure 1 Presentation of the study area**



*Source: Google map background produced by Irié Bi, 2020*

## **2.1 Data Collection Methods**

The data used in this study were obtained through a variety of techniques. The documentary research initially allowed to take stock of the cooperative and organizational movement in the fisheries sector in Ivory Coast. It emerges that there are many cooperatives in the sector. However, they function with difficulty because they face organizational, financial and structural problems. This lethargy leads to a narrow vision of the existence of cooperatives in the Ivorian fisheries sector. Direct observation through a defined observation grid led to the acquisition of data on the different activities carried out by the members of the said cooperative. The field surveys were carried out using a questionnaire for members and an interview guide addressed to the president of the cooperative. The questionnaire focused on the members' interest in the cooperative and the benefits they derive from it in terms of working conditions, income and social benefits. The interview guide concerned the objectives, organization and functioning of the structure. Sampling was carried out using a stratified survey. The members of the cooperative were grouped into three groups, namely the fish mongers, the processors and the others (cateresses, handlers and cutters). Fischer's formula resulted in the sample recorded in Table 2 below. The software SPHINX (data entry and processing), WORD (text writing), EXCEL (making tables) and ARCGIS (map making) allowed the analysis and processing of the collected data.

**Table 2 Distribution of the survey sample**

<b>Actors</b>	<b>Mother population</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Fish mongers	898	46
Processors	350	42
Other	402	48
Total	1650	136

## **III. RESULTS**

### **3.1 Organization and Functioning of the ACOFIPFIP**

#### **3.1.1 Administratively**

In accordance with the statutes and internal regulations, the administrative management of the structure is carried out by a president who exercises her functions under the direction, control and supervision of the board of directors. She is the main representative of the cooperative she represents at conferences in Ivory Coast and abroad. She is assisted by two vice presidents in charge of the interim of the president in case of absence. A general secretary and her assistant ensure the daily management of the cooperative. They note the various entries and exits of the cooperative. The general treasurer and her assistant are in charge of receiving the various contributions and other financial flows to the cooperative. The counselors, four in number, act as a committee of wise men. The supervisory committee ensures security and supervises all the expenses and activities of the cooperative. They are accountable to the president. Finally, the auditor checks the company's accounting documents, controls the conformity of the accounts, and draws up a report which is presented to the ordinary general meeting.

#### **3.1.2 Financially**

Each business segment has a cash position that collects the funds intended for the cooperative, which are then remitted to the structure's accountant. Any disbursement exceeding 100.000 F CFA is authorized by the board of directors. The monthly membership fees per sector of activity are fixed at 1200 F CFA distributed as follows:

- 600 francs are allocated directly into the **ACOFIPFIP's** fund;
- 200 francs for the fund of the communication and reception sector;
- 200 francs for the solidarity fund;
- 200 francs for the travel expenses of office members.

In addition, there are extraordinary contributions to increase the amount of donations intended for the moral and financial support of members (marriages, deaths, baptisms). The amount fixed by the board of directors for the settlement of disputes between members is 2000 F CFA per protagonist. Membership to the **ACOFIPFIP** is made in return for the payment of the sum of 15 000 F CFA divided as follows: 5 000 F CFA for membership fees and 10 000 F CFA for administrative costs.

#### **3.1.3 The sectors of activity of the ACOFIPFIP**

The Abidjan Cooperative of Fishmongers and Processors of Fishery Products is organized into five sectors of activity.

- The tuna sector, also known as the large pelagic sector, includes all the activities related to large fish such as sea rays, swordfish, sharks, etc.
- The small fish sector, also known as the small pelagic sector, concerns all the small fish with scales such as sardinella, pike, and captains.

- The sector of the loaders or handlers including all the people who operate in the handling and transport of fishing products at the landing stage.
  - The processing sector concerns the women who process the fish before making it available to the consumer.
  - Finally, we have the sector of the cateresses. These five sectors can be reduced to three main sectors, i.e. fish trading, processing and handling.
- The fish mongers are responsible for the wholesale of fish products. They have several sources of supply. The first one is constituted by artisanal fishermen who operate in the lagoon and maritime waters around Abidjan city. Then they receive frozen products from the fishing port of Abidjan. The third source of supply is the sister cooperatives based in San-Pedro, Fresco, Grand Bereby and Grand Lahou. Finally, fishmongers of the ACOFIPFIP receive fishery products from the aquaculture and fish farming company SAP la Mé. The products are sold by auction. A dedicated area is dedicated to this activity within the Locodjro site as can be seen in photo 1.

**Photo 1 Fish auction session at Locodjro landing stage**



*Source: Our surveys, 2020*

Fishery products are arranged in heaps and sold to the highest bidder. It is a practice that allows to play on supply and demand. The processing sector allows the marketing of products that have undergone changes in nature. At the level of ACOFIPFIP, the processing of fishing products makes it possible to obtain smoked, salted and dried fish and fish meal. Photo 2 shows fish smoked by ACOFIPFIP's members on the Locodjro site.

**Photo 2 Example of fish processed by smoking**



*Source: Our surveys, 2020*

It is the most common form of fish processing within the cooperative. The handling sector is the prerogative of men. The site being vast, the handling of products from the pontoon to the specialized rooms requires an appropriate workforce. Young people are therefore assigned to this task throughout the site. With the help of bins made for this purpose, they ensure the circulation of the flow of fishery products on the site. Photo 3 illustrates one of the tasks of the handlers.

**Photo 3 Transport of a cargo of fish by a handling agent**



*Source: Our surveys, 2020*

The production unloaded at the quay is transported over a hundred meters to the sales room by handlers.

### **3.2 Improvement of the Working Conditions of the Members of the Cooperative**

#### **3.2.1 A workspace that meets Standards**

Since its creation, the members of the ACOFIPFIP have worked in an informal setting marked by insecurity, insalubrities and precariousness. The difficulties that will result from this fact will lead to the formulation of an advocacy campaign to obtain a more appropriate work space. This will result in numerous external missions, particularly to the European Parliament. The abnegation and dynamism of the members of the cooperative has made it possible to obtain the agreement of the Ivorian government for the construction of a new modern landing stage offering all the conveniences for landing, processing, transformation and trade of fishery products. Built on the shores of the Ebrié lagoon in Attécoubé (Abidjan), the landing stage of Locodjro, called “Mohammed VI Landing Point” was inaugurated on November 27, 2017. Built on an area of 1.4 hectares, the infrastructure includes a platform of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>, a footbridge of 30 linear meters and two pontoons for docking dugout canoes. It comprises six buildings, two of which are dedicated to smoking, with ovens and spaces for cutting and storing smoked fish. In addition, there is a refrigeration building, two buildings dedicated to sales and a social building with a multipurpose room, a medical centre and a crèche. Photo 4 shows the main building that serves as headquarters for the administration and for the ACOFIPFIP.

**Photo 4: Front view of the building housing the ACOFIPFIP headquarters.**



*Source: Our surveys, 2020*

It is adjacent to the five other specialized buildings that make this site an integrated space. The FAO has donated modern ovens (FTT oven) and a support fund. Photo 5 gives an overview of these FTT ovens.

**Photo 5 Front view of FTT ovens**



*Source: Our surveys, 2020*

They are modern and ecological ovens that consume very little fuel pollute less and preserve the health of smokers. This acquisition has boosted the efficiency of the smokers.

### **3.2.2 Ongoing Training for the Members of the Cooperative**

The training given to its members takes into account several aspects that contribute to making them responsible actors. These are the management of work materials, hygiene of the work environment and planning of activities. All those who work in the handling, processing and trade of fish must master the hygiene rules relating to food safety. Fish is a foodstuff whose delicacy requires that special provisions be made to avoid contamination of the consumer. The instructions and advice concern the wearing of clean and protective aprons on one's clothing. This unclean clothing leads to contamination of products, regular washing of hands after going to the toilet, having too long nails, handling fish in case of illness (diarrhea, vomiting, skin infections) etc...

Also, the cooperative finances the trips abroad (France and Belgium) of some managers in order to undergo training that will be passed on to other members. As for the materials and other inputs used, the actors concerned are trained in their proper use in order to perpetuate the work and ensure the sustainability of activities. The use of ice to preserve fish, the control of FTT ovens, and the management of input stocks constitute very beneficial training modules for the users of the site who are members of the ACOFIPFIP.

### **3.3 Positive Impacts on the Living Conditions of Stakeholders**

#### **3.3.1 Improvement of the Actors' Incomes**

The Locodjro landing stage, which now houses the activities the members of the ACOFIPFIP, offers advantages that enhance the value of the various activities carried out, thus increasing the gains. Indeed, the organization put in place and the quality of the available equipment provides added value to the fishing products contrary to the former site characterized by informality. The security offered to the customers, the cleanliness of the place, the good conservation of the marketed products favor better selling prices for the traders. The actors thus obtain profits clearly higher than those perceived when the activities took place on the site of Abobodoumé.

#### **3.3.2 Strengthening the Empowerment of Actors**

The organization and functioning of the structure contributes to improve the autonomy of these members. This is made through a securing of the activities and the incomes which result from it. The regular supply of the site is the result of the seriousness and confidence enjoyed by the cooperative whose reputation extends beyond national borders. This empowerment is reflected in the investments made in other sectors of activity and a strong involvement in household expenses. There are several women whose husbands are unemployed or in precarious employment. They are therefore a valuable help to households. They participate in the expenses related to the schooling and education of children, food and other family expenses.

#### **2-3-3 Social Actions Vital for Members**

The ACOFIPFIP in its operation emphasizes the social component. This can be explained by the fact that it was originally an association of women fish sellers who felt the need to get together for more solidarity and mutual aid. This spirit remains in spite of the mutation in cooperative society. Since almost all the members are women who work to improve their living conditions, social considerations are very important to maintain the cohesion of the group. Thus, the cooperative regularly initiates sessions to give donations to members in difficulty or who have experienced happy events. This is a kind of tontine that works well and, according to the members, gives them a sense of belonging to a community. Also, this spirit of solidarity manifests itself through the granting of financial loans to members, the provision of salt, ice, packaging etc. for the processing and conservation of fish products. This facilitates the work of the members and encourages them to remain loyal to the cooperative.

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

The results obtained in this study show that the Abidjan Cooperative of Fishmongers and Processors of Fishery Products (ACOFIPFIP) makes a tangible contribution to the organization and improvement of the working and living conditions of its members. This is achieved through a mode of operation and actions that promote the existence of a modern working environment and standards, training for members, improved income and social actions that ensure a relative autonomy for the actors and actresses of the cooperative. These results are similar to those obtained by some authors. For F. Ponsot and R. Mauget (2008, p.87), maritime cooperation has its origins in the necessary solidarity between men, required by new economic constraints. Its particularity lies in a particularly high degree of mutual aid. According to D. Gueye (2010), cooperatives appear to be a viable alternative solution to the economic and financial crisis. For M. Dionysos (1985, p. 388), cooperatives are recognized as an instrument of wealth production, job creation and promotion of inclusive social development. Indeed, they are based on the principles of autonomy, self-management, equality and solidarity. In Morocco, for example, rapidly growing cooperatives operate in different sectors, contributing to economic development with a particular interest in the social aspect. They play an important role in the fight against precariousness, poverty and unemployment. They work for the proper organization of the first market, during the auction and are therefore involved in supporting producers' incomes (El. O. Sakina and El D. Slimane, 2014, p. 130). In New Caledonia, the cooperatives provide ice and fuel and for the marketing of their fishery products. Cooperatives play an important role in local development. They have the capacity to empower small-scale fishers so that they can fight against environmental or socio-economic shocks such as a drop in their catch, illness or death in their families, natural disasters or hunger. Fishing cooperatives can promote responsible fishing, food security, women's empowerment and poverty eradication (Anonymous, 2012).

## V. CONCLUSION

The cooperative movement in the fishing industry in Ivory Coast dates back to the 1980s. The creation and operation of these structures mainly in the southern part of the country has given mixed results which led to the lethargy observed in the cooperative movement as regards the actors of fishing. The ACOFIPFIP, because of its dynamism appears as one of the rare cooperatives in activity in the fishing sector in Ivory Coast. The present study on the role of cooperatives in the organization and improvement of the living and working conditions of the actors of the fishing sector in Ivory Coast therefore focused on the ACOFIPFIP. The organization set up within the framework of this structure made it possible to obtain an infrastructure which offers a modern and adequate working environment for the actors. The new landing stage of Locodjro thus allows a clear improvement of the working conditions of the members of the cooperative. This has a positive impact on the earnings received by them, ensuring their relative autonomy. Finally, the social actions related to the operation of the cooperative constitute not negligible aid for actors belonging largely to the disadvantaged social classes.

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