

***DEVELOPMENT OF A JOINT TRANSBOUNDARY OYSTER AND COCKLE CO-  
MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE ALLAHEIN RIVER ESTUARY***

***REPORT ON THE TRIP TO SOUTHERN SENEGAL OYSTER AND COCKLE  
HARVESTING COMMUNITIES***

***AND***

***JOINT MEETING AT KARTONG***

***JANUARY 9 – 12, 2014***

### **Introduction:**

A three day transboundary visit by the TRY Oyster Women Association to Southern Senegal oyster and cockle harvesting communities in the Allahein River estuary took place from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> January 2014. The delegation of TRY was composed of the Coordinator Fatou Janha, Coordinator of TRY Isatou Jarjue, Ebrima Jabang of the Department of Fisheries and Babanding Kanyi of the Department of Fisheries. The visit was funded under the USAID/BaNafaa project seed grant to TRY Association.

The delegation visited five communities: Niafarang, Kabadjo, Abene, Katak, and Donbondir. These communities are part of the Allahein Kafoo established in March 2013 during the initial joint meeting of communities sharing the Allahein River estuary shellfish resources, following a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) conducted in 2012. It comprises oyster and cockle harvesting communities from Southern Senegal and The Gambia. The communities from Southern Senegal include Niafarang, Kabadjo, Donbondir, Katak, Mamouda and Boudouk. The communities on the Gambian side are Kartong and Berending. The oyster and cockle harvesters from both Southern Senegal and The Gambia share the oyster and cockle resources in the Allahein River estuary. The water body serves as a natural boundary between the two countries which has crossing points either by boat or on foot at low tide. Oyster and cockle harvesting has become the livelihood of peoples living near the Allahein River estuary since time immemorial. The fishery creates employment, income and revenue and provides food security as well. The importance of the Allahein River estuary to the peoples living near and beyond cannot be down played. However, the oyster and cockle resources are declining as a result of over exploitation and bad practice in oyster harvesting and cockle collection. Management measures put in place through the process of participatory eco-system based co-management are needed to reverse this trend to ensure a sustainable fishery. Because these Southern Senegal communities are engaged in oyster and cockle harvesting in the Allahein River estuary in Kartong in the Republic of the Gambia; thus sharing the oyster and cockle resources with Kartong. The shared stock of oyster and cockles requires implementation of a joint transboundary co-management strategy for exploitation of the fishery resources to ensure sustainable livelihood for both oyster and cockle harvesters on the two sides of the border.

### **Objective:**

The objective of the mission to visit Southern Senegal oyster and cockle harvesting communities was to:

- Identify and understand the situation of communities that are engaged in oyster and cockle harvesting in the Allahein River estuary.
- Create awareness of the joint transboundary co-management planning process for the shared stock of cockles and oysters in the Allahein River estuary.

- Meet other stakeholders in the management of the oyster and cockle fishery.

### **Output:**

The first leg of the visit was in Niafarang community on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2014. Niafarang is the first village after crossing the Allahein River estuary in Southern Senegal. The oyster and cockle harvesters gathered under the tree near the Alkali's compound for the meeting. The attendance of the meeting included the Alkali's son, fishermen, women oyster and cockle harvesters and youths. After the usual prayer, self-introduction by participants was done so that oyster and cockle harvesters could be identified in the community.

Fatou took the floor, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attendance. She pointed out that her mission was a fact finding one to identify the oyster and cockle harvesters in Niafarang. She introduced the TRY Oyster Women's Association and its activities done over the years. She told them that it is important that they discuss management measures and conservation of the shared oyster and fishery resources in the Allahein River estuary, as their past, present and future livelihoods depend on those resources. She pointed out to participants that a co-management plan for oysters and cockles in the Tanbi Wetlands was prepared and approved by the Government of the Gambia and is implemented by TRY Oyster Women's Association. She informed participants that the Plan is successful in the Gambia resulting in improved livelihoods for women oyster and cockle harvesters, so that should be replicated in southern Senegal. She informed them of the joint transboundary co management planning process that is now being initiated and that should result in a plan prepared by all stakeholders in The Gambia and Senegal for the sustainable exploitation of oyster and cockle fishery in the Allahein River estuary. She added that preparation of a joint transboundary co-management plan requires collaboration of all stakeholders and government officials from both The Gambia and Senegal. This meeting, she said was the beginning of the process to prepare the joint transboundary co-management plan and several consultation meetings will be organized to boost awareness of the resource users and stakeholders.

The oyster and cockle harvesters expressed happiness for the visit and the information gathered from the meeting. They promised to collaborate in preparation of a joint transboundary co-management plan as they are sharing the stock in the Allahein River estuary with Kartong. They corroborated the idea to take sustainable management measures for the utilization of oyster and cockle resources in the Allahein River estuary so that their children would also benefit from the fishery resource. Isatou Jarjue and the Alkali's son spoke in the native language of Niafarang to clarify the message to other participants at the meeting. The meeting ended with a courtesy call on the Alkali who was reported too sick to grace the occasion.

The delegation proceeded in the night to the next community called Kabadjo which has the largest number of oyster and cockle harvesters in the sub region. It was already late to hold any meeting and the community was mourning the death of their kinsman as well so the delegation paid a courtesy call on one of the elders to inform the villagers about the meeting scheduled for the 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2014. The mission landed in Abene and spent at the night at Casamar Hotel.

The next morning 10<sup>th</sup> January the delegation paid visit to the WWF office in Abene. The office staff were introduced and the Gambian delegation did self-introduction. Then a brief meeting was held at the office. The TRY Coordinator outlined the mission to Southern Senegal. The officer in charge expressed appreciation of Try's initiative to prepare a joint transboundary co-management plan for oysters and cockles in the Allahein River estuary. He said that the Senegalese Department of Fisheries with collaboration of the Navy is enforcing closure area of 15 nautical miles stretching from Abene to Kafunting and 10 Nautical miles offshore. He added that fishers were asked to avoid fishing in the no take zone until the open season to allow fish spawning and breeding. He pointed out that his office organized meetings with women oyster and cockle harvesters in Kabajo and Niafrang who are sharing the fishery stock with Kartong to take management measures for sustainable exploitation of the resources. He said the mission will be a catalyst to their effort to bring sustainable management measures for the oyster and cockle fishery in the Allahein River estuary for the benefit of women oyster and cockle harvesters in the Gambia and Senegal. He informed the delegation that Kafunting and Abene communities do not engage in oyster and cockle harvesting. These two communities are engaged in fishing and snail collection. He suggested one officer from his office to join the tour to attend meeting in the communities to show their collaboration with TRY.

The mission arrived at Donbondir and headed to the Alkali's compound where TRY President Jarra Kujabi from Kubuneh oyster harvesting community in The Gambia River estuary was on family visit. The oyster and cockle harvesters, Alkali, Village elders and youths were in attendance at the meeting. The Coordinator of TRY Association expressed delight for their attendance and she outlined the objective of the visit. The Alkali lamented the low turnout of women at the meeting as they were busy with preparation for an annual festival in the Village. Jarra Kujabi then highlighted TRY activities and support to oyster women in the Gambia. The attendees showed interest in taking measures for conservation and sustainable exploitation of oyster and cockle resources in the Allahein River estuary. They promised to collaborate with TRY for the improvement of their livelihood. After the meeting, the delegation paid a visit to the National Assembly Member for the region, who came to attend the festival in Donbondir.

Fatou explained to the Honorable Lady Member of the Senegalese National Assembly the objective of the visit to the oyster and cockle harvesting communities in Southern Senegal who

share the oyster and cockle stock with Kartong in the Allahein estuary. The Honorable Lady expressed happiness to receive TRY delegation in her constituency with noble objective to uplift the status of oyster and cockle harvesters and conservation of the resources for their benefit and generations unborn. The Honorable Member of the National Assembly told the delegation that they have been engaged in mangrove replanting to protect the environment in communities in her constituency and the Senegalese Government supports the effort of TRY in the preparation of a Joint Transboundary Co-Management Plan for the oyster and cockle fishery. The Honorable Member exchanged address cards with the Coordinator of TRY to correspond with her for the realization of the Plan.

The mission left Donbondir for Katak and arrived at the Alkali's compound in the afternoon. The women oyster and Cockle harvesters, village elders and youths converged at the Alkali's compound for the meeting. Fatou spoke briefly about the objective of the meeting and the attendants expressed appreciation for the TRY visit and said it was long overdue. Some attendees who were many times in The Gambia to attend TRY meetings showed happiness that Fatou came to their community to replicate what she has done for oyster and cockle harvesters in the Gambia. They expressed their support and willingness to collaborate with TRY and Senegalese officials for the preparation of a Joint Transboundary Co-Management Plan for the oyster and cockle fishery in the Allahein River estuary. The meeting ended in excitement and the delegation departed for Abene.

The last day of the visit was 11<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and the delegation left Abene in the morning and arrived in Kabadjo. The meeting was held at the village square. The attendees included Alkali, village elders, youths and women oyster and cockle harvesters. The Coordinator of TRY Association expressed delight for their attendance and outlined the objective of the visit. The Alkali welcomed the delegation to Kabadjo and expressed happiness for having such an important meeting in Kabadjo. The objective of which meeting was clearly spelled out by the delegation and will bring development in their communities. The Alkali said implementation of sustainable management measures in the exploitation of oysters and cockles in the Allahein River estuary will improve the ecosystem and livelihoods. Other speakers in the community expressed similar sentiments and promised to collaborate with TRY to prepare the Joint transboundary Co-Management Plan for oysters and cockles in the Allahein River estuary.

## **Conclusion**

The three day visit to six oyster and cockle harvesting communities in Southern Senegal by the TRY Oyster Women's Association was very successful. All six oyster and cockle harvesting communities were visited and meetings held. All the communities showed interest in the sustainable management of the oyster and cockle fishery in the Allahein River estuary. They all acknowledged that the shared stock of oyster and cockle requires a co-management strategy for their benefit and future generations that will have a felt need for the communities agreed to collaborate with TRY to hold future meetings and reach consensus on management measures, by-laws and conservation of the mangrove ecosystem.

The Department of Fisheries in Abene was visited and TRY was assured of their collaboration for the preparation of the Joint Transboundary Co-Management Plan.

The meeting with the Honorable Member of Parliament in Senegalese Government was a breakthrough for TRY. The Honorable Member pledged support and collaboration with TRY in all areas of sustainable development. She assured TRY that the Government of Senegal will provide backstop to the initiative of TRY.

## **Joint Meeting at Kartong**

Following the tour to Southern Senegal the Allahein Kafoo convened a meeting at Kartong Fisheries Centre at the oyster and cockle landing site on the 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2014. The communities visited in Southern Senegal sent delegations to attend the general meeting.

## **Attendance**

At the start of the meeting, a remembrance prayer was said for ,RIP. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Banja Dept. of Fisheries and in attendance were Fatou Janha TRY Coordinator, Babanding Kanyi Dept. of Fisheries, Gibril Gabis Dept. of Fisheries, Jalang Camara TRY Accounts, Ebrima Jabang Dept. of Fisheries, Isatou Sambou TRY President, oyster and cockle harvesters from six communities in Southern Senegal and two communities in The Gambia, youths and local leaders.

## **Output**

Dr. Banja underscored the importance of the Allahein River estuary for providing livelihood for oyster and cockle harvesters from Southern Senegal and The Gambia. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss with Southern Senegalese counterparts on management issues so as to attain a

sustainable fishery. He narrated the evolution of TRY Association and its structure, and then pointed out the by-laws and management measures in the Oyster and Cockle Plan for the Tanbi Wetlands prepared by TRY Oyster Women in collaboration with stakeholders. He went on to say that all issues were addressed through a participatory approach until consensus was obtained. He pointed out that the processes involved a bottom top approach and not top to bottom. Dr. Banja told participants that it is a similar approach to employ for preparation of the Joint Transboundary Co-Management Plan for the Oyster and Cockle Fishery in the Allahein River estuary shared by the two countries. He stressed that sustainable fisheries management will benefit the resource users today and in the future. He added that the governments of Senegal and The Gambia will be involved throughout the process and when it comes to formalization. He asked them to select committees in their community groups and to formalize and get institutionalized/registered.

Fatou Janha spoke about activities of TRY Association of the past years and its profile. She expressed happiness about the presence of youths that should carry the message home and disseminate it. In her concluding remarks she urged participants to involve educated youth in their associations.

Fatou Jabang of Berending, Therese Jassey of Niafarang, Njemeh of Kabadjo and Marie Jatta of Katak all expressed willingness to cooperate with TRY for the sustainable management of oyster and cockles in the Allahein River estuary. They pledged to go back to their various communities to establish oyster and cockle associations and sensitize others who were not at the meeting on resource management issues discussed at the Kartong meeting.

Dr. Banja expressed confidence that the people from Southern Senegal would be able to form strong oyster and cockle associations in their communities. He cautioned them to select reliable and charismatic persons to form leadership of their associations.

Fatou then pointed out that leadership of associations should be temporal with term limit of two years as in TRY. She added that every two years the president of TRY steps down and a new president is elected by the members.

Botondingo Gassama, an elderly man from Kabadjo dilated on the close relationship between people from Southern Senegal and Kartong and Berending, that they are the same people divided only by the political boundary. He said there are Mandingo and Jola tribes in both areas living together for many centuries. However, he pointed out that it is not easy to bring together people of two different compounds, talk less of two countries. He urged the participants to take the matter seriously and collaborate with each other in Southern Senegal and TRY Association for sustainable management of the shared stock of oyster and cockles.

Jerry, the white lady working with Kartong Association for Responsible Tourism (KART) came to the meeting with a coworker and expressed happiness to meeting Fatou Janha for the first time, though she had heard of TRY. She informed the meeting that she is involved in many development programmes in the Gambia and was pleasing to see peoples of two countries meeting to discuss about management of the river which is the life blood where people get their livelihood and are pleased to visit the riverside.

#### Next Steps:

1. Internal organization and formal registration under the laws of their country of each of the oyster and cockle harvesting communities associated with the newly formed Allahein Kafo.
2. Participation of representatives from Allahein Kafo in TRY Association meetings and events in The Gambia.
3. More meetings? At what level?? First among harvesters – then including government representatives from both countries?