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## Informal artisanal fish trade in West Africa: Improving cross-border trade



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# Informal artisanal fish trade in West Africa: Improving cross-border trade

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# Summary

In 2011, the fisheries sector in Africa was worth USD 24 billion or 1.26% GDP of all African countries. More than 400 million people on the continent depend on fish as a vital source of nutrition, protein and micronutrients that are critical for childhood development. Around 12 million Africans are employed in the fisheries sector. Despite these impressive data, fish is often overlooked in terms of addressing food and nutrition security on a continent where both of these issues are endemic.

In West Africa, fishing and trading in fish and fishery products has been practiced for centuries and makes a significant contribution to per capita gross domestic product (GDP). Trade is associated with faster economic or GDP growth (see example in Table 1) and thus aids poverty reduction and the well-being of West African countries.

However, unlike other food commodities, the full extent of trade flows is not well understood for fish in the region (Figure 1). Most fish trading is informal and undertaken by the most disadvantaged people, often women. It is thus underreported in many countries' national accounting. As a consequence there is an absence of

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Fish GDP#	874	1,001	952	1,102	1,249
Fish GDP Growth	-5.7	1.5	-8.7	9.1	5.8
Overall economy GDP Growth rate	4.1	5.7	13.6	7	7.9
GDP (Trade etc)	2,109	2,701	3,282	3,854	4,453

Note: GDP is at current market economy (million Gh¢)

Source: Ghana Statistical Service <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=gh&v=66>

Table 1. Gross Domestic Product growth and relationship to trade in Ghana.



### Legend

- ➔ Flow of frozen fish
- ➔ Flow of smoked fish

Source: Conception and realisation: UFHB project team

Figure 1. Map showing flow of fish trade in Western Africa.

strategies and enforced policies to facilitate free and quick movement of fish products across borders. Countries with low domestic supply of fish will continue to suffer deficits, with grave food and nutritional security consequences. The livelihoods of those involved in the regional fish product value chains, including processors, transporters and traders are also affected.

For governments to get behind policies that create an enabling environment for fish trade, at all nodes of the value chain, a better understanding of the flow of trade for fish is imperative.

If fish trade is to be recognized as important to providing social and economic benefits in West Africa, then urgent efforts are needed. Countries in the region need to (1) be aware of the dynamics and magnitude of trade flows, and the challenges being faced by fish producers, processors and traders both in domestic and regional markets; and (2) put in place necessary strategies and policies to facilitate smooth trade and better utilization of the existing fish resources.

This policy brief illustrates fish trade flows in West Africa, including estimates of volumes, values, key traded fish species, the main value chain actors and challenges being experienced by these actors. It also recommends options that should be considered for policy formulation and implementation by national and regional policy makers.



Photo credit: Camilla Finegard/WorldFish

## Context

Trading of fish has increased in many countries in West Africa due to improvements in fishing technologies, improved exchange of information among traders, commoditization of fish and improved transport infrastructure, as well as increased demand for fish in expanding urban areas. Neil and Béné (2004 and 2005) estimate that the total quantity of fish traded each year in the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) increased steadily from 1800 to 2004; and Redmond (1976) reported that fish resources have long been exploited by societies in the LCB region for both internal consumption and export. There is a diverse range of fish species for sale at local markets, including species that do not exist in local fishing grounds, indicating that fish trade is vibrant.

Despite this, the national official trade records of many countries in West Africa show low levels of trade volumes in fish commodities (Table 2). While many countries have accurate records of international fish trade, much of the intra-regional trade has been missed because of the informality of these transactions. This is a problem for national, regional and international fisheries institutions, because they are unable to express the role of fish in national economic development and welfare (including improved incomes, general wellbeing and nutrition) of fish-dependent communities.

Recognizing this, since 2005, Africa Union member states have prioritized fish as a strategic food commodity for the continent. Regional management plans have been agreed upon for shared fisheries resources and fish has been included in the continental commitment to triple commodity trade by 2025, under the Malabo Declaration, signed by African Union Heads of State and Government in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in 2014. The European Commission-funded FishTrade Program was conceptualized as a partnership effort by the African Union and WorldFish to determine the role of fish in tripling intra-regional commodity trade. These efforts are part of the regional integration agenda, formed through Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which member states have signed, committing to free movement of goods, services and human beings.

However compared to other food commodities such as crops, fish has featured less in regional trade strategies and no mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate the free movement of fish products across borders. As a result, fish traders, especially women, continue to face challenges, including informal tariffs, when trying to move products across the borders.

Country	Destination					Total quantity (tonnes)	Value (USD)
	ECOWAS*	Other African countries	Europe	Asia	Americas		
Bénin	96	96	185	0	0	281	212 000
Burkina Faso						0	0
Cape Verde	0	2 215	7 680	3 785	1 125	14 435	9 540 000
Côte d'Ivoire	7 338	7 554	2 385	1	50	9 990	21 687 000
Gambia	379	570	1 143	395	85	2 193	3 428 000
Ghana	13 747	13 747	4 389	410	67	18 613	24 092 000
Guinea Conakry	5 381	5 381	0	2 479	52	7 912	2 816 000
Guinea Bissau						Not known	1 253 000
Liberia	2	2	0	45	17	64	723 000
Mali	497	497	0	0	0	497	130 000
Mauritania						Not known	453 468 000
Niger	459	459	0	0	0	459	377 000
Nigeria	22	181	8 720	370	2 054	11 325	73 255 000
Senegal	38 742	50 754	30 723	5 392	1 102	87 971	211 476 000
Sierra Leone	251	306	18	76	394	794	1 063 000
Togo	2 542	3 048	125	0	69	3 242	4 026 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>69 456</b>	<b>84 810</b>	<b>55 368</b>	<b>12 583</b>	<b>5015</b>	<b>157 776</b>	<b>807 546 000</b>

\*Economic Community of West African States

Source: International Trade Centre (UNCTAD/WTO) ([www.trademap.org](http://www.trademap.org)). Compiled by Kane (2016).

Table 2. Destination of fisheries exports among West African states.

# Market dynamics, informal fish trade and the importance of regional institutions in West Africa

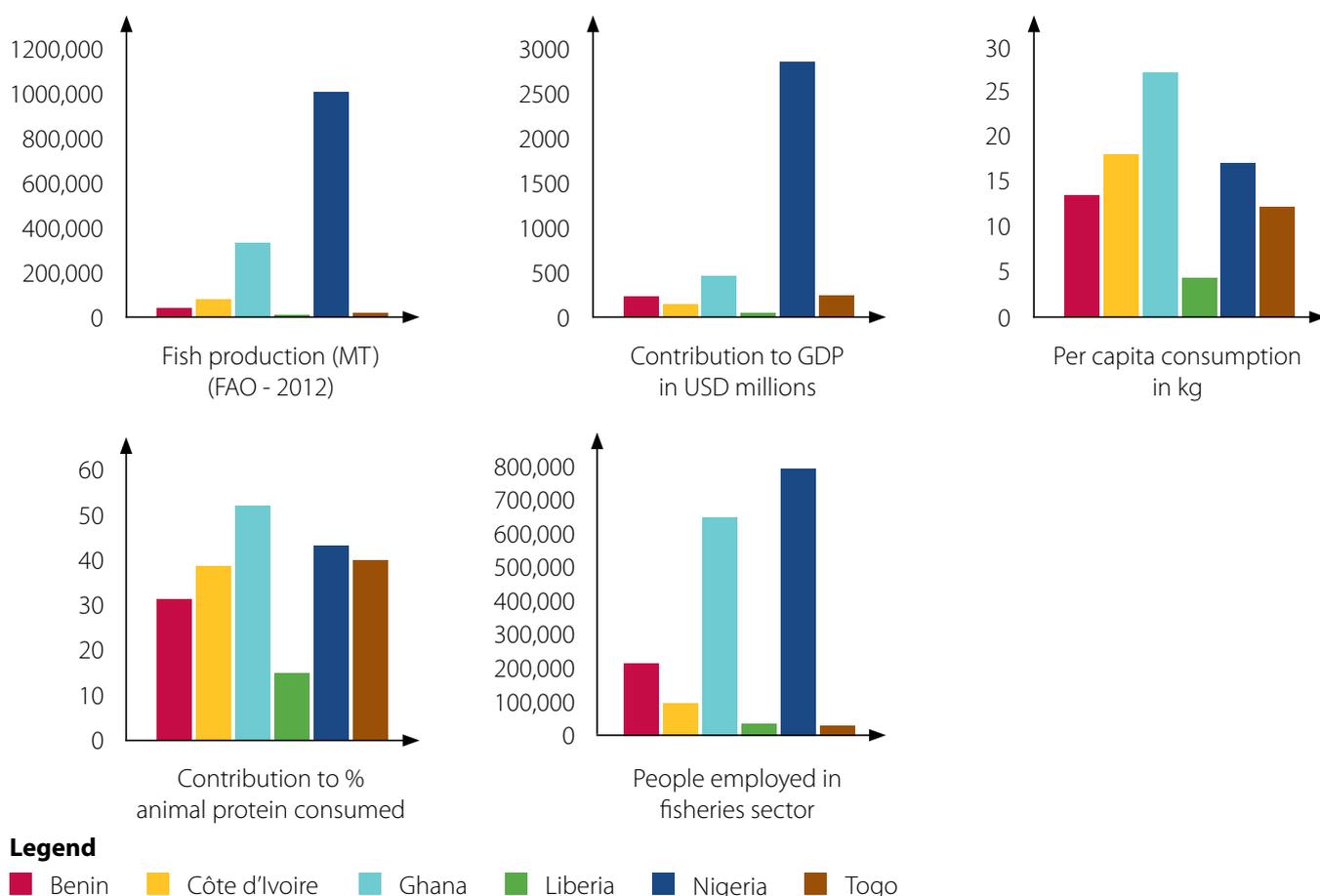
The link between economic development and trade is clear. For fish-dependent communities, fish is important natural capital and in Africa as a whole, there is great potential for fisheries and aquaculture to contribute to poverty reduction and food and nutrition security. However, realizing this potential is limited by three critical issues: (i) policymakers' lack of understanding about the operations and dynamics of fish markets; (ii) the lack of recognition of informal markets and trade by national trade authorities; and (iii) the inadequate role of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in facilitating intra-regional fish trade.

The case studies presented here from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal, focus on countries in West Africa

that are characterized by predominance of fish in the diets of the citizens (Figure 2); traditionally entrenched fish value chain actors; especially women; clear national fisheries policies; and broad commitment by the countries in the region, to regional collaborative management of shared fisheries, through Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs).

Working in partnership with the African Union, NEPAD Agency, ministries responsible for fisheries, national universities, and civil society actors, WorldFish under the FishTrade Program undertook the research presented here to show the value of informal fish trade in the region and deepen the understanding of the challenges which fish processors and traders experience during cross-border trading.

**Fish is vital for the health, economies and food security of African countries**



Source: FAO 2012

Figure 2. Importance of fish in selected countries in West Africa.

The following are summaries of the structure of fish trade in West Africa.

There are two distinct sources of fish – marine and inland fisheries – and two distinct assembly centers – port cities for the marine frozen products and inland assembly cities for marine and inland dried/smoked fish.

The assembly cities or wholesale fish markets are the starting points or nodes of fish distribution. These markets are concentrated in large urban centers, for example, Abidjan, Bouaké, as the case for Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 3).

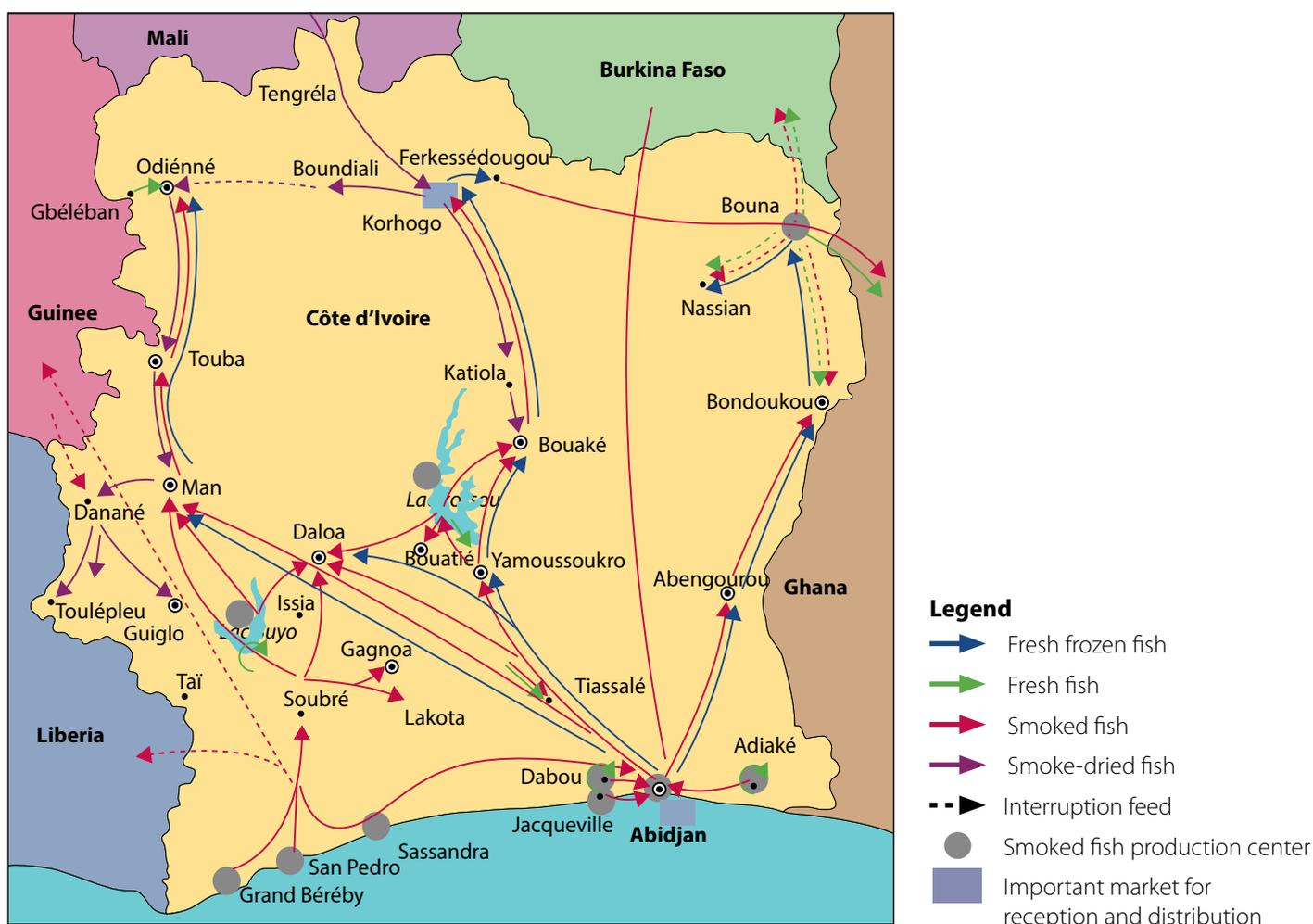
Port cities such as Abidjan are important distribution centers for marine species because of the presence of the harbor/port, where hundreds of tons of imported frozen fish are landed. From the port cities, the frozen and processed (often smoked) fish are distributed throughout the country using middlemen and retailers.

Mauritania is the main African supplier of marine frozen fish products to Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 4). Some imports also come from Senegal and Mali by land

and these are mainly smoked and re-exported by road and on board canoes to Burkina Faso and Ghana respectively.

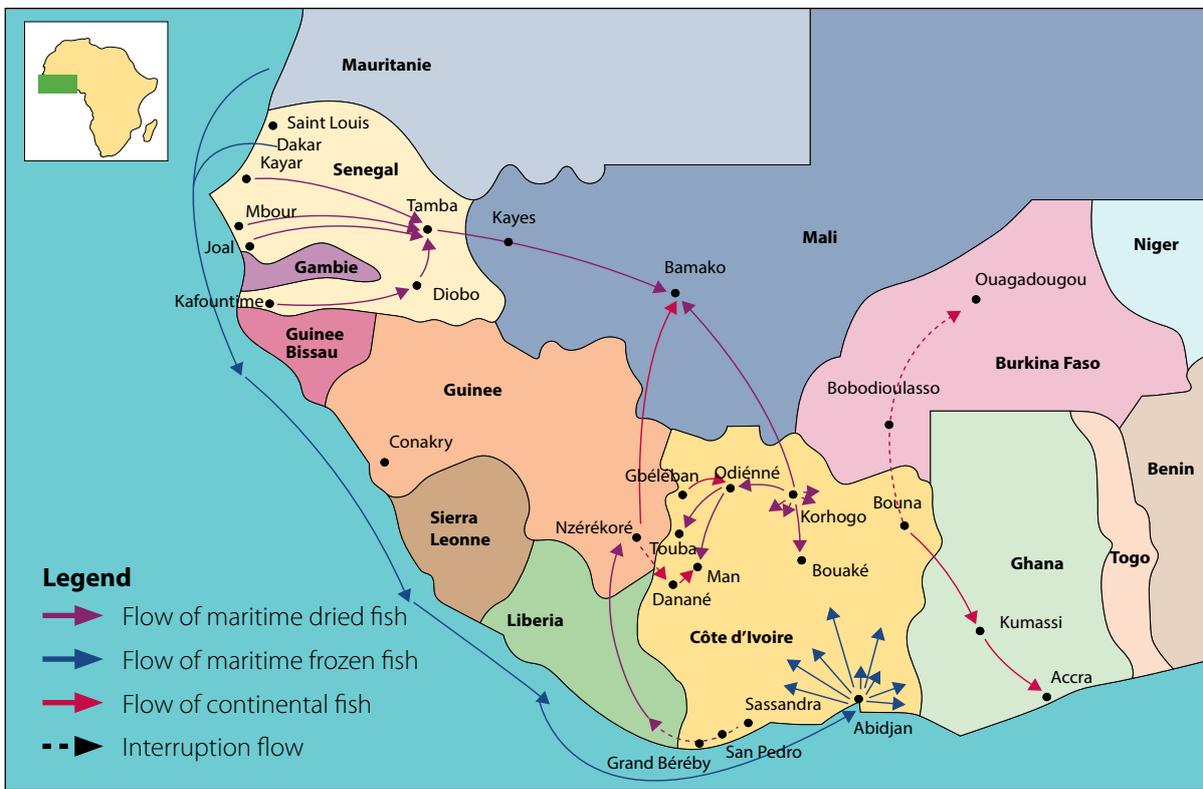
For processed fish from Senegal and Mali, the main entry point is Korogho city, located in the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire, and they come via Bamako, in Mali. Ivorian traders purchase the products from Senegalese wholesalers who buy the fish from the processing centers mainly in Joal and Mbour in Senegal. From Korogho, products are distributed to Odienné, Ferkéssédougou, Boundiali, Sinématiali, Man, Bouaké, Séguéla, Mankono and Yamoussoukro.

For products destined for Ghana, Bouna city is the starting point (Figure 5). Processed fish products are assembled in the village of Vonkoro and transported by canoe on the Black Volta River to the location next to the border with Ghana. From the border, the fish products are transported all the way to Accra, via Kumasi city. While the frozen fish products enter the country formally, with clear customs and import permits, the fish moves internally and crosses the borders informally.



Source: Area survey, 2016

Figure 3. Domestic fish trade flow map for Côte d'Ivoire.



Conception and realisation: UFHB projects team  
 Source: Enquête de terrain, 2016

Figure 4. Domestic and cross-border fish trade channels in and from Côte d'Ivoire.

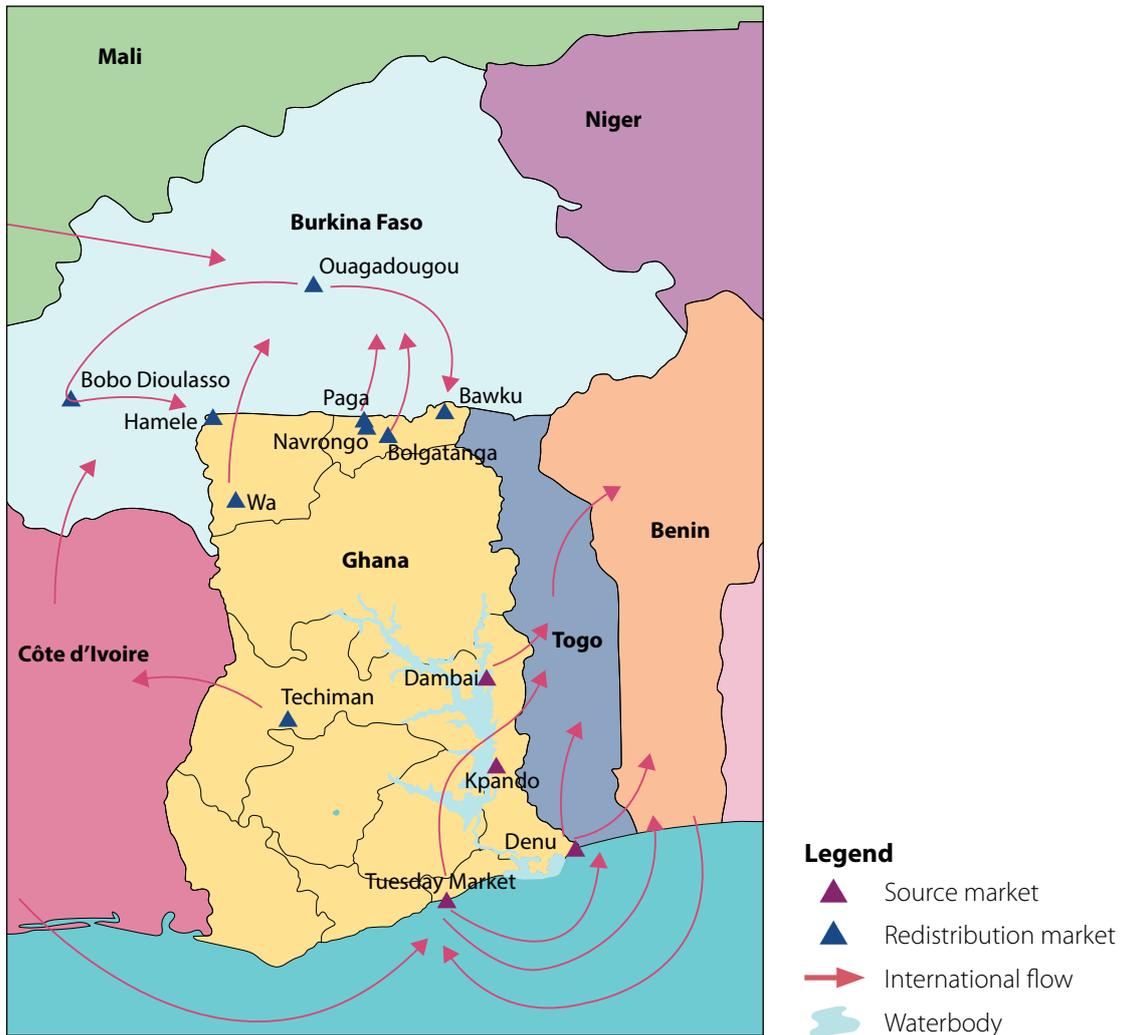


Figure 5. Domestic and cross border fish trade channels in and from Ghana.

## Fish species and products traded in West Africa

A lot of different species are traded in West Africa, but there are 10 main ones (Table 3). In the informal trade between states, small coastal pelagic and river species dominate. The bulk (90%) of these species are traded as dried or smoked fish.

## Quantities and values of cross-border fish trade and the cost of doing business in Ghana, Togo and Benin

Estimates carried out at three selected markets in Ghana revealed that a total of six thousand metric tons of fish are exported informally to neighboring Togo and Benin, with an estimated market value of USD 18.6 million every year (Table 4). It is important to note that Gordon (2011) estimated Ghana's total market value for all fish products to be USD 61 million. Therefore, estimates from a few major fish markets show that aggregate national trade volumes that also take into account informal trade could be much higher than the official trade statistics.

The key factors influencing the cost of fish trading and the price at which traders sold their products are (i) the operational costs (such as fishing gear, fuel and transport); (ii) the season, which is very important as prices were higher during the lean season; (iii) the type of fish species; and (iv) the fish size (Table 5).

## Factors influencing individual participation in the regional fish trade

Analysis of factors influencing fish traders' participation in cross-border trade indicates that traders with

primary or basic education were more likely to participate in cross-border fish trade compared to their uneducated counterparts. Attaining primary or basic education significantly and positively increases the probability of participating in cross-border fish trade because fish traders with some form of education can conduct simple arithmetic, which is essential for any type of trading.

The distance (km) travelled between purchase points and the destination of fish positively and significantly influences cross-border trading; that is, long distances will reduce the probability of fish traders engaging in informal cross-border trade.

It was also apparent that traders who belong to a fish traders' association were more likely to participate in cross-border fish trade compared to those who do not belong to any association. The possible reason is that traders who belong to informal trade associations have access to first-hand information about foreign markets from their colleagues, especially about the cost and benefits of the cross-border trade. An important benefit of being a member of a local informal trade association is that if a trader is unable to do a trip due to ill health, they could rely on their peers to transport their products to market for them.

Availability of good road infrastructure had a positive and significant influence on informal cross-border fish trade participation choices. Residing close to a border town affects fish traders' decisions to participate in cross-border trade because it is easier to access the neighboring country's markets.

FAO/English name	Scientific name	Product/form in trade
Shad, Bonga	<i>Ethmalosa fimbriata</i>	Smoked
Round Sardinella	<i>Sardinella aurita</i>	Smoked
Anchovy	<i>Engraulis encrasicolus</i>	Dried and smoked
Atlantic bumper	<i>Chloroscombrus chrysurus</i>	Smoked and dried
Chub mackerel	<i>Scomber japonicas</i>	Smoked
Pink shrimps	<i>Penaeus notialis</i>	Smoked
Deepwater rose shrimp	<i>Parapaeneus longirostris</i>	Smoked
Black-chinned tilapia	<i>Sarotherodon molanotheron</i>	Salted dried, smoked
Catfish	<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>	Smoked
African moonfish/African lookdown	<i>Selene dorsalis</i>	Dried and smoked

Source: Ayilu (2016)

Table 3. Top ten species in regional fish trade.

Fish markets	Destination	Annual quantity (tons)	Value (USD)
Tuesday (Ghana)	Togo	1857.618	3,109,132
Denu (Ghana)	Togo	1851.528	7,950,158
Dambai (Ghana)	Togo	1558.2	3,151,895
Tuesday (Ghana)	Benin	261.135	536,210.5
Denu (Ghana)	Benin	819.21	3,871,026
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6,347.691</b>	<b>18,618,422</b>

Source: Ayilu (2016)

Table 4. Estimates of quantities informally traded between markets in Ghana and neighboring states.

Determinants	Responses (n)	Percentage (%)
Operational cost	211	22.7
Season	207	22.3
Type of fish species	201	21.6
Fish size	159	17.1
Price of other traders	98	10.5
Fish quality	46	5.0
Weight	7	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>929</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Ayilu (2016)

Table 5. Determinant of fish price.

Determinants	Odds ratio	P>z
Age	0.967	0.430
<b>Education (ref. no formal education)</b>		
Primary/basic	5.349	0.002**
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	0.704	0.554
<b>Household sizes</b>		
Five	0.717	0.642
<b>Market and institutional factors</b>		
Distance (market to destination)	0.997	0.018*
Access to credit (ref. yes)	2.063	0.105
Road network condition (ref. good)	7.052	0.000**
Nearness to border (ref. yes)	0.069	0.000**
Member of fish trade association (ref. yes)	0.017	0.004**
Access to communication facility (ref. yes)	0.672	0.608
Access to market information (ref. yes)	3.959	0.006**
Constant	63.183	0.079

\*Significant at 10%, \*\*Significant at 5%, \*\*\*Significant at 1%

Source: Ayilu (2016)

Table 6. A binary logistic regression model for factors influencing traders to take part in cross-border fish trade.

# Challenges to cross-border fish trade

## Taxes and bribes along the fish trade corridor

Many traders in West Africa were unhappy about various fees and taxes, including bribes, imposed by the cross-border administration, and the assembly market cities, where traders pay daily and monthly municipality fees. On top of the municipality taxes, the owners of the storeroom (where traders keep their products) charge the trader a monthly rental fee. During the field surveys multiple forms of harassment were listed by traders from Senegal, to Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana via Mali. Along the way, there are customs officers, gendarmes (armed police), regular police officers, anti-drug squads, water and forest inspectors and fisheries officers. These government agents check for identity cards, traders' permits/cards, vaccination cards, driving licenses and vehicle papers and sanitary certificates. At each checkpoint, between 500 and 1000 FCFA is paid despite having these papers in order.

## Transport costs

Production centers are often far from major markets and even when they are close, the service roads are frequently in poor condition. Therefore, transport constitutes the major cost of doing business for cross-border traders (Box1). The high cost of transport is also, in part, due to the poor state of the road and inefficient transport system. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) (2001) reported that trade among the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries could be tripled if the entire national road infrastructure linking these countries were in better condition.

## Export/import formalities

All countries in West Africa have national rules and regulations governing trade in fish and other food commodities, and these are applied for both exports and imports of fish products (Table 5). Traders complain that obtaining permits involves administrative procedures that are complex and slow. Of particular concern is the national certification of fish products for exports that every trader must get, to show they comply with the required sanitary and phytosanitary procedures, which fish exporters complain is a process full of delays and exorbitant fees and charges. Requirements to have fish products inspected before exporting results in delays at the border with possible deterioration of the quality of the fish. Inspections also attract fees that result in exorbitant export costs.

## Fish processing

Better post-harvest handling, including processing, is critical for good quality products and longer shelf life necessary for the long transit distances the fish products make from sources to markets. Many countries in West Africa have adopted the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, which sets out the basic rules for food safety and animal and plant health standards. However, fish processors are not able to produce good quality and longer-lasting products. Challenges concerning fish processing include lack of access to credit for working capital, poor hygienic conditions of processing facilities, and the use of obsolete processing equipment. The result

### Box 1: Description of the journey of Mrs. Fatou Fall, a fish importer of processed fish transported from Senegal to Côte d'Ivoire via-Mali

Mrs. Fall is a dual Senegalese and Ivorian citizen living in Korogho, Côte d'Ivoire, dealing with a fish wholesaler in the big market of Korogho. Mrs. Fall travels twice a year to place her order, with the airfare for a one-way ticket costing 120,000 XAF (USD 207), or 180,000 XAF (USD 311) for the round trip. On top of the fare, she pays for the transportation of the products. Each trip she transports 800 to 1000 kg and she pays a total of 30,000 XAF (approximately USD 52) to travel to Mali by train at a cost of 30,000 FCFA. Once in Bamako, she puts the goods in a pickup truck (*bâché*) for a trip to the car/bus station at a cost of 3,000 FCFA. Then the bags are loaded on to a bus to Korogho, at a fee estimated at 20,000 to 25,000 XAF for transport. To ensure safety and control of her products along the way, a care taker or conveyor is paid 5000 XAF. Once at the cars/bus station of Korogho an additional 3,000 FCFA is paid to a porter (*pousse\_pousse*) to transport the products to the market.

is low productivity. As most of the smoking ovens are traditional or primitive, the quality of the fish products is compromised and the smoke from these ovens may lead to emissions of greenhouse gases, carcinogens and dangerous pollutants that may affect the respiratory systems of the people processing the fish. Since selection of wood for smoking is not done carefully, some of the fuel wood leads to alteration of the taste and the quality of smoked fish, resulting in poor sales performance. Following a survey of fish processors who use smoking ovens at Abobodoume market in Abidjan, it turns out that all women using smoking ovens were suffering from serious respiratory illnesses because of their exposure to frequent heat and smoke.

### Lack of knowledge of regional trade rules and regulations

Despite clear free trade rules in the ECOWAS region, for example the abolishment of transit fees (Table 7), many fish traders are still charged. This study has revealed a lot of confusion on the requirements by traders to move food commodities, including fish. The illiteracy rate of cross-border fish traders in Ghana is 35% (Ayilu 2016), while in Côte d'Ivoire it is 55%, with 80% of the female traders illiterate (Anoh et al. 2016). The high

rate of illiteracy among fish traders makes it difficult for traders to understand and comply with hygiene and quality standards, especially for processed products that are destined for export markets. There is a general lack of information on the rules of trade with which traders need to comply when they are taking their products across the border.

### Harassments at road blocks

Traders experience multiple forms of harassment along the trade corridor, including roadblocks and checkpoints (Table 8). As bribes are inevitable, transporters add an amount to the transport fee paid by the trader in order to use it to bribe policemen and other security agents at checkpoints. Hoppe and Aidoo (2015) similarly reported exporters in Benin and Togo adding fees to cover transit bribes). At border posts, there are a number of security agents, including gendarmeries (armed forces responsible for internal security), police officers, customs officers, anti-drug squads, water and forest inspectors and fisheries officers. These security agents check for identity cards, traders' cards, vaccination cards, driving licenses and vehicle papers, and sanitary certificates.

ECOWAS rules for staple food trade	Documents for trading in staple foods
Customs duties – NO	ECOWAS Brown Card (insurance) – YES
VAT or sales tax – NO	Export declaration – YES
Statistical tax – NO	Phytosanitary Certificate – YES
Computerization fee – NO	Waybill – YES
Freight forwarder fee – YES	National and international driver's license – YES
Transit fee – NO	Certificate of Origin – NO
ISRT logbook – NO	ECOWAS Inter-State Road Transit (ISRT) logbook – NO (and NO transit fee)
Weighbridge fee – YES	
Official road tolls – YES	

Source: USAID Agribusiness and Regional Trade Promotion (ATP)

Table 7. Regional trade requirements in ECOWAS.

Highway	Distance (km)	Number of checkpoints	Checkpoint costs per 100 km
Lagos - Abidjan	992	69	7
Cotonou - Niamey	1 036	34	3
Lome - Ouagadougou	989	34	4
Accra - Ouagadougou	972	15	2
Niamey - Ouagadougou	529	20	4

Source: ECOWAS Commission

Table 8. Location of roadblocks on some regional corridors.

# Policy recommendations

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## Revise the national protocol for data collection, analysis and dissemination to reflect the informal trade volumes

Governments should revise their national cross-border fisheries data collection methods to ensure that all fish species and quantities being traded informally are also recorded. This will improve the official national fisheries import and export statistics by capturing fish species that are currently overlooked, and consequently undermining the importance of fish and the role the value chain actors, many of whom are women, in the national economy. This will also enhance the importance of fish in the national accounting, including the contribution of fish to the economy, food and nutrition security.

## Put in place post-harvest strategies for small pelagic species

Small fish and other small pelagic species are the most prominent in the cross-border trade volumes. To ensure that these small fish reach markets in good quality after such long transit distances (for example from Senegal to Côte d'Ivoire), government extension workers should teach fish processors and traders better processing and handling techniques, respectively. Poor quality and broken products tend to be sold as ingredients for animal feeds (fishmeal); therefore, improved quality will enhance availability of this valuable human food.

## Formalize export and import harmonization

While all countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have committed themselves to free trade, the implementation of the ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme has not been accompanied by increase in trade for community enterprises, including fish traders. The reason for this is that trading rules still generate costs and transactions through such procedures as approval applications. Therefore, governments in the ECOWAS region should revise their national trade policies with the aim to integrate fish in the product portfolio/annex and enhance international competitiveness and secure greater market access for their fish products. In particular, the policies should seek to promote regional integration through greater fish trade by harmonizing and reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers to fish trade, including corruption, road blocks and unnecessary fees for cross-border fish traders.

At the regional level, ECOWAS should support its member states to implement the Customs Union, which comprises a common external tariff (CET) with a common customs nomenclature, to make customs procedures more transparent, readily followed and decrease delays at borders.

## Make it easier for fish products to cross the borders

Countries should ensure that compliance with import and export approval processes is not burdensome for traders, especially women. Therefore, the process should be simplified by centralizing the import/export declarations and phytosanitary inspections within the same government agency. Governments in the region should incorporate fish into the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), which sets preferential tariffs for intra-regional trade at zero percent, and that fish should not face any restrictions. Governments should also integrate fish in the One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs). These combine two border stops into one and consolidate functions in a shared work space for exiting one country and entering another, thus reducing travel time for passenger and freight vehicles. In addition, governments should put in place common conformity assessment procedures to be used by all countries to test, inspect and certify fish products for imports and exports. This will ensure that the products being placed on the market comply with all legislative and food safety requirements.

Governments should implement the ECOWAS Inter-State Road Transit (ISRT) scheme, which helps to ensure that goods in transit flow easily without having to pay duties or other fees. A single vehicle logbook and single bond should be put in place to reduce roadblocks and aid quick movements of fish products that are in transit.

## Create awareness among traders on cross-border trade procedures

Governments should reduce inconsistencies in documents required for exports and imports of fish, in line with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS). This will reduce unnecessary costs and opportunities for corruption, as well as make fish trade less risky for small-scale operators, as this will make it easier for traders to know with certainty, the types of documents required at any given border. Due to the complexity of the cross-border trader rules, many

cross-border fish traders, especially illiterate ones, are not aware of ETLs. It is critical for NGOs such as Borderless (set up by USAID to improve cross-border trade governance in West Africa) to create awareness among both government border agencies and traders about the ETLs, including exact document requirements and procedures. NGOs should also create awareness about the need for adherence to trade rules to reduce congestion at the borders. This can be done through community radio stations at the border towns. Similar radio awareness campaigns have been conducted by the FishTrade program at the border between Kenya and Uganda.

### **Address informal costs to trade, especially corruption**

The high number of road blocks, corrupt practices, and harassments by officials are some of the main obstacles to the development of inclusive (that does not discriminate small-scale operators including women) intra-regional trade in fish and fishery products. While it might be said that corruption in the cross-border trade is a result of bureaucratic trade procedures, it is important to recognize the cost of such practices to the cross-border fish traders, especially women. Therefore, national governments and non-governmental organizations should help to create the necessary environment to make corruption impossible, including making cross-border trade rules and regulations transparent. Governments should commit to addressing corruption by empowering traders and communities to anonymously report offenders and punishing those found engaging in corrupt practice.

### **Establish fish trader organizations**

To engage in cross-border and rural-urban fish trade requires a high level of organization and coordination by a wide range of national and international value chain players, including government and non-state stakeholders. This also demands timely access to information on logistics and markets. Therefore, governments and NGOs should promote the establishment of fish traders' associations. These institutions will also help improve dialogue between traders and government agents involved in facilitating cross-border trade and help expose such malpractices.

### **Promote women fish mongers' voices**

Women are very prominent in fish trading in West Africa. Yet often, gender inequalities prevent them from participating in crucial decisions pertaining to fisheries management, fish processing and cross-

border trade. Prevalence of harmful fish smoking practices and harassment of cross-border women traders are clear signs that not much attention has been paid to ensuring a safe work environment and profitable livelihood for women. NGOs should help identify "women champions" who raise the debate about women's role in cross-border fish trade. These champions could work within the framework of African Union women empowerment (2015 was the African Year of Women Empowerment). This could help shift institutional priorities and open new pathways to institutional change in cross-border trade in West Africa.

### **Improve transport and market infrastructure**

The growth of urban markets for food, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana has provided an incentive for the fish trade in the West Africa. While it is clear from the empirical findings that the fish market and trade system is functioning very effectively, albeit under difficult circumstances, there is a need for governments to give greater attention to national road and market infrastructure. This will create an enabling environment for economic development through markets and trade expansion in the ECOWAS region as a whole.

### **Promote evidence-based decision-making and cross-sectoral relationship**

International and national research institutions, including CGIAR centers and national universities should support governments to make evidence-based policy decisions on cross-border fish trade through research and innovation and disseminating knowledge generated through research. WorldFish's experience under the FishTrade Program has shown that promoting policy dialogue based on research findings can enhance cross-sectoral relations and improve communication between (university) researchers, policymakers, and government officials, which is essential for understanding fish traders' needs.

### **Invest in regional collaborative mechanisms**

Regional economic and political integration are enshrined in the African Union as the basis for some of the most important regional economic community (REC) institutions in West Africa, such as ECOWAS and WAEMU as well as regional fisheries bodies (RFBs) such as the Fisheries Committee for West-Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC). From experiences in the ECOWAS region, it is clear that regional integration can help Africa to raise competitiveness, diversify its economic base and create jobs. National governments should

support these regional institutions to enable them to develop and implement national, regional and continental development plans that are coherent with the regional integration agenda.

Regional fisheries bodies such as FCWC<sup>1</sup>, support their member states to work together to promote profitable domestic and cross-border fish trade. The FCWC should develop broad-based partnerships, including

with national and regional universities, CGIAR centers, women fish trade associations and international development institutions to develop and implement participatory monitoring and evaluation efforts to draw lessons for scaling up promising institutional innovations related to fish trade in other regions of the continent.



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## Note

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<sup>1</sup> FCWC is made up of six members (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo)

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