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## The lasting elements of PRA port profiles in Conakry, Guinea: lessons for sustainability

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### • Introduction

In late 1991, the Guinean Fisheries Department and the Conakry-based staff of an FAO regional artisanal fisheries project started training national fisheries officers in using PRA methods with fisherfolk at twelve artisanal landing sites. This experience was reported in RRA Notes 21<sup>1</sup>, and is summarised below. This paper examines the progress of the landing site development committees which were initiated from the port profiling process.

### PRA port profiles from 1991-1993

Five fisheries officers were each assigned to twelve landing sites. Working together with canoe owners, women fish smokers, gillnet fishers, handline fishers, fish retailers, boatbuilders, and other established user groups, they developed a 'PRA Port Profile', a participatory analysis of the landing site, its problems, and potential opportunities.

It was clear from the Port Profiles that for most artisanal ports, no-one had clear responsibility for its development and management. Landing site user groups were offered assistance in forming their own Landing Site Development Committee (LSDC), to be composed of representatives from all the landing-site user groups. Nine of the twelve landing sites which developed PRA Port Profiles decided to establish their own LSDCs.

The PRA Port Profiles reports aided follow-up action for the LSDCs. They provided an embryonic development plan, a clear description of the landing site's situation for higher government authorities, and acted as a background document when discussing possible assistance on specific micro-projects with potential 'outside' partners. Outside partners were essential since the FAO project had funds for the initial PRA training, but not for supporting any of the micro-project proposals which came out of the PRA process. Follow-up activities therefore had to rely either on the landing site's own resources or those of 'outside' partners.

By early 1994, the more active of the LSDCs had already started some activities, mostly with their own resources. These included: the construction of small breakwaters to protect anchored canoes, constructing shelters for smoking fish and repairing nets, repairing the heavy rock shields protecting their shore against erosion, connecting to the city drinking-water system, removing huge amounts of city garbage from the fishing beach (with assistance from a USAID project), and securing legal and political protection from encroachments on the landing sites by housing developers.

When the FAO project closed down its Conakry operations in April 1994, the committee co-ordinating the LSDCs received a transitional continuation of its operating budget for one year from the FAO project, office space from the government, and continued access to the former FAO fisheries project's office equipment. The remainder of this paper examines what has happened to the landing site development committees, and the

<sup>1</sup> R.Reusen and J.Johnson, 'Linking Government Agents and Local Users: Participatory Urban Appraisal for Artisanal Fishing Port Development', RRA Notes No. 21, pp 57-69, November 1994.

national fisheries department's PRA Co-ordinating Committee since April 1994.

**PRA co-ordinating committee**

In 1995, the fisheries department gave the PRA Co-ordinating Committee official status as a national 'Project' headed by a PRA-trained service chief. No operating budget was arranged by the fisheries department, however, so that when the FAO transitional funding for 1994 was used up, there were no further funds to visit landing sites, prepare partnership proposals, or follow-up on the LSDC's requests for legal recognition. Although individual fisheries field officers and port authority officers have continued serious work

with individual LSDCs, the PRA Co-ordinating Committee itself, without operating funds, became virtually inactive.

It did spring back to life for a period during 1995-1996, when a large Canadian-sponsored project for functional literacy training of women belonging to fish-smoking co-operatives in Conakry became active. The Canadian project manager sub-contracted the PRA Co-ordinating Committee, with 20 of its PRA trained fisheries officers, to be the project's functional literacy trainers. When the Canadian project finished, however, the PRA Co-ordinating Committee, again without operating funds, lapsed back into inactivity.

**Figure 1. Status of landing site development committees 1997**

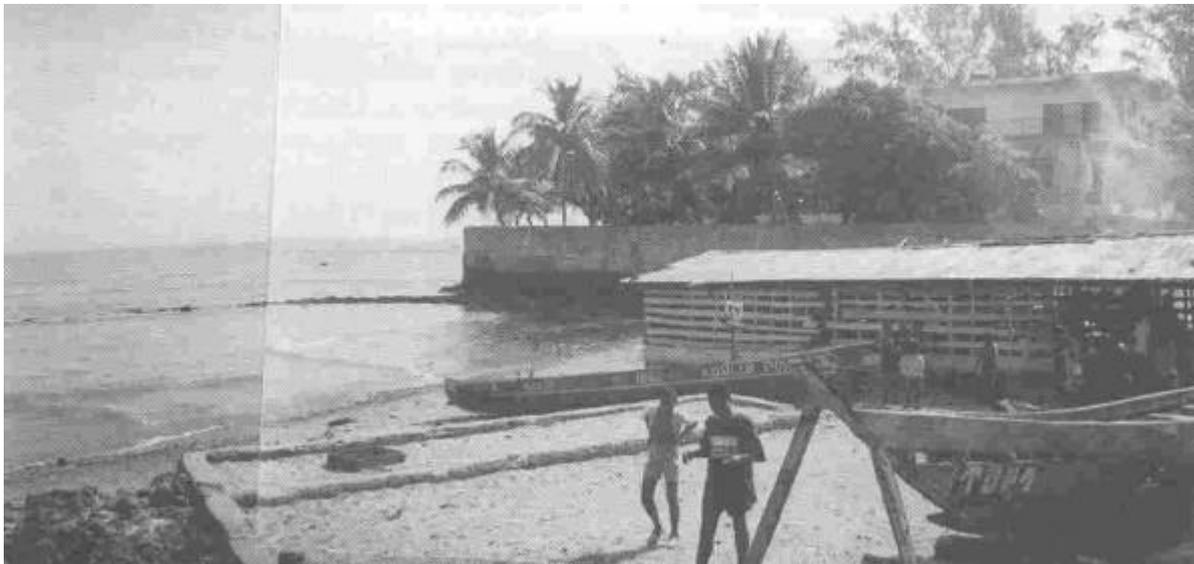
Landing Site >	Boussoum	Coiteh	Mavre	Bonfi	Boubinet	Témirikay	Kaporo	Nongo	Dixinn	Landitah	Dabondy	Féban
RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF PORT (1993)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
RELATIVE THREAT TO PORT'S EXISTENCE (1993)	⊗	⊗	⊗	○	○	○	⊗	⊗	○	○	⊗	○
RELATIVE ACTIVITY LANDING SITE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (1997)	●	●	Port Virtually Abandoned	○	●	○	●	Fishers sold their shore rights	○	○	●	●
LEGAL STATUS IN JUNE 1997	OK!	OK!			On Request		On Request					On Request

## Elements contributing to an effective and sustainable LSDC

Only two landing sites (Boussoura and Coleah) continue in June 1997 to have very active and effective LSDCs (Figure 1). A number of factors have contributed to their success. They were the very first sites involved, and thus benefited from the longest period of technical support from the FAO project and the PRA Co-ordinating Committee. They were faced by serious threats of physical extinction by outside forces: wave erosion to the front and building construction to the back for Boussoura, and attempted 'outside' housing construction right on the landing beach for Coleah (see Figure 2).

At Coleah, the respected chief fisherman combined technical advice from the FAO project with the opportunity of the PRA exercise to turn the fortunes of his port around. They received outside assistance from part of a USAID project to remove a 1500 ton mountain of city waste from their beach. They also contributed their own labour to build their own breakwaters, rock walls against erosion, and large-roofed working sheds. In the recent past, the port had only five fishing canoes, but now it has over twenty.

**Figure 2. Coleah Landing:** Note the home-made breakwater in far left background, nearly covered by the rising tide and home-made shelter for net repair on the right, behind which is hidden the equally large home-made shelter which protects the women's fish smoking operations. Parallel dark lines along the beach are the remains from an unsuccessful attempt by non-fishers to appropriate the landing site area for urban housing construction (see text for details).



Three other landing sites faced similar threats of extinction, but did not develop such strong LSDCs, each for a different reason.

- The fishers of **Nongo** had already 'sold' their shoreside rights to a housing developer before the PRA Port Profile exercise started. This left them tenuous access to the landing site they had been using for many years.
- The fishers of **Mayore** had already lost the most protected part of their canoe anchorage to landfill for housing construction before the PRA Port Profiles began. They had just enough beach left to pull up their three canoes, and no space at all for fish processing. There were probably too few to be able to get strong backing from the local authorities against the housing interests.
- **Kaporo**, equally threatened by housing development but still possessing twenty canoes and a protected anchorage, responded to the PRA Port Profile process by establishing a strong LSDC,

constructing their own large covered landing site shelter (in 1995), and getting firm legal recognition of the fishers' rights to their landing site. Kaporo's LSDC, however, had one less year of active technical support from the PRA Coordinating Committee than Boussoura and Coleah, and never had direct intervention from the FAO project. The Kaporo LSDC has still not received formal legal status, and is now less active than the legally-recognised LSDCs of Boussoura and Coleah..

Based on these experiences, Box 1 shows the factors that appear to improve the sustainability of LSDCs.

BOX 1

**KEY ELEMENTS FOR LSDC SUSTAINABILITY INCLUDE:  
(NOT IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE)**

- **Attention focus through the PRA Port Profile process:** No development action was being undertaken at the artisanal ports before the PRA port profiles were undertaken. The port profiles provided the opportunities to focus fishers to a task.
- **Focus on important and potentially solvable problems, which are common to all users of the landing site.**
- **The absence of competing marine sector interests.**
- **Local level political support.**
- **Character and effectiveness of local landing site leaders:** social and political necessity often required that users ask existing local port leaders to head the LSDCs, leading to good results with good leaders and poor results with leaders who were not trusted by port users.
- **Character of the fisheries officers involved:** a good LSDC and a good fisheries officer appear to reinforce each other's work.
- **Integration with existing port institutions:** all LSDCs officially have the same structure, but the more successful have adapted theirs to the local context. For example, at Coleah, the chief fisher became LSDC president and his traditional advisors the representatives of port user groups. At Boussoura, the strong boat-owners' guild and government agent group accepted the new LSDC as a third co-equal partner with responsibility for the port's physical infrastructure.
- **Command of autonomous resources:** successful LSDCs generate and control substantial resources of their own. The LSDC at Boussoura levies a landing contribution on each arriving canoe which goes towards construction and maintenance of port infrastructure. Coleah can count on large and periodic labour contributions for its harbour works.
- **Duration of technical support:** those LSDCs which were started earliest and had the longest period of technical support have ended up the strongest.
- **Active field presence of (FAO) technical advisors.**
- **Provision of 'outside' assistance with preparation of requests to potential donors:** all successful LSDC requests for assistance from donors and NGOs were prepared with help from the PRA Co-ordinating Committee, sometimes assisted by the FAO Project.
- **Official legal status for the development committee:** it gave them the necessary legal standing to be accepted as partners with donors and NGOs.

## Reflections for future work

LSDCs in urban Conakry turned out to be most effective, and most readily accepted, when the landing sites were threatened with extinction. They can also be of considerable assistance in less dramatic situations. Since they include all important stakeholder groups at the landing site, they can act as the local partner with central government in co-management schemes for management of the fish resources.

Those reflecting on how to improve the situation for LSDCs in Conakry, or considering a similar experiment elsewhere, might wish to consider the key elements of LSDC sustainability described above, especially:

- The critical importance of strong support from local elected officials which was not recognised at the beginning of this initiative.
- Full legal status is essential when the LSDC seeks outside partners for its more ambitious activities.
- Regular follow-up to the PRA Port Profiles and the LSDCs is essential, preferably by PRA-trained field officers reporting to some kind of co-ordinating committee. This requires a small but flexibly administered budget for actual field expenses.
- LSDCs are not themselves very good at preparing well-planned, and attractive proposals, to potential partners. These skills may also be lacking amongst PRA-trained fisheries officers. It would be useful to have an NGO experienced with the preparation of small project proposals to work with the LSDC and Co-ordinating Committee. Their role would be to contact potential partners, and prepare written

proposals which meet the needs of both the LSDC and potential outside partners.

- Many priority activities involve physical port infrastructure. This often requires a high level of technical support to the LSDC. While this technical support and advice is essential, it can often be hard to find. The national harbour authority should be included as an active member of the PRA Port Profile from the start of the project, and a harbour authority engineer included as a member of the PRA Port Profile team whenever possible.

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## NOTES

FAO is preparing a Distance Learning Course for national fisheries officers entitled 'Participatory Port Profiles: Description, Problem Identification and Follow-up Using PRA Methods at the Artisanal Landing Site'. Presently being field tested, it will be available for distribution in 1998.

Already published:

J.A. Sciortino, 'Construction and Maintenance of Artisanal Fishing Harbours and Village Landings', FAO Training Series Manual 25, 137 pages, Rome, 1995. Available from FAO, address as above.

An expanded version of this landing-site infrastructure manual is being prepared as a Distance Learning Course for national Fisheries Officers and will be field tested in 1997. It should be available for distribution in 1998.