

## Establishment of Fisher Folk Organizations in Suriname

### Création d'Organisations de Pêcheurs au Suriname

### Establecimiento de Organizaciones de Pescadores en Suriname

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#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The artisanal fishery, comprising of about 900 license holders, is an important pillar for the fishing and fish processing industry in terms of production and supply of raw materials for local consumption. A poor performance of this sector has immediate complications in a substantial part of society, by way of provision of protein, creating jobs and generation of foreign currency. Referring to the marginal position taken by fishermen and fishermen's organizations it is important that support is given for tangible and intangible benefits.

There were several active fishing organizations representing the interests of their members in Suriname. From 1989 – 1992 we had the special agreement between the Government of the Republic of Suriname and the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium to support the fisheries sector in Suriname

Unfortunately, it has been found that if the donor resources have run out, the fishermen's cooperative will start to function less.

With the regional project “Enhancing food security from the fisheries sector in the Caribbean: Building the capacity of regional and national fisher folk organization networks to participate in fisheries governance and management” in Suriname, the realization came again of setting up fishermen's cooperatives and strengthening existing ones. This project, funded by the European Union Europe Aid Program and is being implemented over a four-year period (2013 - 2016). The project is being implemented by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) in partnership with the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) of the University of the West Indies (UWI) and Panos Caribbean, in association with the Caribbean Network of Fisher Folk Organizations (CNFO) and the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM).

The aim of this project was to improve the contribution of the small-scale fisheries sector to food security in the Caribbean. This will be achieved through building the capacity of regional and national fisher folk organization networks to participate in fisheries governance and management. As part of the project, eight countries, including Suriname, were selected to build the capacity of national fisher folk networks to participate in fisheries governance. The activities of the project include the following: to (i) analyze the issues at the national level; (ii) analyze policy and planning initiatives at the national level and opportunities for fisher folk participation; (iii) review or validate policy positions and communication plan components; and, (iv) analyze capacity needs of fisher folk to effectively participate in governance and management. The implementation of this project also included the appointment of a fisheries mentor for each country, which had the task of setting up fishery organizations and strengthening existing ones and I was appointed as the Fisheries Mentor for Suriname.

In 2013 we also started to write the Fisheries Management Plan for Suriname 2014-2018 with support from the ACP Fish II project “Strengthening Fisheries Management in ACP countries”. The plan was drafted in close consultation with the fisheries sector. The FMP sets out the necessary measures to attain the goals as derived from the fisheries policy. One of the policies is that: *‘The Department of Fisheries will support initiatives that aim to increase the degree of fishers’ organization’*.

In the continuation of this I wrote my thesis with the title:

*Government Policy and the Challenges Faced by the Fishing Communities in Suriname 2003 – 2013 (March 2014).*

With the help of WWF Guianas, we started in June 2015 with the implementation of the project: Regulation and organization of the Chinese seine fishery in Suriname. Within this project we also included setting up fishermen's organizations or discussing the co-management idea with the fishermen. In this regard we can say that the project has been a major success. However, we did not reach the target of creating formalized organizations. We put a lot of effort in the organization of the fishermen and were able to bring volunteers together in all the fishing areas to participate. This was not an easy task given the low interest among the fishermen for organization and the opposition by some factions and individuals. We have seen significant positive changes in the actual participation in the management of the fishing areas and the willingness to cooperate.

At the end of this project in May 2016 we asked WWF Guianas to continue with setting up the structures for fishers' association and we initiated a new project:

*The strengthening of fishers' associations' c.q. cooperatives within the artisanal fishing communities  
Galibi, Commewijne, Paramaribo, Boskamp, Coronie and Nickerie: June 2016 – December 2017.*

**The aim of this project was:**

*Organizing all the fishermen, so that a better fisheries policy is conducted, in which not only the fishing industry, but also the primary target group is involved in order to exploit the fish resource in a sustainable manner with a focus on co-management.*

Within this project several training courses were provided to provide the fishermen and in particular the board members of the various cooperatives with the necessary tools to facilitate their functioning. Some of the trainings were: Communication, Teambuilding and Management skills. At the end of this project we have 5 (five) fishers' cooperative established (Cooperatie Ontwikkeling Visserijsector Nickerie G.A., Cooperatie Ontwikkeling Visserijsector Coronie G.A., Cooperatieve Vereniging Vissers- en Belangenbehartiging Boskamp G.A., Cooperatieve Vereniging Visserscollectief G.A. and Woto Poko Noko – Visserij Cooperatie Galibi G.A.) and 1 (one) umbrella fishers' organization (Suriname National Fisherfolk Organization) in which all the five fishers' cooperatives are represented.

Simultaneously with this project we also have the project REBYC-II LAC which also supports the strengthening of the fishing communities. To prevent that two donors are supporting two projects to do the same work, it was decided to implement the WWF project together with the REBYC-II LAC project. Most important was awareness of being part of cooperation, so that you will be heard. Other trainings were, Leadership and Conflict resolution. It was noted by the consultant that the issues fishermen are facing were similar and as a result of this an evaluation meeting was held with all the cooperatives representatives and other stakeholders appointed by them. This result in valuable national recommendation for the government.

In summary, we can say that the Department of Fisheries in cooperation with the local fisherman supported initiatives aiming to increase the degree of fishers' organization. Over the period 2013-2018, with the support of several national and regional projects, training, mentoring and capacity building activities were carried out with the artisanal fishers of the coastal districts in Suriname. This resulted in the formal establishment of five fisherfolk organizations. In 2018, representatives from each organization were united in a national umbrella organization called SUNFO, the Suriname National Fisherfolk Organization. SUNFO will contribute to strengthening the capacity of fishermen to participate in fisheries management at national and regional level. Further, as a member of the Caribbean Network of Fishersfolk Organization (CNFO), SUNFO will represent Suriname's artisanal fishers internationally. The fisherfolk organizations in Suriname aim to improve fishermen's livelihoods by developing a sustainable and profitable industry through networking, representation and capacity building.

All of this has been made possible through good cooperation between the Fisheries Department, the fisheries sector, the World Wildlife Fund and other international donors such as the Global Environmental Fund (GEF) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

**KEYWORDS:** Communication, teambuilding, involvement, awareness, education