

# 9. Artisanal fisheries in the context of sea globalization

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Artisanal fisheries is a key sector of the economy, particularly for neighboring countries around the Mediterranean Sea and in the intertropical zone, which according to the FAO, employ 90% of the sector's workforce. Artisanal fisheries contribute significantly to food security and poverty reduction. In Africa and Asia, more than 50% of animal protein is supplied by fish. Artisanal fisheries are organized around a rich natural and cultural heritage, yet find themselves in danger, due to the globalization of exploitation, trade, and fisheries management policies.

A wide range of marine professionals are concerned not only by artisanal fisheries but also by other forms of exploitation

of fishery resources (shellfish harvesting, marine farming...). This world, which is dominated by men, should not underestimate the role of women. While in many countries (notably the Pacific), women are prohibited from embarking, at least 20% of those directly involved in fishing activities are women and their role is predominant in the seafood value chains (processing, distribution, consumption).

## Different sustainability issues

Given the diversity of actors, exploitation techniques, and contexts, the ecological, socio-

cultural and economic stakes are highly contrasted, and three aspects are subject to controversies. First, artisanal fishers are seen as predators, exerting anarchic and unsustainable pressure on resources, held responsible for the erosion of marine biodiversity. It is certain that since the 1950s, particularly in southern countries, the sector has undergone a phenomenal explosion, with a tenfold increase in catches between 1950 and 1995, an increase in regional and international demand and trade, an amplification of migratory movements, as well as an extension of fishing territories. Growth is such that from the 1990s on, scientists, relayed by NGOs, have begun denouncing the plundering of the sea, leading to changes in public policies. The



A rich and diversified world (with economic, social, nutritional implications). Left: Xuan Thuy landing in Vietnam. Right: Mbour landing in Senegal. © M.-C. CORMIER-SALEM. ■

development of fishery targeting shark fins, and fueling the Southeast Asian market, is a good illustration of the consequences of overfishing. This practice, from Mauritania to Madagascar and throughout Asia, is often carried out by young opportunistic fisher units. Many ethnographic studies show that the sea and its resources are not free of access, but rather common goods, collectively controlled by artisanal fishing communities, through traditional institutions, and that privatization or coercive public measures may lead to the decline or even disappearance of these communities. Another premise is that artisanal fishers are marginal and poor populations, poorly equipped to withstand competition, particularly from industrial fishing, and are confronted with many conflicts. The sea was long considered as an empty – and dangerous – territory, on which communities turned their backs. Only minority and dominated populations would have been forced to take refuge there.

While it is necessary to denounce the determinism and the historicity of such attitudes, the fact remains that, for a long time, sea peoples formed a world apart, on the fringes of continents, neglected and unknown, and there is an acute lack of data concerning them. What we do know, however, is that their health is better than that of hinterland farmers, notably because of the availability of many resources, which formed the basis of a diet rich in animal proteins and salt, and their location at the land-sea interface, which encouraged trade. Furthermore, many stories and media spotlight the qualities of proud, hard-working people who have the courage to face the sea, to such an extent that

marine safety programs are often hard to implement, since wearing a life jacket tends to undermine a fisherman's virility. The complexity of fishing systems is reflected in the diversity of socio-professional status. The asymmetry of resources between artisanal and industrial fisheries is obvious in EEZs subject to the regulation of fishing effort; the conflicts are real, due to the lack of sufficient control by the fisheries administration. Yet, it is also worth noting the frequent arrangements reached in Africa where artisanal fishermen's pirogues are towed by trawlers because they are able to access bedrocks rich in demersal species, and their catches supply industrial fisheries.

A third controversy concerns the predicted disappearance of these activities in the face of climate change, the urbanization and concreting of the coastline, the commodification of nature, neoliberalism and the globalization of governance of the sea, including the signing of unequitable fishing agreements, to the detriment of communities of artisanal fishers. While there is reason to question the environmental and social vulnerability of coastal communities, their innovative and organizational capacities should be underlined, as evidenced by the consolidation of fisheries workers groups, made up of both men and women from 33 countries who, since 1997, have been organizing a

world day (November 21) as well as running a global forum.

## Towards sustainable local alternatives

Artisanal fisheries are now on the agenda of national and international policies, from blue carbon, blue wefts, to the blue economy. How can artisanal fishers contribute to the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services? Lessons can be learnt from the initiatives taken by these communities, both in the development of local conventions on fishing territories and in the recognition of Autochthonous and Community Heritage Areas (ACAC), which contribute to the reflection on nature-based solutions, in the field of heritage building and ecotourism development and, more broadly, maritime heritage, or the promotion of seafood products through labels such as OVOP "One Village, One product", initiated almost 40 years ago in a Japanese fishing village.

The main challenge is the implementation of conservation and valorization measures for marine biodiversity, in other words, ensuring the effectiveness of co-management, and the participation of sea peoples in the government of their territory.

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