

The Thievery of Fish

Two veterans from West Africa discuss how fisheries agreements with the European Union ought to evolve, in the light of the ongoing review of the Common Fisheries Policy

In April 2009, the European Union (EU) initiated the third review and reform process in the history of its Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). A public consultation this year will feed into a reform process over the next three years. Following that, and based on a proposal from the European Commission (EC), the European Parliament and the Council will then decide on a new 'basic regulation', that is, a new CFP, in 2013.

The International Fishing Policy represents one of four policy pillars of the CFP under review. The policy includes the management of EU fleets in distant (third-country and international) waters, and covers the EU's engagement in international fisheries policy forums, such as the regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). Fisheries agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and other third countries are, therefore, also under review.

The last CFP reform in 2002 led to a transition from the more commercial-style 'pay, fish and go' fisheries agreements to 'fisheries partnership agreements' (FPAs). FPAs strive to adopt a more comprehensive and co-operative approach with the aim of "strengthening partner countries' capacity to ensure sustainable fisheries in their own waters".

Under the current review, the EC is taking the opportunity to see how the FPAs can be improved, including in ways that promote good governance and development in the partner country, and lessen the financial burden on EU taxpayers. The EC is also

giving consideration to "the promotion of aquaculture development in third countries and to increase business opportunities for EU aquaculture firms, in the framework of the external dimension of the CFP".

In the following section, two seasoned veterans from West Africa, who have witnessed firsthand the effect of EU international fishing policy in their respective countries, give their views on how EU fisheries

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relations should be conducted in the future, particularly on how fisheries agreements between EU and West Africa need to evolve.

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FPA protocols

AB: Even if we have just signed a new FPA protocol with the EU, primarily for tuna fishing, it is important both for us and for the other ACP countries, to

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think about how we would like these agreements to evolve. I must also point out that the EU is not the only foreign fishing power with which we sign agreements. We also have an agreement with China, but which has not, up to now, been renegotiated. It seems to me that today our people have the overall perception that we get few benefits from these agreements with foreign countries, including with the EU.

I will give you an example concerning Guinea. A particular cause of the riots of January 2007, which led the government to prohibit the export of basic staples, including fishery products, was the high price of basic food products. And the most expensive item in the Guinean housewife's shopping basket is fish. Meanwhile, we had a fisheries agreement with the EU, with a provision for local landings to supply our markets. But the infrastructure required to conserve the fish, as well as fish from the artisanal sector, a crucial supplier for local markets, is non-existent. Consequently, the implementation of that provision from the fisheries agreement did not have the anticipated results. People find it inconceivable that they should sell access to their fish resources to foreigners when there is a scarcity of fish on the local market, and whatever fish is available is both expensive and of bad quality. For me, this example highlights the need for a real partnership that

should be centred on the development needs in our countries and should envisage how the EU can help us fulfil these needs.

DG: Since 2006 we have not had a fisheries agreement in Senegal. Yet, the impact of the EU fleets on food security for our people remains a pertinent issue. The fish we find on our plates, especially of those of the poorest, are the small pelagics, particularly sardinella. We know that giant European trawlers are catching sardinella off the Mauritanian and Moroccan coasts, thanks to their fisheries agreements with those countries. But, as these small pelagic stocks are shared among our countries, we are also affected. The sardinella caught in Morocco or in Mauritania, within the framework of the agreements with the EU, will never reach the Senegalese artisanal fishermen's nets. Today, what worries us is that the catch quotas of large European trawlers for their own waters have been drastically reduced. To compensate for that, they will now search for greater fishing possibilities off west Africa. If that happens, there will inevitably be negative impacts on our artisanal fishing activities.

AB: There is a real choice here before our governments because, if I am not mistaken, the large European trawlers that fish for small pelagics unload part of their catches in west Africa, where the market demand for fish is great. A better option for our governments to ensure supplies for local markets may be to reserve this fishery for European trawlers as they are able to land good-quality raw material—frozen fish—rather than leave the fish for the artisanal sector, which, because of infrastructural problems, is not able to offer the same quality of product.

Food security

DG: For us, food security is something that depends first and foremost on the state of our resources. If the sardinella stocks are overexploited in west Africa, I don't see how that will contribute to reinforcing food security. Thanks to the Sub-Regional Fisheries Committee (SRFC), and particularly its project

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Sekou (left) and Mohamed, teenagers helping out with the fishing in Guinea Conakry. Fisheries agreements between the EU and West Africa should promote sustainable fisheries

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With its increasing dependence on fish from third countries, including developing countries, to supply its markets, and with one of the largest long-distance fishing fleets in the world, the EU, through its fisheries policy, has important impacts on developing countries' fisheries. There is no doubt that the process initiated to review and reform the CFP will also affect developing countries.

As for the future of EU-ACP fisheries relations, the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA) insists that the EU should propose to developing countries a framework for fisheries governance that establishes an open dialogue, with the participation of civil society, on how sustainable fisheries can be promoted in the partner countries. This should be on the basis of the third country's priorities for the sector, in terms of fisheries management, but also in terms of food security, support for integrated coastal communities' development, value-added processing, and regional/international trade operations.

This framework should mobilize the necessary funding to achieve these priorities but should no longer pay for EU fleet access. This requires good co-ordination among the various EU services dealing with third countries' fisheries issues (fisheries and maritime policy, development co-operation, sanitary aspects, etc.).

Access costs to third countries' waters within such a framework should be fully paid for by EU boatowners. Access for EU boatowners should be restricted to those operators who can demonstrate that their operations fit with EU sustainable fisheries development criteria, as jointly defined by the two parties (such as the use of selective gear, history of compliance with legislation, the number and quality of jobs created, whether the fish caught is destined for human consumption, etc.) and where there is no competition with the local small-scale sector, which should be given priority access.

Looking at the EU fish markets and the future of ACP-EU fish trade, CFFA feels that, in a global context of decreasing fish resources, it is important to ensure that fishermen, in developing countries as well as in Europe, receive a fair price for their fish, so that they can catch less, and contribute to the establishment of sustainable fisheries, while enjoying decent working and living conditions. There is, therefore, a need for a fundamental change of the European consumer's approach to fish consumption, to become compatible with a model of fishing that is environmentally and socioeconomically sustainable, and which promotes lower volumes of catches and better prices for fishermen. In short, consumers should eat high-quality products and pay a fair price, even if it means they eat less fish.

An important condition for higher prices for fishermen is for them to get better organized and informed about markets and prices. In Europe, a price-monitoring agency, combined with producers' organizations, could influence prices. Particular attention should be paid on how to organize the dialogue between the producers and big retailers, who are highly organized and tend to impose low prices on the producers.

Such a situation, where fishermen do not receive a fair price for their fish, also exists in the third countries where the EU has partnerships, either through EPAs or FPAs. In granting support to these third countries for promoting sustainable fisheries, trade-related aspects should be included.

—Extracts from CFFA's preliminary comments on the European Commission's Green Paper for the reform of the European Common Fisheries Policy



A woman in Bongolon, Guinea, standing in front of an inactive surveillance boat. West African nations need more monitoring, control and surveillance mechanisms

on the sustainable management of small pelagics, we now know that the regional sardinella stocks are showing signs of overexploitation. We find this very disturbing, since these stocks fluctuate a lot from one year to another, according to climatic conditions. When bad conditions make sardinella scarce, and, at the same time, the fishing efforts of the EU fleet increase, the nets of Senegalese artisanal fishers are likely to remain empty of sardinella. That will not only directly affect our incomes but also supplies to the local markets. Moreover, while it is true that these trawlers now supply certain west African markets, tomorrow they may go elsewhere if it is more profitable for them. However, we, artisanal fishers from Senegal, will always be here to feed our people.

AB: I completely share your views about the role of the artisanal fishing sector in supplying local markets. In Guinea, the relations between the coastal communities and the interior of the country are very important and dynamic. Women from the fishing sector process and sell fish products far inland. Some undertake trips of several hundred kilometres, and bring back other food products, such as shea butter.

There is a real flow of commerce, which helps create bonds between the various communities and groups in our country. As I conceive it, the role of the State and the EU as a partner in fisheries is to help formalize and improve the conditions under which these commercial flows happen, both inside the country and within the larger region, for example, by improving the infrastructure for fish conservation and processing and transport. It seems that can be done within the framework of the regional economic partnership agreements (EPAs), but it would be also important to find a mechanism to ensure that our bilateral fisheries agreements with the EU are complementary. We must also make great efforts to harmonize the access conditions offered under the fisheries agreements with various foreign countries, and also make them conform to Guinean legal provisions.

Partnership agreements

DG: Our professional artisanal fishing organizations have discussed these partnership agreements, including EPAs and FPAs. But when we are at sea, we find boats of European origin operating there, outside of any of these agreements, which raises many questions for us. In Senegal, most of our

resources are overexploited, and our professional organizations are taking initiatives to rationalize the sector, through the introduction of fishing permits, registration of *pirogues*, and so on. But our fishermen wonder why they should reduce their own fishing efforts, when foreign trawlers can engage in unsustainable fishing because the authorities turn a blind eye to it. How is it that although our authorities decreed a freeze of the fishing effort in 2006 for coastal fisheries, today, when there is no longer a fisheries agreement between Senegal and the EU, there are twice as many trawlers of European origin in our waters as in 2006?

These trawlers are supposedly 'Senegalized'. But what do they bring to Senegal? Their captains are Spanish, the fish they catch goes to Spain, and they directly compete with our *pirogues* in the fishing zones. Even if they do create some jobs, how many others do they destroy in our sector? Really, there is a major problem of transparency in how access to our resources is granted.

AB: Indeed, there must be the greatest degree of transparency in the way we implement our fisheries policies, especially concerning access to resources, and the allocation of fishing licences, in particular. That also could be a topic for the partnership with the EU. The EU should make proposals on this matter, and not wash its hands off the issue of transparency and good governance by citing the sovereignty of third countries. You know, there is now an initiative to improve transparency for the exploitation of mining resources in our country. Well, I think the EU should contribute to launching a similar initiative for the management of fishery resources. I am persuaded that our populations and our governments are ready to discuss a formal framework to improve transparency in the exploitation of our fishery resources.

DG: Greater transparency will also help us fight illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. True, we need more monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) mechanisms, but it is also the absence of political will—in

our coastal States as well as in foreign fishing States—that explains why the fish thieves can act with impunity. Some of our States which, by day, strongly advocate fighting against IUU fishing are the same ones that, by night, behave like true 'countries of convenience', giving asylum to boats that they cannot control and that contribute to the plundering of our fish, to the detriment of our fishermen and our populations.

AB: On this issue, an important component, introduced in recent years into our fisheries agreement protocol with the EU, is the support for improving the MCS capacities of our countries. For example, in Guinea, we were provided with a surveillance boat. Coupled with an initiative for greater transparency, these efforts could improve fisheries governance, and benefit our populations.

DG: Of course, that is why we view with interest the new European regulation to fight IUU fishing. If this regulation is applied without penalizing the trade of products legally caught by the artisanal fishing sector, it could help fight the fish thieves. But for that, it is necessary that we are closely associated with the implementation of the European regulation. For this, as for other issues, the voices of professional fishers should be heard, and their experiences included in the dialogue between our countries and the EU.

At the end of 2008, with colleagues of eight other west African countries, we decided to set up a confederation of west African artisanal fishing sector professionals. One of our objectives is to become a mouthpiece, as well as a source of proposals, for the implementation of sustainable fisheries in our region.

We believe that if people in the EU are serious when they say they want to support sustainable fishing in our countries, it will be necessary that the partnerships that they propose—FPAs, EPAs—are rooted in the participation of our coastal communities, and in a guarantee that our people are properly informed about the issues at stake within these partnerships. 3

For more



<http://agritrade.cta.int/index.php/en/Fisheries>

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http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/index_en.htm

The CFP Reform Subsite

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/consultation_en.htm

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