

# The issue of human rights in the context of artisanal fisheries in Senegal



**By Aliou Sall**  
**Centre de Recherche sur les Technologies**  
**Intermédiaires de Pêche (CREDETIP)**

Since the colonial times, artisanal fisheries have been left to its own demise. There has always been a push from the decision-makers to modernize Senegalese SSF. The first attempts to motorize pirogues occurred in 1953 during the colonial regime. Other innovations followed up to the present day through an approach tinged with a form of 'social Darwinism'. For instance, the Senegalese State's goal, as early as the mid-1960s, was to introduce 12m trawlers, which were to gradually replace pirogues. Artisanal fish processing and micro fish marketing controlled by women were not spared from this narrow vision. The attempts to modernize fish distribution channels were not successful. For decades now the decisions-makers' attempts to replace the traditional wooden canoe with fiberglass are faced with obstacles, as the intimate relationship between the fisher and his boat — a culturally significant relationship — is being neglected. Few technological innovations were accepted by communities. The main initiatives that have led SSF to a high level of development (65% of total volume exported) is thanks only to the ingenuity of the fishing communities. This illustrates a lack of sensitivity towards the multidimensional merits of SSF; it also testifies of their capacity to persevere through thick and thin. Evidently, the main role of SSF is still not well recognized.

In addition, communities fear that the current promotion of Blue Economy leads towards further marginalizing that will ultimately drown this vital sector. In fact, Blue Economy ignores the fact that 'fishing' is a 'cultural identifier'. This is all the more worrying today as, with new gas and oil fields discovered, SSF communities risk being sacrificed. Senegal, just like the overwhelming majority of the countries of the African continent, is changing its fishing policy in favour of the Blue Economy as a benchmark framework, as promoted by the African Union and the World Bank. Finally, the fishing permit introduced by World Bank might jeopardize the traditional right to fish for SSF in the future.

**Photo:** *Fish-landing site in Guet Ndar, northern part of Senegal. 2019. ©Aliou Sall*

**Location:**  
Senegal

**Ecosystem type:**  
Marine

**Main gear:**  
Traditional boats Cast net, Dredge, Drift net, Fixed net, Gillnet, Gleaning, Harpoon, Harvesting machines, Hook and line, Long line, Seine net, Surrounding net, Traps, Trawls

**Target species:**  
(1) Coastal pelagic resources: sardinella, horse mackerel, mackerel, etc.; (2) Coastal demersal resources: white shrimp, red mullet, sea bream, grouper, cuttlefish, octopus, sole, etc.

**Vessel type:**  
Planked dugout

**No. of small-scale fishers:**  
68,175

” ... The right to have a say in matters relating to fishing policies is being increasingly questioned, creating obstacles for traditional, legitimate leaders of fishing communities. Two factors are driving this process: (i) authorities' decision to consider only the people in charge of local structures who have been assigned within the framework of the World Bank projects and (ii) a new trend determined to promote sub-regional, regional or even continental strategies... “

## Justice in context

### Types of justice:

- **Distributive**
- **Social**
- **Economic**
- **Market**
- **Infrastructure/wellbeing**
- Regulatory
- **Procedural**
- **Environmental**
- COVID-19 related

Social injustice is generated and maintained by the inability of decision-makers to differentiate between 'Law in the singular' and 'Rights in the plural'. These basic rights are being gradually threatened:

- 1.** The right to settle on the coast in order to live and work there. This right has been called into question for decades with the development of seaside tourism and, more recently, with oil and gas exploration;
- 2.** The right to access certain services provided by marine ecosystems, including: supply of products for consumption or sale in order to acquire other goods or services; access to cultural services of marine ecosystems such as animals or aquatic plants intended for traditional medicine. These rights are being questioned with the establishment of certain MPAs, which are increasingly privatized in a subtle way under the cloak of biodiversity protection. In reality, a luxury ecotourism has been developing that is consequently denying local communities access to resources;
- 3.** The longstanding question of the right for women who specialize in the artisanal processing of products, traditionally done on the coast, very close to the landing sites, to install their work-units (i.e. drying racks). This issue is driven by tourism and the requirements of the European standards. It is common to see women being displaced far away from their usual sites in order to make way for infrastructure that is intended to ensure the quality of products intended for export;
- 4.** The right to have a say in matters relating to fishing policies is being increasingly questioned, creating obstacles for traditional, legitimate leaders of fishing communities. Two factors are driving this process: (i) authorities' decision to consider only the people in charge of local structures who have been assigned within the framework of the World Bank projects and (ii) a new trend determined to promote sub-regional, regional or even continental strategies. This latter approach is endorsed by institutions such as the FAO, African Union, etc. As a result, we are witnessing the emergence of new leaders who, while having completed higher studies and having mastered new communication techniques, still lack the necessary legitimacy, and who are disabling 'traditional voices' from participating in fisheries decision-making. Traditional fishing communities consider this marginalization of their genuine leaders as a major issue.

### Definition of small-scale fisheries

According to the Fisheries Code, artisanal fishing vessel is: "Any open vessel that uses means to capture fish that is not mechanically operated and whose only means of conservation is ice or salt."

”

*... in Senegal, no household can go without fish for more than two days. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of the population is unaware of the extent to which the basic rights of 'fishers' and 'women in fisheries' are violated on a daily basis due to harmful public policies on the one hand, and the development of other competitive sectors of activity in coastal areas on the other...*

“

## Dealing with justice

The issues described in this chapter are not being adequately addressed for the following reasons:

**(i)** fishing communities are very poorly represented by leaders who do not have the required training, nor the legitimacy and life experience to integrate the issues of which they speak. On the contrary, we have seen no improvement in the way these leaders operate and their discourse has for some time revolved simply around fishing agreements; **(ii)** certain, very committed NGOs position themselves as defenders of the rights of communities but are always focused on fishing agreements and occasionally on IUU fishing; **(iii)** these issues are more properly dealt with through social movements in other places, such as Asia, than in West Africa. In terms of academia, when compared to other cultural spheres, Senegalese academia is still not used to engage with the SSF issues. Unfortunately, it's unlikely to see any effort being done by the Government.

In other words, these 'fundamental human-right related issues' are generally not included — at least in the case of West Africa — in the fisheries agendas, neither by NGOs nor by fishers' organizations, let alone by civil society organizations. But if these issues are not taken into account, this failure can be explained (although not justified) by a context marked by the longstanding marginalization of SSF communities. For example, in Senegal, no household can go without fish for more than two days. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of the population is unaware of the extent to which the basic rights of 'fishers' and 'women in fisheries' are violated on a daily basis due to harmful public policies on the one hand, and the development of other competitive sectors of activity in coastal areas on the other.



### How to cite

Sall, A. (2021). The issue of human rights in the context of artisanal fisheries in Senegal. In: Kerezi, V. & Chuenpagdee, R. (Eds.) Blue Justice For Small-Scale Fisheries: A Global Scan, Volume 2. TBTI Global Publication Series, St. John's, NL, Canada.