

# ***Fish on the menu but for how much longer?***

## ***Senegalese fisheries in search of a sustainable future***



Senegalese fishermen at work in their pirogues © Greenpeace Africa

***Unlike many of its neighbours, Senegal has a very large local fishery sector which plays an essential role in local food security. But tens of thousands of fishermen are too many, especially since they have to share the seas with foreign competitors and Russian pirates, which is why fish stocks have declined dramatically. Fortunately, the Senegalese government and the fisheries associations are acting.***

### ***Senegal and its fish***

In Belgium, we eat an average of 10 kilos of fish per year while the Senegalese consume 28 kilos of fish on average per year. In comparison, the sea is far more important for Senegal's local food security and fish is an essential source of animal protein. Luckily, the Atlantic is very generous for West Africa: from December to May warm wind from the continent blows over the sea while the Gulf Stream sends cold water – and plenty of fish – towards the coast. This explains the strong concentration of mostly smaller fish such as sardines and mackerel in the Exclusive Economic Zones of the West African coastal states.

Fisheries are also very important for employment and the economy. An estimated 15% of the working population builds boats, fishes or works further down the value chain. Mainly women process, dry, smoke and sell fish. Fish is increasingly an export product for Senegal. In 2011, 39% of the catch, up from 27% in 2006, was exported.

### ***EEZ***

An Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a 370 kilometre zone extending from the land edge of coastal states, which is prescribed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Within this zone the state has specific rights over mineral exploitation, fisheries and scientific research. A state that asserts EEZ claims, is responsible for managing the EEZ and it can also sell fishing rights to foreign boats. Senegal's coast line is 718 km long and its EEZ extends over 159,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

### ***Artisanal fisheries***

Traditionally, Senegalese fishermen went to sea in pirogues. Nowadays, boats are getting bigger and GPS technology is used to locate the best fishing grounds. And especially, there are more and more boats.

In 2011, the FAO estimated the number of motorised *pirogues* at 15,000; i.e. three times more than 30 years ago. This growth is mainly caused by a lack of regulation and government subsidies for fuel and fishing gear. "Everyone can be a fisherman. This has caused the local fishery sector to grow out of proportion," says Gaoussou Gueye of APRAPAM, the Association for the Promotion of Responsible Actors in Artisanal Fisheries in Mbour. This organisation has become one of the main voices for local fishermen and promotes sustainability.

In Senegal, 'artisanal' fisheries are good for 85% of landings. As a consequence they have a major responsibility as regards the overfishing of fish stocks before the coast. All Senegalese fishermen will tell you the issue is an urgent one. Over the last few years they have had to go further out at sea, they catch less and have noticed that the fish are getting smaller and smaller.

## Thiof

Artisanal fisheries have a major impact on fish stocks as is apparent with white grouper, locally known as *thiof*. This fish used to be very popular in Senegal, but is now threatened with extinction. Thiof are hermaphrodite fish, i.e. they mature as females and have the ability to change sex later. Because mainly larger fish are caught, only the females remain in the end. Greenpeace Africa started a petition against the Casino supermarket chain under the slogan: "I want Casino to stop selling the last of our Thiof".

## Industrial fisheries

The dramatic drop in fishing stock has many other causes. Since the establishment of EEZs all West-African countries smell money. They sell fishing rights and consequently European, Russian, Korean and Chinese trawlers appear before their coasts.

These industrial fishing ships are equipped with the most modern search equipment and can catch up to 250 tonnes per day, which 100 Senegalese boats would need a year for. As they process and freeze the fish or turn it into fishmeal, such factory ships can stay at sea for months.

The devastating practices of industrial fisheries are known: trawler chains disturb the seabed and marine mammals and millions of fish are lost since this 'bycatch' is thrown overboard dead.



The Russian ship Oleg Naydenov © Greenpeace Africa

## Piracy

In addition, there is fishing piracy. As they know West African states can hardly control their EEZ, foreign ships do not bother about the quota agreed or about licences. Africa's west coast is known to have the globe's highest percentage of illegal fishing. "One must see it to believe it", writes Tafsir Malick Ndiaye, a judge at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. "Many vessels fish in areas for which they do not have a licence, remain at sea for years and conduct illegal transshipments of their catches to other vessels."

It is Greenpeace's merit that it has put the issue on the political agenda. In 2001, 2006 and 2010, Greenpeace's boat, the Arctic Sunrise, cruised West African waters to research the impact of the foreign fishing fleet. Russian and Lithuanian ships were regularly spotted in forbidden zones.



Action at the Senegalese coast © Pierre Gleizes Greenpeace

## Elections

At the beginning of 2012, in the run-up to the presidential elections, the Arctic Sunrise returned to Senegal to bring together artisanal fishermen and raise awareness among them about the need for sustainable fishery practices. With the newly established Platform of Artisanal Players of Senegal's Fisheries (PAPAS) a campaign train was launched with the slogan 'My voice, my future'. In the Main basse sur la Sardinelle report, Greenpeace documents not only the practices of Russian pirate fisheries but also how former Senegalese ministers broke local legislation in an attempt to legalise piracy.

Obviously, corruption is suspected. Macky Sall, the opposition's presidential candidate, met the campaign train and promised improvements if he was elected. When Greenpeace spotted the Russian ship Oleg Naydenov in a forbidden zone again, it was the last straw and Sall's newly-installed government withdrew the licences of all 29 industrial ships that were allowed to fish for smaller species.

The Senegalese marine moored the Oleg Naydenov, a notorious repeat offender, to the great joy of local fisheries in January 2014 after another such breach. The Russians, who still invoke regularisations by the former minister, accuse Senegal's politicians of being influenced by the green lobby. In a strong reaction, Greenpeace claims that pirates such as the Oleg Naydenov block the sustainable development of fisheries.



Traditional Senegalese plate © Norm Copeland

The organisation calls for the Senegalese government to take up regional leadership in the matter because Russian ships follow the migrating fish schools into Moroccan, Mauritanian and Senegalese waters, irrespective of borders or licences.

## Europe

Even though Greenpeace also lists ships under Lithuanian and Latvian flag in its reports, the European Union has always strongly defended against the allegations that it is responsible for overfishing in West African coastal waters. In 1979 Senegal and the then EEC signed a framework agreement on fishing rights for European ships. That agreement was renegotiated 17 times through protocols until talks broke down in 2006.

Senegalese politicians demanded that overfishing by European ships stop. The European point of view is completely different. Because of the fast depletion of fish stocks, Europe put a decrease of catches on the negotiation tables combined with a shift towards financial compensations to the local fishery sector. Especially the latter proposal did not really fall on good ground with the Senegalese ministers at the time...So, no new protocols have been signed since. Some Spanish outfitters solved this creatively by associating with Senegalese companies and operating under Senegalese flag.

## Common Fisheries Policy against waste

After long consultation within the European Union bodies, the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has been in force since 1 January 2014. Sustainability is the core message behind all texts. Only fish from sustainable fishery practices may be traded.

There are quota (only binding from 2020 onwards though) for a 'maximum sustainable yield', to allow fish stocks to recover. It is prohibited to discard bycatch (only fully from 2019 onwards though), the European fishing fleet will be cut, small-scale fishery will get better protection and aquaculture is promoted.

## Towards a new protocol?

Sustainability is also the vogue word in the international chapters of Europe's new Common Fisheries Policy. In future, the Union wants to invest in scientific research into fish stocks through the bilateral agreements with African countries, and European ships will only fish zones that the partner country cannot or does not want to fish. Partner countries are compensated with access rights and financial support for the local fishery sector to make it sustainable. At the end of 2013 European and Senegalese officials started up negotiations again.

In a memorandum APRAPAM clearly stated that a new protocol may only deal with tuna. Gaoussou Gueye: "Fishermen experience it every day and scientists confirm it: almost all smaller fish species along the coast are overfished. Selling rights to European ships would be a disaster for the local fishery sector. Consequently, Senegal can only commit through a new protocol for Atlantic tuna farther at sea, if scientific advice for the survival of the species is taken into account."



Senegalese harbours are always busy © Evgeni Zotov

## Local priorities

Talking with Europe and not giving way to the Russians is essential for all who depend on fishing, but for APRAPAM Senegal's Minister of Fisheries should not forget the main priority: reorganise the local sector. To sustainably develop Senegal's fisheries, APRAPAM demands better registration of boats and licences, tougher control of fishing methods and quota and more transparency.

To this end, APRAPAM proposes to decentralise management and have fishing communities participate in local structures. Regional and national instances must coordinate the efforts and work closely with scientific instances to decide how much fish may be caught. In addition, APRAPAM asks the authorities to take measures to give the most threatened species respite, for instance by creating marine reserves.

In some harbours such as in Mbour and Joal, artisanal fisheries show the way by raising awareness about not fishing young, immature fish and not fishing at night at certain times of the year. "All parties are willing and we have been meeting a lot over the last year," concludes Gueye. "Now is the time to act."

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## Certified fish?

Responsible consumers can find fish with the blue MSC logo at supermarkets. Worldwide, the Marine Stewardship Council is by far the main organisation for labelling sustainable fisheries products. "For us, artisanal fishermen, MSC certification is not realistic," reacts Gueye. "This is both due to the cost of certification and to the huge quantity of data required."

MSC recognises this point of criticism and that is why it has developed specific criteria for artisanal fisheries that start from an assessment of fishery risks. There are a few examples in South America, but Africa remains a blind spot on the MSC map.



Hope for a sustainable future for the Senegalese fishermen © Stuart Gaunt

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