

## **Protect Small Scale Fisheries to Protect Aquatic Environment**

Small scale fisheries play a crucial role in the lives of coastal and non-coastal dwellers in Africa – providing fish, means of livelihoods, employment, contributes to both local and national economies and with artisanal fishers serving as custodians of aquatic environments. Fish meets the nutritional needs of more than 30%<sup>i</sup> of the African population; and in fact, they depend on fish for animal protein and micronutrients that are essential for healthy living. More than one-fourth (27 percent) of the population living within 5 km from the coast depend on small scale fishing for job opportunities.<sup>ii</sup> Artisanal fishing are also rooted in some cultural practices in Africa and possess symbols of identification and heritage<sup>iii</sup>.

### **What are the main human rights challenges facing small-scale fishers and fish workers in your country?**

Offshore, nearshore, swamps and shallow waters oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities as well as their associated infrastructures have proven to be a major problem for small scale fishers and their communities. On account of these activities, pollution arising from spills as well as deliberate, reckless and continuous gas flaring are destroying aquatic environments - causing environmental degradation, increasing the acidity of sea water, promoting dead zones and making these aquatic environments inhabitable for marine life. Consequently, artisanal fishers lose their livelihoods and in many other cases, have to retool their fishing gears to get to high seas where they are also faced with other issues including, piracy.

Because of these installations, some fishing communities are highly militarized and a lot of human rights abuses going on as well as restrictions to certain traditional fishing grounds. To add to the plethora of issues already faced by small scale fishers, climate change induced impacts also affect them the most – with coastal erosion, ocean encroachment (oceanification), dangerous and devastating storms, etc. These have led to damage and loss of properties by these same already stressed social class.

### **What good practices could be shared from your country that has strengthened the recognition, protection and remedies for small-scale fishers and fish workers?**

There is currently no known practice of cooperation and integration of small-scale fishers and fish workers that allow their voices heard in policy spaces. The only mode of organization had been different unions formed by these fishers but the unions have not achieved much.

### **To what extent small-scale fisheries, coastal communities, and fishery workers have been included in national and international policy processes related to the fisheries sector?**

In Nigeria, like in many other African countries, artisanal fishers are almost not recognized for the roles they play in ensuring food sovereignty. They are often a neglected sector that are not consulted, prior and informed consent not solicited, and they are not even invited to participate in discussions for policies formulation(s). These people (artisanal fishers) are knowledge holders – with lived experiences

of the functioning of the marine and freshwater ecosystems and they hold the keys to ensuring a resilient and sustainable aquatic environment.

**What are the main concerns regarding working conditions in the fisheries supply chain? Which parts of the supply chain are the most dangerous or problematic?**

It is quite unfortunate that small scale fishers take a beating for the crimes they do not commit. These are artisanal fishers that fish with different specific sizes of fishnets and gears, depending on the target fish stock. Industrial fishing on the other hand, are the ones responsible for IUU, overcapacity and overfishing – trawling at a sweep, indiscriminately, all manner of sizes of fish and including nontarget species. They have direct interference with seabed and delicate corals and even fish in vulnerable marine ecosystems<sup>iv</sup>. These points need to be stated clearly to set the narratives straight.

Also, Fishers are losing their traditional fishing grounds to various sandfilling and reclamation projects – where known fishing grounds are taken over by governments for mega city projects. Modification of creeks and other waterbodies to suite certain projects also contributes to the destruction of fishing areas. For example, in Finima, Bonny Island, Nigeria, over 30 creeks have been blocked to ensure the continuous existence of the NLNG facility in the community.

The future of small scale fisheries depends on the active participation of the sector in policy formulations, recognition and protection of their rights to decent livelihoods in fishing and the recognition of the sector for the roles it plays in ensuring poverty eradication, food sovereignty, environmental protection and sustainability, socio-cultural and economic growth.

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<sup>i</sup>. Unlocking the Potential of Fish to Improve Food and Nutrition Security in Sub-Saharan Africa:

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/1/318>

<sup>ii</sup>. Data unravelling how small-scale fisheries provide jobs for millions of people in Africa: [New data highlight the hidden jobs effects of small-scale fisheries \(worldbank.org\)](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Ensuring Access to Artisanal Fishing for Local Communities: <https://oceanhealthindex.org/goals/artisanal-fishing-opportunities/>

<sup>iv</sup> A Review of Impact Assessments for Deep-Sea Fisheries on the High Seas Against the FAO Deep-Sea Fisheries Guidelines: <https://www.dosi-project.org/wp-content/uploads/Fisheries-Working-Group-2022-Report.pdf>