



## **Decent working conditions in the artisanal fisheries sector**

### **An essential element for the Covid-19 post-crisis**

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#### **➤ African artisanal fisheries mobilized from the beginning of the pandemic**

Since the pandemic of Covid 19 hit the African coasts, the African Confederation of Professional Organizations of Artisanal Fisheries (CAOPA) and its members have been mobilizing. In early April, in a letter to the African Union and the African governments of the 25 countries where CAOPA has members, we called on decision-makers to take urgent action in consultation with fishermen, fish wholesalers and women processors so that they could continue their activities.

Indeed, the sector is essential for food security of the population and provides, according to FAO, more than ten million jobs for men and women in African coastal communities. To give an example, a canoe fishing small pelagic in Senegal can employ about 100 people from the catch to the consumer's plate.

Measures to combat the pandemic are increasingly difficult for men and women working in African artisanal fisheries.

Restrictions in most African countries on gatherings, movement of people and goods, and the closure of traditional markets for artisanal fisheries products, are making it difficult for the poor to access fish.

Due to the lack of facilities and equipment, the maintenance of hygiene and sanitary measures to combat the disease is also complicated on vessels, landing sites, processing sites and markets.

In addition, women in African artisanal fisheries are particularly affected, as they earn their livelihood on a daily basis. How can they put food on the table for their dependants when their processing activity is reduced by a curfew? Or when strict confinement at home hinders their access to raw materials?

The professional organizations of artisanal fisheries have taken action. In many places, they are raising awareness of the necessary hygiene and remoteness measures that fishing workers must respect. In some cases, they have provided preventive health kits to all those active in the artisanal fisheries value chain.

The professional organizations are thus calling on decision-makers to find ways to enable artisanal fisheries to continue their essential activities: support for cash flow, fish distribution channels, etc.

However, outdated facilities and tools throughout the value chain, lack of sanitary facilities and prevention kits in many artisanal fishing communities remains a challenge.

**For CAOPA, the Covid 19 crisis must be an opportunity to address the long-standing challenges in artisanal fisheries and to improve the hygiene and working conditions of men and women in the sector in the long term.**

➤ **What tools to improve working conditions in the African artisanal fisheries sector?**

International instruments exist to improve working conditions in the artisanal fisheries sector:

- ILO Convention 188 on work in fishing;
- The FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries and the FAO Guide (*under development*) for Social Sustainability in Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains

### ❖ *ILO Convention 188 on Work in Fishing*

The Work in Fishing Convention, adopted in 2007 by representatives of governments, workers and employers at the International Labour Organization (ILO) level, aims *"to ensure that fishermen enjoy decent working conditions on board of fishing vessels with respect to minimum requirements for work on board, conditions of service, accommodation and food, occupational safety and health protection, medical care and social security"*. This text deals with various aspects not covered by previous instruments: repatriation, recruitment, medical care on board, health and safety at work, social protection, compliance and enforcement.

Compared to other ILO instruments dealing with fisheries, this is the first time that a convention also covers artisanal continental and maritime fisheries. The Convention includes in its scope large and small vessels, whether decked or not, and fishermen on board.

Countries that ratify the Convention will have to develop laws, regulations or other measures on a range of issues that are essential to promote safe and decent working conditions in artisanal fisheries, including<sup>1</sup>:

- Fixing a minimum age ;
- Organizing a medical examination;
- Drawing up a crew list;
- Conditions for the repatriation of fishermen;
- Conditions of recruitment, accommodation;
- Sanitary conditions on board;
- Provision of food and drinking water on board;
- Training of crew member(s) to give first aid on board;
- Prevention of industrial accidents, occupational diseases and risks related to work on board;
- Progressive provision of social security protection for fishermen and their families.

The Convention provides for a gradual implementation in order to give some countries the possibility to take more time to apply some provisions for some types of vessels. This provision will be useful for artisanal fisheries where many activities are still informal.

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For more information: ICSF Guide, Understanding the Work in Fishing Convention 2007

[http://aquaticcommons.org/11260/1/ilowc5\\_fr\\_220713.pdf](http://aquaticcommons.org/11260/1/ilowc5_fr_220713.pdf)

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This progressive implementation approach should facilitate the ratification of this text by African countries as it takes into account their difficulties in fulfilling all the obligations of the Convention due to the inadequacies of their infrastructure and institutions.

In addition, for governments to be truly capable of enforcing laws and regulations, a major reorientation or streamlining of the administrations in charge of fisheries, maritime affairs, ship safety and labour will be necessary. Such a development is essential to assist African countries in adopting relevant legislative measures.

Four African countries have ratified ILO Convention 188 on Work in Fishing: Congo (2014), Angola (2016), Namibia (2018), Senegal (2018), and the United States (2019).

**We recommend other African countries to follow the example of these 4 countries and to ratify the ILO Convention 188 on work in fishing, and to seek ways and means to apply it in order to improve the working conditions of artisanal fishermen.**

❖ *FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries and FAO's Guide to Social Sustainability in Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains*

The entire value chain of artisanal fisheries is not covered by ILO Convention 188, especially women in the sector.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, women in African artisanal fisheries, although present throughout the chain, are particularly active in onshore activities not covered by the Convention: the processing and marketing sector.

In most African countries today, however, we cannot but observe that the working conditions of these women are not decent: the women processors work all day long in smoke, sometimes amidst rubbish, without access to sanitation, drinking water or electricity. Often their young children accompany them and live in the same inhuman conditions.

Improving working conditions is one of the main concerns of women in African artisanal fisheries. This concern has been taken into account by the Voluntary Guidelines for

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<sup>2</sup> fishermen who do not work on a vessel, such as fishermen on foot, are also not covered by Convention 188

Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, particularly in the chapters that follow:

### **1. Social development, employment and decent work:**

In this chapter, these Guidelines provide guidance on the socio-economic situation of artisanal fisheries workers and their communities.

*“States should promote social security protection for workers in small-scale fisheries. Les. States should support the development of and access to other services that are appropriate for small-scale fishing communities with regard to, for example, savings, credit and insurance schemes, with special emphasis on ensuring the access of women to such services. States should take steps with a view to the progressive realization of the right of small scale fishers and fish workers to an adequate standard of living and to work in accordance with national and international human rights standards.”*

*All Parties shall endeavour to ensure that occupational health and safety is addressed as an integral part of fisheries management and sector development initiatives.*

*States should take steps with a view to progressively ensure that members of small-scale fishing communities have affordable access to these and other essential services through national and subnational actions, including adequate housing, basic sanitation that is safe and hygienic, safe drinking-water for personal and domestic uses, and sources of energy etc*

*All parties should create conditions for men and women of small-scale fishing communities to fish and to carry out fisheries-related activities in an environment free from crime, violence, organized crime activities, piracy, theft, sexual abuse, corruption and abuse of authority. All parties should take steps to institute measures that aim to eliminate violence and to protect women exposed to such violence in small-scale fishing communities.*

*“Small-scale fisheries actors should recognize the importance of children’s wellbeing and education for the future of the children themselves and of society at large. Children should go to school, be protected from all abuse and have all their rights respected in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child”. From Chapter 6 of the Guidelines*

### **2. Value chains, post-harvest and trade**

The Guidelines recognize that post-harvest activities as well as other activities in the value chain are essential elements of sustainable artisanal fisheries.

*“All parties should recognize the role women often play in the post-harvest subsector and support improvements to facilitate women’s participation in such work. States should ensure that amenities and services appropriate for women are available as required in order to enable women to retain and enhance their livelihoods in the postharvest subsector.”*

*“States should foster, provide and enable investments in appropriate infrastructures, organizational structures and capacity development to support the small-scale fisheries post-harvest subsector in producing good quality and safe fish and fishery products, for both export and domestic markets, in a responsible and sustainable manner.”*

*“States should be support for the setting up and the development of cooperatives, professional organizations of the small-scale fisheries sector and other organizational structures, as well as marketing mechanisms, e.g. auctions, the use of digital technologies, etc..*

*“All parties should avoid post-harvest losses and waste and seek ways to create value addition, building also on existing traditional and local cost-efficient technologies, local innovations and culturally appropriate technology transfers. Environmentally sustainable practices within an ecosystem approach should be promoted, deterring, for example, waste of inputs (water, fuelwood, etc.) in small-scale fish handling and processing”*

*States should facilitate access to local, national, regional and international markets security are equitably addressed. Consultation with concerned stakeholders should be part of these policies and procedures.*

*States should enable access to all relevant market and trade information for stakeholders in the small-scale fisheries value chain. Small-scale fisheries stakeholders must be able to access timely and accurate market information to help them adjust to changing market conditions”. From Chapter 7 of the Guidelines*

On the basis of these Guidelines, CAOPA also participated, with its partners, in the FAO consultation in 2019 on the development of a guide for social sustainability in fisheries value chains, by suggesting the creation of a specific guidance document for artisanal fisheries with references to social aspects and minimum requirements drawn from the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries (VG-SSF Guidelines) and ILO Convention C188 on Work in the Fishing Sector. These guidelines should support all stakeholders, including governments, in using these internationally accepted instruments to promote

socially responsible value chains and to empower men and women in the artisanal fisheries sector.

**We recommend that African countries implement the FAO Voluntary Guidelines to Ensure the Sustainability of Artisanal Fisheries through National Action Plans developed in a transparent, participatory and gender-sensitive manner.**