



World Fisheries Day 2020

CAOPA declaration

The year 2020, for the men and women of African artisanal fisheries, has been marked by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been a source of hardship and concern for the future of our communities and families.

It is almost impossible to comply with the restrictions imposed on gathering people in artisanal fisheries: crew members on the pirogue, buyers rushing to the landing sites, women processors at their site or at the market, all of them have close and constant contacts.

Restrictions on the movement of people and goods, the closure of hotels and restaurants, the closing of borders, the stoppage of air links, have cut artisanal fishing off from its markets - local, regional and even international - and also sometimes from its fishing grounds, when fishermen in neighboring countries. All this has put pressure on the survival of our sector and has also made access to fish difficult for the poorest people in our countries.

Women in African artisanal fisheries have paid a high price. Deprived of raw materials when fishermen no longer go out, cut off from their markets, confined to their homes, their anguish has been, throughout this year 2020, how they could feed their families and contribute to the food security of their country. If artisanal fisheries are allowed to decline, we will face a serious food crisis.

In the year 2020, the lack of policies to support African artisanal fisheries has become glaring.

Where is the access to basic services for fishing communities, whether it is sewerage, access to electricity or drinking water?

Where are the safety measures on board the canoes and at the processing sites, where thousands of women are forced to work in the smoke, amidst the rubbish?

Why are our coastal areas not protected from mangrove destruction? Why are our fishing areas not protected from incursions by industrial trawlers, real 'pirates invited' by our governments, who do not respect anything, but often do so with the fishing authorization given by our governments?

Where are the future perspectives for our daughters and sons, who leave in their hundreds on the dangerous routes of illegal immigration, in the simple hope of overcoming misery and living decently?

This crisis of 2020 will not be the last. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change in our activities: coastal erosion, more frequent droughts or floods, more difficult weather conditions at sea, changes in the type of resources that can be found, etc. We are already seeing the impacts of climate change in our activities.

This is why, for CAOPA, these difficult times we are going through must be an opportunity for governments and stakeholders to react decisively to improve the long-term living and working conditions of men and women throughout the African artisanal fisheries sector.

It is not by pursuing ideas of blue growth based on rapid economic profit, through offshore oil and gas production, through the anarchic development of coastal hotels, or fishmeal factories, that our coastal communities will see their living conditions improve.

The beating heart of the blue economy in Africa is the artisanal fishing that feeds our populations.

We have the tools to make it a buoyant sector for the redeployment of our economies after the Covid-19 crisis. The FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries, as well as Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa: must guide both decision-makers and professionals in this process.

We call on the African Union and its members, in response to the crisis we are experiencing, and also in preparation to the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2022, to become actively involved in the rebuilding of maritime and continental artisanal fishing communities, through the implementation, in a transparent, participatory and gender-sensitive manner, of the Guidelines for Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries.