

Child labour

Growing pains

Child labour in the artisanal fisheries of Senegal was the focus of an ILO study on the worst forms of child labour (See also pg 47)

Senegal's marine artisanal fishing sector was chosen by the International Labour Office of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for an in-depth study on the "worst forms of child labour". The study, titled *Etude sur les pires formes de travail des enfants dans le secteur de la pêche artisanale maritime sénégalaise* (Study on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Senegalese Maritime Artisanal Fishery), was carried out in December 2002 by the Senegalese Institute for Agricultural Research, with the field research conducted by Le Centre de Recherches Océanographiques de Dakar-Thiaroye (CRODT), the Centre for Oceanographic Research at Dakar-Thiaroye. It was contracted by the International Labour Office (ILO/BIT) in the framework of the National Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC/Senegal).

The study's findings highlight that in Senegal's artisanal fishery, over a quarter (26.6 per cent) of the crew embarked are children under the age of 15. In the sector as a whole, child labour represents just under one-third of the workforce (28.8 per cent), 36.5 per cent in boatbuilding and repair workshops, 35.8 per cent in outboard motor workshops, 35 per cent in fish processing and 41 per cent in trade-related activities.

The reasons for the presence of such large numbers of children in the workforce are essentially socio-economic, the study concludes. Child labour, and the conditions under which children work, are culturally accepted and socially entrenched. Generally, child labour is seen in a positive light, particularly in the fishing communities, where it is considered an important part of preparing children for adulthood, and for taking up future responsibilities—a

professional training that is undertaken in the real-life conditions of the sector, where, traditionally, sons follow their fathers, and professional competence is passed down from father to son.

In Senegal, the fisheries sector plays a vital role both in the economy and in society at large, providing, as it does, important foreign exchange earnings, employment and food. There are an estimated 100,000 direct jobs provided in fishing in Senegal, 90 per cent of these being in the artisanal sector. It is further estimated that nationwide up to 600,000 people (17 per cent of the working population) earn their living from fisheries-related activities.

As for food, fish is highly important in the local diet. With an annual per capita fish consumption of 26 kg, fish represents some 75 per cent of the animal protein intake. This is very high when compared to per capita fish consumption generally in sub-Saharan Africa (6-9 kg annually), where fish makes up only 20 per cent of the animal protein intake. In 1999, Senegalese fish exports reportedly earned the country some US\$314 mn, equivalent to twice its debt repayments for that year.

The artisanal fishing sector dominates the Senegalese fishery, accounting for 80 per cent of the fish landings (some 375,000 tonnes in 2002, down from 390,000 in 2000), and employing around 60,000 seagoing fishermen. It is noteworthy that in recent years there has been a huge increase both in the size of the fishing fleet and in the fishing population.

Increased numbers

In the area between Djifere in the south and Saint Louis in the north, which accounts for over 90 per cent of the national artisanal fishing fleet, the numbers of pirogues reportedly increased

from 4,968 in 1982 to 9,761 in 2003. Much of the increase is due to investment in vessels and gear by people leaving the agricultural sector, which has experienced severe crises in recent years.

The workforce too has been swollen by in-migration from the agricultural sector. Landings from the sector have more than doubled over the last 20 years, from around 150,000 tonnes in 1981 to 366,000 tonnes in 2002, prompting considerable concern about sustainability of both fishing livelihoods and the resources on which they depend.

But the sector has proved highly dynamic and adaptable. Motorization has become widespread, with over 90 per cent of the pirogue fleet motorized, and there has been a considerable diversification of fishing operations. Today, large pirogues of up to 20 m are found, and more than 20 different kinds of fishing operations are recognized, including many modern adaptations. The latter include multi-day boats with ice-boxes, squid jigs and long lines. In many areas, there has been a move away from traditional activities that target small pelagics for local markets towards demersal species for export (including squids and octopus). Fishing

migrations to grounds in the waters of neighbouring countries (notably Mauritania) have become more widespread.

The child labour study covered most of Senegal's 700-km coast, including four of the five main maritime areas (Grande Cote, Cap Vert, Petite Cote, and Sine Saloum), with Casamance excluded for reasons of security. Nine main landing centres were selected according to three criteria: the size of the pirogue fleet and number of fishermen, the importance of activities associated with fishing, and the degree of isolation (determining, as it does, access to social services, education and health). Sampling was undertaken according to the nature of the activity, and representative of the size of the target population. In the case of the fishing units, a random stratified sample of 10 per cent was taken.

Fleet census

According to the CRODT March 2002 Pirogue Fleet Census, 63 per cent of the total pirogue fleet in the study area is concentrated in the nine centres selected for study, three of which account for 45 per cent of the fleet (Saint Louis, Mbour and Kayar). On the basis of their census,

Defining the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Senegal

Child: Person aged between six and 14 years old, that is, less than 15 years old. This is in line with the International Minimum Age Convention (No 138), and the Senegalese Merchant Marine Code, which formally forbids the embarkation of sailors under 15 years of age.

Worst forms of child labour: All kinds of work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182), 1999 applies the term 'child' to all persons under the age of 18, and includes the following as the 'worst forms of child labour':

- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; and
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular, for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties.

CRODT calculated that overall the centres selected for the study are highly representative (63 per cent, ranging from 46 per cent to 84 per cent) of the kinds of fishing operations carried out in Senegal.

For the purposes of the study, fishing operations were divided into six main categories: multi-gear fishing vessels (combining two or more fishing methods); surround-seines; liners; gillnetters; vessels with ice-boxes; and other kinds of vessels (drift nets, encircling gillnets, beach-seines and cast nets). Apart from looking at child labour in seagoing fishing activities, the study looked at four associated activities—carpentry (boatbuilding and repair); outboard motor maintenance and repair; fish processing; and trade.

Two questionnaires were used. One was targeted at the pirogue captains and the managers of the workshops, and the other at the child workers in the fisheries sector. The first aimed to identify the main activities carried out, and the associated professional risks; the second, to document information on the children—their socio-demographic profile, tasks, occupations and working conditions, levels of remuneration and destination of pay.

Interviews were also carried out, including individual interviews, with the heads of households of the child workers, as well as with the public and private authorities intervening in the fisheries

sector. In parallel, focus-group discussions with child workers and senior actors in the sector were organized.

In addition, general observations were made by the researchers on the children and on their working environment. These related to the physical hardship of their work, the risks of accident, the degree of surveillance and support provided by adults, the nature of the working environment, and the existence of adequate protection measures. Further, precise information was collected on the state of health centres available for receiving sick or injured child workers.

A number of problems were encountered. These included the influence that older people wielded over the children, where children may have been intimidated into giving biased answers. There were also difficulties in estimating earnings of seagoing children in some units, particularly where there are large fluctuations in earnings (such as amongst migrant fishers), and where income is only calculated and shared out at the end of the season, or on the eve of important religious festivals.

No exact number

In many cases, determining the exact age of the children was impossible, as many do not know their ages. In some centres with strong migrations, it was not possible to find out the exact number of fishing units for some kinds of fishing, and not all pirogues take on child labour.

Overall, 827 children working in 467 units were interviewed, 673 (81.4 per cent) working directly in fishing. Most of the respondents work in the four main landing centres of Saint Louis (191), Joal (131), Mbour (103) and Kayar (73).

Children under 15 represent 28.8 per cent of the artisanal fishery labour force. In fishing itself, child labour represents just over 25 per cent. In Djifere, child labour is relatively low, since it is a place mainly dedicated to migrant fisheries, where harsh working conditions and the need for physical strength mitigate against the employment of child labour.

The highest levels of child labour are found aboard the liners and gillnetters. Here they constitute one-third of the crew. These techniques are the least demanding of physical strength, and fishing is carried out during the day, with operations lasting less than 24 hours. This compares with surround-seine operations, where fishing is often at night, and vessels with ice-boxes make trips that can last several days. In these operations, child labour comprises, respectively, 15 per cent and 17.9 per cent of the crew.

Above-average numbers of children were found to be working in two suburban centres of Dakar—Grand Mbao and Hann. Here the number of children in each unit (seagoing pirogue or workshop) was 5 and 3.4, as against an overall average of 1.8.

There is a wide range in the actual number of children employed across the different kinds of fishing activities. In pirogue fishing with surround-seines, while the proportion of children compared to the overall crew may be relatively small, the actual numbers are relatively high. It is in these units that the highest average numbers are to be found (3.2), and their presence is deemed essential for bailing. Generally, there was a very high rate of work attendance by child workers (95.8 per cent), with only the surround-seines of Hann showing high absentee levels (above 50 per cent).

In the main, 86 per cent of child workers work the year round. More than 70 per cent of the pirogue fleet record a strong

round-the-year presence of children. This is much less marked in fishery-related activities, where children often take up shore-based work during school holidays.

As regards the age and sex of the children, most of those interviewed were boys (girls made up only 8.2 per cent). Forty-eight per cent of the boys and 39 per cent of the girls fall within the age group of 14-15 years. No girls were recorded in fishing activities, being mainly active in processing work. Most of the boys work in fishing (83.1 per cent), and report an average age of 13. The average age of children entering the fishing profession is 10.6.

A high proportion of child workers are orphans—16.2 per cent have lost at least one of their parents. They tend to be under the care and direction of a tutor or uncle (or aunt) to learn about the profession. Children living with both parents generally work as part of a family group, with their father, mother or uncle or aunt.

The main reason given by children for taking up fishing is to get out of school, but it is worth noting that a high number enter due to their precarious family situation. In most cases, children have willingly left school to work in the fisheries sector, but a significant number (33 per cent) have been expelled. It is explained that this is due to the ease with which money can be earned in fishing, and the promise of a career. Some parents explained that children even try to get expelled from school so as to go fishing. In only one centre, in the Dakar suburb of Soumbédioune, was the high cost of school fees mentioned, a factor that is linked to the relatively higher living standards in the capital.

Many heads of households claim that child labour forms an important part of their children's education and professional training. In their view, children who master a profession early on, easily find work. Given the prospect of unemployment, this is an important factor that favours fishing over schooling.

Culturally acceptable

However, the public authorities see things differently. While child labour may be culturally acceptable (passed on from

father to son), it is socially harmful. In effect, the large number of child workers mainly results from the abrogation of their parents' responsibilities.

It is a selfish way to exploit children, given that children still need education and the opportunity to grow up. They also consider that enrolling children into fishing encourages truancy, and while it may accustom children very early on to earning money, it does not assure them any future career.

On average, children in the artisanal fisheries sector work just over eight hours per day. In purse-seiners and multi-day ice-carrying vessels, working hours are much longer, 9.9 and 9.4 hours, respectively. By contrast, in gillnetters, hours are much shorter, averaging 6.8 hours daily. These differences are due to differences in the nature of the operations: purse-seiners may operate both day and night, while large multi-day boats, with their powerful engines and ice-boxes, go far offshore for many days. In the case of gillnetters, the catch has to be brought to market rapidly, by the end of the morning or early afternoon, and as there are no onboard storage facilities, spoilage is a big problem.

However, the work of the children does not end there. In addition to sea time, for those children who work in family units,

as apprentices or as co-owners, they also have to assist with landing the catch, and cleaning and arranging the pirogue. But other children, who work independently, may leave immediately after the catch is landed.

The study report also discusses a number of other important issues. These include the extent to which children are subject to physical violence, the nature and remuneration of their work, and the risks and dangers to which they are exposed.

A large number of those children fishing report that they are beaten (51.2 per cent), physically abused (57.4 per cent) or harassed (35.2 per cent). This is much higher than in shore-based fishing-related activities. As regards working at night, rest periods and time off, in both fishing and fish processing, much of the work (50.5 per cent and 62.2 per cent, respectively) is carried on at night. While there is generally no time off given at the weekends or provisions made for paid holidays, religious holidays are respected, particularly in Muslim communities.

Arduous task

The main task for children working at sea is to bail out the pirogues, a task that is essentially reserved for them. Keeping the boat empty of water is important for its stability, and in rough seas, and in shallow and leaky vessels, bailing can be an arduous task. But this is not their only

task, and alongside adults, they also fish. Their skills are particularly appreciated aboard line-fishing pirogues, where 17 per cent of the children fishing are aged less than 11.

In gillnetting operations, children also help haul the nets and clear them of fish. In purse-seining operations, children are required to dive into the water to guide the fish into the net, and this is generally done by those aged between 12 and 13, who have some swimming experience. There is a high risk of drowning due to the long time spent in the water, far away from the adults who are busy dealing with the net. In multi-day ice-carrying vessels, children bait the hooks, fish with handlines, and haul the longlines. They also help to prepare meals and arrange the fish in the ice-boxes. The particularly harsh working conditions aboard these vessels are reflected in most of the children engaged being above 12 years of age.

In those pirogues that engage in a variety of fishing operations, the number of tasks required for children to master is even higher. These vessels generally carry both lines and gillnets, and as in the multi-day boats, the number of tasks requires older children. In these vessels, there are no children under nine years of age.

In addition to their fishing tasks, children also work in preparing the vessels for going to sea. In the case of surround-seine and multi-day boats, the children are required to anchor and un-moor the vessels, after unloading the catch. After anchoring, they must swim ashore, over several dozen metres. For multi-day boats returning after a trip, children are often left aboard alone to guard the catch, equipment and crew belongings.

Generally, the daily tasks assigned to children vary according to the nature of the operations undertaken. Also, the diversity of tasks and the harshness of conditions is a function of the age of the children embarked. The tasks aboard the multi-day boats, surround-seine vessels and multi-gear pirogues are the hardest and most dangerous.

In drawing conclusions and making recommendations, the authors of the child

labour study focus on the need to combat the entrenched views of child labour as culturally acceptable and socially desirable, and the important role and responsibility of the State in doing this. They provide nine alternative proposals for addressing the problem:

1. Provide short-term professional training tailored to the sector and geared towards a decent job.
2. Establish centres of excellence that offer ideal conditions for training young people who want to take up a career in the fishing sector.
3. Modernize the artisanal fishing sector by promoting alternative technologies that can take over many of the tasks habitually carried out by children.
4. Categorically forbid the embarkation of children under 13 years of age on to multi-day pirogues and surround-seine vessels.
5. Make it compulsory to use adequate navigational and safety equipment.
6. Organize anti-tetanus vaccination programmes.
7. Promote the development of social, educational and recreational programmes.
8. Develop national-level programmes to keep children at school.
9. Provide financial support for the parents of child fishers (scholarships, subsidies, short- and medium-term loans, etc.).

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