

Around the negotiation table

The artisanal fishworkers of Senegal yearn for genuine, not token, participation in negotiating fisheries agreements with the EU

It is not only due to the favourable coincidence of the timing of the EU-ACP Joint Assembly and the fishery agreement negotiations between the Senegalese Government and the European Commission that I am meeting with you today. Although I will represent CNPS in these negotiations. I am with you today because it is urgent that the artisanal fishworkers of Senegal share with you their fears about the next agreement.

Since the end of the 1980s, the CNPS has been pressing for the artisanal sector to be part of the negotiations. In 1994, it was with great joy that we took our first firm step: for the first time we were invited to the negotiating table. At that time, the artisanal fishworkers thought that their battle to participate in the negotiations had been won. We thought that when the 1996 negotiations started, we would be able to build on our gains. Sadly, this is not the case.

As far as the proposal on the negotiating table is concerned, we, the artisanal fishermen, do not feel that we have been properly consulted. Just because we are present at the negotiating table does not mean that we are allowed to participate. In fact, the role expected of us is to merely observe. We do not wish to observe, we want to participate.

We are fishermen. Daily we go to sea. When you discuss fisheries management, you are discussing our daily struggles. When the EU and Senegal agree to sign a fisheries accord, they are signing away our livelihoods. Would you really expect us to accept the role of passive observers, and watch you determine our fate and how our resources are used?

In June 1996, in Dakar, the first round of negotiations took place between the

European Commission and the Senegalese Directorate of Fisheries. The negotiations were to start on a Saturday. Despite our insistent demands, relayed through the local press, we were only invited the previous day. When we arrived at the meeting, they told us, "Only one person is allowed in as observer."! Since we were not allowed to participate to put across our point of view, we left.

In July 1996, in Brussels, the second round of negotiations took place. Thanks to the support of the member NGOs of the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Agreements (CFFA), we were invited not as observers, but as genuine participants. However, a number of key issues were deliberately left off the agenda of that meeting, notably, access to coastal demersal species, which is one of our main concerns.

On 15 August, we learnt through our European partners (CFFA) that Madame Emma Bonino was to visit Senegal to meet with our President and Finance Minister. We were informed that she was coming to give a helping hand to the negotiations on the next fisheries agreement.

We also learnt that the fishing possibilities would probably be increased, due to the interest of a greater number of EU member states in obtaining fishing access. We were not party to any of these discussions, as we were not invited either to participate, or even observe, what was discussed between Madame Bonino and the Senegalese authorities.

Enquiry reply

It was following this same visit that the European Commission announced, in a letter dated 11 September, replying to an enquiry from NOVIB, a member of EUROSTEP (the NGO network), that an

agreement had been reached between the Senegalese and European authorities that the zone between six and 12 miles would be reserved for the artisanal fishery.

We are very pleased that they took this decision, which is in line with our demands, although we were not consulted when it was discussed. It is for this very reason that I would like to record here today, those concerns that I have not been able to express at those meetings to which I was not invited.

We have always demanded that the zone reserved for artisanal fishing be extended from six to 12 miles to allow us to develop our fisheries' potential, and thus further contribute to the development of our country.

If the European boats accept to withdraw from this zone and to remain outside the 12-mile limit, it will be a very positive step forward. We must then continue the discussions with our own industrial fishing fleet and national authorities so that each sector is allocated its rightful place within the 12-mile zone.

In this regard, I welcome the European Parliamentary initiative to organize a workshop with the Senegalese Ministry of Fisheries on the coexistence of the artisanal and industrial fisheries. I also welcome the appointment of Madame

Pery as Co-Chair of this workshop. But I would like to ask her to clarify what our role will be in this workshop.

I only came to know about this workshop thanks to the CFFA. Although it will take place in three weeks time, professional organizations, including the CNPS, have not been formally informed about the workshop. I am, therefore, most concerned to know what kind of role you want us to play in this workshop.

If the EU really accepts to withdraw from the 12-mile zone, an area where most of our stocks of coastal demersal species live, then it is in this workshop that we need to defend our demands to reserve this zone for artisanal fishing, which would be a decisive step for our sector.

Although the European Commission has agreed to withdraw from the 12-mile zone, the artisanal fishworkers are concerned that the fishing possibilities granted to the European boats will be increased beyond the 12-mile zone.

Underutilization

A recent European Parliamentary report has pointed out that the tuna agreement aside, the rate of uptake of the fishing possibilities in the last agreement was only around 30 per cent. The European fleet has, therefore, only used around a third of the fishing possibilities granted under the last agreement.

The reason, as articulated by Madame Bonino in June, is quite simple: in agreements like those concluded with Senegal, the fish have been completely wiped out due to a lack of sufficient control. Nevertheless, in spite of that, according to the declarations made by the European Commission, the EU would like to see, in the next agreement, an increase in fishing possibilities for its fleet. The CNPS can not see how this can be justified, given the actual state of the resource.

You can, therefore, understand our concern over this unjustified increase in fishing possibilities, as well as our question: With the little control that exists in Senegal, with even more boats fishing and even less fish available beyond the 12-mile limit, who can guarantee that these boats will not come into the 12-mile zone to take more than just water?

It will completely destroy all our efforts to develop the artisanal fishing sector in Senegal, and we can not accept an agreement on these terms.

We are appealing to you of the European Parliament and ACP delegations, precisely because we have not been allowed to discuss these vital concerns of ours at the negotiating table.

By taking up our concerns and demands through parliamentary debates, you can help us to achieve genuine participation in the negotiations. We have no desire to be invited to negotiations where the decisions have already been taken.

To emphasize the importance of the contribution of the artisanal fishworkers to such debates, it is important for you to understand what has been taking place in the Senegalese artisanal fishery over the last two years, since the start of the last fisheries agreement.

As far as the resource is concerned, some species like *dorade* (bream) have reappeared in the catch. But the state of stocks is precarious and any new pressures, like those envisaged under the new agreement, will undermine both our resources and fishing communities. Thus, as we have already explained at the beginning of the year, there is no surplus

in Senegal which the Senegalese fishermen are not able to catch themselves, for the long-term benefit of Senegal.

Another positive impact of CNPS's successive campaigns on fisheries agreements has been that other organizations in the sector have become interested in the issues, and have begun to join the battle, which has been led by CNPS for several years.

Thus, since the beginning of the year, the Federation of Fishery Economic Interest Groups (FENAGIE Pêche), whose fishermen members know well the economic interests of the sector, have added their voices to CNPS' in calling for change in fisheries agreements.

CNPS has also been working outside Senegal, with fishermen in the West African region. Our contacts have been intensified with artisanal fishworker communities, particularly in the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry and Mauritania. We have participated in technical exchanges, on initiatives to improve trade in processed fish, and many other areas as well.

Through these linkages with other fishworker communities, we have learned, above all else, that, in all these countries, the artisanal fishworkers are facing the negative impacts of foreign fishing fleets, particularly European, operating under fisheries agreements in their waters. We know their problems well, which are about competition for resources. They are the same as ours.

This is why we feel we have to develop a shared regional perspective on signing fishery agreements with the EU. In the same way, it is equally important that the EU and ACP states develop a regional perspective on fisheries agreements. At sea, boats know no boundaries. So why should we sign agreements on a country by country basis?

Rest period

Several months ago, an agreement was signed with Mauritania. In this agreement, allowance was made for a biological rest period so that the resource could have a good chance to reproduce.

Why are these kinds of positive features not taken account of in the agreement with Senegal? How can we guarantee that these boats will not plunder our waters during this rest period with Mauritania? In our waters, species also have to reproduce, and any additional- pressure on the fish stocks could be catastrophic.

When we asked this question, we were told that controls would be intensified at the border. It is, therefore, recognized in Senegal that this risk exists. However, who can assure us that the means of control are adequate? To that, no one has given us an answer.

I will now deal with the proposals that form part of the negotiations. CNPS' proposals are directed by the experience we have gained locally, regionally and at the international level. Of particular note has been CNPS' participation in the formulation of the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. If it is to be of any use, this Code of Conduct must be applied now. As far as the Senegalese fishworkers are concerned, one of the most important areas for its application is with regard to the signing of fisheries agreements. For this reason, we welcome the EU-ACP initiative to formulate a Code of Conduct for Responsible and Fair Fisheries Agreements.

In terms of the current negotiations on the agreement with Senegal, it would seem to us that the following measures would be appropriate in the context of applying the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and would allow for the sustainable management of fish stocks by the artisanal fishworkers along our coast: stop all European access to coastal demersal species; and extend the zone reserved for the Senegalese artisanal fishery from six to 12 miles.


But it is imperative that this extension be accompanied by a decrease in the quotas allocated to the European boats; and a genuine reduction in the fishing effort deployed by the European fleet. We are also calling for European support to police our coastal waters. There are systems in use in Europe such as satellite surveillance of vessels. Senegal and Europe have a co-operation agreement.

So why doesn't the EU share its information with the Senegalese authorities? It would be most welcome if it was mandatory for all European boats, especially those which fish around our artisanal fishing zones, to use selective fishing methods. It would also be useful to study the possibilities for establishing measures, such as those in the agreement with Mauritania, which allow the resource a good chance of reproduction.

We would equally welcome greater attention being paid to how the financial compensation can be used to develop the artisanal fishing sector. We must insist, however, as a matter of urgency, that the financial compensation earmarked for the artisanal sector be paid into a separate account by the EU, where its management would be the responsibility of a committee comprising representatives of the EU, the Senegalese government and artisanal fishworkers.

We must insist on this technical point because, even today, two years after around 200,000 ECU were allocated to the artisanal fishing sector, the full amount has not yet been used for the development of the sector. Part of the funds which were allocated to women processors still has to be paid. The main support that we fishermen have received from the government has been a new car. Although having a means of transport was one of our demands, nothing has yet been done to meet our other demands, such as lighting on the beaches. This is why we want to be genuinely associated with the use of this financial compensation.

In summing up, I would like to emphasize that we want to participate in the management of our sector and not to have to accept what is granted to us. I hope that you parliamentarians and ACP delegates will support us in this demand.

Thank you for your attention. 

This speech was made by Dao Gaye, General Secretary of the CNPS, as a presentation to the Meeting of the EU-ACP Fisheries Agreements Monitoring Group in September 1996 in Brussels