

Strength in Unity

Small-scale fishermen in the Indian Ocean region are joining forces to claim their legitimate rights over fish resources and push for sustainable and responsible fisheries development

Best known for their so-called individualism, small-scale fishers from the countries of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) have embarked since early 2014 on a process to join their forces, claim their legitimate rights over fish resources, and demand better recognition of their role for sustainable and responsible fisheries development within their marine basin.

Small-scale fishers from the Union of Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion Island have been witnessing the opportunistic exploitation of fish resources and the failure of fisheries governance,

that is driving foreign industrial fleets. Tomorrow, fishing companies which are opportunistically plundering the Indian Ocean will undoubtedly move towards new or recovering stocks, somewhere else on Earth. Because of their local nature, small-scale fishers will not be able to follow the same path. They will have no other choice than staying in the marine basin they depend on.

For those fishers in the Union of Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion Island and their families, living within a hundred kilometers of the coast, the southwest Indian Ocean is where their fortune or decline will take place.

Artisanal fisheries in small island developing States (SIDS) are an important contributor to food security. In Seychelles, for example, fish consumption exceeds 60 kg per inhabitant per year. The main protein intake also comes from fish.

Artisanal fisheries create direct and indirect jobs. They are estimated at about 550,000 within the five IOC member States. They provide fair revenue for fishers and their families. The keystone of this regional initiative is the question of how to balance the interests of industrial and small-scale fisheries while ensuring prosperity for the people of the Indian Ocean. Industrial operators can no longer be the only stakeholders around the table. Small-scale, artisanal fishers must take part in the decisionmaking, if they are to offer their children a chance to sustain the livelihoods they love and defend.

Important advocacy

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helplessly, for years now. In the last ocean to be exploited, long-distance fleets are gathering from all parts of the world. Some, governed by the diktat of globalization, are highly capitalistic in nature and on the lookout for highly valued pelagic species intended to be sold to sashimi markets or processed in fish-canning plants in Asia and the United States. Others, operating in a fairly dubious manner, are looking for promising stocks.

Beyond the choice of a particular economic model, or the promotion of a particular type of gear, it is the whole issue of fisheries governance that is at stake here. The sustainability potential shown by local fishers is in total contrast to the short-term vision

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will have to undertake. The idea of setting up such an organization in the Indian Ocean region emerged from the necessity of making traditional fishers' voices heard. Strengthening fishers' rights as well as raising awareness of civil society, advocacy will become more and more accurate over time.

The limitation of the use of drifting fish aggregating devices (dFADs) by industrial factory boats in the Indian Ocean is the first fight small-scale fishermen want to win, supported by the Reunion Island Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture Committee (CRPMEM). Small-scale fishermen have already thought of different ways to address this issue: sustainability, profitability and the popularization of what a dFAD is, how it can be a useful tool and how it can be a destructive one too.

Among the Vezo people in Madagascar, fishing is a keystone of their identity. They are the only Malagasy people not to depend on lineage and territory: the ocean is their home (they are nomads). The

secular and traditional knowledge of small-scale fishermen values nothing compared to capture declarations provided by the tuna fish industry. Historical catches are the basis on which fishing rights are calculated. Promoting boats' registration, issuance of professional cards, catches' declarations associated with skills empowerment and transfers when needed are at stake in the Indian Ocean.

Food security relies on small scale fisheries. This strong argument finds an international echo since the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) were adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2014. The southeastern islands of the Indian Ocean consume almost 30 kg of fish per inhabitant per year, with a world record for Seychellois people who consume 65 kg. Fish is the first (Comoros, Seychelles) or the second source of protein after chicken

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Members of a fishing community at work in Madagascar.
Artisanal fisheries create direct and indirect jobs for fishers and their families

(Mauritius) and pork (Reunion Island and Madagascar). The regional platform follows two goals: on the one hand, putting the small-scale fisheries as a high-priority item in terms of food security within public policies and regional strategies, and, on the other, addressing fish consumers on the hygiene process needed for safe fish.

The diversity of situations obtaining in the Indian Ocean, associated with the provisions of the SSF Guidelines, has led the regional platform to ask itself what being an artisanal fisherman means. The various partnerships developed during this past year, especially with similar platforms like Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) for European small-scale fishermen, MedArtNet in the Mediterranean sea and Confédération Africaine des Organisations Professionnelles de la Pêche Artisanale or the African Confederation of Artisanal Fisheries Professional Organizations (CAOPA) in Africa, help us understand successful initiatives and develop a methodology for our actions.

A non-exclusionary definition of the small-scale fishery in the Indian Ocean is getting written, based on specificities like boat length, time spent at sea, maximum distance from the coast, ownership of the boat, etc.

Small-scale fishermen in the Indian Ocean live and fish at the very same place unlike foreign fishers. Resident fishermen depend on fishes for nutritional and income purposes. The very strong link they have with their territories, along with the use of traditional vessels such as *kwassa-kwassa* in Comoros, or dugout *Antanosy* pirogues in Madagascar, makes it impossible for them to go beyond 20 miles from the coast.

Small-scale fishermen in the Indian Ocean are experts on marine ecosystems. It is necessary to promote existing expertise. There should no longer be any development of inadequate infrastructure for small-scale fishermen. They should be encouraged to participate in project definition and planning. **3**

For more

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www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X12001510

**The Effectiveness of
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