

# Russian Roulette

The food security and livelihoods of artisanal small-scale fishing communities in Senegal are threatened by the access granted to foreign fleets of supertrawlers to catch sardinella

**A**t this very moment, with our African countries severely affected by economic crises, with drought and desertification spreading in our region, our *sardinella* helps many to survive. *Sardinella*—it's our life blood; it is also the fish of the poor and our 'food safety net', says Gaoussou Gueye, a Senegalese artisanal fishmonger of 30 years standing, and General Secretary of the Confederation of African Artisanal Professional Fishing Organizations (CAOPA).

In West Africa, small pelagic fish species, including *sardinella*, are coveted by many players. Most notable amongst these are distant-water fleets which come from Russia, North Europe and East Asia, and include international groups like Pacific Andes and the Chinese company, Poly Hondone, backed by international investment capital firms, like the Carlyle Group. They sign deals with countries of the region that allow them to bring supertrawlers in search of *sardinella* and other small pelagic species. The Russian fleet gets the lion's share. In the heady days of the former USSR, their fleet was catching up to 1,500,000 tonnes annually of small pelagic species along the northwest coast of Africa; today it 'only' catches 400,000 tonnes.

Nowhere is the presence of distant-water fleets more a cause for worry than in Senegal, where the local artisanal fishing sector traditionally targets *sardinella*. Sogui Diouf, former Director of Fisheries in Senegal, recalls that every year, when the cold season approaches, the Senegalese hear about the Russians—it is the time when their boats come back and they ask for fishing permits. In 2010, Russia, with

the complicity of the then Minister of Fisheries, was illegally granted permission to catch coastal pelagic resources. But, thankfully, in April 2012, the new government ordered this fleet to cease its activities in Senegalese waters.

However, the fleet did not take no for an answer. In 2013, a fishing agreement was signed between Russia and Guinea-Bissau, offering Russia the opportunity to operate in the common maritime area between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. And once Russian vessels were in the common area, it was easy for them to make illegal

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incursions into Senegalese waters. This is how one of them, the *Oleg Naydenov*, came to be arrested in late 2013 for fishing in Senegalese waters without permission.

In 2014, Senegalese artisanal fishers were wondering what strategy Russia was going to use. They did not have to wait for long to find out. In September 2014, a Dakar-based fish trading company, heading up a joint-venture operation, applied for 10 licences to fish for small pelagics, purportedly as a way to revive the fish-processing company, Africamer.

## Exports

Africamer was founded in 1979, and processed 20,000 tonnes of fish annually, 85 per cent of which was exported to Europe. With a fleet of 17

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freezer trawlers, it employed 2,500 people.

Between 2005 and 2008, Africamer, the largest Senegalese company in the national fishery sector, got into difficulties due to mismanagement. In 2011, after several short-lived attempts to revive the company, Africamer was put into liquidation.

Diouf notes with irony that, by “coincidence”, at end of 2013, the representative of Russia’s Federal Agency of Fisheries had filed a request along very similar lines to the office of the President of the Senegalese Republic: fishing licences for 10 trawlers, operating six months each year to catch 100,000 tonnes of small pelagic species, for five years. The request also mentioned the revival of Africamer. In his view, “the similarities (between the Dakar-based company and the Russian request) are so striking that one wonders if the 2014 demand from the Senegalese operator did not actually come from Russia’s Federal Agency of Fisheries”.

Diouf also draws attention to some very unrealistic proposals that were made: “In addition to the reopening of Africamer and the 10 licences for supertrawlers, the Senegalese operator also proposed to create a

frozen and packaged are not suitable to supply such a processing factory. The only way that Russia has found to bring back its fishing vessels to Senegalese waters is to use a lie.”

What is at stake in this quest for *sardinella* in West Africa? Food security and tens of thousands of livelihoods in the artisanal sector—both are threatened by the access of these fleets of supertrawlers. Whether fishing in Morocco, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau or Senegal, distant-water fleets fishing in the region compete directly with the artisanal fishing sector over access to the *sardinella*, a single stock that migrates between Morocco and Guinea-Bissau, passing through Mauritania and Senegal.

*Sardinella* occupies a very important place in Senegal fisheries, whether looked at from the landings, local consumption, jobs or exports. *Sardinella* comprises around 60 per cent of the 400,000 tonnes of fish landed by the Senegalese artisanal fishery sector. Nearly 12,000 Senegalese artisanal fishermen live only from this fishery. In addition, many related activities associated with the *sardinella* fishery (notably artisanal processing and distribution) are characterized by low barriers to entry in terms of capital, qualification and knowhow, and employ tens of thousands of people. The role played by women in the artisanal processing sector is particularly important for poverty reduction.

In terms of food security, *sardinella* is the most accessible source of animal protein as regards price and quantity. Today, with the price of meat and fresh fish on the increase, many Senegalese families can only be assured of one meal a day—lunch based on rice and *sardinella*.

**Overexploited**

From a biological point of view, the state of the *sardinella* resources is increasingly a cause for concern. The FAO/CECAF working group held in June 2013, in Nouadhibou, Mauritania, found that, as in previous years, *sardinella* stocks are overexploited; and fishing effort must be substantially reduced.

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shipyard and an aquaculture site. In order to realize this ambitious programme, he came up with a completely unrealistic proposal to invest only 11 bn CFA franc (over 17 mn Euro). Moreover, the resumption of the activities of Africamer would require a supply of fresh products to the factory—but products caught by the Russian boats benefitting from the 10 licences are frozen on board and packed at sea.... This proposal for a resumption of the Africamer factory is merely a ruse. The promises to recruit workers for Africamer will not materialize because products already

And those who worry most are Senegalese artisanal fishers and women fish processors.

To express their angst, in the early hours of the morning of 7 January 2015, around 80 of them, coming from all fishing regions in Senegal, gathered in M'bour, for a forum organized by the local association for the promotion of sustainable artisanal fisheries (APRAPAM), a platform uniting professionals from the artisanal sector and concerned citizens. The only topic under discussion that day was: "The exploitation of the small pelagic resources: what is at stake for the professionals from the artisanal sector?"

Women fish processors told about their daily struggles, faced as they are by a scarcity of fish for processing. Nowadays, most of their *sardinella* raw material comes from Mauritania. This is a consequence not only of overexploitation but also of the harsh competition generated by foreign investors collecting the same small pelagics for their processing activities, including fishmeal destined for export. Indeed, recent years have seen the uncontrolled mushrooming of fish-processing and fishmeal factories, owned by Chinese, Korean and Russian investors.

Last year, the French newspaper *Le Monde* highlighted that, between 2011 and 2014, 11 fish-processing factories were built close to artisanal landing sites, between Kayar and Joal, an area comprising one-third of the Senegalese coast. These are now attracting most of the landings from artisanal fishermen, including for processing into fishmeal, thereby depriving women of their livelihoods.

Participants at the APRAPAM forum came up with somewhat traditional recommendations: the need to put in place an effective system for controlling catches; the need to extend measures already taken by some communities to prohibit the catching, marketing and processing of juveniles *sardinella*; and for temporary fishing closures.

But they also boldly demanded that the authorities exclusively



Fisher women on the beach in M'bour, Senegal. It is essential to ensure that fish factories do not siphon off the entire artisanal fish production

reserve *sardinella* for the artisanal fishing sector. Such an unprecedented demand requires a new social contract between the Senegalese government and the artisanal fishing sector. In order to improve local food security and to contribute to sustaining livelihoods for the most vulnerable, including women fish processors, as well as reserving exclusive access to *sardinella* for artisanal fishermen, action needs to be taken to ensure that the burgeoning numbers of fish factories which have thoughtlessly been given licences to operate, do not siphon off the entire production of the artisanal fishing sector, depriving women processors of access to the landed catches. ♣

#### For more



[www.aprapam.org/2014/10/27/reserver-a-la-peche-artisanale-lexploitation-de-la-sardinelle-ou-yaboye/](http://www.aprapam.org/2014/10/27/reserver-a-la-peche-artisanale-lexploitation-de-la-sardinelle-ou-yaboye/)

#### Réserver à la Pêche Artisanale l'Exploitation de la Sardinelle ou Yaboye:

[cape-cffa.org/](http://cape-cffa.org/)

#### Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements

[transparentsea.co/index.php?title=Russia](http://transparentsea.co/index.php?title=Russia)

#### Russia and Africa's Fisheries

[www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2014/01/30/la-ruée-des-russes-et-des-asiatiques-sur-le-poisson-senegalais\\_4356805\\_3244.html#7DTjA24p1WSRTiUt.99](http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2014/01/30/la-ruée-des-russes-et-des-asiatiques-sur-le-poisson-senegalais_4356805_3244.html#7DTjA24p1WSRTiUt.99)

#### Au Sénégal, la ruée des Russes et des Asiatiques sur la pêche artisanale, Le Monde