

# A Top-Down Mirage

**The Indonesian government's increasing focus on the Blue Economy should not be at the cost of the knowledge gained from long years of customary or traditional management, says Susan Gui of the conservation NGO KIARA. Edited excerpts**

## **On KIARA's current work**

KIARA still does advocacy. The Indonesian government is focusing on the Blue Economy, with emphasis on massive expansion of production from marine resources, affecting the community. We have also been working on the climate crisis, especially as it relates to the sinking and drowning villages in central Java and many other parts of Indonesia. The climate crisis has led to decreased fish capture, hitting the economics and livelihoods of fishers. It is getting worse.

## **On the differential impact of climate change on women facing socio-economic difficulties**

Over the past decade, climate change has already affected Indonesia's fisherfolk. It has worsened over the past five years. The fishers talk of losing their customary knowledge in discerning weather conditions and tides; they cannot 'smell' the ocean now. Due to changes in the ecosystem, they now have to go farther out to sea to fish. They face a lot of issues related to poverty. Children in coastal communities get forced into early marriages. Women have the double burden of earning and managing the household, ensuring nutrition and education for their children. Many fishing families are trapped in debt. Flooding from the sea drowns all the facilities. Migration has also been affected.

## **On the government's quota-based management for industrial fisheries**

Neither the government nor the fisherfolk are ready to implement quota-based management. We do not actually have the base data of the resources available in our ocean. About

three or four years ago, the Indonesian government tried to introduce quota for lobster exports but the scheme only led to corruption. There are no tools for monitoring, despite the huge potential for transshipment at sea. Some of Indonesia's waters are already over-exploited and implementation of transshipment would be problematic.

## **On the likelihood of positive impacts of quotas**

If you consider revenue a positive impact, we don't see how this will benefit us. For example, now in Indonesia, the government's focus is on developing infrastructure like big ports and cold storage facilities. These, however, will facilitate only large vessels. Small-scale or traditional fisherfolk cannot sell fish in the big ports because they sell in small volumes. We see a lot of gaps in the government budget. Protection and empowerment are still far away. So, the tax revenue only benefits those who have control to access it; but there's no way this can happen for the fisherfolk.

## **On the impact of quotas on community-based management structures**

Looking at the quotas given to big vessels that get big catches, there is definitely going to be an impact on the value chain. The ocean is like a bowl connected from side to side. If you overexploit one side, it could affect the other side. So it's not just the production perspective, the holistic perspective must also be considered. For example, the relationships among the indigenous community, artisanal fisherfolk and fisherwomen, as also their relationship with the coast. This is the missing connection.

*This interview with Susan Herawati Romica (guisusan98@gmail.com), General Secretary of KIARA (Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan), Indonesia, was conducted by N. Venugopalan (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Manager, ICSF, on 3 November, 2023*

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Fishermen unloading buckets of fish from their boats in Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Some fish are going to disappear because of over-exploitation from catch-based quotas

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#### **On the competition between trawlers and artisanal fishers**

Under the new regulations, there will be foreign fishing vessels in our waters. That means our traditional fisherfolk are going to use larger fishing gear to face the big foreign vessels. The big will grab the most, while the smaller players will get only

#### **On reaching the quotas when catches are dwindling**

I'm not really sure. The quotas given are based on the data that we have. Take the case of export of baby lobster. A certain quota is given to one company; if it cannot meet it, it can smuggle fish from another area. There is also the potential for corruption.

#### **There is no mechanism for the control and monitoring of foreign fishing vessels**

the last of the remainder. That is not just. There is no mechanism for the control and monitoring of foreign fishing vessels. Our government says there will be logbooks and VMS. It doesn't realize that not every fisher has the necessary tools; some can't even read and write.

#### **On the total available catch (TAC)**

Government maps show only the red, yellow and green parts of our waters. Red indicates over-exploitation; yellow warns of near over-exploitation; and green indicates plentiful resources. But no data exists for the exact catch availability. This is also part of our criticism: On what basis will the government decide on the quota when it doesn't have a clue about the available catch?

#### **On the declining numbers and status of artisanal fishers**

The past five years have been the worst for Indonesia's ocean management. No

wonder the numbers are decreasing. Exploitative and destructive practices are rampant. Many foreign fishing vessels enter Indonesian waters using trawl and seine gear; their use is not prohibited under any clear regulation. Incidents of conflicts between traditional fisherfolk and those using disruptive fishing gear are much too frequent. Indonesia now allows the export of sand. Who will monitor it? The sand could be coming from the waters that have good resources; its mining could hit the catches. Under the Blue Economy schemes, the government is expanding aquaculture, especially for shrimp. This is likely to destroy our mangrove forests.

#### **On small-scale artisanal fishing sector's contribution**

It accounts for about 20 per cent of the total production. Although the government claims an increase in GDP, the economic parameters do not really capture the real issues of migration and poverty along the coast. There is no precise demographic data on the existing fisherfolk, especially the traditional or artisanal ones.

#### **On governance of marine fisheries**

Indonesia's fisheries regulation programme is not bottom-up. It arises at the top and then goes down. As long as the government doesn't make it hard for the fisherfolk to get access to subsidized fuel, there shouldn't be problems with registering all the traditional fishing boats. But if the idea is to only collect data of how many traditional fishing boats Indonesia has, the traditional fisherfolk are unlikely to benefit in any way. In Malaysia, the government compiles data of the traditional fishing boats but, at the same time, they provide insurance. In Indonesia, it's the fisherfolk who have to pay for insurance.

#### **On controlling IUU fishing**

Over the past five years, we have not moved forward on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The government has now opened up our waters for fishing vessels through quotas, but it has made little effort to solve the problem of destructive

fishing. Logbooks are hard to monitor mid-sea. Hence IUU fishing goes largely undetected. The government does not have a large budget for monitoring, control, and surveillance. Even if those caught stealing our fish are taken to court, they are likely to get away with minimal punishment. Even then, only the captain of the boat is prosecuted, not the investor who pumped in money for the boat.

#### **On the best management of fisheries areas**

Our government assigns the red, yellow and green labels on the map to indicate resource health. But in customary or

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traditional regimes, several indigenous communities already manage their waters in the best way possible. But these communities now have to face the issues of quota and IUU fishing, of mining and reclamation. ↴

#### **For more**

##### **KIARA**

<http://www.kiara.or.id/>

##### **Hot Water Rising: The Impact of Climate Change on Indonesia's Fisheries and Coastal Communities**

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/f7eea193-6e04-4875-9787-058167df2410/download>

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