

Situating Small-Scale Fisheries in the Global Struggle for Agroecology and Food Sovereignty

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Executive Summary

This report explores the politics and practices in small-scale fisheries that form part of the global struggle for agroecology and food sovereignty. It first frames the political context and explains the challenges facing small-scale fisher (SSF) initiatives and communities as well as how fishers are organised in order to confront these. It goes on to map the recent articulation of agroecology and food sovereignty with SSF initiatives and shows how alternative food systems that include fisheries are situated in relation to food sovereignty and other allied struggles. It links fishers' realities and struggles to three key debates within mobilisations in support of food sovereignty by focusing on local-level insights.

The analysis examines the challenges of transforming and re-localising food economies by looking at experiences and the role of small-scale fishing cooperatives in Turkey offering direct sales. It then looks at struggles to defend natural resources and the importance of women's leadership by examining gender and territory in Indonesian fisheries. Finally, it engages with the realities of labour in the food system, showing the central importance of confronting exploitation in the fisheries sector by exploring the intersections between migration and fisheries with a specific focus on fishers in West Africa and Europe. Taken together these cases illustrate the connections between fisheries and the struggles for agroecology and food system transformation by acknowledging their specific local characteristics but also highlighting existing practices that are contributing to struggles for food sovereignty.

Fieldwork was conducted for each case study during 2018 and 2019, drawing on participant observation and interviews with fishers and civil society organisations (CSOs) working in fishing communities. Since then, and as the report was being completed, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of the corporate-controlled global food system and in many cases deepened the very inequalities and injustices highlighted in this report. Long-distance transport, on which so much of the industrial food system relies, was interrupted. Fish prices plummeted, restaurants stopped buying or were closed, as were

many fish auctions. Increased unemployment, lockdowns, and school closures exacerbated tensions within households, and women are shouldering many of those additional burdens.

At the same time, the response to COVID-19 among SSF has demonstrated that much of the knowledge and infrastructure for building food sovereignty already exists. Local direct sales networks boomed, at the same time contributing to more resilient, food systems that value and directly connect seasonal, artisanal fishers to their local customers. Fisher-peasant food exchanges offered lifelines and food security to those in precarious economic circumstances. While most of the research on which this report is based predates these momentous changes and so is not centred on the pandemic, some points are highlighted throughout to underscore the relevance of these issues in a post-COVID-19 world.



Image 1: Indonesian fishing village. Photo by Zoe W. Brent

1 Introduction: Framing the Political Moment

Fisheries are a central part of global food production. Small-scale fisher (SSF) communities, and small-scale commercial fishers in particular, supply about 65% of fish captures destined directly for human consumption. More than 90% of capture fishers and fish workers are employed in small-scale fisheries.¹ The sector is also characterised by injustice: the largest industrial fishing boats catch 65% of all global captures, sometimes leading to overfishing and the collapse of fish stocks. In addition, their destructive gear and substantial use of fossil fuels contribute to climate change.² At the same time SSFs' access to and control over marine and freshwater areas and fisheries resources are increasingly restricted.³ Industrial fishing reproduces the logics of monoculture and commodification of crops already seen in the agro-industrial sector, for example by concentrating the control over fishing quotas and/or access rights in the hands of few super trawlers. This has led to significant social and ecological damage, negatively affecting coastal communities and their livelihoods.

Facing increasing marginalisation, dispossession and displacement, SSF communities have mobilised, building local, national and international organisations, and setting up the World Forum of Fish Workers and Fish Harvesters (WFF) in 1997, from which part of the members branched off forming the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP) in 2001.⁴ These two organisations collaborate with each other as well as with allied organisations like the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), and peasant farmers' movements like La Vía Campesina (LVC). Indeed, fishers have become key political actors along with peasant farmers in food sovereignty movements, publishing common manifestos and organising informal meetings. They also cooperate in more formal political settings, for example, in the Rome-based International Planning Committee (IPC) on Food Sovereignty, where they jointly seek recognition of their rights as small-scale food producers.⁵

At the national and subnational level, various SSF organisations and allies from different contexts are also engaging with and becoming key protagonists in the movement for food sovereignty. Some are members of WFF and WFFP as well as other initiatives in solidarity with SSFs. These include the Movement of Artisanal Fisherwomen and Fishermen (MPP) and the Fisherfolk Pastoral Commission (CPP) in Brazil, the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA) in the United States,⁶ the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) in

India, the Indonesian Traditional Fisherfolk Union (KNTI) in Indonesia, Istanbul Birlik in Turkey, C-Condem in Ecuador, Masifundise in South Africa, the network of journalists for responsible fisheries in Western Africa (REJOPRAO),⁷ and the network for the defence of food sovereignty in Guatemala (REDSAG),⁸ among many others.

Despite this important history of engagement, since being coined by LVC in 1996, the term food sovereignty has primarily been associated with agroecological food production on the land, overlooking the role of small-scale fishers.

This report explores what food sovereignty and agroecology mean in the context of fisheries, highlighting the role of fishers in organising for change in the food system. We draw on the definition of food sovereignty proposed by social movements (including WFFP and WFF) in the Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in Nyéléni in 2007:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers.⁹

The 2015 Nyéléni Declaration underlined that agroecology is integral to food sovereignty, not only in its technical and productive dimensions but also in socioeconomic, political and cultural terms:

The real solutions to the crises of the climate, malnutrition, etc., will not come from **conforming** to the industrial model. We must **transform** it and build our own local food systems that create new rural-urban links, based on truly agroecological food production by peasants, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, urban farmers, etc. [...] We see [agroecology] as the essential **alternative** to [the industrial food production model], and as the means of **transforming** how we produce and consume food into something better for humanity and our Mother Earth.¹⁰

1.1 Differences and commonalities between small-scale peasant and fisher movements

Small-scale fishers and peasant farmers worldwide face particular historical and social realities. Their activities, methods and cultures, as well as their gear and equipment, vary significantly.¹¹ All of them – along with beekeepers, pastoralists, indigenous people, landless and working people – are social actors, producing for the primary sector, feeding the world and helping to sustain the planet. Often, especially in the global south, these primary occupations and identities overlap – fishers may also be peasant farmers, and both may be from indigenous communities. Peasant farmers and SSFs face similar challenges posed by the global capitalist agri-food system and are threatened by the dynamics of land and ocean grabbing.¹² Against these common threats, the common objectives of agroecology and food sovereignty have emerged from struggles led by small-scale producers striving to maintain their traditional ways of food production and their access to land and the sea.

Although food sovereignty struggles on land and water (including oceans, seas, freshwater areas and inland fisheries in rivers or estuaries) share many similarities, there tends to be less awareness of the specific dynamics of small-scale fishing, the challenges fishers face, and the solutions they propose, even within the movement for food

sovereignty. For instance, although some of the practices of land-based food production greatly affect the health of waterways due to run-off or contamination of aquifers, the threats proposed by the use of pesticides and/or hormones in agro-industry and animal husbandry are not perceived as affecting fisheries. Thus, existing networks and coalitions on food sovereignty often overlook SSFs, while fisher organisations that are facing ocean grabbing, decreasing fish stocks and economic marginalisation may struggle to be heard.

In addition to (or perhaps because of) the lack of awareness about the role of fishers in food sovereignty, SSFs may not see themselves as intrinsic to debates on agroecology and food sovereignty. Some fisher movements and initiatives reject the term ‘agroecology,’ which they assume mainly refers to debates on agriculture. Nonetheless, the practices of SSFs and the proposals put forward by SSF movements often embody the spirit of agroecology and food sovereignty. Movement leaders see the strategic importance of cultivating alliances among diverse small-scale food producers – whether land- or water-based – and food sovereignty movements. In the words of Naseegh Jaffer, former WFFP General Secretary:



Image 2: Convergence of land and water struggles, COP21 2015. Photo by Zoe W. Brent



Image 3: WFFP GA, 2017. Photo by Zoe W. Brent

At its core, food sovereignty is not new to fishing communities. It simply gives us a new language to describe what already makes up the heart and soul of the defence of our territories, our heritage and our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food. Food Sovereignty is at the centre of our struggle against the neo-liberalism and global capitalism. It provides a framework for sharing indigenous, traditional and new knowledge and wisdom between fishing communities within the entire WFFP constituency.¹³

At its 2014 General Assembly in Cape Town, WFFP initiated a campaign on food sovereignty. Since then, its leadership and a working group on food sovereignty have debated, explored and disseminated the language and concepts of food sovereignty and agroecology in order to build the capacity to articulate and mobilise around them. Since the two concepts are still not widely used in SSF struggles, in some cases SSFs have developed their own terminology for similar concepts or challenges in order to be heard and achieve more visibility as political actors. An important example was the slogan adopted by the 7th General Assembly of WFFP in 2017 held in New Delhi: 'We are the People, We are the Oceans!'

In other cases, fishers have employed the language of food sovereignty. In their 2017 publication arising from an exchange in Indonesia on the topic,¹⁴ WFFP and KNTI elaborated the meaning of what each of the six pillars of food sovereignty means in a fisheries context – specifically 1. *Focuses on food for people*; 2. *Values food providers*; 3. *Localizes food systems*; 4. *Puts control locally*; 5. *Builds knowledge and skills*; and 6. *Works with nature*. The report represents an initial attempt by WFFP to show the parallels and shared visions with others in food sovereignty movements, such as peasant farmers, and to highlight their common political struggles.

Rather than dwelling on the exact language or wording, it is important to remain flexible about the terminology, in order to identify the existing practices and alliances of SSF communities and organisations that contribute to food sovereignty and agroecology and explore the different ways in which SSFs struggle for alternatives that in practice resemble food sovereignty and agroecology, whether or not they call it that. With this, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of the empirical and agroecological realities that link SSFs to the broader food sovereignty movement.

2 Mapping the Articulations of Agroecology and Food Sovereignty with SSF Initiatives

In order to better understand how agroecology and food sovereignty are and could be further integrated in SSF struggles, we began with a review of primary and secondary literature using the terms ‘agroecology, food sovereignty and fisheries’.¹⁵ Although the literature is limited, there is an increasing activist and scientific interest¹⁶ in issues related to the aquatic (marine and freshwater) side of agroecology and food sovereignty. The immense challenges facing SSF communities are becoming more visible, which has led to a growing interest in addressing the knowledge gap.

Until now, the most straightforward written definitions and conceptualisations used by SSFs of the agroecology and food sovereignty movement have been produced in collaboration with fisher movements: ‘*La pesca artesanal en la discusión de la Soberanía Alimentaria*’¹⁷ and, as mentioned above, ‘*Agroecology and Food Sovereignty in Small-Scale Fisheries*’.¹⁸ While the first focuses on the rights of fisher people by conceptualising the sea as a commons, and on ecological and environmental issues and threats to SSFs,

the second emphasises SSF rights and addresses the global capitalist agri-food system by studying social, economic and environmental aspects related to the agroecology and food sovereignty movement and linking the struggles on land and seas.

Beyond this, only a few sources and initiatives focus on small-scale fisheries in the context of agroecology and food sovereignty using the same terminology. First, a small number of academic and scientific publications engage directly with the topics of fisheries and food sovereignty and/or agroecology (see Colombo et al., 2015¹⁹; Seixas et al., 2018²⁰; Cotrim, 2009²¹; Levkoe et al., 2017²²; Rodríguez-Crisóstomo, 2016²³; and Inakake de Souza, 2017²⁴). These are complemented by scholar-activist and popular publications (for example, the 2016 special issue of the journal *Soberanía Alimentaria, Biodiversidad y Cultura* on fisheries and fisher communities,²⁵ and *Pesca y agroecología* and the 2016 Nyéléni Newsletter²⁶).

The conceptualisation of the role of fishers in transforming the food system is perhaps most often found in documents and declarations resulting from assemblies or gatherings of fisher people’s movements and activists in the context of debates on food sovereignty (e.g. WFFP 7th General Assembly in India in 2017, MPP meeting in Brazil, the ongoing work of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty Working Group on Fisheries²⁷); or meetings of social actors within the broader food sovereignty movement where fisher people and their struggles are mentioned, sometimes only briefly or with limited focus; the declaration of small-scale food producers’ organisations and CSOs at the II International Symposium on Agroecology convened by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)²⁸ in April 2018; the first national congress and declaration of ‘*Encontro Unitário dos Trabalhadores, Trabalhadoras e Povos do Campo, das Águas e das Florestas*’ in 2012, with the participation of MPP and CPP²⁹; the webinar on COVID-19 and small fisher-folk of North Africa and Palestine organised by the North African Food Sovereignty Network (NAFSN) and Transnational Institute in May 2020)³⁰; and documents or guidelines published in the framework of international institutional politics such as the *People’s Manual on the Guidelines on Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (IPC et al., 2016),³¹ and more

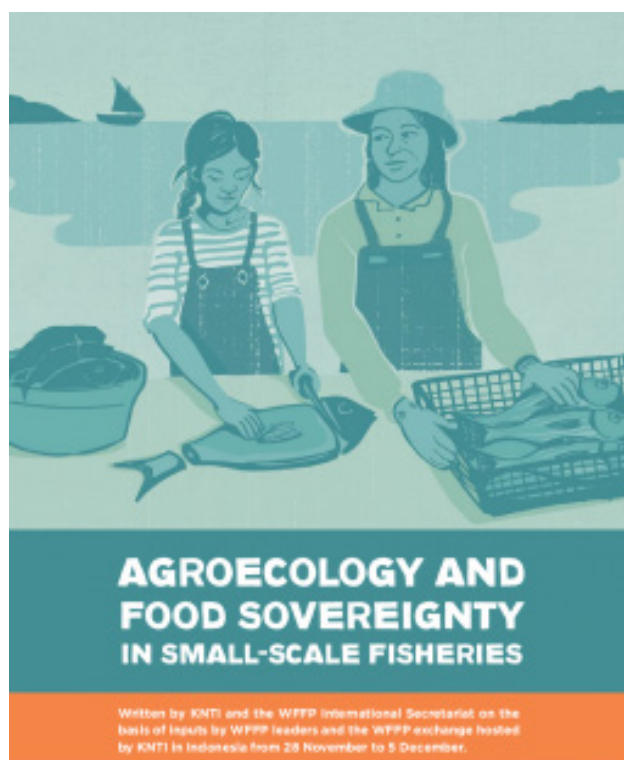


Image 4: WFFP publication cover

generally the declarations of gatherings on food sovereignty like the 2017 LVC international congress or Nyéléni 2007 and 2015. The text of the 2015 Declaration on the Nyéléni forum on Agroecology, for example, includes traditional and artisanal fishing in agroecological practices:

The production practices of Agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales.³²

The declaration recognises fishing grounds as being central to agroecological systems, and the importance of valuing traditional fisher knowledge and facilitating exchange through 'fisher-to-fisher' training.

In line with this vision, increasing interest in SSF struggles within agroecology and political debates on food sovereignty have led to collaboration and knowledge sharing among different social actors. For example, in May 2018, the 7th International Congress on Agroecology took place in Córdoba, organised by ISEC (Institute of Sociology and Peasant Studies) from the University of Córdoba and the Observatory for Food Sovereignty and Agroecology

(OSALA).³³ The congress included a Working Group on Fisheries and Agroecology where presenters discussed SSF experiences and their links with agroecology with case studies from Brazil, India, Mexico, Spain, and Sri Lanka and also from a global perspective. This Working Group has since organised follow-up meetings in Valencia (December 2018) and Barcelona (June 2019) to explore the connections and practices of agroecology in fisheries.

In November 2018, the European regional members of WFFP and representatives from supporting CSOs met in Thessaloniki to discuss how to advance debates on agroecology and food sovereignty in SSF movements and make these debates relevant to each local initiative. The 7th Symposium of Urgenci also brought Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Community Supported Fisheries (CSF) initiatives – such as Local Catch Network from USA and Istanbul Birlik from Turkey – and networks together, where links between land- and sea-based agroecology and practices and movements on food sovereignty could be further explored.

These encounters gave rise to a new project: Urgenci, Pleine Mer (France), Local Catch Network (USA), Transnational Institute, and Istanbul Birlik are collaborating in a multi-year project on Community Supported Fisheries. The programme aims to further develop fisher-to-fisher



Image 5: Exchange with fishers, El Palmar, Valencia, 2018. Photo by Zoe W. Brent

training, to empower SSFs, their communities and their local food systems, and to map and connect regional CSF networks so they can strengthen their own movements and establish stronger alliances.

Another example of collaborative initiatives that explore the role of fisheries in food sovereignty is the 2020 'Rise Up!' online summer school organised by Community Alliance for Global Justice in Seattle.³⁴ The curriculum focused on understanding indigenous fishing communities that are mobilising around the concept of food sovereignty, as well as the campaign against genetically modified salmon in the US.³⁵

In addition to work that explicitly highlights the role of SSFs in the context of agroecology and food sovereignty, a broad literature links SSFs to related or similar terminology. These include works on sustainable and/or community-based management of fisheries; community/alternative economies; a human-rights approach to fisheries; tenure rights of fisher communities; ensuring SSF rights; the right to food; the right to the commons and reclaiming the sea; social and cultural aspects of fisher communities; Community Supported Fisheries (CSF); co-management; and ecosystem-based management. In the academic and scientific literature focusing on SSF rights, the articles on community-based fisheries management and direct sales of SSF products (e.g. Stoll et al., 2015³⁶; Bolton et al., 2016³⁷; Brinson et al., 2011³⁸) are especially relevant.

Finally, there has been a proliferation of institutional documents (published especially by the FAO) mentioning the rights of SSFs or tenure rights, such as 'Coping with the food and agriculture challenge: smallholders' agenda',³⁹ the 'Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security' (VGGTs),⁴⁰ and the 'Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in

the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication' (SSF Guidelines).⁴¹ These documents establish guidelines on how to value the lives and livelihoods of small-scale food producers and so are fundamental to food sovereignty. This boom of institutional work on fishers' rights is to a large extent a reflection of the massive organizing carried out by global and regional fisher movements. WFFP and WFF along with allies played an important role in lobbying for and drafting these documents and declarations, especially in the case of the SSF Guidelines. After the approval of the SSF Guidelines in 2014, SSFs applied further pressure for their implementation at the national level. In response, the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) published the complementary SSF Guidelines Global Strategic Framework (SSF-GSF), which aims to promote human rights, raise awareness, and establish effective ways to implement and monitor national-level guidelines, with the participation of all SSF stakeholders from all regions.⁴² Furthermore, the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) on 17 December 2018,⁴³ which explicitly defines and promotes the rights of small-scale fisher communities and frames them as central actors in food sovereignty, was achieved owing to the collaboration of various allies including peasant farmers, pastoralists, foresters, beekeepers, among others.

While not an exhaustive review, these publications, guidelines and declarations represent key instances, clearly increasing over the last decade, where the language of food sovereignty is used in reference to SSFs, including by institutions in which SSFs do not set the agenda. In other instances, SSF-led organisations have framed their struggles in line with food sovereignty movements, which has strengthened mutual alliances.



Image 6: Indonesian fishing village. Photo by Zoe W. Brent

3 Practices and Alternatives in Different Territories: Insights from the Ground

Beyond issues of terminology, there are many ways in which the principles of food sovereignty are brought to life in fishing communities. By connecting fishers' experiences to broader debates on food sovereignty we highlight the commonalities among land- and water-based small-scale food producers by showing some specific ways in which fishers address the challenges of transforming the food system. How to build local and sustainable food economies? How to ensure that the ecological stewards and small-scale food producers have access to, and control of, the natural resources on which they depend? How to ensure that the labour of producing food is valued and fair? Answering these questions necessarily means addressing

economic inequalities as well as gendered and racialised forms of oppression that present barriers to changing these political, economic, natural resource and labour realities in the food system.

We look at specific fishing communities to explore these key dimensions of food sovereignty: transforming food economies and direct sale experiences among SSFs in Turkey; defence of natural resources; gender and territory among Indonesian SSFs; labour in the food system; and migration and fisheries in Europe and West Africa. While contributing to broader debates, these case studies across a range of territories show the diversity and specificity of SSF struggles.

3.1 Transforming and re-localising food economies

Scholars and activists have long highlighted the failures of the current globalised food economy,⁴⁴ from ecological damage, to alienating and undermining rural food producers' livelihoods, to food miles and lack of transparency regarding the food consumers buy. Food has been treated as a commodity, subject to free-trade agreements that encourage specialised food production geared towards export. The profit-driven approach of corporate food production, with its blind faith in the free market, has concentrated control among a few corporate actors and intermediaries, leaving many vulnerable to chronic or acute food insecurity. Long-distance food-supply chains are also especially vulnerable to disruption, for example through the increasingly common incidence of climate or health crises, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since many SSFs and food producers worldwide have been forced to depend on exports and long-distance food-supply chains, it is no simple matter to return to democratic, sustainable, just and local food systems. As one global network of food producers and allies, the International Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), demonstrates, most small-scale food producers rely on what they define as 'territorial markets',⁴⁵ connecting urban and rural populations, and exchanges between consumers and those providing food from within their bio-regions.

Promoting such markets can also be a strategy to strengthen food sovereignty, increasing food producers' incomes, reclaiming power from intermediaries and maintaining

dignified livelihoods. Being closer to food producers can enable consumers to know more about how food is produced, their own roles in a just and sustainable food system, and to choose their food on the basis of ecological concerns. Food sovereignty activists have paid extensive attention to community-supported agricultural networks



Image 7: Live fish auction, Montgat. Photo by Zoe W. Brent

and local markets. Initiatives promoting local fish consumption, such as La Platjeta in Barceloneta,⁴⁶ and local markets like Catalonia's last remaining live auction (*subhasta cantada*) in Montgat are contemporary examples of some of these practices in the fisheries sector. In general, however, the way that fishers are engaging with territorial markets and local food economies, and the barriers they

face, are less well understood. In recent decades, the creation of alternative markets for small-scale food producers has become urgent, and small-scale fishing cooperatives in many regions are important social and political actors strengthening local food systems, and the sustainability of fish stocks.

Small-scale fisheries in Turkey and the experience of Istanbul Birlik⁴⁷

The situation for Turkish SSFs has become critical, threatening their economic and physical survival. Overfishing and illegal fishing have led to the collapse of important fish stocks. Pollution due to high levels of urbanisation and industrialisation, and insufficient environmental controls, have contributed to declining fish stocks and catastrophic biodiversity loss, especially in the Marmara Sea.⁴⁸ The marketing system for fish and seafood has also trapped many SSFs and their cooperatives in a cycle of rising debt. Current fish and seafood markets are based on intermediaries and commissioners (and the concentration of the larger fish businesses) which use their market power to pressure SSFs to accept below-market prices, leading to a spiral of indebtedness. Consequently, small-scale fishers have become increasingly marginalised. Younger generations have lost interest in fishing, and state representatives and civil society are generally ignorant of fishers' identity and culture.

In response, SSFs are speaking out about the role of fisheries in local food economies. The Association of Istanbul Fishing Cooperatives ('Istanbul Birlik'⁴⁹) was founded in 1980 and represents 34 fisheries cooperatives with about 2,500 members of mostly small-scale fishers around Istanbul. Most of its members' fishing areas are on the coastlines of the Marmara Sea or the Turkish coastal area of the Black Sea.⁵⁰ They participate in meetings of the FAO and IPC (International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, a political organisation of global movements to advance their food sovereignty agenda at the international level) with other organisations fighting for food sovereignty such as LVC, and represent regional and global fisher movements in international arenas.

Istanbul Birlik is an active regional member of SÜR-KOOP, which is the national association of fishing cooperatives in Turkey. Founded in 2004, SÜR-KOOP comprises 15 regional members, and about 243 cooperative members representing approximately 19,000 individual fishers,⁵¹ but also includes industrial fishers. Therefore, the regional associations have distinctive characteristics, and their own political positions and activities.

Historically, industrial fishers and industrial fisher cooperatives in Turkey have been influential, both economically and politically, active in meetings with policy-makers, especially with the General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Previously, small-scale fishers were much less represented in these spaces and processes. Their active participation and the organisation of cooperatives have made them stronger and more visible especially since 2012, 'when around 200 Istanbul Birlik fishers attended the fishery notification meeting in Ankara to the surprise of industrial fishers and policy-makers. [...] This was the first time that such a meeting was attended by any small-scale fisher organisation'.⁵²

In Turkey, SSF vessels are usually made of wood and between 5 and 12 meters long, and fishers use gillnets and/or longlines. Small-scale fishing boats form 90% of the country's fishing fleet, but their total catch is usually less than 10% of the total yield – a significant discrepancy,⁵³ which also translates into a dramatic difference in the environmental impact and pressure on fish populations.

The national and international political development of Istanbul Birlik

Istanbul Birlik has been especially active since 2010, focusing on building its members' capacity, participating in various social and political circles, and building alliances with other social actors such as universities, non-government organisations (NGOs), municipalities and journalists to examine their situation as a SSF community.

The election of a new director and board in 2011 led to a more active approach, focused on community-building, active participation in decision-making spaces, defining structural and political goals, and strengthening communication with fisher people from different cooperatives; and linking up with policy-makers at various



Image 8: Istanbul Birlik member coop. Photo by Zoe W. Brent

administrative levels, as well as with researchers, NGOs, journalists, and municipal governments.

In this period, conflicts between small-scale and industrial fishers have also become more visible, especially regarding the law that stipulates the distance from the coast where purse seiners and trawlers are allowed to fish. On 3 November 2011, purse seiners and trawlers organised a protest in the Bosphorus Strait to be allowed to fish closer to the coastline. Small-scale fishers and NGOs such as Greenpeace and Slow Food Istanbul (*Fikir Sahibi Damaklar*) denounced trawlers fishing illegally in the Bosphorus, as well as the sale of illegally caught juvenile fish.⁵⁴ Industrial fishing actors and other powerful intermediaries colluded in well-organised networks, which used increasingly aggressive tactics, as reported by local newspapers and discussed in forums of fisher people during our fieldwork. Intimidation and coercion were directed against outspoken environmental defenders, which included SSF communities, ecologists, consumer groups, and NGOs, and even included an attack on a cooperative director in Istanbul.⁵⁵

In such an environment, Istanbul Birlik's visibility and political influence has been helped by collaboration with a

range of civil society actors and NGOs such as Greenpeace and Slow Food, consumer groups, restaurant chefs, journalists and academics from disciplines such as biology, fisheries economics, fisheries and aquaculture engineering and the social sciences. Istanbul Birlik has co-organised campaigns, including one against illegal fishing in order to prevent the catching and selling of juvenile fish with the slogan, promoted by Greenpeace, '*How many centimetres is yours?*'⁵⁶, and a 2011–2015 campaign⁵⁷ to protect the traditionally and culturally significant blue fish species of the Bosphorus called 'lüfer' with the slogan '*Lüfer protection team*'.⁵⁸

Istanbul Birlik also organises ongoing capacity-building activities among its members, including regular workshops, aimed at improving the management structure of cooperatives (e.g. principles, legal structures and responsibilities); promoting sustainable fisheries; and discussing how to improve the situation of their members, both in terms of the infrastructure and facilities provided to fisher members, and through protecting the SSF identity and culture. This has facilitated a fisher-to-fisher learning system, strengthened collaboration among members of Istanbul Birlik, and developed their

organisational structures, as well as enabling cooperatives and their members to communicate and collaborate more closely with researchers and academics – from whom fishers received feedback and support by exchanging ideas on topics including legal structures, cooperativism, the relation of fisheries and aquaculture, marine plastics, and Blue Growth, among others.

Engagement with other food sovereignty movements

Istanbul Birlik has also joined existing international networks and built new relationships. This has helped to raise awareness of fisheries issues within the broader international movements for food sovereignty and agroecology, strengthened the political voice of SSFs, and presented new opportunities for joint work. After participating in the International Colloquium on Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies and the workshop on ocean grabbing held in Vitoria/Gasteiz in the Basque Country in April 2017, Istanbul Birlik hosted a workshop of SSF organisations from Europe in September of that year. Regional members of WFFP attended, including representatives from Spain (*Asociación Profesional de Autónomos del Mar*), France (*Plateforme de la Petite Pêche Artisanale Française*), the Russian indigenous platform (Aborigen Forum) and

Despite the political and economic dominance of industrial fishers, Istanbul Birlik has succeeded in making small fishers increasingly visible since 2011. Now recognised as important actors in this sector, they have gradually entered into discussions about amending the national fisheries legislation, which is renewed every four years, with the existing one in effect until 31 August 2020.

Sápmi (Saami Council). This exchange facilitated a deeper understanding of problems and struggles common to fishers throughout Europe, and encouraged them to look for ways to further collaborate at the international level.

Thanks to these collaborations, Istanbul Birlik attended the 7th General Assembly of WFFP held in New Delhi, the occasion of WFFP's 20th anniversary. Istanbul Birlik became a member of WFFP, joining more than 50 other country representatives. '[T]hese transnational alliances constitute a source of inspiration for Istanbul Birlik in terms of new ideas (e.g., food sovereignty and agroecology), organisational structures, or even procedural details such as how to run an effective meeting and how to ensure participation of a diverse set of stakeholders'.⁵⁹



Image 9: The design of a possible Co-op Shop of 200m² with areas to sell, process, cook and eat fish and for cultural activities (Source: 'Know Your Fisher Project' flyer)

Putting ideas into practice: Direct Sales Model and Co-op Shops

Facing the ecological and social crisis in their region, especially with falling fish stocks and spiralling indebtedness of small-scale fishers to intermediaries, Istanbul Birlik has launched a 'Direct Sales Model' project. The project aims to increase SSFs' control over the fish they catch and sell to consumers. Rather than depending on intermediaries who buy up the fish very cheaply and add commissions along the value chain until it reaches the final consumer in supermarkets, fishmongers or restaurants, they seek to establish direct-sale networks. These would both give value to the producer and provide cheaper fish for the consumer, helping to make it more accessible to people with limited economic means. According to the head of Istanbul Birlik, the model will help to change the dominant view fostered by the capitalist market system: 'people would perceive fish not as a commodity, but as food'.⁶⁰

The planned Direct Sales Model includes opening Co-op Shops (see Image 2) in different districts in Istanbul. Fish caught by Istanbul Birlik's members will be bought by the cooperatives at a fixed and fair price. Istanbul Birlik will own its refrigerated transport system, and fish would then be sold in Co-op Shops. This direct access to local markets will improve the economic situation of SSFs, and reduce their dependence on intermediaries in determining the price of fish.⁶¹ Co-op Shops would provide not only a market place but also an area for processing, cooking, and selling value-added products. The objective would be to employ women and young adults in particular, giving them more visibility and offering employment linked to the SSF sector.

Part of the Co-op's space would be dedicated to cultural events such as fisher festivals, seminars, exhibitions, activities for children, and debates. These would help to increase awareness about SSF traditions, local species, the specific characteristics of the marine territory (i.e. the Northern Marmara Sea, the Bosphorus, and the southwest area of the Black Sea) as well as the idea of Community Supported Fisheries (CSF). Design and construction of the space will be undertaken in collaboration with other groups such as agroecological consumer initiatives, researchers, district municipalities and CSOs.

This project aims first to improve the situation of SSFs, beginning with the members of Istanbul Birlik, but it is also a broader project to enhance public knowledge about

the seas, traditional ways of fishing, fisher communities, and the dynamics and social actors in the fisheries food system. In recent years, thriving organic, agroecological, and/or local food movements have helped communities to discover the many rewards of rebuilding relationships with small-scale food providers.⁶² Reconnecting communities to traditional and small-scale fishers can likewise provide many benefits.⁶³ The name of the project – 'Know Your Fisher Project' – (see Image 10) alludes to this.

The experiences of CSF networks from the USA and estimates for the Istanbul Birlik's seafood marketing project and the proposed Co-op Shops (see Image 9) indicate that SSFs could expect a 30% increase in their income.⁶⁴ This would be an important means to overcome the SSFs' indebted and marginalised economic situation. To realise this plan, Istanbul Birlik has been meeting with district municipalities during 2019/20 to obtain a physical space with the support of the municipality, to avoid paying inflated commercial rents. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has stalled negotiations.

İSTANBUL BÖLGESİ SU ÜRÜNLERİ KOOPERATİFLER BİRLİĞİ



"BALIKÇINI TANI" PROJESİ



HEDEF 1:
Küçük ölçekli
balıkçıların
sürdürülebilirliğe
katkılarını arttırmak

HEDEF 2:
Tüketicilerin küçük
ölçekli balıkçıyı
tanıması, kaliteli ve
ucuz balığa erişmesi

Image 10: The 'Know Your Fisher Project' flyer

Community -supported Fisheries (CSF) networks: fishers' alliances with the agroecological consumer groups and municipalities

Since the last municipal elections in early 2019, Istanbul Birlik has maintained contact with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM), aiming to realise Co-op Shops in 10 to 25 districts. Regular meetings took place throughout 2019 and early 2020 between the IMM, agro-ecological consumption cooperatives and initiatives, and fisher cooperatives in order to collectively design such farmer/producer markets.

Today, there are about 30 agroecological consumer groups in the Istanbul region. The first was BÜKOOP (Consumption Cooperative of Members of Bogazici University) founded in 2009,⁶⁵ which was followed by others that have flourished, especially since 2015. These are key potential allies to the 'Know Your Fisher Project', and SSFs and Istanbul Birlik are joining conversations and debates on how to link these initiatives to build a social

and solidarity economy, and about what kind of structure would be possible in Istanbul.

Such citizen and consumer initiatives, learning collectively and working to establish broader Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Community Supported Fisheries (CSF) networks, are critical in the movement towards a just and more socially and ecologically sustainable food system, based on food sovereignty. This project and other initiatives of the Istanbul Birlik demonstrate the many parallels between Birlik fishers and agroecological farmers and the debates among food sovereignty activists about how to re-localise food economies. Both on land and at sea, these alternative food economies are more democratic, economically viable, ecologically sustainable and culturally appropriate.

3.2 Defence of natural resources: the foundation of food system transformation

With the advent of capitalism, the displacement of peasants from their land has been key to the industrialisation of food production and the undermining of small-scale and artisanal food production. As the growing literature on land grabs has demonstrated, these processes of dispossession are not some relic of the past,⁶⁶ but an integral part of the contemporary corporate-controlled food system. Importantly, these processes are often deeply unjust even if they observe 'legal' state-sanctioned means. Now they are also taking place at sea, displacing fishers, in what has been described as 'ocean grabbing'.⁶⁷ The threats of displacement faced by small-scale food producers are massive and diverse. Resisting and reversing such grabs of natural resources is central to the global struggles for food sovereignty, aiming to reassert people's control over the natural resource base needed to produce food sustainably.⁶⁸

Like peasant farmers campaigning against land grabbing, fishers have also campaigned against natural resource grabs in defence of their territories. In Brazil, for example, since 2012, the Movement of Artisanal Fishers (MPP) and the Brazilian bishops' Pastoral Council of Fishers (CCP) have been mobilising and advocating for a federal law that would protect artisanal fishers' rights to territory and food sovereignty. Thanks to this campaign, with the slogan 'Fishing Territory: Biodiversity, Culture and Food

Sovereignty of Brazilian People' (*Território Pesqueiro: Biodiversidade, Cultura e Soberania Alimentar do Povo Brasileiro*)⁶⁹ they convened more than 250 fishermen and fisherwomen in November 2019 during the *Grito de Pesca* 2019, and collected around 200,000 signatures which are currently being processed by the Brazilian government. Throughout the mobilisation process, they have been defending their fishing rights, indigenous rights, territorial rights, the rights of fisherwomen as well as food sovereignty, linking these debates and struggles together.⁷⁰ Gathering insights from different cases helps to reveal key patterns of resource grabbing and lessons from struggles against it. Natural resource grabs exacerbate existing rural inequalities created by intersecting forms of gendered, racialised and ethnic oppression.

Here we focus on the gendered consequences of land and ocean grabbing because fisherwomen's current mobilisations suggest that it is crucial to support and frame their resistance efforts. Peasant women's labour is systematically rendered invisible, their role in agriculture is often seen as the wife of a farmer, and land and credit are routinely harder for women to access than for men. Women peasant farmers tend to manage smaller-scale farms, less oriented towards export and more crucial for ensuring their community's food security, yet women disproportionately bear the brunt of hunger in rural areas.



Image 11: Woman processing fish for lunch, Tarakan, Indonesia. Photo by Zoe W Brent

Similar processes are happening in fishing communities worldwide. Activities that take place at sea tend to be what comes to mind when we think of fishing – essentially male-dominated work. But women also go out to sea and also dominate in a range of pre- and post-harvest tasks that sustain local fishing economies as well as households. From mending nets and gear, to keeping the books, from childcare and job training to fish processing and selling, women around the world occupy diverse and essential roles in fisheries. These contributions are important to sustaining households, and to healthy diets. FAO (2015) has estimated that small-scale fishers who mostly sell to

local markets provide some 65% of the fish destined for direct human consumption.⁷¹ Seen in this way, fishing communities play a crucial role in healthy food systems and local-level decisions: which fish can be caught or need to stay in the water, which to dry or eat fresh, which gear to use, which market stand to buy from, how to clean or process the fish, and how to cook it are all important aspects of food sovereignty. Women in particular make many of these decisions and keep these activities going – and so are key protagonists in the struggle for food sovereignty in fisher communities.

Gender and territory in Indonesian fisheries⁷²

In Indonesia, an archipelagic nation comprising over 17,000 islands, fishing is a way of life for over 6 million people and some 85–90% of the total catch is brought in by small-scale fishers.⁷³ However, large-scale infrastructure projects as part of President Jokowi's Blue Revolution, which aims to frame the country as the 'World Maritime Axis,' are putting pressure on fishers' access to marine resources and undermining food sovereignty in these areas. In a total reorganisation and reallocation of ocean space, referred to as marine spatial planning (MSP),⁷⁴ sand from the seabed is being mined, shipped and piled up to

redraw part of the Indonesian coastline, making space for new ports and logistical hubs, tourist development and luxury real estate. This process of turning existing ocean space into new coastland is referred to as reclamation. As sand is moved from one place to another, ocean currents are disrupted, fish habitats are destroyed, and fishers themselves are being displaced to make way for new infrastructure aimed at integrating Indonesia's peripheral regions into central trade and transport routes and to position the country for global commerce.

Makassar: Indonesia's shipping hub displacing traditional fisheries

Makassar is one of the major port cities on Sulawesi Island, which Jokowi aims to make a central logistics and commercial hub in Indonesia. The two main infrastructure development projects currently underway in the region are the Makassar New Port (MNP, a national strategic project managed by state-owned port-management company, PT Pelindo IV), oriented towards shipping and set to reclaim 1,428 ha; and the Central Point of Indonesia (CPI, managed by private real-estate developers PT Yasmin Bumi Asri and Ciputra Group, and construction services provided by Dutch company, Boskalis⁷⁵), which proposes to reclaim 156 ha geared towards tourism. To prevent protests against the CPI, a large mosque has been built on the site, which has limited resistance. However, as we explored in our fieldwork, the MNP has been the target of ongoing mobilisation by fishers and allies.

The development of the MNP prevents fishers from accessing fishing grounds and coastal areas that are vital to local livelihoods, for example around the villages of Tallo, Sengka, Batu and Buloa. Here, as in all fishing communities, women play a critical role in the local fishing

economy. One of the key fishing activities is practised only by women: harvesting mussels, *lingula* (lamp shells) and oysters on the sea shore. Women also work throughout the value chain, from harvesting mussels, to washing them and taking them to market. They are also involved in post-harvest activities of the boat-based fishery practised primarily by men who use traps to catch crabs, which are generally washed and sold by women. Women also dry fish and shrimp. With the construction of projects like CPI and MNP, women have limited access to the shellfish and other raw produce and are deprived of these important sources of income.

The development of the MNP, which began in 2017, has been written into the marine spatial plan, which was approved with little consultation with fishers, although the process was promised to be participatory. The maritime construction has generated pollution along the shore, and the increase in mud and coastal erosion due to the waves carrying larger particles from the reclamation means that fishers have to go farther out to catch fish.

Gendered impacts of infrastructure development

While men and women alike are experiencing negative impacts and are being excluded from the places they fish and collect shellfish, women especially are bearing the burden of a wide range of other consequences. We can see this in terms of women's productive activities (to generate an income, job opportunities, paid employment) and social reproductive roles (i.e. unpaid domestic and care work, which ensures the reproduction of the social system in which their family members live and work).

First, according to fisherwomen in Tallo, the volume of mussels they collect has halved from two sacks a day bringing in around IDR100,000–120,000 to one sack a day worth IDR 50,000. Some have given up altogether, because they no longer have access to their fishing grounds, so they cannot catch fish or harvest mussels. Fisherwomen have to seek work in informal warehouses where they are hired on a daily basis for IDR 80,000. Similar situations can be observed in Jakarta and Surabaya, where big infrastructure projects also have gendered impacts. Fadhillah Trya Wulandari interviewed women mussel collectors from the communities of Muara Baru and Kali Baru, in relation to the reclamation project in Jakarta Bay (including a sea wall, supposedly to avoid flooding). She noted that women saw an increase in production costs

after the reclamation project particularly because of the greater distance between where mussels are processed and where they are sold.⁷⁶ Women also observed a drop in their incomes, because water pollution is reducing the growth rate of mussels. As they are paid by the kilo, it now takes far more time to collect the same weight.

Second, the fisherwomen said they generally shoulder the financial impacts on the household, as they are traditionally seen as the family financial manager and responsible for making ends meet. The decline in incomes among fisher families has also meant mounting debts. Some children drop out of school, because their parents can no longer afford the fees. Worse still, economic desperation is leading to a rise in child marriage for girls, as a way to earn a dowry and relieve the family's financial pressure.

As lack of access to fishing zones undermine fishermen's livelihoods, this can fuel what might be seen as a crisis of masculinity in a context where traditional patriarchal gender roles assume that men are the main breadwinners. Interviews with local community organisers suggest that frustration and pressure are rising, as is male violence in the home.



Image 12: Fishing village outside of Makassar city. Photo by Thibault Josse

Lastly, the invisible emotional labour of maintaining social relations and cohesion among neighbours, and community structures and norms, which is commonly undertaken by women, is also affected. According to fisherwomen, several local NGOs in and around Makassar are encouraging fishers to accept government compensation to offset the negative impacts of the MNP. Unfortunately, the compensation is only about IDR 1 million and women are often not

consulted. Some fishers reject compensation outright. This is causing further community tensions, which the women say they end up having to manage. Similar situations occur in the agricultural sector, where decisions made by men who hold land titles in terms of farm yields and practices are given priority over household food security and social reproductive labour.

Institutionalised patriarchy

Arie Kurniawaty, of the Women's Solidarity Association, Solidaritas Perempuan (SP), argues that the process of marine spatial planning in Indonesia has been developed and implemented according to a patriarchal logic. 'RZWP3K' (the spatial plan) is allocating space to different sectors. Who is the most important in this? Some people will lose. In Indonesia there are patriarchal priorities – big projects. But for us creating jobs for women in fishing communities should be a priority, but they are not seen. Women are invisibilised and therefore will lose.⁷⁷

Indeed, this lack of recognition is institutionalised by the state and in their own communities. Women are registered on their ID cards as the wife of a fisher, rather than as fishers in their own right, even if they go to sea and/or contribute in many ways to local fishing economies. Insurance and public finance options do not recognise

women as fishers so they cannot get government support. Women need a marriage certificate to inherit property, which is only possible if they are widowed, otherwise they may not own property. In the limited consultation on the development of the Makassar MSP, women were not invited or make a contribution because they were not recognised as stakeholders. Legally, the man is the head of the family. Thus, in the words of Kurniawaty, 'the law itself and policies specific to fisheries are patriarchal'.⁷⁸ At the same time, their own husbands and other men in the community often claim that women are superfluous to the process. Thus, like many peasant women, traditional fisherwomen's perspectives are not taken into consideration and their contributions are rendered invisible. Of course, what they do is fundamental to subsistence, but 'the New Port is not about subsistence, it's about big business'.⁷⁹

This capitalist development logic that promotes massive coastal infrastructure also has serious ecological implications. According to Buckingham-Hatfield (2000), 'women are disproportionately affected by negative environmental impacts because of their social and domestic roles and a greater likelihood of poverty'.⁸⁰ As Kurniawaty from SP and

Mobilisation and the way forward

These projects not only have gendered impacts, but also gendered reactions and mobilisations as women's participation and leadership are growing in fisher organisations.⁸¹ Formed in 1992, SP supports women's mobilisation and provides feminist leadership training from its 11 offices across Indonesia. Its vision is to create a democratic social order, based on the principles of justice, ecological awareness, and respect for pluralism, with equality in gender relations, in which women and men fairly share access to and control over natural, social, cultural, economic and political resources.

There are 76 individual members in Makassar, and SP is working particularly in fishing communities like Tallo, facing the impacts of the MNP development. They use popular education and action research to analyse the gendered impacts on Indonesian communities, and empower women to fight these issues. These research methodologies

Wulandari's analyses show, environmental degradation is a form of discrimination, part of an oppressive system, institutionalised by policies that promote large-scale infrastructure development while rendering women's rights and needs invisible.

prioritise women-only spaces where they seek to raise awareness about what is happening in the communities and specifically to understand women's perspectives, without men encroaching on their space. 'If we want to make working groups, which is important to work more easily, if women are in groups with men, then we won't be heard. We need our own groups.'⁸² These groups are carefully collecting data and information about the MNP construction processes and its impacts in order to strengthen advocacy work. Community meetings organised in this way help to gather data about gendered impacts of big infrastructure development while also supporting women in organising and building strategies to resist such policies, which are deeply rooted in a capitalist and patriarchal system.

In particular, SP members have analysed how policy tools like MSP are used by the national and provincial governments to justify and implement major infrastructure



Image 13: Fisherwomen discussing organizing strategies. Photo by Zoe W Brent

projects. MSP is described as a neutral tool to resolve conflicts over ocean space, but a recent report on the topic shows that a gender bias is clearly evident in the way MSP is implemented, taking advantage of patriarchal cultural and institutional dynamics to exclude women from a decision-making process that is likely to have a major impact on them.⁸³ The participatory action research helped to create a vehicle for fisherwomen's mobilisation. They have put pressure on government from outside the institutions, organising many protests attended by hundreds of women outside the local government, and SP leaders have been invited to give public presentations before the local government on the gendered impacts caused by MSP.

Implications for gender and food sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty highlights the ways in which the small-scale producers that keep local food economies going and feed marginalised communities are being displaced from their lands and territories to make way for global trade and investment. Feminist perspectives articulated by SP dovetail with this vision of food sovereignty, emphasising the importance of systems that ensure life and dignity. Highlighting the feminist dimension of food sovereignty puts life and life-sustaining activities like food production at the centre of decision making. A gender-sensitive analysis of food sovereignty helps to focus specifically on women's lives and needs and their diverse roles in the

In 2015, the 'Aliansi Selamatkan Pesisir' (Save the Coast Alliance) was formed in order to push for litigation against the CPI coastal development. This work was led by Walhi Sulsel (Friends of the Earth South Sulawesi), and the SP office in Makassar (SP Anging Mammiri) joined to strengthen the role of grassroots women in the alliance. The strong presence of SP on the ground also allows its members to make gender concerns a central issue in the coalition, raising awareness among other NGOs that may be less aware of gender dynamics at the community level. This puts gender at the centre of civil society organising, helping gradually to address patriarchy within NGOs as well as bringing a feminist analysis to the advocacy work.

food system, from production to provision, among other things. This makes clear the need to challenge institutionalised patriarchy, which does not recognise these crucial contributions, as well as patriarchy within communities and CSOs. Although there is much to be done, feminist perspectives are increasingly evident in agroecology and food sovereignty movements, in slogans like 'Without feminism there is no Agroecology'⁸⁴ and the rules on gender parity for all leadership positions within global movements like WFFP and LVC, as well as their campaign against violence against women in rural areas.⁸⁵

3.3 Labour in the food system

The percentage of migrant labour (especially) in industrialised primary sectors such as industrial fisheries and industrial agriculture has been dramatically increasing in recent decades. Many of the migrants employed in agriculture – legally or with exploitative or no contract – endure harsh and unjust working and living conditions.⁸⁶ In Spain, for example, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food called for authorities to 'immediately improve the deplorable conditions' of migrant workers,⁸⁷ only for agro-business owners to deny any 'irregularities' in their employment practices.⁸⁸ In the midst of these debates, serious tragedies continue to occur, such as the death of Eleazar Blandón, a Nicaraguan temporary farmworker who suffered heatstroke while harvesting watermelon in Spain. Instead of attending to his health needs, the field manager ignored him until finally leaving him at the door of a nearby health clinic.⁸⁹ These injustices have been deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the dependence of European food systems on migrant labour. Migrants have

faced increasingly draconian border politics, interrupted travel due to restrictions or in some cases permitted despite the serious health risks.⁹⁰ In industrial fisheries, the case of forced and child labour – most victims are migrant workers – is also almost entirely neglected by policy-makers and industries.⁹¹

Cases like these have reinforced the importance of situating labour conditions at the heart of efforts to build food sovereignty and agroecology. The movement for food justice and food sovereignty 'cannot thrive in a system where food workers are criminalized, exploited, and going hungry',⁹² and so must address the struggle for labour rights and immigrant rights. At the same time, while many food sovereignty activists, peasant farmers and artisanal fishers struggle against violations of labour rights and injustices, ensuring jobs for all of those workers in an alternative food system, and establishing the alliances necessary for a politics of convergence rather than confrontation among peasants and farm workers, for example, is much more difficult.

While we do not pretend to have the answers, the questions that emerge at the intersection of migration and fisheries in Europe and West Africa shed light on

some of the challenges, dynamics and political opportunities for transforming labour relations in building food sovereignty.⁹³

Circuits of displacement and exploitation in fisheries

By some accounts, even in the 1970s irregular migration from Africa to Europe took place on large fishing trawlers. Those who could pay the equivalent of €2,500–3,000 would make deals with the trawler owners to take them to Spain at the end of the fishing season, and others would seek help from the workers on the trawlers, paying €500–1,000 to travel as stowaways.⁹⁴ Others would take overland routes through the desert to Spanish protectorates Ceuta and Melilla. Migration flows have shifted over the years in response to increased border controls, and the externalisation and militarisation of EU borders led since 2004 by Frontex, the EU border control and coastguard agency. Further, entry into Europe via Ceuta or Melilla declined after the highly publicised brutality against migrants attempting to cross the border in 2005, and the border fence being increased from three to six metres in height. This led to new opportunities further south along the West African coastline from where boats could take migrants across the Atlantic to the Canary Islands. The Mauritanian city of Nouadhibou became a transit hub, until strengthened border controls pushed efforts further south to Saint Louis in Senegal, Mbour, Joal, Casamance and eventually Guinea-Bissau.⁹⁵

From 2006 onwards, coordinated by Frontex, the EU effectively began to subcontract its border security tasks to West African countries, via operations like Hera I, II, and III, in hopes of catching people at the start of their migration journey. Through this cooperation, European member states such as Portugal, Italy and Spain supplied 2 helicopters, 2 ships and around 10 patrol boats to Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia and Cape Verde.⁹⁶ The Atlantic sea route to Spain dwindled in importance and in 2012 only 173 new arrivals were arrested, although this excludes the vast number who did not survive the journey.⁹⁷ Subsequently, Mediterranean routes resumed importance, and once more diversified and expanded rapidly.⁹⁸ Many who embark on treacherous journeys across the Atlantic or the Mediterranean in search of work and opportunities to support their families do not make it (some 28,000 deaths have been registered by the Migrants' Files database since 2000, and many more will probably never be counted).⁹⁹ If they do arrive, institutional racism, xenophobia and the threat of deportation limit their ability to make a decent life.



Image 14: French fisher. Photo by Thibault Josse



Image 15: Photo by Thibault Josse

Fuelling Senegalese migration

In the face of inequality, war and conflict, human rights violations and multiple threats to human survival, thousands of people see migration to Europe as the best, or only, option. Among the factors driving this migratory flow are the EU's own fisheries policies. Bilateral fishing agreements included in the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) essentially allow the EU to pay non-EU countries large sums to convince them to open up their sovereign waters to European fishing fleets, which have exhausted fish stocks in European seas.¹⁰⁰

In Senegal, for example, nearly 20% of the national workforce is employed in fisheries, but fish stocks and income in this sector have suffered as a result of industrial fishing, especially through agreements with foreign fishing fleets and with the EU.¹⁰¹ Formal bilateral agreements between the EU and Senegal were not renewed after 2006 because of the devastation of fish resources. 'However, since then a number of European-based companies have settled in Senegal as joint ventures. They are officially Senegalese, count as Senegalese fishing companies, and at the same time are an opportunity for European fleets to informally fish in Senegalese waters and reserve their catches for export to the European market.'¹⁰² The number of small,

locally owned boats fell by 48% between 1998 and 2008 as international fleets overfished and squeezed out artisanal fishers.¹⁰³

In Europe, industrial fishing is a sector that increasingly employs migrant labour. This tragic circuit, whereby European trawlers generate the conditions that force people to migrate and benefit from their precarious position on reaching their destination by employing them in exploitative labour arrangements, is one of the central processes through which migration intersects with fisheries in Europe. One fisher describes how he was brought to tears when he had to return to Senegalese waters on an industrial fishing boat, unable to set foot on land to visit his family, and as the trawler continued the pillage of his native coastal fishery – which was why he was forced to migrate in the first place.¹⁰⁴

Of course, not all West African fishers migrate, people from a diverse backgrounds migrate to Europe, and not all non-local people who end up working in the European fisheries sector are former fishers. 'Migration is a collective action'¹⁰⁵ and has been part of human interaction for millennia. 'It arises out of social change and affects the whole society. Boat migration thrives on networking: networks of

migrants, families and organizers, as well as networks of settled migrants in the country of destination.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, 'it is often the women and their families who make the men's journeys possible by funding their trips, helping them find jobs and housing when they arrive, and taking on the added burdens they leave behind'.¹⁰⁷ The undermining of SSF livelihoods and ever-evolving patterns of migration affect

Producing precarity in European fisheries

Many European nationals find the protection against risk and precarity offered by the fisheries sector as insufficient. Increased pressure and uncertainty among fishers, compounded by high levels of risks and accidents at sea, mean that young Europeans are choosing not to continue in the family tradition. Increased regulatory and financial barriers impede access to boats and, along with the necessary qualifications, make it hard to enter the fishing sector. Strictly regulated or limited fishing periods drive fishers to stay out at sea for longer or in bad weather in order to catch enough to earn a living.¹⁰⁹ European nationals generally have better educational and professional opportunities than their parents, and the deteriorating image of the fisheries sector – seen as dangerous and faced with

not only the men who migrate but entire families and family structures. For example, after the Senegalese fisher called Omar settled in Europe, his and his partner Aida's families planned their wedding ceremony. But since he still had not obtained legal status permitting him to travel, he was not physically present at his own wedding – something increasingly common among Senegalese families.¹⁰⁸

declining fish stocks¹¹⁰ – makes 'recruitment through a father-to-son pathway' less common than before.¹¹¹

In France, recruitment is most difficult on medium and larger vessels.¹¹² Declining fish stocks combined with rising consumer demand for fish products incentivises industrial trawlers to cut wages in order to compensate for the declining catch and maximise profits. According to Seafarers' Rights International, it is this large-scale part of the industry that is primarily turning to non-local labour.¹¹³ 'Migrants – including those from non-EU countries – are often viewed as the solution to difficulties in recruiting from the local population, who sometimes regard fishing or fish-processing jobs as low-wage work with unpleasant working conditions.'¹¹⁴



Image 16: French fishing boat. Photo by Thibault Josse



Image 17: French fishers. Photo by Thibault Josse

Fishing has always been a dangerous profession.

Fishers are more likely to lose their lives at work than those in other occupations, including dangerous jobs such as mining and construction. Information from fisheries' administrations and fishers' organizations indicates that fatality rates are on the rise. In the UK, where safety rules are very tight, fatal accidents among fishers were 115 times greater than for the overall workforce in the period 1996-2005.¹¹⁵

However, fishers not working in their country of origin face even higher levels of risk and injury. 'For example, 75 per cent of deaths on UK fishing vessels in 2008 were migrant fishers from either Eastern Europe or the Philippines. The Filipino death rate of 350 per 100,000 was more than

three times the UK death rate of 102 per 100,000.'¹¹⁶

Of course, those who end up working in the Western European fisheries sector face very diverse circumstances and challenges. Many non-local fishers are highly sought after because of their excellent skills at sea. Migrant fishers who work for companies that are sensitive to migration issues can enjoy comfortable working and living conditions, even if fishing is still hard and dangerous work. But unfortunately, many end up in jobs that take advantage of their migration status, particularly when they are in an irregular administrative situation. A range of exploitative labour arrangements and mechanisms enable boat owners to pass on losses to workers.



Image 18: Istanbul fishing port. Photo credit Istanbul Birlik

Human trafficking and near or actual slavery conditions are currently a reality in western European fisheries. According to an investigation by the *Guardian*, ‘some boat owners and crewing agencies are smuggling African and Filipino workers into Ireland through entry points at London Heathrow and Belfast airports, and then arranging for them to cross from Northern Ireland into the Republic by road, bypassing Irish immigration controls’.¹¹⁷ Fishers interviewed by the *Guardian* indicate that crewing agents set up deals in advance in the fishers’ country of origin, lending money for the passage and charging for the visa, which ultimately does not exist. Though not explicitly told they would end up working without papers when promised by recruiters that a job awaited them in Europe, upon arrival they are shouldered with debt to hiring agents and, ‘[m]any workers describe subsequently living in fear of deportation and being told to stay on their boats in port because the owners would be fined if they were spotted and stopped by the authorities’.¹¹⁸

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), which has spearheaded the campaign for regulatory change in Ireland,¹¹⁹ has also denounced similar practices in Galicia in Spain.¹²⁰ Our fieldwork found that in Brittany, one boat owner is well known for confiscating migrant

workers’ papers in order to put pressure on them to accept low salaries. These situations trap non-local fishers in exploitative work, where they experience psychological pressure, lack of sleep, dangerous working conditions and limited time on land, all of which limit the extent to which they are able to organise collectively or even make contacts that could help them to escape or push for better working conditions.

People migrating within the EU may also face unjust and irregular employment conditions. The system of *posted workers* makes it possible for European companies to hire workers without complying with all the regulations of the country in which they work. Instead, the worker is subject to the employment conditions of the ‘sending’ country, where they remain formally employed. In 2017, a total of 2.8 million posted worker agreements were issued in the EU. Workers in agriculture, hunting and fishing make up only some 0.8% of total posted workers, but this nonetheless represents about 10,972 workers in that year alone. Notably, 6,911 (63% of posted workers in agriculture, hunting and fisheries) came from Poland.¹²¹ In the case of French fisheries, our fieldwork indicates that such workers are hired by industrial boats in order to cut costs and pay lower wages than French fishers expect. In

this case, we also found some Spanish boat owners who had bought old French trawlers to access French fishing quotas, and who rely on lower wages of posted workers to recoup the investment cost. Overall, these practices reveal the ways that some boat owners leverage the mobility of capital and labour within the EU to increase profits. The European Commission (EC) has described this as ‘social dumping’, a situation ‘where foreign service providers can undercut local service providers because their labour standards are lower’.¹²²

Although there are no reliable data for legally employed migrant labour in fisheries across EU member states, a 2016 EC study attempts to compile existing data sources. Authors claim that some 5.6% (19,000) of legally employed workers in EU fisheries are non-local, concentrated primarily in France, Spain and the UK.¹²³ Much of this labour comes from workers moving between EU countries, as is the case for 86.1% of non-local workers in France, for

example. However, countries like Spain and Portugal rely much more heavily on workers coming from outside of the EU, as the table below demonstrates.

In many cases the diversity of people working in European fishing fleets is an opportunity for cultural exchange on board and generational renewal in a sector in which many local young people prefer not to work. Our fieldwork suggests, however, that on some boats, despite having work permits, racialised workers face racism and discrimination at sea, which can make already tough working conditions unbearable. Senegalese fishers working on big trawlers in Brittany explained they face harassment because of the racism of some white crew members. This can lead to depression or to tensions among the crew. Some of those interviewed explained that this can be a motive for leaving a boat or business to go somewhere where they feel more accepted, even though finding another job may be very difficult.

Finding ways to survive in Europe

For many people who migrate to Europe, continuing to fish may not be an option. One striking example of this trajectory is the case of Barcelona’s street vendors, known as ‘*Manteros*’. Given the impact of European fisheries policies on Senegalese coastal areas, an important proportion of street vendors – selling clothes, bags, shoes, etc. in the tourist areas near the recently gentrified Port

Vell – are former Senegalese fishers. However, the police and sometimes local people often treat them as criminals for informal street selling. The Barcelona Municipality has been trying to improve the situation of street vendors and to better welcome refugees, but so far there is no real solution to the issue.

TABLE 1
Proportions of EU and non-EU workers within non-local labour force (2013).

	Total non-local workers	% EU	% non-EU
Spain	3,887	27.2%	72.8%
France*	1,552	86.1%	13.9%
Denmark	871	60.2%	39.8%
Germany	799	68.8%	31.2%
Portugal	390	32.4%	67.6%
Finland	189	82.0%	18.0%
Estonia*	85	62.4%	37.6%
Cyprus**	42	70.8%	29.2%
Croatie**	28	44.0%	56.0%

* Data refers to catching sub-sector only, as no data available for EU/non-EU/ split for other sub-sectors

** Share calculated from 2011 Census as the only source available

Source: MRAG Ltd, Coffey and AND International, 2016: 19

As a way to combat the precariousness and social stigma they face in Barcelona, the primarily Senegalese community of street vendors formed a cooperative in 2015 called the 'Sindicato Popular de Vendedores Ambulantes', commonly known as the 'Sindicato de Manteros' (Union of Manteros). A year later they created their own brand, 'Top Manta' and began to sell their own T-shirts and sweatshirts under the brand of the cooperative in an old shop in the Raval neighbourhood. After the cooperative was formed, many social movements became aware of the struggle and began looking for ways to collaborate. The Sindicato de Manteros has thus participated in many assemblies, events, and cooking workshops in order to explain their stories and their struggles, opening the way for further collaboration with other collectives and movements. In one such encounter, former fishers and members of the collective participated in the 'Food Sovereignty and Small-Scale Fisheries encounter' organised in Barcelona in June 2019. This was an important opportunity for people from different food sovereignty movements to understand their various struggles, and helped to make their case more visible and establish solidarity. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the collective has organised the collection of food and donations to distribute among families in need. The collective continues to face police harassment, and a fine of up to €60,000 for ensuring the basic food security of over 300 of the city's most vulnerable families.¹²⁴

In addition to formal employment in fisheries, many refugees use recreational fishing as a way to meet part of the

food needs of the household or community. In France, for example, recreational fishing is legal and important for many families who endure racist immigration policies, as well as social and economic exclusion. In Douarnenez, in Brittany, recreational fishing is a widely used community subsistence activity among immigrant populations from nearby cities. The so-called 'pier of shame' attracts many locals, Africans, Asians and Roma people to fish mackerel or squid. In the summer and autumn when these fish are in season, the dock is lined shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of people fishing. Fishing gear ranges from professional poles to a simple hook and line thrown by hand. Recently, there have been conflicts between these 'recreational fishers' and the professional fishers working in Douarnenez, and the municipality wants to prohibit all recreational access to avoid conflicts. This criminalisation of recreational fishing would significantly affect the families who count on it for subsistence. Fishing on this pier is a lively social activity, seen as a way for communities to meet and support each other. If this prohibition goes through, the intercultural value of the Douarnenez dock would be lost. This type of prohibition could also fuel divisions and scapegoating of immigrants for supposedly triggering the closure of the pier. Realising this, local people organised a movement to defend 'the right to fish for everyone', demanding universal access to the pier.

Artisanal fishers on the French Atlantic coast are also working to create access to fishing for migrant youth, with a focus on decent working conditions and support



Image 19: 'Pier of Shame', Douarnenez. Photo by Zoe W. Brent



Image 20: Istanbul fishing boat. Photo Zoe W. Brent

for acquiring necessary training certificates. In Saint Jean de Luz, in the French Basque Country, one retired fisherwoman involved in SSF movements for many years now participates in organisations supporting refugees. When one young man showed interest in the fisheries sector, she decided to ask her former colleagues to take him on board so that he could discover what fisheries are about. 'When he told us about his story and the way he had to

cross the Mediterranean Sea while seeing his friends dying, we realized how lucky we were. It is clear that we should help these people to get saved at sea and have proper living conditions afterwards.' This young man is now studying in the fisheries school of Ciboure, in order to go to sea as soon as possible, which would provide him a decent livelihood.

Emerging solidarity and collective action within the fisheries sector?

In the face of humanitarian crises at sea, fishers and the NGOs organising rescue operations in the Mediterranean are constantly criminalised by the EU, often referred to as 'Fortress Europe'. The EU funds and trains Libyan coastguards or local militias to prevent refugees from entering EU territory by returning them to Libya. 'Today solidarity with migrants is a crime. Save people from drowning in cold waters and you are a human trafficker.'¹²⁵

Because of this political climate and their precarious living conditions, refugees often struggle to organise politically and many are trapped in the paternalism of charity organisations. However, 2019 saw the creation of the collective 'Les Gilets Noirs' ('Black vests', in reference to the 'Gilets jaunes' or yellow vests, another French social movement). This collective has organised massive mobilisations in Paris to defend the rights of asylum seekers, with the slogan 'rights and papers for all'.

In parallel, artisanal fishers, facing a crisis of generational renewal, often struggle to organise collectively, as illustrated in the declining membership in small-scale and

artisanal fishers' organisations. Thus, the refugee crisis and the support that fishers want to give to people who migrate could be an opportunity for mutual learning and strengthen political mobilisation in each area to counter policies that undermine small-scale fishing and criminalise migrants and refugees.

There are huge challenges to ensuring just labour conditions throughout the fisheries sector in view of the degree of exploitation. Despite widespread measures to criminalise rescue and solidarity efforts, collective autonomous action is emerging. In the words of one fisher who saved a sinking ship in the Mediterranean, '[w]hen the migrants were safely aboard the coastguard ship, they all turned to us in a gesture of gratitude, hands on their hearts. That's the image I'll carry with me for the rest of my life, which will allow me to face the sea every day without regret.'¹²⁶ Similarly, food sovereignty movements will need to engage with and challenge the exploitative labour and migration patterns fuelled by the current fisheries sector in order to face the future food system 'without regret'.

Conclusion

Fishers are a central element in our global food systems. In much the same way as corporate-industrial agriculture has a negative impact on the ecological, social and economic health of rural communities, industrial fishing – incentivised by a profit-driven food system – has overfished the seas and contributed to hollowing out coastal fishing culture and communities. Food sovereignty and agroecology offer urgently needed visions for transforming the food system, but have historically overlooked the role of fishers. In recent years, fisher movements from the local to the global scale, with allied organisations, have been working to articulate what food sovereignty and agroecology mean in a fisheries context. Through publications, policy proposals and advocacy in the FAO as well as a range of collaborative knowledge exchanges, these ideas have taken shape and begun to incorporate a sustainable future for fishing as part of the broader agro-ecological food system. Beyond using the terminology of food sovereignty, the everyday practices of fishers offer important insights that can inform debates in the food sovereignty movement.

Our study has highlighted how small-scale food producers are undermined by the current global food system. Gender inequalities and racialised forms of oppression – such as the politics of creating the conditions for forced migration and employing migrant labourers in unjust working conditions – in fisheries, as well as among other small-scale food producers, are rooted in the capitalist, profit-driven food system. In Turkey, however, we saw the importance of direct-sale mechanisms and getting rid of intermediaries/commissioners and big seafood businesses for small-scale fisher cooperatives. This case shows that fisher cooperatives can be key protagonists in defining the steps towards consolidating Community Supported Fisheries and linking these initiatives to Community-Supported Agricultural networks and the food sovereignty movement more broadly. Patriarchal legislative and

political systems marginalise female fishers more than male fishers under capitalist production relations, but Indonesian experiences demonstrate how women are key leaders in mobilising to defend the territories that form the basis of food production. Small-scale fisher people in Senegal are forced to migrate as a consequence of the grabbing of their oceans and resources. Thousands of men (and women) brave harrowing journeys in search of work that ultimately brings other types of economic and political exploitation as migrant labourers when they reach their destination, and often leaving behind the multiple social and economic burdens for women to manage.

In this context, bringing the role of fishers into debates on food sovereignty – as well as all of the complex class, gender and racial dynamics that define these intersections – provides a more complete picture of some of the challenges to be addressed, but also opportunities to transform the food system. Listening to fisher voices and including the questions these raise in debates on agroecology and food sovereignty helps construct a more just and sustainable society for all, where food production focuses on people and works with nature, food providers are valued, food systems and control are localised, and knowledge and skills are co-built with (fisher) communities.



Image 21: Photo Thibault Josse

Endnotes

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Image 22: Ugandan fishing village. Photo by Zoe W. Brent



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Pleine Mer is a French organization of fishers and fish consumers organising for a just transition in the fisheries sector. Pleine Mer members and staff are committed to developing strong community supported fisheries, able to sustain small-scale fisheries in the long term. Pleine Mer also works with other groups of fishers and NGOs in order to consolidate alliances against industrial fishing.

www.associationpleinemer.com



Solidaritas Perempuan, or Women's Solidarity (SP) for Human Rights, is an Indonesian feminist organization founded on December 10, 1990. For more than 25 years, SP has worked with women to build democracy from the grassroots, based on the principles of justice, ecological awareness, respecting pluralism based on an equal gender relations where women and men can share access and control over natural, social, cultural, economic and political resources in an equitable way.

www.solidaritasperempuan.org