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Migration and the right to survival: An empirical study of three fishing communities in Senegal

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ABSTRACT

Each year, thousands of Senegalese migrants brave the perils of the oceans in tiny canoes bound for Europe and the Canary Islands. In many cases, these migrants are local fishers who, owing to the depletion of the oceans, leave the country in search of greener pastures abroad. Many die en route from cold, starvation, and drowning. This empirical study seeks to make an original contribution to the literature by interrogating the lived experiences of local fishers in Senegal vis-à-vis dwindling fish stock largely occasioned by the activities of industrial fishing fleets. Semi-structured interviews were held with local fishers in the Senegalese coastal villages of Bargny, Saint-Louis, and Thiaroye with a view to developing grassroots perspectives on issues surrounding quality of life, survival, access to food, and migration within the context of declining small-scale fishing in Senegal. These perspectives are tested against thematic socioeconomic human rights such as the right to food, the right to work, and the right to free disposal of natural resources.

1. Introduction and relevance of study

Economic migration continues to be an important issue in global politics. In some cases, it has formed the bedrock for populist movements, political upheavals, and regional breakaways such as Brexit (Ruzza 2018; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018; Lutz, 2019; Laine, 2020). Europe remains a major destination for intending migrants owing to stability, better infrastructure, and improved economic circumstances (Kuschminder et al., 2015; Boswell, 2018; Michalon et al., 2019). In recent years, many of these migrants have come from the West African country of Senegal headed mainly for Europe and the Canary Islands (Vives and Vazquez Silva, 2017). At least 545 migrant boats from across North and sub-Saharan Africa, carrying nearly 20,000 people were reported to have reached the Canary Islands, a gateway into Europe, between January to November 2020 (Wallis, 2020; Shryock 2020). In many cases, the journeys have not gone as planned. For instance, in 2020 a boat carrying 200 migrants, set for Europe, sank off the coast of Senegal; at least 140 migrants were reported dead (BBC News, 2020). The previous year, at least 414 people were reported to have lost their lives en route to the Canary Islands (BBC News, 2020).

In November 2020, after having seen an influx of nearly 20,000 migrants in that year alone, the Spanish Foreign Minister visited Senegal to hold discussions on mutual ways of deterring migrants from attempting the 1500-km voyage across the Atlantic to the Canary Islands. The discussions reportedly reiterated steps such as cracking down on migrant smuggling networks and increasing ocean patrol (BBC News, 2020). These were not the first efforts at curbing migration from Senegal. In 2006, following an incursion of migrants into the Canary Islands, European actors, led by Spain, launched Operation Hera which together with Senegalese border guards patrolled national and international waters, returning people attempting to cross to Spain without authorisation (Jegen 2020; de Farias 2020).

A number of reasons have been adduced for the recent surge in migration from Senegal. One research found major factors to include labour demand in Europe alongside economic insecurity and low incomes in Senegal (Baizan and González-Ferrer, 2016). In one news feature, local fishers blamed the country's fishing crisis for the increasing rate of migration (Shryock, 2020). Fishing licences to distant-water nations, such as Chinese and European fleets, have reportedly led to the depletion of stocks off the Senegalese coast putting at risk thousands of local fishers who rely on fishing as a means of food and livelihood. To fend off the economic strain of the ocean's depletion, some of these fishers and their relatives have braved the ills and hazards of the oceans in search of greener pastures in Europe. Quite curiously, and despite the volume of attention on migration and its impact especially as it relates to Senegal, very little research has been conducted on the link between the depletion of the oceans and migration from fishing communities (P&G 2021). Failler and Ferraro (2021) bemoan the lack of

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research initiative dedicated to understudying fishing migration in Africa. Binet et al. (2012) also highlight the minimal attention paid to migration in the decision-making process of national and regional fisheries management.

This study contributes to what is only a fledgling literature on the link between migration and depleting fish stock in Senegal by interrogating the perspectives of local fishers in three fishing villages in Senegal, on pertinent issues such as quality of life, access to food, and migration. In other words, it seeks to, through direct interaction with the affected group, assess the impact on local fishing communities of large-scale industrial fishing and the concomitant effect on access to food, work, and migration.

The following sections will explain the methodology and theoretical rationale for the research. An analysis of the qualitative data will then follow including discussions of relevant themes such as the importance of fishing in the studied communities, depletion of fish stocks and uneven power relations, perceived government ineptitude, and migration.

2. Method

The study is predicated on the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with local fishers living in Senegal. The fishers were selected from three fishing villages of Bargny, Thiaroye, and Saint-Louis. The fishing villages were chosen for their access to the coast and strong history of fishing. Bargny, a settlement of 70,000 people, is 35 km south of Dakar, the capital city of Senegal, and originated from an ancient fishing village by the Lebou tribe (Simoncelli et al., 2021). Thiaroye, a coastal city of 45,000 inhabitants, only 12 km from Dakar, is one of the cities most affected by the "pirogue phenomenon" or what local inhabitants term "Barcelona or death" in reference to the desperation of inhabitants to migrate to Europe at all cost, even at the risk of death (Mayault, 2017). Located on an island on the mouth of the Senegal River, Saint-Louis is primarily a fishing hub (Hallaire, 2015); a recent news report has described how plummeting fish stocks in the coastal city has driven the migrant surge to Europe (see Gauriat, 2022).

Interviews were held with 18 local fishers, six from each of the three villages, in the month of July 2021, typically next to the shores, the equivalent offices of the participants. The fishers were exclusively male reflecting the gendered distributing of roles in Senegalese artisanal fishing where the men traditionally catch the fish while the women sell them both to wholesalers in the local markets.

The interviews were conducted in Wolof with the aid of a qualified interpreter. The sensitive, and even political, nature of discussions warranted the anonymisation of responses and the use of aliases. The following system of identification is used: the first letters of the city (B representing Bargny, T representing Thiaroye, and SL representing Saint-Louis) and an accompanying number is used to represent participants; for instance, B1 would represent Participant 1 from Bargny and SL 5 would represent the fifth participant in Saint Louis. As part of the dissemination process, a brochure website with transcripts of interviews has been created (www.fishsenegal.com).

The project was funded by the Research Centre for Migration, Diaspora and Exile (MIDEX) and the Research Centre for Global Development (C4Globe) of the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). Ethical approval for the study was granted by UCLan. Informed consent of each participant was obtained.

3. Research theory: socioeconomic rights to work, food, adequate standard of living and access theory

The research is predicated on the theories of rights and access. Using a rights-based approach, the research examines the theory of socioeconomic rights such as the rights to food, work, and an adequate standard of living, and aims to link the deprivation of these rights to the challenges and deprivations faced by artisanal fishers owing largely to depletion of fish stocks and the activities of industrial fleets in Senegalese waters. The theory of access examines the ability of the people, in this case artisanal fishers, to benefit from marine and ocean resources.

The following sections explain both theories, albeit briefly. The theory of socioeconomic rights is examined with particular reference to the rights to food, work, and standard of living. Reference is made to relevant international treaties and charters such as the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) with particular attention paid to regional charters like the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter). The theory of access is also briefly examined through the seminal work by Ribot and Peluso (2003).

3.1. The theory of socioeconomic rights

Discourse on human rights distinguishes two main groups of rights namely first generation civil and political rights on the one hand and second-generation socio-economic rights on the other. This bifurcation is clearly demonstrated in the twin covenants of the International Bill of Human Rights—the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). While civil and political rights can be traced to centuries of civil and political movements bludgeoning into the protection of the rights to equality, liberty, expression, association, and dignity, socioeconomic rights address social, economic, and cultural well-being and include protections such as the rights to health, education, and work (Uwazuruike, 2020). These latter rights, it has been argued, are more difficult to enforce and require the "injection of financial and technical aid to the economy of the state concerned" (Smith, 2016). This financial requirement raises concerns on the ability of poorer states to ensure the enjoyment of those rights, a point which the ICESCR attempts to address by charging member states to take steps to the maximum of their available resources towards a progressive realisation of the provided rights.

The language of the ICESCR has contributed in part to discussions on the justiciability and prioritisation of this group of rights. For instance, socioeconomic rights are conspicuously missing from human rights instruments such as the European Charter on Human Rights (ECHR). Also, some national constitutions whilst detailing these rights contain provisions that limit their enforceability. One example in this regard is the Nigerian constitution which, though making provisions for some socioeconomic rights, does not define them as "rights" but as "fundamental objectives" and "directive principles"—an approach that has led the Nigerian courts to declare that such socioeconomic provisions as non-justiciable (*Archbishop Okogie v The Attorney-General of Lagos State*, 1981). Interestingly, the African Charter makes a marked departure from this view by including both groups of rights in the same document without making distinctions or allusions as to enforceability, availability of resources, or progressive realisation (Odinkalu, 2002). The Charter's preamble specifically states that civil and political rights cannot be dissociated from socioeconomic rights, the latter being necessary for the fulfilment of the former. Accordingly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice (ECCJ) has held that it was well established that the rights guaranteed by the African Charter, including socioeconomic rights, are justiciable (*Nigeria*, 2009). Opposing the need for progressive realisation, Agbakwa (2002) argues that the enforcement of socioeconomic rights is necessary to catalyse development and reduce the spate of armed conflicts on the continent which arguably spring from the denial of socioeconomic benefits. This argument appears to be supported by Smith (2016) who points out that in including a right to work, drafters of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights were mindful of the role of high levels of unemployment in the rise, not only of the Nazi regime, but other civil revolutions around the world.

3.2. Right to work

The general human rights law position is encapsulated in Article 6 of the ICESCR which provides for "the right of everyone to the opportunity" to earn their living by work which they freely choose. States are also to take appropriate steps to safeguard this right through the creation of policies aimed at reducing unemployment and the rendering of vocational guidance and training. Smith (2016) points out that states are obliged to aim for 100 per cent employment within their jurisdictions by adopting strategies aimed at ensuring the availability of work for those who wish to be employed. The right to work is not limited to access to employment but also extends to security in one's employment (Craven, 1995). Such security would encompass the existence of just and favourable working conditions as well as freedom from arbitrary dismissal (ILO Convention No. 158, 1972).

The right to work is further protected in the African Charter which provides for the individual's right to work "under equitable and satisfactory conditions" (Article 15). Expanding on this provision, the 2014 Pretoria Declaration on Economic Social and Cultural Rights in Africa provides for the equality of opportunity of access to gainful work including for disadvantaged persons. This would impose an obligation on states to ensure the creation of policies that do not disadvantage all or certain members of the populace. Accordingly, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) would find a violation of this right where a person lost their job as a result of questionable government policies. This was the case in the case of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights & Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe v. Zimbabwe (Communication 284/03) where the Commission held that the Zimbabwean government violated the right to work by closing down newspaper offices and confiscating printing equipment. The closure of the offices and confiscation of work materials directly led to loss of work and earnings of the workers thereby unjustly depriving them of this right. Similarly, in *Elgak and others v Sudan* (Communication No. 379/09), the state was held to have violated the complainants' right to work following the closure of the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environment Development which rendered the complainants jobless.

The implication of seeking local perspectives on the impact of the country's bilateral fishing arrangements is two-fold. Firstly, it was necessary to gauge the perspectives and lived experiences of affected fishers on the licensing of industrial fleets and the impact this has had on their work and survival as fishers. Secondly, an indication that government policies such as the licensing of foreign fleets—or even inaction in terms of curbing perceived excesses of such fleets—had gravely affected the work and survival may very well be prima facie basis for demonstrating breach of the right to work of local fishers. To this end, participants were asked, inter alia, to explain the nature of their work as fishers and the challenges faced in recent years following the steady increase in the activities of industrial fleets.

3.3. Right to food

Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration) asserts the right of every individual to an adequate standard of living including food. This provision is mirrored in Article 11 of the ICESCR which provides for the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food. The article proceeds to recognise the "right of everyone to be free from hunger". According to Article 11 of the CESCR General Comment No. 12, the right to food is realised when "every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement". However, this ideal is very far from being attained. The United Nations (2021) reports a global poverty rate (people living on less than $1.90 a day) of roughly 10%. Four out of every five people below the poverty line lived in rural areas such as the three fishing villages under study (World Bank, 2021). The situation is dire in Senegal with nearly half of the population (46.70%) living in poverty (World Population Review, 2022). Bantekas and Oette (2020) assert that the global food crisis does not arise solely from food shortage but more so from socioeconomic factors of poor availability and accessibility.

By Article 25 of the Universal Declaration, natural resources belong to the people and are to be used for the amelioration of the conditions of life. There is therefore a duty on governments to exploit and manage these resources transparently and in such a way as to generate economic growth, social wellbeing, and environmental sustainability. Bantekas and Oette (2020, p.454) further note the state's "concrete obligation" to use "all means at its disposal" to make food affordable and available to the populace. This positive obligation also comes with the duty to refrain from action that removes existing access to food which would include "food and agricultural concessions to foreign investors in situations where local communities rely on those resources for their survival" (Bantekas and Oette, 2020, p.454). In the context of this study, therefore, the Senegalese government could be seen to have infringed the positive obligation to make food affordable if, by its licensing and concessions, access to fish has become increasingly difficult for local communities. The link between fishing and the right to food is captured in Belhabib et al. (2014) finding that, if not rehabilitated, the state of Senegal's declining resources could not only endanger the country's economy but also affect the people's ability to get 75% of their animal protein intake. To this end, participants were asked to speak generally on access to food and the importance of fish in the local diet.

The right to food is not expressly captured in the African Charter. However, the African Commission has read it into the Charter's extant provisions. In *the Ogoni case* (SERAC & CESR v Nigeria, Communication 155/96) the African Commission held that the right to food was inextricably linked to the dignity of the human being and was necessary for the enjoyment of other rights such as the rights to life, health, and development. It also set out the obligations arising from the right to food to include the duty not to destroy or contaminate food resources, not to allow private parties to destroy or contaminate food resources, and not to hinder peoples' efforts to feed themselves (Fons Coomans, 2003). The "right to food security" is further protected under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), which mandates state parties to ensure that women have the right to nutritious and adequate food.

National protection of this right can also be found in the Senegalese constitution. Article 25(2) of the 2016 constitution imposes on the state the obligation to:

> preserve, to restore the essential ecological processes, to promote the responsible management of species and of ecosystems, to preserve the diversity and the integrity of the genetic patrimony, to require environmental evaluation of the plans, projects or programs, to promote environmental education and to assure the protection of the populations in the drafting [elaboration] and the implementation of projects and programs of which the social and environmental impacts are significant.

It is important to note the latter part of the provision which prescribes for particular attention to be paid to the interest of the populace both in the creation and implementation of social and environmental policies. Indeed, the following sections examine the fulfilment of this obligation vis-à-vis the granting of fishing licences and its concomitant impact on the lives of local fishers and the general wellbeing of fishing communities.

3.4. Access theory

The theory of access focuses on the "ability" rather than the "right" to benefit from resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). By focusing on ability rather than rights, this approach draws attention to a wider range of socio-economic factors that affect the ability of people to benefit from

resources. The access theory is relevant in the context of this research to mitigate the inadequacies of a purely rights-based approach which may not allow for analysis of a range of social and political-economic factors such as uneven power relations, global food systems, and government regulation. Such access analysis aids in understanding why some people may or may not benefit from resources regardless of whether they have rights to those resources. As Sikor and Lund (2009) point out, "struggles over property [or resources] are as much about the scope and constitution of authority as about access to resources" (p. 2).

A review of the data collected from the participant will reveal perspectives on issues such as perceived uneven power relations between industrial fleets and local fishers and how the activities of more powerful fleets limit the fishers' access to ocean resources. The access theory further allows for a broadening of the framing to include socio-political and economic discourse, such as the global political economy enabling large-scale industrial fishing, which invariably cause subsistence crisis for local communities such as the villages studied.

In the context of the present study, local perspectives on the impact of government policies on local fishing was sought. Since the country's independence in 1960, successive governments have pursued expansionist policies which often gave priority to the local industrial fishing subsector at the expense of the artisanal subsector, even though the latter continued to be a key player throughout the years (Sarr et al., 2022). Such policies included lax regulation and tax exemptions on purchases of fuel and fishing gear (p. 68). However, both subsectors now face stiff competition from foreign industrial fleets, owing to trade policies which have seen the foreign fleets gain access to Senegalese waters through bilateral trade agreements with the Senegalese government. For instance, the EU's first fishing agreements with Senegal, which gave access to a wide range of fisheries resources, were first signed in 1979 and implemented till 2006 (Popescu, 2020); with the first bilateral agreement with China signed in 1985 (Mallory, 2012). In 2014, a five-year agreement on tuna and hake fisheries was signed with the EU. In July 2019, an additional five-year protocol to the 2014 agreement provided for fishing for up to 28 freezer tuna seiners, 10 pole-and-line vessels and 5 longliners from Spain, Portugal and France, equalling a reference tonnage of 10,000 tonnes of tuna per year, plus an additional 1750 tonnes of black hake per year for two Spanish trawlers. The annual payment for access rights to Senegal's waters for this period was €800, 000 (Popescu, 2020). It shall be seen from the analysis below, how the introduction of these foreign fleets has shifted the power balance and impacted on fishing communities across the country.

3.5. Qualitative review of the access to food and work of Senegalese Fishers

Between June–August 2021, semi-structured interviews were held with 18 artisanal fishers from the fishing villages of Bargny, Thiaroye, and Saint Louis, on the impact of fishing fleets in the communities. Findings are examined under three main headings: fishing as a way and source of life, depletion of the oceans and its impact on fishing communities, and migration.

3.6. Fishing as a way and source of life

Coastal villages in Senegal are characterised by the existence of large fishing communities whose subsistence and way of life are inextricably tied to the oceans and the living resources in them. In Senegal, there is a strong historic tie to fisheries and fish features prominently in local dishes such as the national dish "Thie Bou Dien" (Belhabib et al., 2014). The establishment of these fishing communities is generally attributed to years of land and sea migration (P and G 2021). Belhabib et al. (2014) further identify two contributing factors: the first is Senegal's location at the edge of two of the world's most productive fishing zones, namely the Canary Current Large Marine Ecosystem and the Gulf of Guinea Large Marine Ecosystem; the second is the strong seasonal upwelling and extensive continental shelf which makes it one of the countries with the largest fisheries in the world.

Participants were asked a range of questions such as how they got into fishing, what fishing meant to them, the role fishing played in their immediate society, and what it meant for survival. In response to the question "how did you get into fishing?" all of the participants could trace their fishing roots to family heritage. The fishing culture is captured by SL1 who stated: "I was born in an area where the main activity is fishing. From my great-grandfather to my father, we knew only fishing. My children will also take over from where I have left". SL4 also stated that he wanted his kids to continue in the tradition when he was gone. B2 noted that the way of life in the communities had not changed much since the days of his grandparents: people neither saved nor had bank accounts; instead, they lived from day to day, relying mainly on the sea.

However, even though they had grown up fishing, some participants noted that they had persevered, or in some cases returned to fishing, owing to financial difficulties and the lack of alternative jobs. For instance, B4 noted that, even though he came from a family of fishers, he had previously been working at the national printing house. However, he had to leave the job and return to fishing following the death of his father, as the family's financial burden subsequently rested on him. Another participant, T4, stated that he had to drop out of school to help his family members who were passing through a lot of difficulties at the time. In his words, the only available means of surviving and making a living in the community was fishing. This assertion appears to receive support from other participants with B2 and B5 stating that in Bargny the sea was the people's chief source of income and livelihood. SL4 pointed out that even though there were employment opportunities within and outside the communities, there was a high rate of unemployment outside fishing and therefore stiff competition for those positions, and people who could not get a job simply returned to the villages to fish.

On the riches of the oceans, SL3 stated that fishers caught a variety of fish including sardine, tuna, barracuda, mackerel, bluefish, catfish, seabass, swordfish, and cod. According to SL2, wild fish were the most expensive and were distributed by the fishmongers, traditionally women who were critical to the supply chain, to markets, hotels, and restaurants. B2 and SL1 explained that most of the fish were sold to these fishmongers who distributed them within the communities and country at large, with some even making their way to neighbouring countries. SL1 remarked that the "Malians would often come for fish in their refrigerated trucks" emphasising the importance of the local Senegalese fishing sector to neighbouring West African countries.

3.7. Depletion of the oceans and its impact on fishing communities

The literature has explored the depletion of fishing stocks both in Senegal and within West Africa. For instance, Ndour et al. (2014) note that overfishing and declining fishing stocks have led to the impoverishment of the marine ecosystem along Africa's western coasts. Jönsson and Kamali (2012) and Jönsson (2019) have emphasised the threat to traditional fishing and pointed to the consequent increased poverty, unemployment, social stress, and declining health and well-being for local communities.

Participants were in consensus on the decline of fisheries within Senegalese waters in the past decade. B1 recalled how his father "used to catch very large fish" which were hard to come by in present times. There were times, he stated, when one would offer fish to a friend and the latter would decline. B4 noted that fishing used to be so lucrative that he built a house out of it. However, fish had now become a prized good such that gifting was hardly feasible. T2 remarked that the drop in the amount of catch had impacted his income such that it had become increasingly difficult to meet daily expenses. T6 stated that it was this lack of resources that prompted him to undertake the perilous journey to Spain a few years prior.

3.8. Effect of foreign fishing fleets and uneven power relations

A common theme in the participants' responses was the negative impact, on the lives of the fishing communities, of foreign fleets, mainly from European and Asian countries, operating in Senegalese waters. These ranged from overfishing by the industrialised fleets leading to scarcity of fish, to the destruction of artisanal fishing instruments in the course of inadvertent collisions with fishing ships. On the issue of overfishing, participants noted that since the arrival of foreign fleets in the past decade, it had become harder to replicate previous volumes of catch. B1 noted the wide disparity between the capacities of the local fishers and industrial fleets by explaining how the fleets could simply throw and drag their nets "draining the oceans" for miles. While a local fisherman would struggle to catch ten kilos of fish a day, an industrial fleet could easily bring in several thousands.

The extent of difficulty encountered by fishers varied amongst the participants. B3 stated that since the arrival of the fishing fleets, it took him 7 hours to catch 2 hours worth of fish. SL1 stated that, previously, he would fish from 8 a.m. in the morning to 4 p.m. in the evening to meet his targets. However, since the arrival of the fleets, he found himself staying at sea for up to 15 days to meet similar catch targets. SL5 stated that in the past he would generally fish for a day but since the arrival of the fleets, he had had to spend up to 10 days at a stretch at sea. SL4 stated that in decades past, fishers from the community used rods to catch fish and only needed to go two nautical miles into the seas. In present times, he stated, nets had become compulsory.

Challenges were measurable not only in terms of prolonged fishing times but also in increased travel distances and expenses. T1 noted that previously he and his crew only needed to travel 3–4 nautical miles into the sea to fish but now needed to go up to 30–40 miles to have any hope of making a catch. These longer trips cost upwards of CFA 100,000 (roughly $170) for gasoline, a substantial sum for indigent fishers. Some participants explained that they had had to leave their communities to fish in other localities. SL4 stated that he had gone to Dakar, Kayar, Casamas, Mbour, and even to the Gambia to find fish. B4 stated that some fishers had had to go as far as Mauritania where they stayed fishing for up to 6 months at a time.

There was also the issue of collisions with the industrial fleets which often meant that the fishers lost their boats and catch. SL3 explained that one could spend CFA 500,000 for a single fishing trip and come back empty-handed due to a collision with an industrial boat. B5 narrated how the boats would tear a fisherman's nets apart making him "cry like a child". The risk of losing their nets, T4 notes, was very high each time the fishers went out to sea. SL4 explained the difficulty of evading the industrial fleets after already having cast one's net:

> "You try to send a signal so that they can avoid you, but they cannot because they are very big. So what do they do? They cut the net. And sometimes, they take it with them, and you are left with nothing."

There was also the challenge of communication. T3 noted that when the fishers tried to explain to crew members of the industrial fleets that their nets had been damaged, they often found that they could not communicate as the crew did not understand their language. B5 explained that fishing gear was expensive and was often "the only hope and support" for many families.

The participants' perception of the presence of the industrial fleets rested heavily on the latter's impact on catch. T3 likened their activities to "real plundering" given how they "take everything in their path". This "plundering" it was opined had exacerbated the depletion of the oceans and scarcity of fish. Even when operating far away from the coast, the activities of the fleets affected the availability of fish in the coastal waters. SL5 explained that the "big fish" no longer came closer to the coast as there was no "small fish", such as sardines, to attract them, the small fish having been caught by the industrial fleets. T1 makes the same point noting that the absence of small fish prevented big fish from coming closer to the coast to feed. This congruence in thought is remarkable given that both participants were from different villages and were unaware of each other's contribution. It also demonstrates the similarity of challenges faced in fishing villages across Senegal.

On why the foreign fleets caught small fish, T1 suggested that they were either used as bait or to repopulate the seas in Europe and elsewhere. Sardines in the coastal waters of Thiaroye, he stated, were all but disappearing posing a real threat to the survival of the species. T3 observed that even though small fish like sardines and mackerel were scarce in the coastal waters, the fishers often saw industrial fleets docking at the port of Dakar with "large quantities" of those same fish.

The participants generally linked the depletion of the oceans to the proliferation of fishing boats particularly foreign industrial fleets which caught loads of fish. In T2's words, the big boats were "blocking the fish from coming near the coast." T6 stated that there were simply "lots of big boats" at sea and they were creeping closer to the shores each year. B4 corroborated this by stating that in the past one could sail an entire day without seeing the boats; however, in present times, it was improbable to sail a few miles without coming across one.

The situation appeared to be further worsened by apparent wastage at sea in the form of discarded catch. Belhabib et al. (2014) state that discards by industrial fleets operating in Senegal, between 1950 and 2010, amounted to more than 6.3 million tons, the equivalent of 40% of the industrial landed catch. Addressing this issue, T3 stated that the fleets caught fish indiscriminately, picked out the ones they wanted, and threw the rest back into the sea.

SL3 summed the perception of local fishers in Saint Louis thus:

> "With their presence, fish have become rare and our revenues have decreased significantly. The sea still has fish, but the main problem is that we cannot share the few fish with these fleets; we are always the losers. To fish, we spend a lot of money."

T4 puts it more plainly thus:

> "I have a lot of pity for future generations because … the situation will only get worse. I do not think they will find fish in the sea."

Overall, participants bemoaned reduced access to the resources of the seas owing to the depletion of the oceans—a direct consequence of the activities of foreign industrial fishing fleets. The comments on the depletion of the oceans are backed by research on the declining fish stock in the West African country. As with the participants, research has generally linked declining fish stock to the activities of foreign fishing fleets in the country. Niasse and Seck (2011) find that there is an over-exploitation of Senegalese fisheries resources both by legal and illegal foreign fishing fleets. Jönsson (2019) notes that West African waters, being among the most fertile in the world, are attractive for foreign fleets. It has been estimated that from 1950 to 2010, 15.5 million tons of fish were caught by foreign fleets from Senegalese waters alone; foreign catches represented half of the total domestic catch (Belhabib et al., 2014).

3.9. Government's lack of support and ineptitude

The participants believed that the adverse impact of the fleets was exacerbated by poor governmental regulation and ineptitude. T4 opined that the industrial fleet and local fishers could coexist if reasonable demarcations were set and stuck to, for instance by limiting the fleet to around 50 nautical miles off the coast. B2 saw no problem with fully licensed fleet fishing in the waters as long as they abided by contractual and international standards. However, B5 noted that they hardly did. In his words, at night time, the fleet would turn off their lights and "descend on the coast" to fish. These incursions are noted in the literature as noticeable on both sides (Déme and Dioh, 1994; Binet et al., 2012; Belhabib et al. (2014). For instance, Belhabib et al. (2014) observe that there are frequent incursions by industrial fishing vessels into local fishing zones as well as a large number of artisanal pirogues operating outside of legally established zones. However, with regard to the latter,

they note that the Senegalese authorities cannot limit the growth of the artisanal sub-sector in so far as it cannot control legal and illegal foreign distant-water fishing in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone.

The participants generally sought a reduction in the number of fleets fishing in Senegalese waters on the grounds that the current arrangement was not in the favour of local fishers. In T4's words, the contracts with European and Asian fleets were "to the detriment of the people". T1 advocated for a limited number of boats over which the government would have complete control. The accession by the government to "thousands of boats", he stated, was deplorable. These comments highlight the participants' concerns on what appears to be a national prioritisation of economic profits through transnational contracts to the detriment of the standard, way of life, and access to resources of artisanal communities and dwellers.

Aside from its failure to oversee the activities of the fleet, participants also lamented the government's general lack of support. B2 stated that having licenced foreign-backed fleets to fish in the country's waters, it was up to the government to support local fishers to enable them compete. This it could do through the provision of canoes and other fishing equipment as well as the licence to fish in reserved fishing parks. ST1 and ST2 stated that, given the paucity of government funds, the local fishers had to rely heavily on funding from external funders such as Mauritanian investors. Their financial state also meant that the fishers could not access credit from the bank. B3 remarked that the banks never gave them loans as they could not provide guarantors. Some of the participants did not even have bank accounts. B2 captures this aptly:

> Not much has changed since the days of my grandparents. They did not have bank accounts. We do not have bank accounts. They did not save. We do not save. They lived from day to day. We live from day to day. They had no support. We have no support. We literally have to see to every one of our problems ourselves.

Opinions on the role of NGOs were mixed. T6 stated that there were a number of organisations that tried to help by speaking on their behalf to the ministry even though the impact of such intercession was very limited. B1, T1, and T4 also spoke of unionism and the existence of small groups of fishers who were banding together for a united voice. T4 stated that he was a member of a union in Thiaroye that was planning a strike until fishers' demands were met. However, this optimism was not shared amongst participants especially those from Bargny. For instance, B2 stated rather emphatically that there was no union in small-scale fishing and that all that existed were "small organisations". B4 seemed to corroborate this stance by stating that there were no unions and that local fishers simply helped each other when they needed to.

3.10. Impact of depletion: the migrant fallout

Increased activity by industrial fleets in Senegalese waters has also had a spill-over effect on economic migration out of the country. Economic and social problems occasioned by overfishing and declining fish stocks have led to increased poverty and forced migration in recent years (Alder and Sumaila, 2004; Jönsson and Kamali, 2012; Jönsson 2019). Belhabib et al. (2014, p. 8) have argued that the absence of alternative sources of livelihood for artisanal fishers "may soon lead Senegalese fishers to a dead end". Indeed, the motto of thousands of Senegalese willing to migrate is "Barsa wala Barsakh" which is Wolof for "Barcelona or Die" (Mbaye 2014). In a survey of Senegalese residents in Dakar, Mbaye (2014) found that potential illegal migrants were willing to accept a substantial risk of death in order to emigrate. According to Jönsson (2019, p. 223), such migration is not a free choice, but rather "an action for survival which is forced on many people who otherwise would not leave their local communities, families and their homes". Indeed, the link to the fishing sector is clear from the role fishers play on these trips. According to Mbaye (2014), the captain of the pirogue is often an experienced fisherman who is assisted in managing the GPS by a group of colleagues.

Illegal migration, Mbaye (2014) points out, was predicated on the strong belief that success was only possible abroad. Thus, international migration is generally perceived as positive especially given the economic benefits of remittances from the diaspora which not only constitute an important income revenue for many Senegalese households but is also a considerable contribution to the country's GDP (Jegen, 2020; Guermond, 2020; Smith, 2022).

The participants gave insight into how migration was viewed in the three fishing villages. B1 asserted that locals were forced to migrate due to a lack of financial resources and the need to feed their families. B5 noted that the current economic situation meant that one was "obliged to brave the oceans". For T3 and SL1, migration was a search for hope as it offered a chance at survival. It was no use staying in Senegal when one did not earn enough to survive. T3 believed the government had "sold the sea" and there was no hope to be found in it. He was sure there would be a lot of passengers for the next canoe making the dangerous journey to Europe. SL4 laid out an interesting perspective by stating that he was still in Senegal because he was not "courageous". Had he been courageous enough, he would have long made the trip to Europe like the other courageous migrants. T4 pointed out that most migrants were fishers who migrated in their pirogues, sometimes with other migrant passengers.

One participant, T6, was a migrant who had returned to Senegal having previously migrated to Spain. He had to leave because the standard of living was low in Senegal and he believed he could make some money in Spain. He stated that many migrants had lost their lives while trying to reach Spain. He survived on some menial jobs for weeks before returning to Senegal because it was hard to earn a living without immigration papers.

4. Conclusion and implication of findings

The aim of the research was to engage first-hand with local fishers in Senegal on their lived experiences in relation to fishing and what the activities of industrial fishing fleets meant for their survival. This ground-up approach served three purposes. First, it actively engaged the subject of the research as an integral partner in the process and finding of the research. Second, it ensured that the perspectives of subjects were fully harnessed, analysed, and integrated into the research. Third, and particularly in the context of the research, it ensured that these perspectives had the potential of being a basis for critiquing the observance of basic socioeconomic rights and duties, including the access to food, work, and resources as guaranteed in instruments such as the Senegalese constitution and the African Charter.

Ultimately, the research, through a qualitative analysis of the responses of 18 fishers from across three key fishing villages in Senegal, makes three main findings: threatened food security of fishing communities and limited access to water resources, threatened cultural existence and development of fishing communities, and threatened right to work of dwellers in those communities.

On food security and access, it was found that fishing held a special place in the history, development, survival, and way of life of the local fishers in the studied communities. Locals also considered their survival, access to resources, and development threatened by the activities of industrial fishing fleets in Senegalese waters. The impact on their survival, they stated, prompted the search for greener pastures through illegal migration. It was proposed that government assimilate local fishers in policy making and create accessible channels for voicing grievances. Concerted efforts were also necessary to restrict the activities of foreign industrial fishing fleets and better protect the socioeconomic rights of local fishers and their access to the ocean's resources.

The participants generally expressed their fears over the threat to food security both for themselves and for future generations. The dwindling number of fishes, they explained, meant that their survival and access to food were threatened. As has been discussed above, such a situation has serious implications for the individuals' right to food which

imposes on the government a twin duty of ensuring access to food and refraining from policies that threaten the people's access to food. It is therefore pertinent for the government to tighten regulations on the activities of industrial fleets in Senegalese waters with a view to restricting and ultimately putting an end to such activities. The end of industrial fishing in Senegalese waters will have strong ramifications and impact, not only in the lives of artisanal fishers and their villages but also in the general contexts of sustainability and preservation of the marine ecosystem. In the interim, the Senegalese government may consider regulations specifically aimed at addressing overfishing and wastage practices by the fleets. Furthermore, steps must be taken to address uneven power relations between these fleets and local fishers, for instance in the context of accidents that occur between the former's huge ships and the latter's small canoes with the latter being mostly on the receiving end. This could be done through the creation of an easily accessible local complaints commission to avoid direct conflict and communication barriers between the fleets and local fishers. Such commission could also extend to giving a voice to local fishers who, in the course of the studies, decried the lack of forums for airing their challenges and concerns. Positive support to fishers may also come in the form of increased funding and empowerment of fishers aimed at bridging the power differentials.

On the second finding, Article 21 of the African Charter provides for the people's right to freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources. This provision is bolstered by Article 22 which provides for the right of all peoples to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their identity. For most of the participants, fishing was a way of life, and all the participants expressed historical and familial connections to fishing. The threat to fishing occasioned both by the depletion of the oceans and the activities of industrial fleets severely threatens the enjoyment of these rights. Accordingly, the Senegalese government must commit to taking steps to ensure the preservation of the cultural heritage of these fishing communities and villages both through positive support and by re-evaluating the activities of industrial fleets in Senegalese waters, through for instance, a restriction of their activities which has directly contributed to the deterioration of the Senegalese marine ecosystem. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may also play an important role by acting as a bridge between the people and government and ensuring that individual and group interests of local communities are protected.

Finally, the participants expressed concerns over the threat to their right to work resulting in the increased appeal of illegal migration. Some participants saw such migration, and the expected benefit of foreign work, as the only alternative means of survival. This finding draws further attention to the need to battle rising poverty in rural Senegal, providing job opportunities and training for dwellers.

Author statement

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Data availability

Research data can be accessed on www.fishsenegal.com

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