

editorial



Illustration:
Rosine Nsimire
(Alliance pour la
vie) and Alessandro
Musetta - **Agathe,
the matriarch above
the water.** A mixed-
media digital publication
documenting the
experiences of artisanal
fisherwomen from Lake
Kivu, Democratic
Republic of the Congo.
alliancepourlavie.
github.io/agathe/

waves of resistance: Fisher peoples defending food sovereignty

In a rapidly changing world, beset by war and billionaire oligarchs, fishing livelihoods remain ignored in policy discussions. US President Trump's 'drill baby drill' agenda, worldwide extractivism, neo-protectionist nature enclosure through 30by30 (Global Biodiversity Framework), government-backed aquaculture expansion, and profit-driven mega projects continue eroding fisher peoples' territories and livelihoods.

The rise of the radical right has led some governments to reduce or eliminate development aid, and philanthropy holds greater sway in determining what and who gets support, further deteriorating the funding landscape. As NGOs and fisher movements increasingly rely on funding from philanthropy, this can lead to co-optation of some organizations' political agendas and create division between those maintaining food sovereignty principles and those following funder-directed focuses like 30by30,

'blue foods' and 'blue transformations'.¹

Fisher movements must unite to discuss political positions and tactics. Following the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty's (IPC) decision to avoid endorsing the UN Food Systems Summit, similar positions may be needed on other imposed agendas. Fisher movements need to set their own agenda, and actively shape the direction of the larger food sovereignty movement. The Nyéléni Global Forum in September 2025 in Sri Lanka offers such an opportunity: to put fisheries on the agenda, build solidarity with other small food producers, food workers and climate movements, and advance the food Sovereignty struggle.

FIAN International, GRAIN, IPC working group on fisheries, TNI, WFF, WFFP

1- For more info, refer to the list of material on page 6.

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who we are

In the last years hundreds of organisations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organisations were present in the *International Nyéléni Forum 2007* and feel part of a broader **Food Sovereignty Movement**, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **Nyéléni is the voice of this international movement.**

Organisations involved: AFSA, ETC Group, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, GRAIN, Grassroots International, IPC for Food Sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Real World Radio, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, Transnational Institute, VSFJusticia Alimentaria Global, WhyHunger, World Forum of Fisher People, WAMIP.

Mobilize at the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture

April marks a crucial moment for the Working Group on Fisheries of the International Planning committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC FWG) as we mobilize in Antalya, Turkey, to participate as observers in the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, a subsidiary body of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI). This political arena serves as a platform for shaping aquaculture policies and development strategies. With its Bureau led by Turkey and including representatives from Indonesia, Mexico, Senegal, and the United States, this space demands our attention and advocacy to counter the push for aquaculture expansion aligned with FAO's Blue Transformation roadmap—a menace to small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples' food sovereignty.

Industrial aquaculture fuels land and resource grabbing, displaces fishing communities, and strips them of their customary rights and livelihoods, all while accelerating environmental destruction. This corporate-led model benefits the few at the expense of the many, deepening inequalities and undermining our survival.

The IPC FWG demands a shift toward a human-rights-based approach that uplifts small-scale fishers as essential stewards of food security and biodiversity. We call on governments to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines)¹ and reject market-driven agendas. The fight for food sovereignty and the centrality of small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples must be the priority in these global discussions.

1 - <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/edffbfcb-81e5-4208-a36f-334ff81ac10f/content>

Resisting industrial aquaculture!

Global aquaculture production has tripled since the start of this century and people are now consuming more seafood from farms than from fisheries. But within the impressive numbers are two distinct types of aquaculture, with very different outcomes for food security.

One is small-scale, typically involving either the inland farming of freshwater carps or the semi-wild farming of molluscs along the coasts. These hardy species require little, if any, feed or other inputs, and are often integrated with other crops and animals. The rapid growth of this type of aquaculture has been hugely important for global food security, with few negative impacts.

The other type is industrial aquaculture. It focuses on breeds of shrimp, salmon and other “high-value” species that require large volumes of commercial feeds and vast amounts of antibiotics, pesticides and other chemicals to stop disease outbreaks. It produces for export and supermarkets, not local markets, and relies on highly exploited labour. It is also controlled by powerful local elites and corporations with farms across different geographies and their own feed mills and processing factories.

These corporations destroy more food than they produce. Every year, 15% of the entire wild catch of fish is ground up and fed to fish and shrimp in industrial farms. Industrial aquaculture farms use up to 6 kilograms of wild fish to produce a kilogram of salmon and 1.5 kilograms of wild fish to produce a kilogram of shrimp. The wild fish are mostly taken from traditional fishing areas in the global South, where they would otherwise provide local people with cheap and nutritious food, while farmed salmon and shrimp go to mostly wealthy consumers in the North. Worse still, corporations build their fish farms in areas traditionally used by local fishers and farmers, taking away the waters and lands they use for fishing and farming and then rapidly destroying them with pollution and disease.

Industrial aquaculture farms are multiplying and getting bigger, but so too are movements to stop them. Fishers and fish workers are leading actions around the world to stop companies from destroying their fishing grounds. This past year a number of communities came together in Poros, Greece, to launch an international #FishFarmsOut campaign, while, a few months later, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) launched a global campaign against industrial aquaculture at their 8th general assembly, declaring: “Industrial aquaculture is NOT fishing; it is privatizing, fencing and destroying our territories; dispossessing fisher peoples from the lands and waters; polluting water and coastal ecosystems with dangerous chemicals; driving ocean grabbing and climate change; and contributing to the criminalisation of and violence against fisher peoples.”

The struggle to end industrial aquaculture and build back local fisheries and small-scale aquaculture is critical to the larger movement for food sovereignty, dignified working conditions and climate justice.

For more, see GRAIN's report, “The pushback against Aquaculture Inc” - <https://grain.org/e/7218>

Ocean, Water and Fisher Peoples' Tribunals

People's Tribunals emerged after World War II, with the Vietnam War crimes tribunals serving as a landmark case. Since then, these tribunals have become important tools for civil society to expose injustices and build moral pressure outside official legal systems. They are typically initiated when formal courts fail to protect human rights or refuse to act.

When Society for Nutrition, Education & Health Action (SNEHA) and Delhi Forum decided to plan a series of Peoples' Tribunals for fisher peoples in India in 2018, they did not envision other countries would pursue the same paths. Recognizing the inadequacy of traditional methods, they planned a series of Ocean, Water, and Fisher Peoples' Tribunals with the first being rolled out in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, and Bangladesh in 2020. Since then, Movimento de Pescadores e Pescadoras Artesanais do Brasil (MPP) in Brazil (2022) and Masifundise in South Africa (2024) have held tribunals in their countries, and other organisations are planning for similar processes.

As non-governmental judicial courts, the Ocean, Water, and Fisher Peoples' Tribunals address critical issues like human rights violations, environmental crimes, and social injustices. They amplify the voices of oppressed communities and recognize their knowledge and experiences. While the verdicts are not legally binding, they serve as powerful forums of justice and solidarity building and allow affected groups to speak truth to power where judicial systems fail.

The importance of the tribunals was recognised by Michael Fakhri, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. He writes:

There are two different ways to imagine our oceans, rivers and lakes. There are those that treat bodies of water as economic opportunities, as a 'blue economy', something that can be exploited yet somehow balanced with sustainability policies. They envision governing bodies of water through markets and financial instruments. Thinking in these market-driven terms will ensure a world rife with inequality and violence.

Whereas, there are those whose lives are intertwined with bodies of water. Ocean, water and fisher peoples are essential to aquatic ecosystems and life. They understand oceans, rivers, and lakes as central to who they are and their way of life. The full realisation of ocean, water and fisher peoples' human rights is the most powerful way to ensure the world's bodies of water thrive.

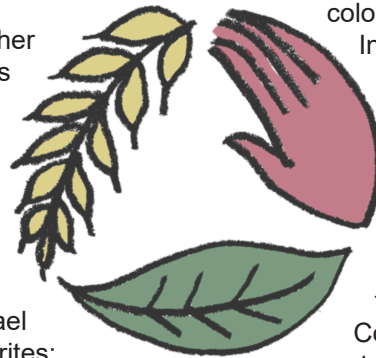
The process and verdict of the Ocean, Water and Fisher Peoples' Tribunals provide one of the most important expressions of international solidarity in relation to aquatic life. They provide a crucial understanding of what is at stake and what is to be done to ensure our bodies of water continue to be the source of life.

While the tribunals have produced profound empirical evidence of state failures to protect the human rights of fisher peoples and have weaved nets of solidarity, fishing communities are still waiting for material improvements to their lives. The jury verdicts hold potential to bring governments to the table at a time when other political strategies on their own appear insufficient.

Additional reading:

"Ocean, Water and Fisher Peoples' Tribunals Cutting the nets of capital and weaving nets of solidarity" <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/ocean-water-and-fisher-peoples-tribunals>

Blue Economy Tribunals in Asia - <http://blueeconomytribunal.org>



Indigenous Peoples and the Treaty Right to fish



Rochelle Diver and Chief Gary Harrison, Indian Treaty Council (ITC) and IPC Working Group on Fisheries, Great Lakes Region and Alaska respectively

In the US and Canada, the rights for Indigenous Peoples to fish are affirmed by Nation to Nation treaties signed between colonial governments and Indigenous Peoples. However, in Alaska, the trawl industry has annihilated salmon populations, collapsing ecosystems that Indigenous Peoples protected for over 25,000 years. Colonization replaced sustainable stewardship with greed—trampling fishing rights and destroying nature. Trawlers decimate habitats, kill salmon indiscriminately, and drive entire rivers to extinction—all for profit. This is ecological genocide.

Additionally, mining, as well as coal-fired power plants are contaminating fish with mercury and other chemicals and in-turn are contaminating our people. Ten percent of babies born in the Great Lakes region are pre-polluted with mercury. What use is the right to fish if the fish are harmful for our people and future generations? The intergenerational impacts of mercury and forever chemicals in our lakes are both physical and cultural. Developmental impacts from mercury hinder our children's ability to retain our languages, stories and traditions.

Supporting Indigenous rights is supporting human rights and small-scale fisheries. Please join us in our fight for a toxic-free food system.

voices from the field



2 Gaza's fishers: a beacon in the struggle for food sovereignty and liberation

Saad Ziada, Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), Palestine

The fisheries sector in Gaza has been totally destroyed – we speak about equipment, boats, storage facilities, everything. Fisherfolk already lived in extremely precarious conditions before October 7 as a result of the blockade which affected access to the sea, incoming materials and export opportunities.

Now their livelihoods have been destroyed, and their lives and lifestyles are under serious threat of erasure. Fishermen have been killed trying to fish near the shore on improvised floating devices to avoid starvation.

Since the ceasefire many families have returned to their neighborhoods but have not found anything left. We have been able to find one motorized boat that survived all destruction.

The fisherfolk remain steadfast though and are eager to rebuild their livelihoods, but the ceasefire has not fulfilled its promises in terms of incoming fuel, equipment and other basic materials to restart life. Even nets are hard to come by leaving us few options to restart the fisheries sector.

But we are fighting a struggle for existence, a struggle for food sovereignty and against cultural erasure. We can not do that alone and call on WFFP, IPC and its members, to demand accountability for the crimes committed and support us in rebuilding a fisheries sector of cultural importance which will serve as a beacon in the struggle for food sovereignty and liberation.

3 From abundant fish to struggling for sustenance: Resilience in Uganda's fisher communities

Namaganda Rehema, FIAN Uganda and Margaret Nakato, Katosi Women Development Trust

Uganda's once thriving lakes have become sites of militarized control. Soldiers now dominate the waters where small-scale fishers once freely worked to sustain their livelihoods. Fishers are struggling to comply with harsh new fisheries regulations from 2017, brutally enforced by the military's Fisheries Protection Unit.

The military routinely arrests fishers, destroys their boats, and confiscates their gear– acts that disrupt families, markets, and the delicate web of local food systems. Women, who process and trade the fish, bear the brunt. Once a unifying force, fish has become a symbol of disintegration. Once an abundant and vital source of protein, it is now scarce.

Amidst the hardship, the fisher communities are responding with collective action. They have initiated petition letters, held numerous meetings with policy makers, and engaged the media to bring their struggles to light, leading to significant progress, including changes to fisheries law.

Their struggle is more than a fight for resources; it is a fight to sustain their families, their communities, and their culture.

In the face of continuing militarization, they remain steadfast in their focus on food sovereignty, refusing to let their rights be overshadowed. For in their hands lies the power not just to fish but to shape the future of the lake they have long called home. Theirs is a fight for dignity, justice, and the right of every community to feed itself.

"One does
not sell the earth
upon which the people
walk" Tashunka Witko, 1840 –1877



4

Community-based transformation

Claudia Pineda, FIAN Honduras

Honduras is a biologically diverse Central American country whose communities were forged in the struggle for survival, particularly in the coastal areas of the Gulf of Fonseca. There, thousands of families that depend on marine species for small-scale fishing and shrimp farming suffer from the destruction of their ecosystem.

They are victims of the rapid and detrimental transformation of their territory as a result of environmental pollution and the deforestation of their mangrove forests due to agribusinesses and shrimp farming practices.

They are witnesses of how these practices based on an instrumental vision of nature have socio-environmental effects, with the reduction and loss of livelihoods, and increased vulnerability to extreme weather events. Both situations trigger migration and extreme poverty.

Access to food is one of the main drivers of internal displacement and migration to countries such as Spain and the United States. This phenomenon leaves families with social problems in terms of changes in population structure, family disintegration and loss of labour force, to name a few.

However, resistance to this model is mounting, and fishing communities are increasingly demanding the right to participate in the definition and control of food systems.

This is how, since 2024, began the construction of a community management's model of their natural goods, based on local knowledge and practices.

5

The Blackchin tilapia outbreak: A major ecological disaster in Thailand

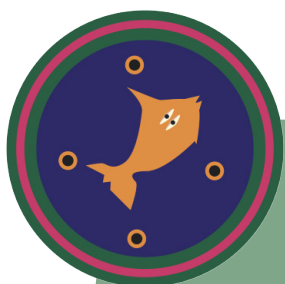
Network of Thai Citizens Affected by the Blackchin Tilapia Outbreak (19 Provinces)

A blackchin tilapia outbreak began in Thailand in 2010 when Charoen Pokphand Foods (CPF) imported the species from Ghana to breed at its farm in Samut Songkhram. Within a year, the fish had spread to public canals and aquaculture ponds, and to nearby provinces. The species aggressively outcompeted native aquatic life, destroying shrimp, fish, crabs, and mollusks, leading to massive losses for small-scale fish farmers and coastal fishers. Many faced debt, land loss, and even suicide.

In 2017, affected communities filed complaints with the National Human Rights Commission, revealing CPF's failure to comply with biodiversity protection measures. By 2024, the outbreak had spread to 19 provinces, threatening Songkhla Lake's biodiversity and neighboring countries. Environmentalists called it "one of Thailand's worst ecological disasters."

On January 13, 2025, affected communities protested at CPF's headquarters, demanding compensation and ecosystem restoration. "This serious problem originated from large corporations. We demand that environmental criminals be held accountable and that the state enforce strict biosafety laws to safeguard food sovereignty", said Mr. Walop Khunjeng, a fisherman from Samut Songkhram.

CPF has yet to take responsibility and instead sued Biothai, an organization exposing the crisis. Experts warn that open-system fish farming may become unviable, forcing small farmers into CPF's corporate-controlled closed systems.



In memory of Budi Laksana

Budi Laksana, Secretary General of Serikat Nelayan Indonesia (SNI) and a leading member of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), passed away on 28 November 2024 in Brasilia. He had traveled to Brazil to join comrades at WFFP's 8th General Assembly, where he embodied the next generation's fight for food sovereignty before succumbing to a sudden thrombosis attack.

Budi Laksana played a leading role in formulating the UN Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines, endorsed by the FAO in 2014, and worked tirelessly for their implementation in Indonesia and beyond. Under his leadership, SNI fought to protect traditional fishers' territories and way of life from oligarchic interests. He was always at the forefront of marches and protest campaigns, denouncing the oligarchic policies of the Indonesian government from the speakers truck in front of the masses.

Coming from a traditional crab fishing family, he strongly opposed corporate aquaculture and industrial fishing, which he saw destroying not just livelihoods but entire food cultures and local economies. His vision for fisher peoples was grounded in principles of sovereign rights over food systems, inter-generational knowledge, and environmental stewardship. In his final days at the WFFP

assembly in Brasilia, his positive spirit, comradery and passionate speeches on food sovereignty infused energy and solidarity amongst the over one hundred fisher delegates from fifty countries.

Budi Laksana championed women's leadership, helping initiate the woman-led Nyimas Kumambang Fisherwomen's Cooperative. As a stalwart supporter of food sovereignty, he placed women and their role in the entire value chain of fisheries at the forefront. As a woman fisher leader who accompanied him in his final days noted, he was "fighting and refusing to submit to a system that is greedy and impoverishing fisherwomen."

Budi Laksana was a family man, leaving behind his beloved wife and three sons of five, ten and twelve years of age behind.

Our thoughts go to his family and close comrades. Budi Laksana's spirit will forever bring inspiration and power to fisher peoples' struggle for food sovereignty.

Comrade Budi Laksana, rest in power.

to read, listen, watch and share

- Campaign - #FishFarmsOut: <https://fishfarmsout.org/>
- Declaration – WFFP 8th General Assembly 20 November 2024, Brasilia, Brazil: <https://wffp-web.org/declaration-wffp-8th-general-assembly-20-november-2024-brasilia-brazil-2/>
- Film - Impact of Climate Change on SSF in Bangladesh: Voices from the Ground, ICSF 2024: <https://icsf.net/resources/impact-of-climate-change-on-ssf-in-bangladesh-voices-from-the-ground-by-icsf-2024/>
- Paper - Ruling the Waves, How corporations are deepening their control of global ocean politics, TNI 2022: <https://longreads.tni.org/ruling-the-waves>
- Podcast: Cuando el mar se traga El Bosque: un pueblo mexicano contra la crisis climática (When the sea swallows El Bosque: a Mexican town against the climate crisis), El Hilo 2024 (in Spanish): <https://elhilo.audio/podcast/desplazados-el-bosque-tesis-climatica/>
- Publication - The Blue Fix Unmasking the politics behind the promise of blue growth, TNI 2018: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-blue-fix>
- Publication - 30X30 - How do we see and understand the hidden contours of 30 x 30?, The Research Collective – PSA 2023: <http://www.psa-india.net/s/30-by-30-TRC.pdf>
- Report - Fisheries and the right to food in the context of climate change – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri 2024: <https://docs.un.org/A/HRC/55/49>
- Video - The Shift From Capture To Culture Fisheries & Challenges in Advancing Food Sovereignty, WFFP conference 2024: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXNBq2yqh2U&ab_channel=WorldForumofFisherPeoples
- Website - IPC Fisheries Working Group: <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/working-group/fisheries/>