Food and Allied Workers Union, Zimbabwe

Dzimiri Runesu

• What do you see as the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fish sector and fish workers? What local, sub-national, and national policies during the pandemic were beneficial? What did fish workers do themselves to help each other during these difficult years?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching impact on the socio-economic rights of workers in the fishing in Zimbabwe. As the government announced a raft of measures to contain the spread of the virus, it also curtailed the right to freedom of assembly for workers as gathering were also banned. Another right that workers lost due to the impact of COVID-19 on health.

Zimbabwe’s health delivery system, which was already underfunded and dilapidated, undermined the right to health for many workers in the fish industry. Public health facilities faced several challenges which affected their capacity to provide basic and emergency healthcare during the pandemic, for example, the lack of equipment, limited intensive care unit beds and ventilators, lack of PPE, staff shortages, poor remuneration and working conditions for workers, among many other challenges. Some health facilities were closed after COVID-19 infections were reported, such that several people failed to access critical health services such as maternity services for pregnant women, access to life-saving support in case of emergencies, and access to medication to chronic patients suffering from HIV/AIDS or Tuberculosis.

COVID-19 affected thousands of people dependent on fish for a living. For example, thousands of Zimbabweans in the informal sector buy and sell fish for a living. Closure of informal economy businesses, including fish marketplaces and vending sites deprived them of their sources of livelihoods and incomes. Fish vendors and small-scale fish producers reported disruptions in the supply chains, low sales, high rates of produce leftovers and spoilages which threatened profits, and a decline in number of customers visiting vending sites or informal markets. There were job losses in the sector as well as reduction or disappearance of wages for most contract and casual workers.

However, there were some local, sub-national, and national policies during the pandemic were beneficial. These include support for health services and operational funds to make lockdowns or partial lockdowns effective, direct cash aid for citizens to enable consumption and support the domestic real sector; loan guarantees to companies to avoid layoffs.

 • What do you see as the main threats to fish workers today?

Climate change is a great threat to the fish workers in Zimbabwe. We have seen rivers and dams dry up due to draught. Fishing farmers risk having their farms closing due to inadequate water and very abnormal temperatures.

What does the fish supply chain look like today to you? Which companies dominate the sector in your country?

The fish supply chain in Zimbabwe has undergone significant changes in recent years, reflecting the evolving demands and preferences of consumers. Today, the fish supply chain is characterized by a combination of traditional fishing practices and modern distribution networks. In rural areas, where fishing is a primary source of livelihood for many communities, traditional methods such as net fishing and handline fishing are still prevalent. These small-scale fishermen often sell their catch directly to local markets or individuals.

Most fish companies have played a crucial role in the distribution process by partnering with wholesalers and retailers to reach consumers effectively. They have established cold storage facilities and transportation networks that maintain the quality and freshness of their products during transit.

Other notable players in the sector include Lack Harvest which is one the major players have also specialized in processing and packaging fish products for both domestic consumption and export. Their state-of-the-art facilities adhere to international standards, ensuring high-quality products that meet customer expectations.

Overall, while traditional fishing practices still exist in Zimbabwe's fish supply chain, larger companies dominate the sector through their advanced farming techniques, efficient distribution networks, and commitment to quality assurance.

• What are your main concerns regarding working conditions in the fish supply chain? Which parts of the supply chain do you think are the most dangerous or problematic?

Working conditions in the fish supply chain have long been a cause for concern. The exploitation of workers, poor safety standards, and environmental degradation are just a few of the issues that plague this industry. One of the main concerns regarding working conditions in the fish supply chain is the widespread exploitation of workers. Workers are subjected to low wages, long hours, and hazardous working conditions. This not only violates their basic human rights but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty and inequality.

Another major concern is the lack of safety standards throughout the supply chain. From fishing vessels to processing plants, workers face numerous risks such as accidents at sea or injuries from heavy machinery. Inadequate safety measures exacerbate these dangers and put workers' lives at risk.

Additionally, environmental degradation poses a significant problem within the fish supply chain. Overfishing practices, destructive fishing methods, and pollution contribute to declining fish stocks and damage fragile marine ecosystems. This not only threatens biodiversity but also jeopardizes the livelihoods of those dependent on fishing for their income.

Amongst all parts of the supply chain, fishing vessels are perhaps the most dangerous and problematic. These vessels often operate in remote areas with limited oversight or regulation. Workers endure harsh weather conditions, physical exhaustion, and isolation for extended periods without proper rest or medical care.

More importantly working conditions in the fish supply chain raise serious concerns that demand immediate attention. Exploitation of workers, poor safety standards, and environmental degradation must be addressed collectively by governments, businesses, and workers alike. By advocating for fair treatment of workers and sustainable fishing practices throughout all stages of the supply chain, we can strive towards a more ethical and responsible industry. We still have workers earn way below the poverty datum line and inflation on the other hand causing serious havoc amongst the Zimbabweans just as an example in January 2023 it was around 230%. There is still massive casualisation of labour, job insecurity, victimisation for belonging to a political party of their choice, lack of maternity leave and benefits; sexual harassment; lack of proper and adequate sanitary facilities and Personal Protective Equipment; lack of Training on OSHE; Another non-payment of wages and going for several months without being paid is one other major challenge

• How do you think the issues of modern slavery, exploitation, human trafficking and child labour could be addressed through international and national policies?

Modern slavery, exploitation, human trafficking, and child labor are grave issues that require urgent attention and robust policies at both the international and national levels. To effectively address these problems, a comprehensive approach is needed that combines legal measures, enforcement mechanisms, awareness campaigns, and support for victims.

At the international level, countries should collaborate to establish stringent laws against modern slavery and human trafficking. These laws should criminalize all forms of exploitation and provide severe penalties for offenders. Additionally, international agreements should be reached to ensure that countries cooperate in investigating and prosecuting cases of human trafficking across borders.

Child labor can be addressed through national policies that promote access to quality education for all children. Governments should also enforce strict regulations on businesses to prevent the employment of underage workers. Additionally, companies must be held accountable for their supply chains by implementing transparent monitoring systems.

In reality, addressing modern slavery, exploitation, human trafficking, and child labor requires a multi-faceted approach involving international cooperation as well as strong national policies. By implementing comprehensive legislation backed by effective enforcement mechanisms and raising awareness among workers and communities worldwide.

• What is your opinion on aquaculture? Can it be a good sector for both the environment and people?

Aquaculture, the practice of farming aquatic organisms such as fish, shellfish, and plants in controlled environments, has become a significant sector in the global food industry. While opinions on aquaculture may vary, as a Union we strongly believe that it can be a good sector for both the environment and people because of the reasons prescribed below

* It offers a sustainable solution to meet the increasing demand for seafood. With wild fish stocks depleting due to overfishing, aquaculture provides an alternative source of protein that reduces pressure on natural ecosystems. By cultivating fish and shellfish in controlled environments, we can ensure their survival while minimizing negative impacts on marine habitats.
* It has the potential to enhance food security and alleviate poverty.
* It creates employment opportunities where traditional fishing may no longer be viable.
* Producing seafood locally through aquaculture practices, countries can reduce their dependence on imported products and improve access to affordable protein-rich diets.
* Advancements in technology have allowed for more environmentally friendly practices within the aquaculture industry.

It is vital to acknowledge that certain challenges exist within this sector. Poorly managed operations can lead to habitat degradation and pollution if not regulated effectively. Therefore, strict environmental standards must be enforced to ensure responsible practices are followed.

Aquaculture can be a good sector for both the environment and people alike as it can offer opportunities to meet growing food demands sustainably while providing economic benefits to communities worldwide.

• What national laws in your country or international standards need to be implemented to better serve and protect fish workers' interests?

The fishing industry plays a vital role in Zimbabwe's economy, providing employment opportunities and contributing to food security. However, fish workers often face numerous challenges, including poor working conditions, low wages, and limited access to social protection. To address these issues effectively, it is crucial to implement national laws and adhere to international standards that protect the interests of fish workers. The national and international laws are as prescribed below.

* Employment Rights: Enacting legislation that guarantees fair wages, reasonable working hours, and safe working conditions is essential. This would include provisions for rest periods, occupational health and safety regulations, and protection against discrimination. b) Social Protection: Establishing a comprehensive social security system that covers fish workers would provide them with financial support during unemployment or illness. c) Access to Education and Training: Ensuring that fish workers have access to quality education and vocational training programs will enhance their skills and employability prospects.
* ILO Conventions: Ratifying all Fundamental and other relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions such as Convention No. 188 on Work in Fishing would ensure the protection of fish workers' rights globally.
* Sustainable Fisheries Practices: Adhering to international standards for sustainable fishing practices can safeguard the long-term viability of fisheries while preserving marine ecosystems.
* Collaboration with Regional Bodies: Strengthening cooperation with regional bodies like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) can promote harmonization of policies across borders.

It is therefore important to serve and protect the interests of fish workers in Zimbabwe through implementation of national laws that safeguard their rights while adhering to international standards promoting sustainable fisheries practices. That can assist in the creation of an enabling environment for workers in the fishing Industry thus ensuring fair treatment, improved working conditions, access to social protection measures, educational opportunities, as well as contributing towards sustainable fisheries management.

• Have you been able to adequately participate in national and international relevant discussions? If not, from which discussions have you been excluded?

As a Union we have never been at all participated in national and international discussions.

• What do you see as the major hurdles to implementing the fundamental ILO Conventions in seafood and fish production?

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has established 10 fundamental conventions to protect workers' rights across various industries, including seafood and fish production. However, the implementation of these conventions faces significant hurdles that hinder their effectiveness.

One major hurdle is the lack of awareness and understanding among stakeholders in the seafood and fish production industry. Many employers, especially in developing countries where labor standards may be less regulated, are unaware of the ILO conventions or do not fully comprehend their importance. This leads to a lack of commitment to implementing them.

Another challenge is the complexity of global supply chains in this industry. Seafood and fish products often pass through multiple countries before reaching consumers, making it difficult to monitor compliance with labor standards at each stage. This complexity creates loopholes that can be exploited by unscrupulous actors who engage in exploitative labor practices.

Furthermore, enforcement mechanisms are often weak or non-existent in many countries. Governments may lack resources or political will to enforce labor regulations effectively. In some cases, corruption within regulatory bodies undermines efforts to ensure compliance with ILO conventions. Ratification and domestication of ILO Conventions on seafoods and fish production has not been done by most Governments including Zimbabwe.

• How relevant is the FAO Small-Scall Fisheries Guidelines for your work?

FAO Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines provide a valuable framework for sustainable management practices in small-scale fisheries. Their emphasis on community-based approaches, ecosystem-based management, and gender equality aligns closely with our work as a Trade Union that represents the interest of workers in the fishing Industry. It is however important to incorporate the guidelines into research and implementation strategies

• What is your opinion on the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement?

Our opinion as Union is that there is need to find a balance between environmental conservation and socio-economic development is crucial when evaluating the WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement in order to ensure that sustainable practices are promoted without disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities heavily reliant on fisheries subsidies.

• How do you see the High Seas Treaty as potentially affect human rights and workers’ rights?

The High Seas Treaty, also known as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), is an international agreement that aims to establish a legal framework for the use and conservation of the world's oceans. While it primarily focuses on issues such as maritime boundaries, navigation rights, and resource exploitation, it also has implications for human rights and workers' rights. It has potential benefits for both human rights and workers' rights through its provisions on marine pollution prevention and sustainable fisheries management. It also ensures the need to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and promoting greater collaboration between stakeholders in order to ensure that the treaty effectively protects these fundamental rights in the high seas. The treaty obliges states to prevent and control pollution of the marine environment, which directly impacts human health and well-being. By reducing pollution levels in the high seas, it can help protect coastal communities that rely on these waters for their livelihoods.

• Please add any other information, or position, which is not covered by the above questions but might be relevant to the report on the right to food and fish workers. Don’t forget to include your name, union/organization, and contact information (phone and/or e-mail) with your answers

As a Union Representative, I believe the information requested was adequate and everything has been covered.

**Name:** Mr. R. Dzimiri General Secretary

**Name of the Union**: FFAWUZ

**Email address**: rdzimiri75@gmail.com