

Illegal fishing

Stealing fish, stealing lives

Illegal fishing in Guinea results not only in stolen fish, but also in lost lives

In July 2005, Baillo Secko, a fisheries inspector in Guinea, died during a night encounter with a trawler fishing illegally. A few months earlier, it was the whole crew of an artisanal pirogue that went down in a similar encounter. Of the crew of four, only one fisherman survived. Almamy Camara was picked up after three days at sea, clutching on to just a few buoys, waiting for help. Illegal fishing in Guinea results not only in stolen fish, but also in lost lives.

Guinea has extensive and valuable shrimp and octopus resources, and rich demersal and pelagic fisheries. Like the proverbial bees to the honey pot, this attracts all kinds of fishing vessels, including the ones involved in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In 2001, a Greenpeace report of at-sea observations in Guinea's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) highlighted that 34 of the 92 vessels observed (37 per cent) were fishing in a prohibited zone, largely taking catch from the area designated for artisanal fisheries, and were, therefore, fishing illegally.

These illegal activities, in particular by Korean trawlers fishing for *otholites* (a type of croaker/grunter), have been denounced for many years, particularly by Guinean artisanal fishermen. Issiaga Daffe, President of the artisanal fishermen's organization, Union Nationale des Pêcheurs Artisans de Guinée (UNPAG), explains: "Illegal incursions of trawlers into the Guinean coastal zone are most damaging for the fishing resources as well as for our coastal communities. These incursions result not only in degradation of our coasts, but also, particularly as they happen mainly at night, in collisions with small-scale fishing vessels, lead to loss of gear and

casualties. Some of our fishermen who tried to discuss with these illegal boat crew were often welcomed with gunfire or boiling water thrown on to the pirogues."

In May 2005, a joint field visit was organized by two European non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA), with the collaboration of the Association pour le Developpement de la Pêche en Guinée (ADEPEG). Several ports and bases along the coast of Guinea were visited, where the extent of illegal fishing and the need to support surveillance programmes were glaringly apparent.

Despite this lack of means, a total of 19 vessels had been arrested during the first six months of 2005 by the Guinean authorities. Eight of them had been charged with fishing without licences, four for fishing within the 12-nautical mile zone reserved for artisanal fishermen, and six for using the wrong size mesh in their trawl.

A close examination of the ownership and registration of these vessels showed that many have a history of illegal fishing in Guinean waters and are well known to surveillance authorities. Multiple name and flag changes are common, and some vessels even have dual identities—using one name or flag while fishing in Guinea and a different one when using port facilities.

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A recent (July 2005) report by MRAG Ltd, a London-based consulting company with broad international experience in fishery science and management, estimates that the value of the fish stolen by illegal fishing in the Guinean EEZ, for the

12-month period 2003–2004 was around US\$110 mn. If illegal fishing activities at sea are the ones that have the most immediate damaging impacts, they are not the only ones.

Until recently, fraud too was rife, notably concerning the obligatory landings. Mamayawa Sandouno, the Guinean Fisheries Ministry's Chief Inspector, recently explained: "Boats fishing in the Guinean zone must land part of their catches according to the pro rata of their total catch and the vessel tonnage (expressed in gross registered tonnage, GRT). But, until very recently, the vessel tonnage references used were called 'consensual GRT'. These consensual GRT didn't reflect the real tonnage of the boat. To address that problem, the Guinean administration obtained information from the Lloyds Register for boats fishing in Guinea with their true tonnage, and is now using the Lloyds GRT to calculate the obligatory landings. Since these changes have been introduced, and as a direct consequence, landings have risen in volume by 30-40 per cent."

However, it needs to be highlighted that many vessels fishing illegally in Guinean and other waters are not on the Lloyds Register.

Another aspect of fishing activities in Guinea that results in non-declared and under-declared catches are the activities

of three 'collector boats'. These boats collect the by-catch from industrial vessels and bring them to areas near the coast where pirogues can collect them and bring them ashore. The origin of this by-catch is unknown and there are suspicions that these collector boats are a means to launder the catches made by boats fishing illegally.

Given the scale of illegal industrial fishing activities occurring in the zone that is normally reserved for artisanal fishermen (12 miles or 20-m depth), the Guinean authorities, with the support of the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) initiated, in 2000, a two-year pilot project of participative surveillance. Through this pilot project, artisanal fishermen reported real-time information from their observations at sea, directly to inspectors of the Centre National de Surveillance des Pêches (CNSP).

Surveillance infrastructure

According to local reports, at the end of the pilot project, incursions of trawlers diminished by 60 per cent in the artisanal fishing zone. The system could only be implemented in areas where there were classical surveillance bases, as patrol boats were necessary for the actual arrests, and a certain infrastructure was essential for training and supplying the fishermen, but it exploits the fact that illegally-operating fishing vessels are not as suspicious of

canoes as they are of official surveillance boats.

Despite the success of the project, funding support by foreign donors stopped in 2003. The impacts did not take long to arrive: decreased activities and deterioration of equipment. The findings of the EJF/CFFA field visit show that, for example in Kamsar, north of Guinea and close to the border with Guinea-Bissau, the surveillance base is located a few kilometres from the sea. It takes a couple of hours to get the surveillance boat out to sea, which is problematic when urgent intervention is needed. At the time, there were no means of communication or radar on board, and no means for information from land to be transmitted to those at sea, or vice versa. Fishermen do not have radios to inform the patrol boat or base station of infractions they witness.

In the other surveillance base in Bongolon, there is a surveillance boat, but it is in a very degraded state, with its engines broken. Spare parts for the engines are not easy to find, and it is difficult to get fuel: the nearest petrol station is 20 km away. Communication equipment has been damaged by seawater and the base has no functioning radar, so it cannot react quickly to information received.

Like many other so-called development projects in developing countries, in case of the Guinean surveillance project, emphasis has been placed on providing equipment while maintenance, repairs and training have been neglected.

For surveillance programmes, in general, most of the donor and government support has been invested in establishing expensive monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems. Despite these investments, in many developing countries the situation has not noticeably improved; in many cases, it has deteriorated even further.

While acknowledging the importance of such systems, it needs to be remembered that the efficiency of these MCS technical tools relies entirely upon human competencies. So the whole system will

be inefficient if people in charge of its implementation are not sufficiently trained. Remunerations of people in charge of the MCS should also be proportional to the difficulty of the task, in order to make them less vulnerable to the rampant corruption prevalent in administrations, particularly in a sector where the economic issues at stake are enormous.

This article is by Beatrice Gorez (cffa.cape@tiscali.be) of the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements and Helene Bours (helene.bours@ejfoundation.org) of the Environmental Justice Foundation