



NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency
Agence de Planification et de Coordination du NEPAD



STOP ILLEGAL FISHING CASE STUDY SERIES **05**

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Community Surveillance TO PROTECT SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

Background

Guinea and Sierra Leone – two West African coastal countries – both have productive fisheries, contributing 4% and 9% to the respective national GDPs, while also generating rural employment for around 80,000 and 230,000 people respectively within the two artisanal fisheries sectors¹. Fish is also a vital protein source, with 40% of consumed animal protein coming from fish in Guinea and 64% in Sierra Leone.

This high productivity attracts foreign fishing vessels (FFVs), with some of these vessels illegally targeting the inshore exclusion zone (IEZ) – an area off limits for industrial FFVs to protect artisanal fishing. In response to this, and as a means to protect the interests of small-scale fishers, community surveillance has been piloted by Guinea and Sierra Leone – this case study tells of their encouraging experiences.

In the late 1990s, foreign industrial fishing vessels were illegally encroaching and fishing in the **Guinean** IEZ. This was threatening fish stocks and spawning grounds, damaging the communities' fishing gear and boats, and often injuring and even killing crew members during clashes at sea. To address this, the government – through the National Centre for Fisheries Surveillance and Protection (CNSP), supported by the National Coordinating Unit² of the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP)³, and with participation of the local communities of Koukoudé, Matakang and Bongolon – carried out a pilot project from 2000 to 2002 to develop a community-based surveillance system.

Six coastal bases, staffed with 50 coastguard officers, radios and patrol boats, were established to respond to community-derived reports of illegal fishing vessels. The participating fishers who had been trained and provided with equipment such as GPS and radios would, while on regular fishing trips, radio the local CNSP base with the location of any sighted illegal vessels.

STOP ILLEGAL FISHING CASE STUDIES aim to:

Define best practice by analysing practical examples of different approaches in the fight against IUU fishing. They also demonstrate the magnitude of activities and partnerships underway to stop illegal fishing and provide the basis for policy advice.





The Story (cont'd)

In response, a coastguard patrol boat would then be dispatched to intercept the intruding vessels.

Facing the same problem, **Sierra Leone's** Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) and the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) – began a project in 2009, working with 15 communities from the Sherbro River area, to provide resources and capacity to support effective community-based surveillance. Fishers would report illegal vessel sightings, and the EJF boat would respond, firstly locating the illegal vessel and then taking photos, GPS positions and documenting any breaches of law. This information is then passed to government authorities to facilitate the investigation of suspected illegal operators.

As many of the documented illegal vessels operating in West Africa export their catch to the European Union (EU), EJF also sends 'illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) alerts' to the European authorities to facilitate EU States' ability to invoke the EU Regulation to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU fishing to block import of illegal fisheries products. For example, in March 2011, based on evidence sourced from the community surveillance project and submitted by EJF, a consignment of fish worth £6 million was seized in the Spanish port of Las Palmas. This consignment was later released by Spanish authorities, against the advice of the European Commission and disregarding communications by three West African governments that the vessels concerned had operated illegally in their waters.

Players involved

- **Local fishers and communities:** They were the motivation behind change and they were the key surveillance and reporting informants. In Guinea, they also assisted in capacity building by being trained to become trainers of other fishers.
- **Government authorities:** Local and central government authorities were involved in both countries. In Guinea, CNSP, who are in charge of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), conducted training of fishers and provided the patrol boats, with support from the Navy and the National Maritime Fisheries Directorate (DNPM). In Sierra Leone, MFMR and the Joint Maritime Committee (JMC) were key partners, together with two local councils as well as traditional authorities who played a key role in promoting the work of the project.
- **Supporting and funding agencies:** The Guinea work was implemented primarily by local actors but supported through the SFLP. In Sierra Leone, funding has been provided by the EU since 2011, with the EJF providing and operating a boat as well as providing technical advice and overall support to the project.



Drivers

In both cases the main driver for action was the need to stop the damaging effects of illegal fishing in coastal Guinea and Sierra Leone by foreign trawlers. IUU fishing vessels were trawling in these areas without fear of arrest or prosecution, while local communities were suffering from the consequences.

Key features and outcomes

- **Reduction of IUU fishing in monitored areas in both countries** – before community monitoring began in the three communities of Guinea, 450 illegal incursions occurred in 2000; by 2002 this had dropped to 56 incursions⁴. In the Sherbro River area of Sierra Leone, sightings fell from 32 reports in the second quarter of 2010 to four in the same period in 2011, while ten FFVs known to have been illegally fishing in the country in 2010 and 2011 were no longer fishing there in March 2012.
- **Increased livelihood security and community cohesion** – fewer accidents at sea and less damage to gear and equipment in both countries meant that fishers became more willing to go to sea, thus improving their incomes and boosting community spirit. In Guinea, this resulted in community surveillance being included in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy⁵.
- **Improved catches and ecosystem health** – in Guinea fishers noted that they had more fish in their nets during the project than before⁶. In Sierra Leone it is too early to ascertain the impact on catches, however, communities have already reported increased catches of certain species and increased sightings of sharks (an indicator of improved ecosystem health) in the area previously targeted by the illegal trawlers.
- **Generation of revenues from fines** – between October 2011 and January 2012, fines in excess of 300,000 USD were generated for the Sierra Leonean government as a result of evidence generated from the community monitoring project.
- **Relying on fishers, local communities and local government authorities to implement the project** – by establishing surveillance systems based around existing actors and their institutional arrangements as well as utilising low-cost technology with low demands on capacity-building provide a good basis for ownership and long term sustainability.

Challenges

- **Overcoming practical limitations** – bad weather and the rainy season as well as limited resources or dependency on external funding to run patrol boats and to mend or replace broken equipment all limit monitoring opportunities.
- **Avoiding increased small-scale fishing pressure** – as the community surveillance system became successful in Guinea, more fishers were attracted to the protected area, thus, increasing pressure on the resource and reducing the initial improvements in catch.
- **Reducing opportunities for bribing** – for example through establishing anonymous tip-off systems and monitoring of the reporting processes.

Lessons learned

- **Identify priority areas for pilot projects** where illegal activities are known to be relatively high and communities are motivated to engage in the project.
- **Ensure effective communication between government authorities and communities** from the beginning to reduce potential animosity between the local authorities, who may feel their role is being threatened (for example the coastguard), and local fishers. This also facilitates timely action against perpetrators.
- **Formalise the role of communities in national fisheries surveillance systems**, for example through the adoption of formal participatory surveillance guidelines as done in Guinea in 2006. In Sierra Leone, a formal reporting process for communities to the JMC is being developed.
- **Where possible, track the onward journey of the illegally caught fish** in order that port States can be requested to take action.
- **Formalise systems for communicating evidence** to authorities, such as the national government, the flag State, and regional bodies, to facilitate the prosecution process.
- **Adopt an adequate legal framework** to enable prosecution and allow for issuing of fines and other sanctions.
- **Publicise monitoring activities and success stories both nationally and internationally** as this helps to deter further illegal operations. This may also encourage further political support.

- **Identifying the vessels involved in illegal activities** – the vessels often deliberately hide their names and other identification markings. In Sierra Leone, a photographic database of vessels enables forensic comparisons to assist in identification.
- **Ensuring adequate and effective follow up action** – in Guinea, successful prosecutions and fines were limited mainly due to inadequate or incomplete evidence. In Sierra Leone, however, evidence submitted referred to specific laws that had been breached, legal provisions that allowed action to be taken, and also included a photograph of the illegal vessel with a GPS position, leading to more vessel sightings being converted into prosecutions.

Policy implications

- Overall, a supporting legal framework should consider that MCS is most effective when there are: high probability of being caught, simple equipment, low implementation costs, sanctions for breaking rules, and high likelihood of sanction being applied.
- Formalising community participation into MCS activities at policy, strategic and planning levels can assist in overcoming illegal fishing.
- Sustainability of a community surveillance system can be consolidated by investing part of the fines generated back into surveillance operations.
- Compiled information about illegal fishing incidents and ensuing actions can be used to inform national positions in fishery access negotiations as well as African positions on international fisheries policy.
- A mechanism to facilitate national, regional and international collaboration and information exchange, including between coastal, flag, port and market States, in relation to evidence gathering, arrests and prosecutions in fishery cases is required.
- A global record of industrial fisheries vessels would help in identifying offending vessels – a unique vessel identifier as well as photographic images would be useful components of this.

Acknowledgements

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Further information



NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency
Email: info@nepad.org
Website: www.nepad.org



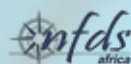
Partnership for African Fisheries
Email: information@africanfisheries.org
Website: www.africanfisheries.org



Environmental Justice Foundation
Email: info@ejfoundation.org
Website: www.ejfoundation.org



Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
Email: FI-Inquiries@FAO.org
Website: www.fao.org



NFDS Africa
Email: [nfd@nfd.info](mailto:nfds@nfd.info)
Website: www.nfd.info

Next steps

At the end of the Guinean pilot project, participants concluded that to successfully continue, the following actions would be required:

- **Improving operational capacities**, particularly at night, to deter illegal operators at all times.
- **Building partnerships between small-scale fishers and legal industrial operators** in order to more effectively combat illegal operators.
- **Establishing formal systems to gather and communicate information and evidence** on illegal operations, nationally and within the sub-region.
- **Creating a supporting legal framework, long term funding and a support plan for surveillance** – once the project ended vessel encroachments soon started re-occurring, demonstrating that the surveillance activities would benefit from the backing of formal institutional and legal frameworks, including funding options for the maintenance of equipment and operations.

In order to strengthen the Sierra Leone project, the following actions are in the pipeline:

- **Expanding operations** to also cover Yawri Bay, where illegal fishing has been reported, some of it possibly displaced from the Sherbro River area.
- **Expanding the project to address illegal fishing regionally** – EJF plans to use their patrol boat in northern Liberia, and it may also be feasible to replicate this model in other West African countries suffering from IEZ encroachment. EJF also plans to develop a model reporting procedure to facilitate the effective implementation of the EU IUU regulation.
- **Ensuring that information on IUU fishing is shared with relevant flag States**, so that robust action is taken when their vessels breach Sierra Leone's national fisheries law.

Footnotes

- ¹ FAO Fishery Country Profiles (Guinea – August 2005, Sierra Leone – May 2008). (DFID) and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- ² Set up to bring together technicians, government officers and members of key civil society organisations to represent the interests of fishing communities.
- ³ Financed by the UK Department for International Development
- ⁴ Background information provided by FAO.
- ⁵ SFLP Keysheet. *Communities' participation in the surveillance of fisheries in coastal zone.*
- ⁶ Background information provided by FAO.



Stop Illegal Fishing

Email: pct@stopillegalfishing.com

Website: www.stopillegalfishing.com