
Discussion Document on Implications on Coastal Communities of Fisheries Crime with Examples from Nigeria and Gulf of Guinea¹

1. Background

This discussion document is based on the sixth webinar in a series of Blue Justice Forum webinars facilitated by the Blue Justice Initiative Secretariat in conjunction with the UNDP Blue Resilience project.

The theme for the webinar was the ‘**Implications on Coastal Communities of Fisheries Crime with Examples from Nigeria and Gulf of Guinea**’.

The webinar was presented by Dr. Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood, Maritime Governance and Security Expert and a Lecturer in Sustainable Development at the University of St. Andrews, and Dr. Maurice Beseng, Postdoctoral Researcher in Conservation Geopolitics at the University of Oxford. A total of 30 participants joined the webinar from a total of 14 countries (Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Nigeria, Norway, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States). The webinar was moderated by Emma Witbooi.

2. Topics in Focus

Implications on Coastal Communities of Fisheries Crime: Examples from Nigeria and Gulf of Guinea – Dr. Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood, Maritime Governance and Security Expert and the University of St. Andrews.

1. Fisheries is of major significance in a number of socio-economic factors. It provides 40 – 80% of all animal protein and is therefore an essential source for nutrition, while at the same time providing millions of people with a livelihood. In the Gulf of Guinea, even if the direct fishing is dominated by men, it is often financed by women, thereby serving as a gender equalizer in the economic sphere. In post-production for example, 80% of the seafood sector is marketed by women. In terms of revenue, the industry makes up 0.55% of national GDP in Nigeria, 1.2% in Ghana, 3.9% in Cabo Verde, 5.8% in São Tomé and Príncipe, and 13.5% in Senegal. These numbers point to the key role that fisheries play for coastal communities in the region.

¹ The webinar was held on 22 October, 10:00 CET.

2. Organized crime in fisheries manifests itself in different forms. Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing can constitute, lead to, or go together with corruption, fuel smuggling, money laundering, fraudulent catch documentation, and drugs and human trafficking.
3. For coastal residents, the direct impact of organized crime in fisheries manifests itself in depleting fisheries and consequently less income. Reduced catch for fishers reduces the amounts of fish available for processors and sellers, thereby also decreasing the number of fish available for communities to affordable prices. The revenue from fishing is often used to cover costs of education and health care in these communities. Depleting stocks due to organized crime is therefore a threat, not only to personal security, but also to children's education and public health.
4. On the macro-level, organized crime in the fisheries has a direct negative impact on state revenue, resulting in less income. Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and Sierra Leone all lose US\$2.3 billion annually to IUU fishing related offences.
5. Indirect implications of organized crime in the fisheries result from the increased securitization of the ocean. If in close contact with cargo vessels or trawlers in piracy hotspots, local fishers are sometimes mistaken for criminals and have been subject to attacks resulting in fatality. Indirect implications also include a reduction in inshore fishing areas and introduction of closed seas, measures introduced to maximise profit and address issues of sustainability, respectively.
6. A cyclic effect on drugs trafficking has also been documented, where 5.7 million or 55% of the 10.36 million drug users in Africa, are located in West Africa (2018). Fishers are increasingly being paid with drugs instead of money, with the cyclical effect of increased consumption and infectious diseases in local communities. In Ghana for example, HIV and Hepatitis C contraction rates for PWIDs are 0.69 per cent (2003) and 40.1 per cent.
7. When faced with increased threats to their traditional livelihood of fishing, coastal residents seek alternative sources of income. Men and women often employ different coping mechanisms in these instances. Many become involved in farming or aquaculture, trade goods in the market, join cooperative societies, or utilize their boats to transport people. A great number also migrate or move to larger cities in search of other means of living.
8. Unfortunately, vulnerable coastal communities increasingly engage in criminal activities themselves. They participate in illegal fishing, pipeline vandalization, oil/fuel smuggling or illegal migration. Since organized criminal networks wish to utilize fisherfolks previous knowledge of the sea, they are recruited to act as look-outs/navigationers/informants, to traffic humans/drugs/wildlife, or engage in armed robbery or kidnapping. Some, and typically women, will resort to sex work, in exchange for fish, money or to guarantee credit.
9. So how come organized crime in fisheries is on the rise in the region? Besides harmful subsidies, the rise can be accredited to corruption, poor MCS capabilities, inadequate legal frameworks and weak enforcement as well as a lack of support for coastal residents to build resilience to their vulnerabilities.
10. The cyclical nature of the issue undermines human, national, regional and global security. It is therefore crucial that, going forward, the global community address these challenges by putting an end to harmful subsidies and by closing the legal gaps that exist and enhance the capacities of the relevant agencies to implement existing regulation. Coastal welfare and ecological protection must be put at the center of the blue economy. A good start is for countries in the region to adopt the FAO (2015) "Voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication".

Implications on Coastal Communities of Fisheries Crime: Examples from Cameroon – Dr. Maurice Beseng, Postdoctoral Researcher in Conservation Geopolitics at the University of Oxford.

11. In Cameroon, the fisheries sector contributes to around 1,8% of the country's estimated US\$35 billion GDP. With some 70+ industrial trawlers and about 34000 artisanal canoes, revenues from fishing licenses generates an annual US\$ 289,000 and the entire sector employs more than 200,000 people in the country, providing up to 25,5% of the animal protein. Fish is increasingly becoming a scarce resource in the country, hence Cameroon government and private seafood companies import fish from neighboring countries to cover market demand.
12. Fisheries-related crimes in Cameroon include illegal fishing, corruption, labor market crimes and deliberate chemical pollution at sea. Offences such as money laundering, illegal immigration, and smuggling of arms, fuel, timber, wildlife and contraband are also associated with the sector.
13. Organized crime and the subsequent depleting fish stocks is becoming a serious threat to the community way of life. In terms of livelihoods, coastal communities are becoming increasingly vulnerable, experiencing food insecurity and lack of income as fish stocks are depleted. While previously being able to both live off their catch and sell the surplus, fisherfolks now spend more time fishing for less catch. Many therefore, find themselves unable to continue fishing even as basic subsistence. The development disproportionately affects women, who are often dependent upon buying surplus catch from artisanal fishermen to sustain their own micro businesses.
14. Coastal communities also experience shrinking fishing space and insecurity due to increased zonation and securitization of the sea. Fisherfolks are often caught in the middle between fisheries criminals and the police and are subject to arrests/beatings and imprisonment for being too close to oil refinery complexes/petroleum exploration zones. There is also a tendency of increased coastal community surveillance due to the increased militarization of anti-fisheries crime operations.
15. Since they pay more in fish licenses, industrial fishers tend to be prioritized in terms of regulation and are offered more security than artisanal fishers. This regulative discrimination of artisanal fishers is often connected to corruption, since many public officials personally invest in industrial fishing vessels.
16. As a result, coastal communities are left seeking alternative livelihoods. While some engage in illicit activities themselves, others seek employment on industrial fishing companies. The labor conditions on such vessels are often very poor, and employees are subjected to hazardous work with no social security protection. Female fish entrepreneur resort to buy fish directly from industrial fishing vessels at port, often placing in more vulnerable positions as they are exposed to sex-for-fish trade negotiations while others engage in other petty trading activities
17. To address the issue of organized crime in the fisheries and safeguard the livelihoods of coastal communities, corruption must be addressed by increasing levels of transparency in acquisition of fishing licenses and permits. The fishing efforts of industrial fishers must moreover be limited, while increasing monitoring of their onshore activities (MCS). MCS should be increased and decentralised by engaging coastal communities and fisherfolks in operations. On a similar note, it is crucial that governments invest in marine aquaculture and capacity-building of artisanal fisherfolks to become engaged in the sector, whilst also fostering transnational cooperation in maritime security governance.

In sum:

1. Fisheries is of major significance in a number of socio-economic factors. It provides 40 – 80% of all animal protein and is therefore an essential source for nutrition, while at the same time providing millions of people with a livelihood. In the Gulf of Guinea, even if the direct fishing is dominated by men, it is often financed by women, thereby serving as a gender equalizer in the economic sphere. The sector is also crucial in terms of state revenue in the region.
2. Organized crime and depleting fish stocks leave coastal communities vulnerable, experiencing food insecurity and lack of income. While previously being able to both live off their catch and sell the surplus, fisherfolks now spend more time fishing for less catch, finding themselves unable to continue fishing even as basic subsistence. The development disproportionately affects women, and since the revenue from fishing is used to cover costs of education and health care, it poses a larger threat to children's education and public health.
3. Faced with depleted stocks and increased securitization and zonation of the seas, coastal residents are seeking alternative ways of income. While many become involved in farming, aquaculture or trade, others start engaging in criminal activities themselves. They will typically participate in illegal fishing, pipeline vandalization, oil/fuel smuggling or illegal migration, or are recruited by criminal networks to act as look-outs/navigation/informants, to traffic humans/drugs/wildlife, or engage in armed robbery or kidnapping. Some, and typically women, will resort to sex work in exchange for fish, money or to guarantee credit.
4. To address the issue of organized crime in the fisheries and safeguard the livelihoods of coastal communities, corruption must be addressed by increasing levels of transparency in acquisition of fishing licenses and permits. The fishing efforts of industrial fishers must moreover be limited, while increasing monitoring of their onshore activities. MCS should be increased and decentralised by engaging coastal communities and fisherfolks in operations. On a similar note, it is crucial that governments invest in marine aquaculture and capacity-building of artisanal fisherfolks to become engaged in the sector, whilst also fostering transnational cooperation in maritime security governance.

General discussion

Discussion themes included:

- The efforts to constitute the IUUF as a TOC into international law.
- The role of disrupting technologies, such as drones, in addressing organized crime in the fisheries sector.
- How domestic legislation can hinder MCS capacity.