

ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED (IUU) FISHING

The “Saiko” Story

SUMMARY

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing violates conservation and management measures currently in place in many countries. IUU is recognized as a serious threat to sustainability of capture fisheries due to its negative impact on the ecology of the oceans and economy of fishing nations. Global losses due to IUU fishing alone are estimated between US\$10 billion and US\$23.5 billion per year with West African waters deemed to have the highest levels of IUU in the world representing up to 37 percent of the region's catch (OECD, 2012). This is estimated at US \$ 100,000 per day, in addition to damage of artisanal equipment in the marine waters of West Africa. While much of the IUU fishing in the region is believed to be conducted by foreign vessels fishing in the EEZ of coastal West African States, in Ghana, a large part of the IUU fishing problem can be attributed to the Ghanaian fishing fleet. IUU fishing is often associated with a large quantity of by-catch as fishers do not comply with regulations, particularly the use of small mesh size.

Transshipping of fish is banned in some West African countries, including Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea. In Ghana, the practice is authorized under a special permission and can only occur in port under the supervision of an agent of the Fisheries Commission. In recent years, a new form of transshipment developed between industrial vessels and the artisanal canoes, with the canoes buying frozen by-catch from trawlers at sea. Although it is deemed illegal and prohibited under the Fisheries Act 625 of 2002 (Section 132), the business has grown due to its lucrative nature in many coastal communities of Ghana. This is known as 'SAIKO' fishing. It is widely practiced in some landing sites in the Central, Western and Greater Accra Regions.

As one by-catch collector puts it, “with SAIKO, harvest is always assured”. The problem of SAIKO is compounded by overfishing, poor public education, greed and weak fisheries law enforcement mechanisms. This brief proposes practical enforcement measures to reduce illegal fishing activities.

THE ISSUE: IUU FISHING

IUU fishing has three components which are interconnected; they are (i) Illegal fishing, (ii) Unreported fishing and (iii) Unregulated fishing.

Box 1: Summary Explanation of IUU Fishing and Saiko

Illegal fishing takes place when vessels or harvesters operate in violation of the laws of a fishery. This can apply to fisheries that are under the jurisdiction of a coastal state or to high seas fisheries regulated by regional fisheries management organisations.

Unreported fishing is fishing that has been unreported or misreported to the relevant national authority or regional fisheries management organisations, in contravention of applicable laws and regulations.

Unregulated fishing generally refers to fishing by vessels without nationality, vessels flying the flag

of a country not party to the regional fisheries management organisations governing that fishing area or species on the high seas, or harvesting in unregulated areas.

Saiko: By-catch collectors use modified boats, go to sea without nets to collect or buy fish (mostly juvenile fish) from trawl vessels. Sometimes, fish is exchanged for money, fruits, vegetables and water, among others.



Global Loss due to IUU (source: APP, 2014)

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is a lucrative venture in many coastal African countries, especially those without resources to police their exclusive economic zones. The global losses due to IUU fishing alone are estimated to be as high as US\$23.5 billion per year with West African waters deemed to have the highest levels of IUU fishing in the world, representing up to 37 percent of the region's catch, (OECD, 2012). Most of this catch occurs not on the high seas but in coastal waters under national jurisdiction (Global Oceans Commission, 2013).

Transshipment of Fish—"Saiko" fishing

Transshipment is the transfer of fish consignments from a fishing vessel to another vessel or canoe. This can take place either in port or at sea. Transshipment is sometimes legally authorized, at port but in many instances, they are carried out illegally or without any permission. Transshipment frequently facilitates the laundering of IUU fish due to the inability of coastal state authorities to monitor how, by whom and where transferred fish was caught.

In Ghana, transshipment of fish, involving artisanal canoes, popularly referred to as "SAIKO" fishing, is one of the major IUU issues the country continues to face. Saiko fishing has gained acceptance and is on the increase in major landing sites along the 550 km coastline of Ghana. Some canoes are engaged in transshipment of fish from trawlers and inshore vessels. The catch are mainly juvenile small pelagic



Transshipment of fish at sea between an industrial trawl vessels and an artisanal canoe (source: EJF)

such as sardines, chub mackerel and other juvenile demersal fish as well as it is seen as an assured means of harvest in the face of declining catches. Some Saiko fishers claim to pay taxes on their operations to district authorities and therefore perceive the practice to be legitimate.

Saiko fishing as practiced by the artisanal canoes contravenes the laws of Ghana and such offences are sanctioned by the Fisheries Act 625, 2002 and Act 880 (Amendment) and the Fisheries Regulation, LI 1968. According to these laws, a vessel caught engaging in transshipment is fined a minimum of \$1 million and a maximum of \$4 million with revocation of license. Nevertheless, Saiko is quickly gaining root into a full time occupation within some fishing communities in Ghana. Some landing ports, notably Apam, Elmina, Axim, Tema and Sekondi have been identified as locations where the practice is pervasive. Saiko fishing operations in Elmina and Apam are being managed by highly recognized executives of a By-catch Collectors Association. The Fisheries Enforcement Unit (FEU) of the Fisheries Commission of Ghana, since December 2013, has accrued fines totalling GH¢ 295,839 from vessels that committed various offences along the country's maritime domain. Transshipment accounted for GH¢135,460 from 13 Ghanaian vessels arrested, representing almost half of the fines collected.



Saiko fish as sold on the market (source: Hen Mpoano)

Contributing Factors

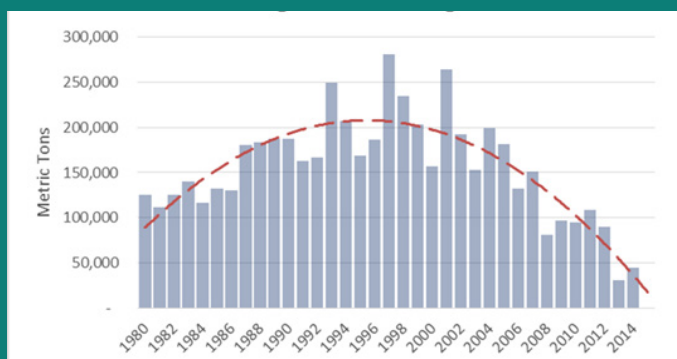
Many factors are promoting IUU and related Saiko fishing in Ghana. These include:

Weak Law Enforcement

There are adequate laws to regulate fishing activities but their enforcement is weak due to poor logistics and inadequate law enforcement personnel, limited public education, greed, gaps in the prosecution of fisheries infractions and political interference.

Overfishing and overcapacity.

Landings of small pelagic complex decreased sharply since 2007 to reach in 2014, about 15% of the maximum landings realized in 1996 (281,096 tonnes). The trend observed from 1980 to 2007 fluctuated with high landings in mid-1990s between 200,000 and 281,096 tonnes. This decline is due mainly to overfishing, and has given rise to illegal activities including Saiko fishing. Continuous decline in the capture fishery, coupled with rising levels of fishing effort and decreasing profit is resulting in increased poverty in fishing communities. This situation is strengthening the socio-economic justification for Saiko fishing.



Small pelagic landings (source: STWG, 2015)

Rising Demand for Fish

The rising demand for fish in Ghana and the affordability of Saiko fish are posing a serious dilemma to many stakeholders in the fisheries sector. By-catch collectors on the average incur less cost compared to canoe owners who catch fish with their own nets. With Saiko “harvest is always assured” due to a wide availability of the product from trawlers at sea. Thus the uncertainty factors of landing fish are reduced considerably and profitability is improved.

Perceived Legitimacy of Saiko

The perception of legitimacy among Saiko fishermen due to tax some of the fishers claim to pay to the district assemblies; contributes to the increase in this form of IUU fishing. Saiko fishermen do not see themselves as contributors to the issue of overfishing in the sector and do not see the damage the practice causes to the long term sustainability of the fishery.

Open Access

With an open access fishery regime, people decide to enter the fishery at will, thereby putting marine resources under severe pressure leading to scarcity of fish. As fish becomes scarce fishermen result to more and more desperate and disingenuous measures including the use of light, dynamite, carbide, fine mesh nets and Saiko to get the last fish.

The Effects of IUU and Related Saiko fishing

- » It exacerbates overfishing and jeopardizes the livelihoods of artisanal fishers, who have few alternative sources of income.
- » The widespread sale of Saiko fish has led to trawlers and inshore vessels engaging in this practice to compete more directly with the canoe fleet for the small pelagic catch and at the expense of the canoe fishers involved.
- » Saiko catch and sales now means that more and more of this already overfished resource is harvested, further depleting the resource and threatening collapse of the fishery and long term economic viability of the industry and livelihoods of tens of thousands of fishing households.
- » Widespread illegal fishing means that regulatory measures put in place to help rebuild the health of fish stocks cannot work as intended, endangering the economic recovery of the fisheries sector.
- » Saiko landings that are unreported (as it is illegal) means information on status of the stocks is inaccurate, making decision making more difficult.
- » From the ecological standpoint, Saiko fishing has the potential to impact significantly some demersal fish stocks since many juveniles red snappers for instance are found in the catch.

ADDRESSING IUU/SAIKO FISHING IN GHANA: THE WAY FORWARD

To address SAIKO and other IUU fishing activities, the following actions are proposed

» **Immediate implementation and monitoring of the national action plan for IUU prevention**

National planning to prevent IUU should be based on a consensus developed by a wide range of stakeholders including government institutions, non-governmental organizations, fishers and research institutions.

» **Strengthen fisheries enforcement**

To effectively patrol the over 300 landing sites dotted along the coast of Ghana, the number of Fisheries Enforcement Unit (FEU) – a unit established under the fisheries Act 625 to enforce the fisheries law in Ghana’s territorial waters – and Marine Police should be strengthened through provision of outposts at key landing beaches noted for IUU fishing and increasing the number of MCS staff spread across the country. Incentives in the form of risk allowance and comprehensive insurance packages should be provided for fisheries law enforcement officers.

» **Empower traditional fishing authorities**

Chief Fishermen wield a certain degree of power over fishing activities within their jurisdiction. For this power to be effective in fisheries management, it should be recognized by law under a co-management arrangement. This will also help promote voluntary compliance.

» **Financing law enforcement and public education**

Since law enforcement and public education are expensive, it is proposed that a part of the

fisheries development fund be dedicated to fisheries law enforcement and public education on these issues.

» **Incentive for information**

Enforcement relies heavily on accurate information but such information will not be available as potential informants often feel threatened. An IUU short code can be instituted for anonymous reporting of IUU fishing to protect the identity of informants or as a means of crowd sourcing to get better information on where and when IUU fishing occurs. An informant reward and protection scheme can also be incorporated into fisheries enforcement activities being undertaken by the FEU to enhance the work of the FEU.

» **Increase collaboration and exchange of information on IUU prevention**

The contributions of advocacy groups – such as those concerned with sustainability of the world oceans – as well as fishermen and fish processors and traders should be recognized and encouraged to participate in national fisheries policy formulation and representation on official fisheries advisory bodies and the Fisheries Commission.

» **Increase surveillance at sea**

Most transshipment activities occur within Ghana’s maritime jurisdiction hence the need for effective monitoring and surveillance in the maritime domain. This calls for more investment in capacity building for officials in fisheries management, including training in fisheries law, monitoring, control and surveillance.

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COMMENTS ARE WELCOME:

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