

## Illegal Fishing along Ghana's Coast: A Threat to Sustainable Fishing and National Security (A Case Study of Nungua Fishing Community)

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### ABSTRACT

Illegal fishing is putting the livelihoods and nutrition of millions of people on the continent at risk. Ultimately, this carries serious consequences for the rest of the world, in terms of sustainable supply of fish and protection against climate change. Overfishing which is a consequence of illegal fishing refers to the rate or level of fishing that is not sustainable which hampers the rebuilding or recovery of fish stocks. Overfishing is a global problem with many serious social, economic and environmental implications. Every day, billions of people around the world rely on fish and seafood as direct source of nutrition and means of income. Now, more than ever before, the oceans are under pressure to meet the needs of growing population in developing countries and a growing appetite for fish and seafood in developed nations. Rising global demand for fish has made West African waters a magnet for fishing fleets from around the world. European trawlers remain the primary foreign presence but fleets from China, the Philippines, Russia, South Korea and Taiwan have also expanded in recent years.

**Keywords:** Nungua, fishermen, illegal fishing, sustainable fishing

### INTRODUCTION

Fishing is the activity of hunting for fish. It is an ancient and worldwide practice that dates back centuries with various techniques as well as traditions. It has been transformed by modern technological development. Fishing is a gathering skill which involves catching fish. Higher fishing levels allow for the utilization of different mechanisms of fishing as well as the ability to catch a larger variety of fishes.

According to FAO, 2000, it is estimated that up to 78 per cent of marine capture fisheries are overfished. Given that the global marine catch increased from 18 million tonnes in 1950 to 92 million tonnes by 2001 (FAO, 2004). A decade ago, it was already clear that the era of bountiful fishing in West Africa's waters was in steep decline. The fisheries sector no longer contributed as much to their national economies because of high levels of illegal fishing, often from foreign vessels and declining fish stock as well as lack of management and infrastructure. Yet in recent years, the West Africa Region has discovered better practices and fostered regional cooperation that has brought new hope to

coastal communities, coastal cities, and the fisheries sector. Therefore, the government and other stakeholders need to adopt strategies and measures in order that marine fishery resources are not completely destroyed, hence, sustainable use and conservation of marine, inland aquatic and coastal resources for food security, job creation, and economic growth. It is about fisheries, aquaculture, transport, trade, seabed mining, coastal zone management, tourism, marine biotechnology and aquatic endangered, threatened and protected species. Most importantly, the livelihoods that can be derived and improved with these activities.

### THE NEED AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

There have been concerns about the illegal methods of fishing and overexploitation of Ghana's marine resources which cannot continue, as they threaten the very essence of the country's existence. Over the years, especially in recent times, nearly all of Ghana's marine fisheries and some inland fisheries have been overfished. This is buttressed by the last stock survey conducted in April 2016, which

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shows that sardines, the dominant fish stock, are disappearing from Ghanaian waters.

The fisheries sector has seen a rapid decline, which stakeholders attribute to lack of political-will on the part of government to enforce the law and ensure compliance to curtail application of the illegal fishing methods and theft in Ghanaian territorial waters. This has allowed rampant illegal and unsustainable fishing practices including, the use of chemicals, light, dynamites and explosives, small mesh size nets among others. Nowadays, fishermen spend more time, more energy, more money and more effort but get less fish each day. Therefore, this study seeks to ascertain Sustainable fishing in Ghana for national security which appears to be dreadful due to the perceived illegal practices.

This research may also be of relevance to students who may find it interesting for the purpose of conducting similar research or as a source where they can generate other problems for study.

### OBJECTIVES

The general objective is to ascertain Sustainable fishing in Ghana for national security which appears to be dreadful due to the perceived illegal practices.

The specific objectives of the study are

- To identify the existing fishing practices that can be termed illegal.
- To identify measures to overcome perceived illegal practices of fishing.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research sought to answer the following questions.

- What practices exist that can be termed illegal?
- What can be done to solve these illegal practices?

### Scope

The global consequences of illegal fishing have been the focus of much scrutiny in recent years by scientists, economists and policy makers and this important work continues. While there is much more to be learnt about the long-term effects, there is ample evidence to support taking a precautionary approach and ensuring that the entire ecosystem, not only specific fish stocks are considered when it comes to fisheries

management. This study covers the geographical terrain of Nungua (Nshorna) fishing community and its artisanal fishermen.

### Literature

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) note, in their report on the State of the World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2014, that one of the key issues affecting international trade in fish products is the need to ensure that internationally traded fishery products from capture fisheries (i.e. not aquaculture operations) have been produced legally. Products derived from illegal fishing operations often find their way into local or international trade, thus undermining the economies of local fisheries and the supply of fish to local markets. Rough estimates indicate that IUU fishing is responsible for 11 to 26 million tonnes of fish being taken each year, with an estimated value of 10 to 23 billion US dollars (Burgener, 2016).

Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing activity is an international problem because such activities are harmful to global fish stocks. In addition, IUU also undermines the effectiveness of measures adopted nationally, regionally and internationally to secure fish stocks for the future. By undermining effective management systems, IUU fishing activities generate harmful effects on economic and social welfare of the society as a whole but for legal fishers in particular, it reduce the incentives to comply with rules. This is an important challenge for policy makers to deal with (Schmidt, undated).

Fishery and aquaculture production activities around the world provide direct employment and revenue to an estimated 155 million people substantial proportion of whom are fish processors and traders, majority are female (FAO, 2007).

From a market perspective, the IUU fish trade can pose significant liabilities for companies in the supply chain. Taking the necessary steps to prevent illegal fish from entering a market in the first place might simply be an easier route than certification or fully vetting the supply chain with sustainability criteria well after a fish has been pulled from the sea. Recognizing this, early adopters in the seafood business community are preliminarily implementing voluntary measures to improve transparency, to support a handful of global initiatives and domestic policy reforms intended to deter IUU

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fishing, increase traceability in the seafood supply chains and reduce fraudulent labelling. IUU has also been associated with an array of crimes, including drug smuggling and human trafficking. Several recent high-profile cases in Thailand and Indonesia linking IUU fishing to human rights and labor abuses have given authorities another good reason to take action on IUU fishing (Cordes, 2015).

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### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Progressively, the study relied on primary data collected through the administering of validated interview guides with some fishermen and focus group discussion. For the purpose of this study, a total of 60 respondents were sampled using targeted/purposive sampling method. Basically, the purpose of the survey interview as a tool for primary data collection is to establish a solid base of facts from which conclusions are drawn, interpretations made and to determine future courses of action with regards to the social changes. It helped the researcher to obtain valid and intelligent opinions and submissions from the respondents. The data gathered was qualitative.

### Data Collection and Presentation

The responses to the instruments used in the collection of data on the study are presented and analyzed. Research interview and focus group discussion reports on the study participants are evaluated. The interview guide contained a

number of questions aimed at identifying the respondents' opinions and discernments on illegal fishing in Ghana's territorial waters by foreign vessels (Asians). The findings of the survey are presented as follows.

### *The Occupational Experience of the Fishermen*

Fishing in coastal communities in Ghana is not just an occupation, it is a culture. This lifestyle is often passed on from generation to generation. However, indigenes can easily move from one occupation into fishing related activities. All activities in a fishing community relies on fishing, therefore when indigenes commence fishing, they can remain in that economic activity all their life.

### *Vessels Engaged in Illegal Fishing and the Nationalities of their Crews*

The fishermen stated that, the types vessels used for illegal fishing are fishing trawlers and feeder vessels. Also, the illegal fishers along Ghana's territorial sea are Chinese nationals. These Chinese nationals employ local fishers, maximum of 5 Ghanaians onboard their vessels with the idea of exploiting them. When the indigenous fishers help the foreigners to obtain operational license in Ghana, they abandon.

### *Impacts of Foreign Vessels on Indigenous Fishing Activities*

According to the fishermen, the foreign vessels use sophisticated fishing nets and equipment that capture their boats. The equipment and vessels endanger the activities of indigenous fishermen. As a result, the local fishers disagree to the idea of the government permitting these foreign vessel in Ghanaian waters.

### *Ability to Drive the Foreign Vessels Away*

The respondents are unable to send away the foreign vessels that engage in illegal fishing activities along Ghana's coast because these foreign vessels use sophisticated vessels and equipment which the local fishers cannot compete.

### FINDINGS

Commencing from the fishermen's perspective, illegal fishing is highly attractive as foreign fishers employ sophisticated vessels and equipment that can catch the fishes irrespective of their sizes and the water depth. Illegal fishers do not pay taxes or duties on these catches. A further reason why illegal fishing takes place on such a large scale is that, it is often practiced

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with liberty. This is mainly the case in the territorial waters or exclusive economic zones of countries which cannot afford to set up costly and complex fisheries control structures. The situation is especially difficult in the developing countries like Ghana. In this analysis, it can be concluded that ambivalent legislation and a lack of will or capacity to enforce existing national legislation.

- The law does not work for the artisanal fishermen in terms of compensation for destroyed gears and loss of fishing time as they cannot afford the services of lawyers.
- There is no insurance cover for artisanal fishermen and their fishing boats.
- Inadequate storage facilities to cater for excess during bumper harvest.
- Lack of logistics to aid communication with the navy, fisheries commission and district assembly when artisanal fishermen are at sea fishing.
- Pollution is not regulated.
- The foreign trawlers have small unauthorized nets that are able to catch fingerlings.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS

In order to help encourage and sustain fishing activities, traditional occupations that have been the source of livelihood of the people in and around Nungua district over the years, the following recommendations have been proposed:

- Sensitization and education of local fishermen.
- The government has to implement a Fisheries Management Plan to help ensure the long term conservation of Ghana's waters and the marine stocks therein. The key objective of the plan will include reduction of excessive pressure on marine stock, effective legislation, strengthening participatory decision making and meeting regional and international obligations.
- Engaging local people in marine patrol since they have in depth knowledge of what happens in the Ghanaian waters.
- The various stakeholders should devise effective communication system with the artisanal fishers to exchange relevant information when necessary.

- The owners and crew of these foreign illegal vessels should be arrested and sanctioned severely. It would deter others from engaging in illegal fishing.
- Aquaculture should be encouraged.

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**Citation:** Ewedji, C.S & Ewedji F. S., "Illegal Fishing along Ghana's Coast: A Threat to Sustainable Fishing and National Security (A Case Study of Nungua Fishing Community)". (2019). *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 6(12), pp.3-7

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