



## ABSTRACT

Unregulated, illegal and unreported fishing has been undermining maritime security especially for vulnerable coastal nations in Africa. This is particularly problematic for the Gulf of Guinea region where millions of people directly depend on fisheries for their livelihoods. Drawing on primary and secondary data, this paper reveals the extent of unregulated and illegal fishing practices, noting that their operational synergies and impact are a threat to the regional economic security of the Gulf of Guinea. The paper also finds that, corruption, low investment in the maritime sector, lack of completion of

# UNREGULATED ILLEGAL FISHING IN THE GULF OF GUINEA AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC SECURITY: AN INTERROGATION

DR. DANLADI E. BOT & JOSEPH E. AKE

National Defence College Nigeria, Abuja

## Introduction

The oceans surrounding West, Central, and Southern Africa are collectively referred to as the Gulf of Guinea, also known as the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem (ACS, 2014).

This region includes Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, Congo Republic, DR Congo, and Angola among other nations. Waterways that flow into the ocean, like the Congo and Niger Rivers, are abundant in the Gulf of Guinea. The Congo River, which is about 4,700 kilometres long and is the main commercial artery of equatorial Africa, has the second-strongest streams in the world after the Amazon River in Latin America (IMF, 2005). Also, the Niger River, which is 4,200 kilometres long and flows through nine countries, is vital to the lives of over 110 million people in West Africa (Economist, 2004).

The region is regarded as one of the richest in the world, and in recent years, it has been affected by the rest of the world's escalating competition for marine resources. The region is known to be rich in minerals and other natural resources, including lead, zinc, oil, granite, marble, quartz, bitumen, uranium, copper, manganese, gold, phosphates, and so on. It also has a very rich rain forest, which makes up 20% of the world's total rainforest and is one of the world's primary sources of oxygen (Babagana, 2017). A wide variety of marine life, including fish, planktons, shrimp, turtles, crabs, crayfish, and other sea creatures, call it home (Babagana, 2017). Access to the sea and other rivers from Niger provides a remarkable pool of fish for neighbouring countries (IMF, 2005). However, as coastal urban populations have increased and fishing technology has improved,



maritime limitation zones for some countries in the region, and complicity of local authorities, amongst others, have exacerbated the situation. From the point of view of this research, efforts towards curbing unregulated and illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea region must recognize the complexity of the phenomenon and therefore adopt a region-wide coordinated coastal-area fisheries management initiative and planning framework that would be appropriate to enhance the capacities of states in regulating the reaping of marine life in the region.

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competition for shared fish stocks has become much more intense. Unregulated and illegal fishing is rampant, with unregistered foreign vessels "pirating" the seas. Foreign fishing boats that enter rich regional fishing grounds are particularly vulnerable and appealing targets for pirates.

Given the vast amounts of marine resources, security of the Gulf of Guinea waters, is of crucial importance as insecurity could have a negative impact on the economy of the region. Essentially, security is paramount to the Gulf of Guinea's fishing industry as it provides sustenance and employment opportunities for the region's population. Inevitably, the lack of effective fishing vessel controls fosters criminal activities such as illegal and unregulated fishing.

For instance, pirates in the gulf of guinea waters, in addition to their other activities, prey on marginal fishermen. They may not only seize the fish catch; they may also rob ships of their engines, equipment, cash, and other valuables. This has made it difficult for legal fishing fleets to operate freely if the Gulf of Guinea water. Aside the pirates, the illegal and unregulated activities of foreign vessels have also been a problem. In 2014 for example, two vessels, MT Omat and MT Ortakayo-1, were arrested in Nigerian waters for suspicious marine resource depletion crimes, both failing to get required operating approvals, along with the FT Silver Streak which had engaged in illegal and regulated fishing activities.

As it is, this unregulated and illegal fishing is undermining emerging blue economy initiatives across the gulf of guinea region, costing states billions in lost revenue. Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone alone lose US\$2.3 billion annually to unregulated and illegal fishing. Beyond these high losses in revenue, the harmful environmental effects of unregulated and illegal fishing can lead to stock collapses, with an inevitably negative impact on the profitability and employment levels in the legitimate fisheries sector. For instance, coastal states in the gulf of guinea can lose revenue from landings fees, license fees, taxes, and others which are payable by legal fishing operators and the most important is the loss to Gross National Product (GNP) from fisheries production revenue.

Moreover, the economic loss does not only have direct effects but also indirect and induced impacts, including the loss of revenue in supply chains in upstream activities like decreasing of vessels and fishing gears production for the fisheries sector and downstream activities, like reduction of fish processing and packaging. This economic loss is the most clear and straight impact from unregulated and illegal fishing to the gulf of guinea society and government. As a



result, if not abated, unregulated and illegal fishing in the gulf of guinea, could severely hamper economic security in the region, and also hinder its regional economic development initiatives. This paper therefore attempts to examine unregulated and illegal fishing through the perspective of economic security. The major area of concern here is the Gulf of Guinea region, that has always witnessed a high volume of sea traffic.

Thus, this paper will try to do a valuation of fisheries in the region, later it examines the scope and trends of unregulated and illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea as well as the factors that motivate this form of maritime crime. Thereafter it delves into the economic impact of unregulated and illegal fishing for the region, especially as it concerns the economic security of the region. It concludes with an analysis of the progress made by gulf of guinea states and related entities, to curb the trend and attempts to frame a way forward in the fight against this phenomenon. It will be important however, to begin with some conceptual clarifications

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Unregulated and Illegal Fishing**

Unregulated and illegal fishing, in general, refers to fishing activities that do not adhere to national, regional, or international fisheries conservation or management legislation or measures. However, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea lacks a precise definition of unregulated and illegal fishing (UNCLOS). Unregulated and illegal fishing was first mentioned at a meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) in 1997. It was listed as Agenda Item 1, Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported Fishing in the Convention Area, at the Seventh Session of the Standing Committee on Observation and Inspection, and then as Agenda Item 5, Illegal and Unregulated Fishing in the Convention Area, at the Sixteenth Session of the Commission the following year (UN Report, 2016). Soon after, the terminology became widely known in international fora and organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), and the Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs).

With respect to unregulated and illegal fishing, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU) – provides a functional description summarized thus:

*“Illegal fishing” constitutes fishing and fishing-related activities conducted in contravention of national, regional and international laws, while “unreported fishing” involves the non-reporting, mis-reporting and under-reporting of information on fishing operations and their catches. “Unregulated fishing” meanwhile constitutes fishing activities that are not regulated by states, fishing in areas or for fish stocks for which there are no management measures and fishing in a Regional Fisheries’ Management Organization (RFMO) area by vessels of non-member states (FAO, 2001).*

Essentially, unregulated fishing occurs in areas or for fish stocks for which there are no applicable conservation or management measures and where such fishing activities are conducted in a



manner inconsistent with State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law. While illegal fishing can be seen as fishing activities conducted in contravention of applicable laws and regulations, including those laws and rules adopted at the regional and international level. What must be understood also is that, fishing activities are unregulated when occurring in an RFMO-managed area and conducted by vessels without nationality, or by those flying a flag of a State or fishing entity that is not party to the RFMO in a manner that is inconsistent with the conservation measures of that RFMO.

### ***Methodology and Research Design***

In the course of studying the phenomenon of unregulated illegal fishing and its attendant impact on the economic security of the gulf of guinea, this study employed the descriptive and explanatory design; library research was employed to collect data. Primary and Secondary data sources were used. For this research, it was important to use the explanatory design, given that issues of maritime security are often complex, the explanatory design was able to help bring illumination and understanding to the issue of unregulated and illegal fishing; using this design, the study was able to ascertain how and why this phenomenon is occurring in the Gulf of Guinea. This design made it easier for the study to investigate the patterns and trends of unregulated and illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea, from existing data.

The study largely focused on the Gulf of Guinea's Ocean jurisdiction, covering the major stakeholders concerned with maritime security and policy formulation. The target population were key stakeholders in maritime security. While the unit of analysis were stakeholders in the maritime environment under study, the units of observation were the Coast Guard Services, Sea fearers, the Docks, Fisheries Departments', and other stakeholders

Secondary data was collected from books, journals, published research projects, policies and strategies. This helped to capture what had already been done on unregulated and illegal fishing from a global, regional, and sub-regional level, with information gathered helping to create a deeper understanding on the phenomenon of study. For proper context, it will be important at this point, to provide a brief economic valuation of fisheries sector in the gulf of guinea.

### ***Economic Valuation of Fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea***

The fisheries and aquaculture industry in Africa is valued at \$17.4 billion. The \$288.4 billion GDP of fishing in Africa is 6% of the continent's overall GDP. Aquaculture contributes almost one percent, marine industrial fisheries and inland fisheries both contribute the same 1.63 percent, and marine artisanal fisheries account for 1.82 percent of the total GDP (FAO, 2014). For instance, the fisheries industry in Nigeria contributes roughly 5.4% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Olalekan and Wahab, 2018). Fisheries are their main source of food and subsistence, and it is estimated that 40% of West Africa's population resides along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. According to Okafor-Yarwood (2020), the fishing industry alone provides jobs for 12.3 million people on the African continent and about 9 million people in the coastal region of West Africa (FAO, 2014). While in the FAO's estimation, 4.9 million (42.4 percent) of the 12.3 million people employed in the fisheries sector are processors, 0.9 million (7.5 percent) are fish farmers, and the remaining 500,000 (50%) are fishermen. While the majority of processors (42 percent) work in marine artisanal fisheries, with 30% working in inland fisheries and 28% in industrial fisheries, more



than half of the fishers are employed in inland fisheries (FAO,2018). In contrast to the fisheries sector's contribution to employment, the extractive industries are capital intensive and make a limited direct contribution to employment (IMF, 2012). For example, the oil and gas industry contributes only 1.5 percent of Saudi Arabia's working population and 4 percent of Equatorial Guinea's working population (UNCTAD, 2008).

It is also worth noting that, only 0.01 percent of Nigeria's workforce was employed in the oil industry as of 2013, making it the nation's lowest employer of labour (Vanguard, 2014). Since up to 95% of investment in the industry still happens overseas, the situation has not changed. Unfortunately, a number of issues like oil spills, toxic waste discharge into the ocean, piracy, insecurity, illegal and unregulated fishing, and a slew of other difficulties have seriously threatened and undermined the sustainability of the marine environment, as well as the resources that support the lives and livelihoods of the region's communities. All these have led to a steady decline in fisheries resources in this region and have devastated its marine ecosystems and habitats and have affected the means of subsistence of millions of people (Okafor-Yarwood, 2018).

#### ***Scope and Trend of Illegal and Unregulated Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea***

Without a doubt, the Gulf of Guinea's fisheries are among the most productive in the world (Dyhia B, & Daniel P, 2015). Some countries in the region rank among the top ten in Africa and among the top 50 globally in fish production (World Bank, 2019). The fishing industry also provides a vital source of employment for millions of people. Currently, the fisheries sector accounts for up to a quarter of all jobs in the region (Africa Progress Panel, 2014). Foreign direct investment, exports, licence fees, and income from fishing agreements with distant-water fishing nations all contribute directly to national economies, with Benin, Cabo Verde, The Gambia, So Tomé and Prncipe, and Senegal earning 3 percent, 3.9 percent, 5.7 percent, 5.8 percent, and 13.5 percent of GDP, respectively, from the fisheries sector (De Graff G & Garibaldi L, 2014). Ghana is a good example of the sector's importance: the fisheries sector generates over \$1 billion in income for the Ghanaian economy each year (Pierre F, et al, 2014), accounting for 1.2 percent of total GDP and 5.6 percent of agricultural GDP (Kwamena K & Jingjie C, 2019). Fish accounts for 60% of the animal protein consumed by Ghanaians (Francis K, et al, 2014), and the sector employs 10% of the workforce (UN FAO, 2016). Unfortunately, states in the Gulf of Guinea have yet to fully realise the full economic potentials of the fisheries sector, as the majority of coastal states in the region lack the capacity to harvest fish in their EEZs; as a result, countries outside the Gulf of Guinea are the greatest beneficiaries of the region's fisheries resources (Tafadzwa P, & Foley H, 2015). This scenario has also aided the spread of unregulated and illegal fishing in the region.

Pointedly, the activities of reefers, the import hubs for regionally-sourced frozen fish, as well as the containerized frozen fish sites, which are crucial in the long run, should not be overlooked among the various forms of illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea. Reefers operating in the region under different national flags launched about 26,459.64 MT in 19 trips in 2013, according to observations of daily operations off the Gulf of Guinea coast and samples from nine illegal reefers. In 2016, 349 trips from ships carrying 118,701 Metric Tonnes (MT) of fish were made to the Las Palmas port, which serves as a gateway for frozen fish from the coast of West Africa. (Merem E, 2018).



China's involvement gives the illegalities a new twist. For instance, Chinese fishing companies caught 1,804,000 MT of fish in the waters of numerous West African nations from 2000 to 2012, with an average catch of 180,400 MT. This involved three different times of varying intensity. Trawlers have consistently caught between 50,000 and 100,000 MT of fish in the West African region over the years. As a result, Chinese operators threw in more than 200,000 MT between 2008 and 2012 than in previous years. The second-most notable activities in terms of the volume of marine catches over the years (2001-2007 and 2011) were 170,000, 189,000-190,000 MT tonnes, and 160,000-166,000 MT tonnes for 2002 through 2010. These fishing operations relied on hundreds of vast fleets of trawlers on the high seas of many West African countries, totaling \$1,754 billion dollars in monetary value between 2000 and 2012. The massive penetration of 13 to 16 trawlers in almost all of the region's 14 countries from 2000 to 2018 reaffirms the region's growing scales of fishing activities (Merem, 2018).

Despite the fact that the number of fishing operations decreased from twelve to ten between 2009 and 2012, the hundreds of thousands of MTs of fish estimated to have been caught and the large fleets of ships deployed were evidence of the region's intensity. In reality, most fish species in West and Central Africa, such as yellowfin tuna, swordfish, and round sardinella, are currently overfished (UN FAO, 2011). In the waters from Senegal to Nigeria, more than half of the fish resources have already been depleted (Africa Progress Panel, 2014). From the frequency of the violations between 2000 and 2018, about 74 vessels were implicated while the IUU fishing and fraud cases involved were reported in various countries of the region from Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Ghana.

However, it should be noted that the various types of illegal and unregulated fishing make matters more complicated because the factors influencing large- and small-scale fishing are very different and because deterrence rates are low due to a lack of resources. Essentially, illegal and unregulated fishing practises include fishing by unlicensed foreign vessels, fishing in restricted areas, including inshore waters, fishing with illegal nets, fishing without a turtle-excluding device for shrimping vessels, fishing by small-scale fishers, including fishing in restricted areas, with illegal nets, or using explosives, and illegal transshipment at sea by large-scale industrial vessels. Pointedly, the "transfer of catch from one fishing vessel to either another fishing vessel or a vessel used solely for cargo carriage" is known as transshipment. (UN FAO, 1996). Unauthorized transshipment is used by illegal operators to avoid port controls and maximise profits (UN FAO, 2018).

While all forms of unregulated and illegal fishing are harmful to the marine environment, fishing without a licence by foreign vessels and fishing in prohibited areas are the most responsible for accelerating overexploitation and, as a result, cause the most damage to the Gulf of Guinea's fisheries sector. Even though they operate on a much smaller scale, small-scale fishermen still engage in unreported and illegal fishing (Okafor-Yarwood, 2017). Unfortunately, understanding illegal and unregulated fishing is challenging due to its nature. According to estimates, 40–65 percent of fish caught in Gulf of Guinea waters are illegally caught (Agnew D, et al., 2009), and historically, unrestricted and illegal fishing has been characterised as a low-risk, high-reward crime due to the insignificant consequences (High Seas Task Force, 2006). The region continues to be exposed to unrestricted and illegal fishing by large-scale industrial vessels as a result of poor fisheries governance and insufficient monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) capabilities (INTERPOL Study, 2014). Certainly, there have been quite a number of factors that have made the



region vulnerable to unregulated and illegal fishing, these, the research shall now enunciate on some of them.

### ***Factors Militating against the Curbing of Unregulated and Illegal Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea***

The factors that drive unauthorised fishing by foreign vessels in the Gulf of Guinea are not random events. Numerous environmental, ethical, and global factors have an impact on them. In the paragraphs that follow, these aspects are in-depthly examined.

### **Corruption & Criminality**

Long recognised as one of the richest fisheries grounds in the world, the Gulf of Guinea is teeming with snapper, grouper, sardines, mackerel, and shrimp, but it loses up to \$1.5 billion worth of fish annually to vessels fishing in protected areas or without the necessary gear or permits (Reuters, 2012). Large foreign trawlers frequently venture into areas near the coast that are reserved exclusively for artisanal fishermen, allowing them to drag off tonnes of catch and jeopardising the livelihoods of millions of locals. This is due to widespread corruption and a persistent lack of enforcement resources.

Experts assert that annual plunder risks worsen instability in the Gulf of Guinea by encouraging coastal communities to engage in crime. This is similar to how illegal fishing in Somalia in the 1990s encouraged locals to take up piracy, which is now a lucrative criminal enterprise that costs the world billions of dollars annually. While there isn't any concrete proof that neighbourhood fishermen are responsible for known ship hijackings and sea-based bank raids in coastal cities, there are worries that their dwindling livelihoods may lead them to engage in such behaviour.

The point must be made however that, unregulated and illegal fishing in the region include the use of a single license for multiple vessels or small-mesh nets - nets whose holes are smaller than regulations stipulate and which end up catching even the smallest fish. For this reason, sometimes local fishermen become part of the illegal fishing enterprises. The interlopers employ them with their canoes to access the off-limits near-shore zones along the vast stretch of coast without triggering suspicion.

### **Physical and Environmental Elements**

Millions of kilometres off a vast coastline and Exclusive Economic Zones, the Gulf of Guinea region is home to some of the richest sardine and mackerel fisheries in the world. This important unprotected fishing frontier along the Atlantic, Eastern, Central, and Gulf of Guinea currents is so large that illegal trawlers from the EU, Asia, and other nations are constantly vying for it.

Despite the fact that international maritime regulations prohibit fishing operations outside of a specified 200-mile area off the territory of another nation without permits, the capacity to enforce those rules is limited due to a lack of both expertise and the massive assets required for patrolling such vast maritime areas. Because only a few nations in the region have the ability to adequately monitor their coastal fishing waters. Foreign trawlers fishing in West African coastal waters operate with impunity, despite the legality of global conventions.

### **Lack of completion of Maritime Zones Limitations**



It has been the case that, some coastal states in the Gulf of Guinea have yet to complete their maritime zone delimitations in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and global best practises. It has been observed that four nations, including Cameroon, continue to have maritime boundary disputes (with Gabon and Equatorial Guinea). An International Court of Justice ruling in 2002 partially resolved the border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon (there are still outstanding issues) (ICJ 2002). Essentially, the lack of clearly defined maritime zones weakens host countries' ability to protect their maritime territories and creates loopholes for foreign actors to exploit for unregulated and illegal fishing.

### **Ineffective and Contradictory Policies**

Another dimension to the illegal plundering of fishery stocks off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea is the wide range of ineffective policies linked to governments' inability to monitor and enforce compliance among rogue trawlers from other nations. Foreign trawlers subsidised by rich nations through large distant fishing fleets, cheap fuel, and insurance, frequently exploit these lapses in a system where the unrivalled coast guards on the Gulf of Guinea's shorelines are understaffed. Rich nations, using policy instruments at their disposal, spend billions of dollars each year subsidising those depleting stocks through illegal fishing.

Additionally, larger vessels operating with significant subsidies from foreign governments and advancements in fishing gear and techniques have made it simpler than ever for commercial fishing operations to catch more fish from farther away. This level of access is making fish stocks more vulnerable and making it harder for small-scale fishing operations in the Gulf of Guinea to make a living. This promotes more illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which significantly contributes to the depletion of fish stocks and the destruction of marine habitat.

### **Limited Investment in the Maritime Sector**

There has been a constant outcry that investment in the maritime sector has not been a priority for most Gulf of Guinea coastal countries, and local actors across the region complain that they are unaware of any local investment mechanism. In the case of fisheries, particularly industrial and semi-industrial fishing, regional states continue to prefer rentier licencing systems or bilateral agreements, despite the fact that this approach benefits distant-water fishers and rich fishing nations more than host countries. For example, the recently renewed fishing agreement between Gabon and the EU reportedly includes fishing licences for twenty-seven European seiners to catch 32,000 tonnes of tuna annually over a six-year period (2021-2026) in exchange for a total of €26€30 million to fund Gabon's tuna industrialization (Press Conference of Gabon's Minister of Agriculture, 2021). The fleet also includes six pole-and-line tuna vessels and four trawlers targeting demersal fish and crustaceans in an exploratory fishery, while Chinese fishing vessels account for nearly all of the Republic of the Congo's industrial fishing fleet.

### **Complicity of Local Authorities**

The fight against pirate fishing, or unreported and illegal fishing, is being lost by regional nations like Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Guinea. As a result, Guinea alone loses catches worth about \$100 million. Local authorities in Cote d'Ivoire have only detained four boats since 2007 despite local





fishermen reporting almost daily encounters with foreign ships (Reuters, 2012). Normally, captured ships are kept in port until their owners pay a fine to release them. Even reports of Chinese ships destroying everything in their path without regard for the restraint of local authorities.

Kobenan Kouassi Adjoumanil, a former minister of fisheries for Cote d'Ivoire, claims that illegal fishing costs his nation 55,116 tonnes of fish every year. As a result, the nation has been in talks with the French aerospace company Thales SA about using satellite technology to monitor its territorial waters. It is also looking for more high-speed patrol boats to intercept suspicious vessels. This effort, however, may be thwarted by inadequate resources to patrol zones and out-of-date fisheries legislation. Another obstacle is the region's pervasive issue with "unprofessional behaviour" by local authorities.

### **Culture of Bribery**

Another factor militating against the curbing of unregulated and illegal fishing in the region is the taking of bribes or cash gifts, as the case may be. It has been the case that, when suspect vessels are intercepted by local patrol boats, their captains and crews often offer Gulf of Guinea soldiers and fisheries officers bribes to look the other way—generally they pay money in cash and carry on. According to sources, the bribes offered are typically in the thousands of dollars.

### ***Impact of Illegal and Unregulated Fishing on the Regional Economic Security of the Gulf of Guinea***

There is no doubt that the aforementioned issues have severely depleted the Gulf of Guinea's fisheries and allied resource reserves, undermining the region's economic security. Evidently, the monetary equivalent of fishery losses caused by unauthorised activities off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea has been increasing over time. Between 2010 and 2015, IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea reached a staggering total of \$12,317 billion cases in all IUU activities, with the unauthorised activities highlighted under different categories to that effect. The costs of illegal values of missing fish totaled \$10,267 billion dollars, followed by \$2,020 billion in unreported activities plus \$30.2 million over a seven-year period. The illegal shipment of fish from the Gulf of Guinea coastal waters hovered around a billion and a half dollars (\$1,459) in the first three years (2010, 2011, and 2012), then jumped to \$1,669 to \$1,608 billion from 2013 to 2015, before breaking the \$1,996 billion mark in 2015. The fiscal equivalence of the losses caused by illegal fishing in the region includes the unreported values of missing sea food, which were estimated to be \$376 million in 2010-2011 and \$533 million in 2012. Similarly to the previous years (2013-2015), the region lost \$177 to more than \$200 million dollars, with the unregulated side of illegal ventures fluctuating by 0.1-6,2 million to 11.4 and 4.1 million dollars, respectively (Salame, 2017).

Examining the regional breakdown of known unregulated and illegal catches from across the Gulf of Guinea, the region of the Gulf of Guinea and North Africa alone accounted for approximately 2664174.316 to 1425485.635 tonnes, representing close to 57% and 30% of Africa's illegal and unregulated fishing, respectively. While the other regions of the continent (Eastern and Southern Africa) had lower illegal and unregulated fishing tonnage (342090.885, 173354.1706, and 76941.88931), this equates to 7%, 4%, and 2% when compared to the first two regions. As it is, the Gulf of Guinea has the highest number of unregulated and illegal fish catches, as going by the regional distribution of economic costs, out of a total of \$362 billion in liabilities across the



continent since 1980, the Gulf of Guinea outpaced the other areas with exposures totaling \$137.9 billion. North and South-Central Africa followed with unreported tonnage costs ranging from \$81.2 billion to \$62.8 billion, while East Africa incurred \$19.3 billion (FAO Expert Workshop, 2015) Furthermore, by lowering revenue from licence fees and taxes, unrestrained and illegal fishing threatens the livelihoods of the local population. It is estimated that IUU fishing costs six countries in the region—Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and Sierra Leone—\$2.3 billion annually. However, only a small portion of this loss is covered by fines for violations related to fisheries. The economic cost of IUU fishing in Sierra Leone can reach \$100 million, or 20% of the nation's 2018 education budget. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is thought to cost Ghana \$50 million annually. The value of the fish that was illegally exploited has an impact on the lost revenue. Losses in revenue result from missed opportunities for catches, exports, domestic consumption, licencing fees, value-added tax, income tax, and, for the people involved, employment opportunities. The livelihoods of millions of disadvantaged people in the area, particularly women who depend on the fishing industry for marketing, distribution, and processing, are impacted by this. Additionally, IUU fishing puts nations in the region at risk of failing to meet SDG5—achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women—by widening the gender inequality gap and impeding the region's ability to meet SDG4—improving economic growth (Doubouya et al, 2017).

Local fishermen have tried to engage in IUU fishing themselves in response to a decreased catch, either by fishing in prohibited areas or crossing borders. For instance, 30% of IUU fishing in Togolese waters is conducted from Ghanaian canoes. Continued overexploitation raises the possibility of conflict between small-scale and industrial fishers, as well as small-scale fishers competing across borders for scarce resources (Alfonso, et al, 2016). Although Cameroonian authorities deny these claims, there are numerous reports of clashes between Nigerian fishermen and Cameroonian gendarmes, including extortion and, in extreme cases, the deaths of Nigerians who attempted to fish in the once-disputed Bakassi Peninsula, which was ceded to Cameroon in 2002. (Linus, 2019).

Furthermore, coastal communities in the respective countries have experienced a wide range of negative effects on various scales with implications for the environment and socioeconomic development as a result of unregulated and illegal fishing activities in the coastal zone of the Gulf of Guinea. In terms of ecosystem risks, there is mounting proof that increased fishing activity worldwide is having a detrimental effect on ocean health, including the fishing zone in the Atlantic Eastern Central region of the study area. The evidence of ecological effects demonstrates that other fish species and resources in the same ecozone suffer when commercially valuable fishery stocks are overexploited. Additionally, current research indicates that overfishing of large shark species has a long-term impact on the available linear food web for sharks and a growing number of species, such as rays, that serve as typical targets for large sharks, which often leads to declines in smaller fish and shellfish targeted by these species. All of this continues to be directed at the research area.

Along with harvesting vast quantities of fish and marine food for the market, large-scale fisheries unintentionally kill unwanted aquatic animals like young fish, corals, and other items from the sea floor. Eliminating these creatures could have disastrous effects on the ocean's ecology. However,



the loss of ecosystem and habitat, have important unintended consequences. Since the 1980s, when estimates of unrealized potentials and the cost of stock recovery for desired species started to be made, the Gulf of Guinea has been conventionally valued in the hundreds of billions of dollars-making it an unrealized economic opportunity for the region. Essentially, fishing that is illegal and unregulated puts sustainable fishing methods and ocean ecosystems in danger. Given the negative impact on fisheries, oceanic ecosystems, food security, and coastal communities, illegal and unregulated fishing undermines domestic and international conservation and management initiatives, threatening the sustainability of Gulf of Guinea shoreline economies. As a result, overfishing by foreign fleets in the Gulf of Guinea is having a devastating socioeconomic and environmental impact, with fishing habitats now stretched beyond their carrying capacity. This, in turn, causes significant damage to fishery stocks through declines and eventual collapse.

### ***Responses to Unregulated and Illegal Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea***

Thus, from the foregoing, unregulated and illegal fishing does not only drive underdevelopment, but it prolongs it by sapping critical income generator essential for development, regional livelihoods and economic security. It is for this reason, and given the cross-boundary nature of the crime and its impacts, a collective response to IUU fishing is crucial. In recognition of this, a growing number of ongoing regional initiatives are aimed at improving fisheries governance. The West African Task Force (a working group of the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea, or FCWC), with technical support from Trygg Mat Tracking and Stop Illegal Fishing, and funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, or NORAD, supports regional cooperation to improve MCS capabilities, enforcement, and prosecution of Unregulated and illegal fishing (Fisheries Committee, 2015).

The Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa (PESCAO) project is also implemented by the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission and Norwegian government funded Fisheries Committee for West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) and funded by the European Union, and is aimed at building the capacity of national and regional monitoring, control, and surveillance authorities to deter unregulated and illegal fishing in the region (PESCAO, 2019). In the same manner, on 17 March 2014, the European Union adopted its strategy on the Gulf of Guinea<sup>19</sup> and adopted specific EU policy conclusions for the area to support the efforts of the region and its coastal states in addressing the many challenges of maritime insecurity and organized crime.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, the African Union has been working towards ensuring the optimum maximization of the fisheries resources on the continent, as witnessed by the signing (on 16 October 2016 in Lome, Togo) of the African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety, and Development, a legally binding instrument aimed at facilitating the consolidation of efforts in combating maritime security threats, promoting trade, and most importantly ensuring the sustainable exploitation of Africa's marine resources (AU 2016). Undoubtedly, the adoption of the African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development by the African Union member states (many of whom are from the Gulf of Guinea region) is a step in the right direction. Looking at the way other projects aimed at ensuring maritime security on the regional level have ended, however, one might be right to argue that it takes more than signing on dotted lines to implement the much-needed changes.



Within the region, there have also been, bilateral arrangements aimed at combating unregulated and illegal fishing. The West Africa Task Force is a classic example. The Task Force comprises six member countries namely Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Côte D'Ivoire, and Togo, as part of the Norwegian government funded Fisheries Committee for West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) project. The six member states can alert each other to the activities of vessels that engage in IUU fishing, as well as checking whether a vessel that alleges to be registered/flagged by a participating state is indeed registered in that country. This initiative has proven to be efficient in monitoring activities of fishing vessels operating in the region not least because, for the most part, the project has been funded through bilateral arrangements, with Norway funding the initial three years' of the project aimed at strengthening research expertise and information sharing to fight against unregulated and illegal fishing (AU-IBAR 2016a: 22). While these efforts are noteworthy and have certainly achieved significant milestones in checking unregulated and illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea, a lot still needs to be done, which the paper shall now enunciate

#### ***Way forward for the Gulf of Guinea Nations***

##### **Proper Delineation of Maritimes Borders**

The maritime delineation process is a complicated subject, because of both the number of real and potential situations for countries of the Gulf of Guinea, and the complexities of the delineation process. The delineation process itself involves several types of issues. One concern is the source of authority. A second issue involves the principal methods by which delineation is carried out, and finally there are technical questions regarding the determination of the actual lines in space.

However, for the Gulf of Guinea countries, proper maritime boundary delineation can arguably be viewed as an essential precursor to the full realisation of the resource potential of the region's maritime zone and the peaceful management of the region's ocean resources, especially its fisheries. With regard to the region's seabed resources, they could prove crucial to the well-being and regional economic security of states in the region of coastal States, on the other hand, extensive overlapping maritime claims will hinder development while maritime boundaries remain unsettled. Ultimately, the lack of clearly defined maritime zones weakens the ability of Gulf of Guinea countries to protect their maritime territories and creates loopholes that foreign actors can opportunistically exploit.

##### **Greater Investment in the Maritime Sector**

It has been reported widely that, the lack of interest and very low investment in the Gulf of Guinea countries are responsible for the lack of attention paid to the sector. Another reason is the fact that most of the Gulf of Guinea nations are oil-producing and oil-dependent but it will take the interest of the government and investment from international actors to diversify to marine and other resources.

Over the years, there has been the call for, the G7 countries to invest in the fisheries sector of the Gulf of Guinea. Although the EU has been involved in the region since 2018, they have been more focused on piracy and other crimes. Experts have also observed that, the U.S is also not very visible in the sector but is only focused on security and oil exploration in the region-this situation does not augur well for the region's 'blue economy'. Going forward, what will be required of the G-7 and



U.S., will be the provision of development financing which takes cognizance of the security of the region

### **Proactive Engagement of Gulf of Guinea in the International Discourse on Fisheries Management**

To combat threats to their ecosystems and fisheries sectors, Gulf of Guinea states must be more active in World Trade Organization negotiations to end harmful and unsustainable fishing subsidies. Non-Gulf of Guinea states must recognise that their short-term profit-driven approach erodes maritime security, particularly in the region. This will ultimately damage their interests in other sectors, such as shipping.

Most Gulf of Guinea states do not have enough resources to monitor and control their vast exclusive economic zones. So tackling illegal fishing depends on cooperation, as weaker efforts in one country can undermine fisheries management steps in a neighbouring state.

### **Active Participation of Gulf of Guinea States in Mechanisms to Fight Unregulated and Illegal Fishing**

Finally, Gulf of Guinea states can take proactive steps by joining or deepening their engagements with established mechanisms to fight illegal fishing. The Food and Agriculture Organization Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) is an important global initiative to block fishing vessels from landing illegal catch in ports subject to the agreement. When signatories robustly enforce the PSMA, it creates a significant deterrence and disincentive to illicit fishing vessels, partly by denying them ports and restricting their access to markets.

Importantly also, the issue of capacity has come up to the front burner... Most Gulf of Guinea States, especially the related institutions, lack the capacity to not only stop illicit vessels from operating in their territorial waters, but also the ability to develop sound fishing practices that would foster the growth of its marine environment. To this end, it may be crucial for the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea, taking advantage of international mechanisms like the PSMA, to pull their resources (both human and material) together and formulate a region-wide coordinated coastal-area fisheries management initiative and planning framework that would be appropriate to enhance the capacities of states in regulating the reaping of marine life in the region.

### **Conclusion**

The Gulf of Guinea is one of the world's busiest shipping routes. The waters of the Gulf of Guinea are also regarded as among the richest fishing grounds in the world. The hazards of unregulated and illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea have been recognized by the surrounding littoral states and concerted regional action has been taken to reduce the phenomenon. The long-term sustainable use of the Gulf's marine life and resources is, however, at risk due to a lack of common perceptions of the potential adverse influence of unregulated and illegal fishing on its coastal and marine environment. Without a doubt, a coastal-area fisheries management initiative and planning framework would be appropriate to enhance the capacities of states, towards regulating the reaping of marine life in the region and issues facing the individual nations who depend upon the region for their livelihood, and for establishing regional management solutions to common problems.



While from the stand point of the international community, the Gulf of Guinea coastal communities will certainly require more assistance in dealing with the phenomenon, going forward. No doubt, the European Union has been assisting in addressing illegal and unregulated fishing through the implementation of the IUU Regulation and through EU Fishery Partnership Agreements with many of the coastal countries in the gulf of guinea. These, to an extent, have helped to regulate fishing, including by EU vessels, and support development and improved governance in the gulf of guinea fishing sector. Nonetheless, gulf of guinea coastal communities still require increased investment, especially in development grants, to help improve their fisheries sector-empowering the fish farmers, which in turn, will lessen the indiscriminate exploitation of marine resources by the locals. At the same time, the international community has to do more in helping gulf of guinea states curb the illegal activities of international fishing trawlers and vessels in the high seas of the gulf of guinea. As those illegal activities renders the exercise of state authority and fishery management extremely harder. The pains associated with it linger, as the freewheeling offenders roam from one place to another unrestricted, leaving in their wake scores of nations under the worst conditions than they were originally.

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