

Tackling the Menace of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing: A Call for Global Action

Ghazi Salahuddin*

1. Introduction

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing presents a complex challenge with widespread impacts on the economy, society, and environment. In the realm of fisheries management, IUU activities intensify issues, particularly affecting vulnerable developing nations¹. This article explores the profound consequences of IUU fishing across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It also draws attention to the interconnected rise of piracy in the Horn of Africa. The global term "IUU fishing" denotes non-compliance with fisheries conservation obligations, affecting both developing and developed nations. Even well-resourced countries like the U.S. face difficulties combating IUU fishing, as seen along its border with Mexico due to the demand for shark fins².

2. Economic Impacts

The economic fallout of IUU fishing is staggering, with repercussions at both macro and micro levels. The cycle of illegal fishing, from small-scale operations to industrial levels, disrupts processes such as shipment, processing, and distribution³. Legitimate operators face losses in revenue, levies, and taxes, as IUU fishers displace them. The disruption of markets leads to negative adjustments in fishing quotas, affecting law-abiding operators. Globally, estimates

* Senior Manager, WWF/ World Maritime University, gsalahuddin@wwf.org.pk

¹ Marine resources assesment group. (2005). Review of Impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing on Developing Countries (pp. 55- 70, Rep.). London: Marine resources assesment group.

² S. H. (2014). Too big to tackle? The persistent problem of pirate fishing and the new focus on port state measures. Retrieved August 6, 2015, from <https://litigationessentials.lexisnexis.com/webcd/app?action=DocumentDisplay&crawlid=1&doctype=cite&docid=37+Suffolk+Transnat%27I+L.+Rev.+109&srctype=smi&srcid=3B15&key=a1ec4cf66ed185246791817eaf9e1c14>.

³ Liddick, D. (2014, December). The dimensions of a transnational crime problem: The case of IUU fishing. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 17(4), 290-312.doi:10.1007/s12117-014-9228-6

by David Agnew indicate annual losses ranging from \$10 billion to \$23.5 billion, underlining the severe economic toll of IUU fishing, especially on developing nations⁴.

3. Social Impacts

IUU fishing contributes significantly to hunger and poverty in regions where fish is a primary protein source. The social consequences extend to armed resistance against surveillance, conflicts between industrial and artisanal fisheries, and a decline in employment opportunities. Nations like Kenya and Somalia are grappling with the loss of social and economic opportunities, food security, and environmental degradation due to IUU activities⁵. The social fabric of coastal communities is torn as livelihoods are threatened, and the consequences are dire, with reports indicating a 70% decrease in income for affected communities⁶.

4. Environmental Effects

IUU fishing exerts immense pressure on marine ecosystems, driven by poor governance, excessive fishing capacity, and destructive practices. Discarding practices contribute to the estimated 7 million tons of fish rejected dead at sea⁷, causing environmental harm and biodiversity loss. The implications of IUU activities extend to the depletion of marine habitats, vulnerable ecosystems, and food security. Such activities hinder responsible fisheries management, impeding efforts by nations and international organizations.

5. Piracy in the Horn of Africa: A Consequence of IUU Fishing

The nexus between piracy in the Horn of Africa and IUU fishing reveals a direct correlation. Somali pirates, initially local

⁴ D.A., J.P., & G.P. (2009). Estimating the Worldwide Extent of Illegal Fishing. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0004570

⁵ Marine resources assessments group. (2005). Review of Impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing on Developing Countries (pp. 55- 70, Rep.). London: Marine resources assessments group.

⁶ M.S., G.D., J.K., R.P., A.H., & A.M. (2007). Application of the Global List of irresponsible fishing vessels as a tool to combat Illegal Unregulated and Unreported Fishing in Eastern Africa (pp. 8-18). Seychelles.

⁷ FAO, R. (. & F. (2010). Agreement on port state measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Retrieved July 7, 2015.

fishermen, turned to hijacking in response to intimidation from illegal fishing operations. With inadequate law enforcement in Somalia's waters, approximately 700 foreign fishing vessels engage in unlicensed fishing, further exacerbating the challenges faced by developing countries in controlling such activities⁸. The Western Indian Ocean becomes a hotbed for maritime security issues due to the confluence of illegal fishing and piracy.

6. International Response and Drivers of IUU Fishing

6.1 International Response to Piracy

Initiatives like the European Union's Operation Atalanta aim to combat piracy in the Horn of Africa. However, challenges persist, with allegations of illegal fishing involving EU fishing boats operating in the Indian Ocean. The lack of coordination and conflicting objectives among nations underscore the difficulties in addressing both piracy and IUU fishing effectively⁹.

6.2 Drivers of IUU Fishing Activities

Internally, IUU fishing is driven by demographic factors, economic forces, and weak governance. Lack of alternative livelihoods, inadequate governance, and conflicting objectives contribute to the persistence of IUU activities. External drivers, such as the open registry system¹⁰, provide flexibility to fishers to evade legislative constraints. The use of Flags of Convenience and open registers enables vessels to reduce compliance and contract costs, creating economic advantages for IUU operators.

6.3 Organized Crime in the Fishing Industry

IUU fishing serves as a safe haven for organized crime in the fishing industry, involving activities like tax fraud, corruption, human

⁸ J. H. (2011, February 10). The Piracy-Illegal Fishing Nexus in the Western Indian Ocean. Retrieved July 1, 2015, from http://www.academia.edu/6737362/The_PiracyIllegal_Fishing_Nexus_in_the_Western_Indian_Ocean Indian Ocean Research Programme

⁹ Information sought from Maritime Headquarters of Pakistan where database regarding Operation Atalanta is maintained due participation of PN ships and observers in the mission.

¹⁰ Open Registration is a type of registration under a national flag available to all ships irrespective of nationality.

trafficking, money laundering, and drug trafficking. The lack of effective governance, combined with the globalization of capital, facilitates the expansion of transnational criminal networks. Flags of Convenience and open registers provide a cover for these activities, leading to severe consequences for crew conditions, safety, and environmental norms.

6.4 Addressing the IUU Fishing Menace: A Global Imperative

As IUU fishing continues to thrive, it poses a substantial challenge to fisheries policy makers and undermines the credibility of fisheries management. The interconnected nature of IUU activities demands a comprehensive, global response. International instruments and guidelines have been established, yet implementation remains a key issue. Focused attention on addressing gaps in existing mechanisms is crucial to effectively combat IUU fishing.

7. Conclusion

The menace of IUU fishing is not merely an isolated issue but a global challenge with far-reaching consequences. The economic, social, and environmental impacts underscore the urgency for collaborative efforts to curb IUU activities. The rise of piracy in the Horn of Africa further emphasizes the interconnectedness of maritime security issues with illegal fishing. A concerted, global response is imperative, encompassing improved governance, strengthened enforcement mechanisms, and heightened international cooperation to secure the sustainability of marine ecosystems and livelihoods dependent on fisheries. Only through collective action can the world hope to mitigate the pervasive effects of IUU fishing and secure the future of our oceans.