

# ACP MEAs 2

## ACTION TO COMBAT ILLEGAL FISHING AND PROTECTING THE ENDANGERED FISH SPECIES IN AFRICA



The African component of the ACP Capacity Building Program related to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) Project is housed at the African Union Commission (AUC) and builds the capacity of Africans to adequately implement MEAs, in relation to controlling illegal fishing in Africa.



*An initiative of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States funded by the European Union*



## Importance of fish in food and livelihood security

The total contribution by the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa is estimated at US\$ 24.0 billion (FAO, 2013), and accounts for 1.25 percent of total GDP. The highest contribution is from marine artisanal fisheries (0.42%), followed by marine industrial fisheries (0.36%), inland fisheries (0.33%), and aquaculture (0.14%). The overall contributions of fishing and processing are 0.76 and 0.33% respectively, and this illustrates the significance of fisheries in Africa. The fisheries sector plays an important role towards export earnings, in addition to the sector's important role in income generation and food security. Fish provides an important food for over 400 million people in Africa, providing over 22% of the protein intake in sub-Saharan Africa. The fisheries sector offers employment opportunities with over 12.3 million people employed as fishers or processors (FAO & NPCA, 2013) and contributes 10.9 Million tonnes live weight total



**Table 1: Total and per capita food fish supply by continent and economic grouping in 2013**

Region	Total Food Supply (Million tonnes live weight equivalent)	Per Capita Food Supply (kg/year)
<b>Africa</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>9.8</b>
North America	7.6	21.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	5.8	9.4
Asia	99.0	23.0
Europe	16.5	22.2
Oceania	1.0	24.8

*Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations 2016.*

## Illegal fishing in Africa

In Africa, there are many characteristics of illegal fishing and are involved in by both foreign and African actors. They include unauthorized fishing in closed areas/seasons, illegal fishing by foreign vessels (distance water fleets), fishing with forged and fraudulent licenses or vessel registrations, unreported and misreported catches, catching undersized, threatened and endangered fish species, taking fish in excess of quota, using prohibited fishing gear and methods, landing in unauthorized ports, fishing without an observer on board as well as failing to operate a vessel monitoring system.

According to FAO, illegal fishing accounts for about 26 million tonnes of fish a year, or more than 15 percent of the world's total annual capture fisheries output. In Africa, the potential of the fisheries sector to contribute to poverty reduction and improved socio-economic benefits to populations have not been optimally exploited. One of the principle causes of this is illegal fishing that's a common practice on the Africa's water bodies. Illegal fishing is one of the biggest threats to Africa's fisheries resources, undermining both national and regional initiatives to sustainably manage the fisheries and conserve aquatic biodiversity. This is negatively impacting on the African economy as well as putting peoples' livelihoods at a risk of food insecurity and poverty. According to the African Union Interafrican Bureau for Animal resources (AU-IBAR), it is estimated that Africa loses between US\$2-US\$5 billion annually due to the mismanagement in the fisheries sector. For West Africa alone, on a conventional estimate, fish catches as a result of illegal fishing activities is estimated at 40% higher than reported catches costing about US\$1.3 billion a year.

**Table 2. A regional summary of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) catches estimated from the Sea around Us Project Data (Pauly and Zeller 2015).**

	Tonnage Unreported	% Breakdown out of Africa wide IUU estimate	IUU as % of IUU + Reported	IUU/ Reported
Central Africa	342090.885	7%	44.4	0.798
Eastern Africa	173354.1706	4%	31.6	0.462
Northern Africa	1425485.635	30%	47.4	0.901
Southern Africa	76941.88931	2%	7.1%	0.076
Western Africa	2664174.316	57%	52.6	1.108
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4682046.896</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>0.807</b>

*Source: African Union - Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources 2016.*

High levels of exploitation as a result of illegal and unregulated fishing severely hamper the sustainable management of marine ecosystems, negatively impacting on the economic and social position of the fishers involved in legal fishing. Fishing communities' livelihoods are being destroyed as a result of illegal fishing and Africa is significantly losing a vital protein source and the opportunity to enter the world higher value-added trade areas. Weak legal and governance frameworks, together with inadequate political will, have been major obstacles to confronting illegal fishing in Africa. Conventional fisheries management policies are currently in place in many African countries, but are not effectively implemented and enforced to address the existing declining status of fisheries resources. This has partly seen various illegal fishing practices carried out on various African water bodies which is significantly putting the fisheries resources at a risk of collapse, with various fish species even facing extinction.



Illegal fishing impends the sustainability of fish stocks, damages the ecosystem and deprives African governments of revenue and people of livelihoods. Ultimately, illegal fishing in Africa pose a serious threat too for the rest of the world, with respect to sustainable supply of fish and fisheries products. It's in this regard therefore that the management of marine, coastal and inland water ecosystems, including habitats and living resources, is imperative for ensuring sustainable fisheries in Africa. African nations and their people will enjoy the benefits of sustainable and increased incomes from their fisheries resources only if illegal fishing is eradicated. A new focus on implementing internationally agreed instruments could prove effective. However, most nations in Africa lack the capacity, both human and material resources of local, sub-regional and regional fisheries administrations, to monitor and enforce compliance of the fisheries management policies. This has caused the escalation in use of a number of illegal fishing methods currently witnessed in many African countries posing a threat to peoples' livelihood, as earlier highlighted, as well as biological consequences, including natural aquatic habitats and ecosystems destruction; the capture of juvenile and immature fish.

#### KEY FACT:

It has been, and remains, an important principle of International law - with a long and respectable history - that countries are not bound by agreements to which they are not Party. The consequence, in a regional fisheries conservation and management context, is that non-Parties to regional fisheries agreements cannot be held to be in breach of such agreements. In that sense, they cannot be said to be fishing illegally even if they fish in a manner that is contrary to such an agreement.

The nature and reasons behind illegal fishing in Africa differ and come in various forms, depending on situations and conditions as they affect the different fishers in different ways. Some of the illegal fishing methods practiced in Africa include use of dynamite and other explosives and poisons to kill the fish; use of small sized meshed fishing nets and other destructive gears.

### KEY FACTS

- Illegal fishing is a universal problem and a significant impediment to the achievement of sustainable world fisheries
- Illegal fishing contributes to overexploitation of fish stocks and is a hindrance to the recovery of fish populations and ecosystems.
- **30%** of the significant total worldwide fisheries catches come from illegal fishing, and in particular cases, illegal catches can be three times higher than legal catches
- Between **11** and **26 million tonnes** of illegally caught fisheries products reaches the global market annually
- Globally, annual losses due to illegal fishing are estimated between **US\$ 9 billion** and **US\$ 24 billion**, representing between **11** and **26 million tonnes of fish** — between **10** and **22%** of total fisheries production.
- Developing countries are most at risk from illegal fishing, with total estimated in West Africa being **40%** higher than reported catches— the highest level globally.
- Annual economic loss due to illegal fishing in Africa is between **\$ 10 billion** and **\$ 13 billion**

Fisheries management institutions in Africa need to put more efforts in fighting against illegal fishing to sustain their peoples' livelihoods as well as boosting their economies through the fisheries sector. The collaboration of intergovernmental organizations in addressing issues related to illegal fishing is expressively needed to the development and promotion of approaches to tackle the problem.

However, for this to be effectively achieved there is a need for enhanced collaboration and support from the local fishing communities. Fisheries communities need to be empowered to take on a significant role in the sustainable management and utilization of their fisheries resources. More than ever, fisheries resources need community stewardship, with collaboration from other different stakeholders, if they are to continue delivering cultural as well as socio-economic benefits to humanity.



## Protecting the endangered fish species in Africa

In Africa, fisheries resources are being threatened by numerous activities and some fish species are facing extinction. Some of the fish species facing extinction in Africa include; Berg River Redfin (Critically Endangered); Maloti Minnow (Critically Endangered); Twee

River Redfin (Critically Endangered); *Oreochromis alcalicus* (Endangered); *Oreochromis esculentus* (Critically Endangered); *Oreochromis jipe* (Critically Endangered) and *Oreochromis hunteri* (Critically Endangered) etc.



The critically endangered *Oreochromis esculentus* (Singidia Tilapia)

There are many factors that contribute to some of the fish species in Africa appearing endangered. The activities, mainly human induced, include overfishing, catchment degradation, trade, pollution and the introduction of fish species into areas where they didn't previously exist as well as alien fish species taking over and destroying their natural habitat. The biggest challenge in the protection of endangered fish species in Africa is that conservation efforts are poorly represented in the development planning process and most development activities are incompatible with the protection of the threatened fish species on the continent. Therefore, conservation efforts need to be scaled up to help the threatened fish species in Africa rejuvenate. Of the efforts needed, availing information on the status and distribution of fish species that are facing extinction in Africa is critical. This would create awareness amongst the local communities and other stakeholders towards the protection of such species. For this to be effectively achieved, regional experts and other stakeholders across Africa need to be involved and hence trained in fisheries biodiversity assessments to establish and map the distribution ranges of the threatened fish species, a significant tool for application in conservation and development planning process. African, governments, conservation organizations,



development partners and other stakeholders need to come to a drawing board to ensure that the fish species facing extinction are given due consideration, and hence protected from activities threatening their rejuvenation as well as their ecosystems.

### **The Role of the African Union Commission MEAs Project in controlling overfishing and protection of endangered fish species in Africa**

One of the best ways to protect endangered fish species is to prevent their decline and deterioration in the first place. Towards that end, the African Union Commission, through the Multilateral Environmental Agreements project, is working towards maintaining healthy fish populations by promoting and ensuring that broad-based conservation efforts such as the existing fisheries biodiversity conservation action plans are effectively enforced by the African Union member states. This is through enhancing the capacity of Africa law enforcement personnel, Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Servants and other stakeholders in defending and strengthening policies that provide essential legal safety net preventing fisheries resources depletion in Africa. Also, MEAs project understands that there is inadequate fisheries management oversight, government regulations, and traceability of fishing activities in various fishing industries of many African countries. As such, the project is looking forward to helping in strengthening the existing rules and regulations towards limiting the fishing capacity to sustainable levels. The project is as well looking forward to continue strengthening the capacity of various fisheries management bodies in adequately incorporating scientific guidance on fish harvesting, and customs agencies and retailers to constantly ensure that the fish entering their countries is caught legally and in a sustainable way.

Weak monitoring capacity in many African countries has created a situation where Illegal fishing activities are becoming more rampant on the continent. As such, the Multilateral Environmental Agreements project in collaboration with the Monitoring for Environment and Security in Africa (MESA) project of the African Union is also exploring avenues for sharing and enhancing access to reliable, timely and accurate satellite data (Geospatial maps) with respect to vessel monitoring systems as well as other monitoring information

in case of suspicion of illegal fishing activities on African water bodies. This is hoped to enable easier monitoring and proper enforcement of fisheries management activities and a better appreciation of the maritime situation. On the same note, the project is further finding out how, within Africa national governments and between them, the competent authorities can exchange information in agreement with applicable national and international regulations against illegal fishing, share resources and coordinate monitoring through more efficient use of existing capacity.

African Union through the MEAs project is helping African countries in implementing policies that pledge long-term food security and provide fishing communities with a higher and sustainable standard of living. The project is promoting initiatives that promote a right-based approach to fisheries management by the fishing communities, which creates incentives to them to become good agents towards the management of the fisheries resources and protection of endangered fish species. In addition, the project is exploring avenues of supporting numerous stakeholders in charge of law enforcement in Africa to participate in the activities by the Interpol Working Group on illegal fishing.

African Union Commission's Multilateral Environmental Agreements project also plays an important role in reducing overfishing and protecting endangered fish species populations in Africa by advocating for increased funding, from the African Union member states and other development partners, to private landowner incentives and other conservation programs that benefit endangered fish species as well as reducing overdependence on the fisheries resources by the local communities across the continent.

Promotion of community stewardship is another way how MEAs project, in collaboration with other partners is assisting in controlling overfishing as well as the protection of endangered fish species on the continent. Stewardship in this regard means empowering the local fishing communities to take a more dynamic role in making the fisheries resources, that they depend on, more sustainable. This is creating a basis for more involvement and more organized distribution of resources, leading to stronger

position between the fishing community activities and MEAs project initiatives then, eventually, better outcomes with respect to sustainable fisheries resources management and subsequent protection of fish species facing extinction. The project in collaboration with the development partners is promoting and encouraging public access to the various fisheries legislations to enable responsible law enforcement institutions in Africa to swiftly discover any violations and increase transparency on their roles to fighting against illegal fishing.

### **What should be the role of Africa's Regional Economic Communities in controlling overfishing and protection of endangered fish species?**

African Union Commission MEAs project, in its initiative to control illegal fishing and hence protect endangered fish species in Africa, believes that the Regional Economic Communities have a significant role to play in controlling overfishing and protection of endangered fish species. But how can the regional Economic Communities indeed contribute towards this cause?

The regional economic communities can play an important role in controlling overfishing as well as protection of endangered fish species through fostering direct negotiations and collaborations between African member states and the international community, particularly potential development partners, on areas where there has been improvement, as well as prevailing gaps and priorities that require significant input and support, including through enhanced partnerships in fisheries biodiversity conservation. Through collaboration with a number of development partners, the regional economic communities will then be striving to transform fisheries so that they are sustainable and the fish species facing extinction are protected.

Entering into negotiations with African member states on how to build the capacity of the local fisheries management institutions in controlling overfishing as well as protecting the endangered fish species in Africa. This can be through building the capacity of such institutions on how to train and empower local fishing communities to

participate in other income generating activities, to reduce on the pressure exerted on natural water bodies for fish and other aquatic resources.

Strengthening Non-Governmental organizations, academic institutions, civil servants and other stakeholders to deliver and improve capacity enhancement activities with respect to effective implementation of the existing policies against overfishing as well as protection of the endangered fish species.

Mainstreaming overfishing and endangered fish species concerns into their planning and other development processes. This can be through advocating for and signing MoUs with development partners to set out the stages for the development of mechanisms for cooperation in sustainable use of fisheries resources as well as protection of endangered fish species.

Advocating for, as well as funding initiatives geared towards stopping overfishing and protection of endangered fish species. The regional economic communities can also work with stakeholders to reform fisheries management in their respective regions, not only focusing on promoting sustainable practices that conserve fish ecosystems and protect endangered fish species, but also sustain people's livelihoods and ensure food security.

The regional economic communities can also put in place mechanisms that prove the legal origin of fish and fisheries products in the initiative to stop illegal fishing activities. This can be through requiring catch documentation with the use of new and advanced technology to monitor fishing as well as implementation of traceability systems that track fish and fish products along the supply chain. This should be coupled with strengthening and encouraging regional countries to share information aiming at improving the response of institutions responsible for fisheries law enforcement and to have a complete overview of illegal fishing in Africa.

Regional Economic Communities with other development partners should focus on supporting member states to update the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) notices on illegal fishing activities in Africa and on a regular basis inform various institutions responsible for the fisheries law enforcement about suspicious vessels activities.





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**<http://sp.au.int/MEAS/resources/documents>**



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