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**Awoko**     "We make every effort to see that our actions live up to our words and be vigilant with regards to our behavior."  
- Thomas Sankara

Fri June 23, 2017 05:05PM

On the re-opening of SLPP Office ... "We would not

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**Sierra Leone News: Illegal fishing threatens fisheries – Marine report**

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Despite government's efforts and donor funding, illegal fishing accounts for about 30% of catches by industrial foreign fleets in Sierra Leone, says a new study published in *Marine Policy*, an academic journal published by Elsevier, in the U.K. The study estimates that more than 42,000 tonnes of fish were caught illegally in 2015 alone.

The paper states, in the past decade, industrial foreign vessels have increased their presence and illegal activities in Sierra Leonean waters either on their own or by enticing small-scale fishers into illicit partnerships, such as acting as transshipment vessels in near shore areas.

In April, the Joint Operation Center (JOC) underwent upgrades funded by the U.S. Government, including the installation of coastal radar, a ship transponder identification system, and technological upgrades to JOC computers.

These upgrades give the JOC a much-improved ability to combat the many illegal activities taking place offshore, including piracy, smuggling, trafficking, and illegal fishing.

The upgrades at the JOC mirror similar significant investments at the JOC by the World Bank. The World Bank's support helped bring all stakeholders in the JOC together to agree on joint management of the maritime zone as well as providing equipment, four years of staff training, and fuel and operating costs to develop JOC capabilities.

The European Union is working closely with the authorities in Sierra Leone to support them in strengthening their fight against illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing through a formal dialogue process under the European Union IUU Regulation.

Notwithstanding these developments, the researchers say that reduced monitoring, control, and surveillance, related to the withdrawal of development aid, is spurring unlicensed operations. On top of this, most of the West African country's industrial fishing is carried out – both legally and illegally – by foreigners using destructive bottom trawl gear. In some years, foreign catches approached or surpassed the limit of how much could sustainably be fished from Sierra Leone's Exclusive Economic Zone. "This has profound impacts on the lives of local fishing communities," says Katy Seto, the lead author of the study. Using the Sea Around Us' catch reconstruction method, which complements the Food and Agriculture Organization's fisheries data by incorporating unreported catches, the researchers were able to provide comprehensive estimates of how much fish was really caught by the industrial and small-scale sectors and under what circumstances from 1950

to 2015. Their results show that total catches were over two times higher than what FAO reported. Substantial challenges to fisheries governance, lack of infrastructure, and weak enforcement capacity to exclude illegal actors explain the numerical gap. “While Sierra Leone’s authorities are actively fighting illegal fishing, structural and financial limitations represent major threats to the country’s fisheries sustainability,” Seto says. These threats further compound existing challenges to food security, livelihoods, and economic growth in a country ranked as one of the poorest in the world.

In July last year a combined team of personnel from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Sierra Leone Navy, Sierra Leone Police and Standing Crew onboard the patrol boat, “Sorje Ibrahim Koroma”, arrested a Chinese vessel, for allegedly fishing within the country’s Inshore Exclusive Zone (IEZ) reported the Head of Monitoring, Surveillance and Control Unit of the Ministry of Fisheries, Victor Hamusa Kargbo.

In April 2017, Greenpeace Africa, also exposed serious problems in Sierra Leone’s fishing industry. Four illegal fishing vessels, two Chinese, one Korean and an Italian ship, were discovered during their four-day visit to Sierra Leone in which they did a joint surveillance mission with fishery authorities. “These fishing vessels are causing the Sierra Leone government to lose millions of dollars of revenue due to lack of surveillance and outdated legislations,” explained Greenpeace International, Project Leader West African Oceans, Pavel Klinckhamers.

Greenpeace also noted, “Currently 140 vessels are licenced to operate in Sierra Leonean waters, including tuna purse seiners, demersal and shrimp trawlers and shrimps and mid-water trawlers targeting pelagic fish like sardinella and mackerel. Nearly half of all vessels in the country’s waters are owned by Chinese companies, and 40% by European Union companies.

The Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Charles Rogers, appealed for capacity building and complete details of the Greenpeace findings.

Officials are also striving to know more about the state of their fisheries, and are considering incorporating the catch reconstruction method into their statistical system, says Dyhia Belhabib, a co-author of the study.

This is important because “by knowing what and how much each sector is catching, particularly those that are underreported, they will be able to prioritise better,” Belhabib adds.

The paper “War, fish, and foreign fleets: The marine fisheries catches of Sierra Leone 1950–2015” is a joint research by scientists from the University of California at Berkeley, the Sea Around Us project, based at the University of British Columbia’s Institute for the Ocean and Fisheries and the University of Western Australia, and five other organizations and institutions.

OG/21/6/17 By Ophaniel Gooding Thursday June 22, 2017.

Link: <http://awoko.org/2017/06/22/sierra-leone-news-illegal-fishing-threatens-fisheries-marine-report/>