

# Attempts to curb illegal fishing are hurting small-scale fishers in Africa most

November 22 2021

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Credit: University of St Andrews

Attempts to curb illegal fishing in African waters while turning a blind eye to large fishing fleets which are most damaging to fish stocks are putting small-scale fisheries at risk, according to new research from the

University of St Andrews.

The research, published in *Marine Policy*, found that fishing restrictions and the advancement of fishing arrangements with Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) are causing small-scale fisheries to struggle financially despite being best placed to support local economies and food needs.

Growing global demand for seafood has attracted diverse actors to African waters, including DWFN fleets, resulting in complex fisheries governance challenges, unsustainable rates of fishing and rising fisheries-related crimes.

To reverse these impacts, some African states are deploying various fisheries governance mechanisms such as closed fishing seasons in Ghana and reducing inshore fishing areas in Liberia, Madagascar and Somalia.

However, drawing on the extensive experience of experts, the review of literature, fisheries databases, international and regional agency reports, governmental and non-governmental reports as well as [case studies](#) from West and East Africa, the new research concluded that fishing restrictions are instead actually benefiting the industrial fishing sectors.

Dr. Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood, of the School of Geography and Sustainable Development at the University of St Andrews, said that "despite a higher incidence of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in industrial fisheries compared to the small-scale fisheries, fisheries governance mechanisms continue to advance the 'Survival of the Richest'—the [industrial sector](#), to the detriment of the 'Fittest' – the small-scale fisheries."

"The small-scale fisheries support millions of jobs and are better adapted

to meet the continents' nutrition and socio-economic security."

"For the fisheries sector to contribute to the [sustainable development](#) of Africans, states must redirect governance towards regulating the industrial sector, emphasizing equitable access for the small-scale fisheries whilst prioritizing ecological sustainability."

Co-author, WoldFish Executive Director for Science and Research Professor Edward H Allison, said that "the most important contributions that African fisheries make to African economic development is in the jobs, livelihoods and nutritious diets that they support, and it is small-scale or artisanal inland and inshore marine fisheries that provide most of these benefits."

"Securing these fisheries is thus the most important task for fisheries governance on the continent. This can be achieved by both prioritizing small-scale fisheries development and directing regulatory efforts to the industrial and distant water fleets. At the moment, as our paper shows, it's too much the other way round."

**More information:** Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood et al, Survival of the Richest, not the Fittest: How attempts to improve governance impact African small-scale marine fisheries, *Marine Policy* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104847](#)

Provided by University of St Andrews

Citation: Attempts to curb illegal fishing are hurting small-scale fishers in Africa most (2021, November 22) retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-11-curb-illegal-fishing-small-scale-fishers.html>

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