



Cite this article as: Zoppi, M. (2019). Global Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in West Africa: Recent Trends and Historical Legacies, *East African Journal of Social and Applied Sciences*, 1(2), 1-12.

GLOBAL ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED (IUU) FISHING IN WEST AFRICA: RECENT TRENDS AND HISTORICAL LEGACIES

Marco Zoppi

Department of Political and Social Sciences,
University of Bologna,
Strada Maggiore 45 – 40125 Bologna, Italy

ABSTRACT

The “new” scramble for African resources, triggered by the expansion of Chinese trade and development cooperation, increasingly aims at the exploitation of African fish resources. This brings severe threats to local coastal populations, whose economy as well as protein intake is based on fishing activities. This article focuses on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) in West Africa to shed light on the risks that the massive presence of Chinese and European trawlers entails for biodiversity and for the livelihood of local artisanal fishermen. It will describe some recent cases of IUU fishing in the area and the challenges faced by local authorities, through literature evidence and information collected through an interview. The goal is that of providing an update view on the issue yet with a look also at the historical foundation of the investigated phenomenon. In fact, I link the case of IUU fishing to the broader question of the expansion of rapacious capitalism in Africa in the shadow of the global market, to reflect on the lack of transformation of some dynamics inherited from the last century that continue to penalize the continent.

Keywords: *Illegal fishing, European Union, Africa, China, neoliberalism, third world countries*

Paper type: *Research paper*

Type of Review: *Peer Review*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the twentieth century there has been a considerable increase in global trade which has involved also the African continent. However, the economic performance of the latter remained rather poor when compared to other areas of the world, including those areas in which similar developing countries are located. In an attempt to explain the reasons for this difference, some scholars have suggested that the problems of development in Africa should not be interpreted as the result of marginality of the continent in the international system - an analytical tendency indeed widespread in the past decades - but rather as the outcome of the ways in which Africa has historically been included in the dynamics of the global market (Bayart, 2000). As I will show in this article, the issue of IUU fishing provides a case in point to assess the intricacies of the global market and its negative impact on some African economies. Before delving into that, however, I will present some general but significant data that help framing the question of global markets and Africa.

As a starting point for our discussion, it should be noted in fact that many of Sub-Saharan Africa economies consistently depend on the export of just few natural resources, oil and minerals especially. The latest data from the World Bank (2019) on total natural resources rents as share of gross domestic product (GDP) indicate that there are 15 countries in the area whose GDP is made for at least 15 per cent of revenues deriving from trade in natural resources (note that for most EU countries this value is below 0.5 per cent). Among these Sub-Saharan African countries, particularly significant are the cases of Republic of Congo (42.7 per cent), the Democratic Republic of Congo (32.7 per cent), Liberia (25.2 per cent) and Equatorial Guinea (24.3 per cent). This condition of marked dependence on foreign exports, in part the reflection of the natural endowment of the African continent, implies

for these same countries an enormous vulnerability on the international markets because the oscillation of prices for raw products/materials can cause serious internal financial imbalances.

The last example of such vulnerability was observed in the period 2014-2016, when the transitory setback of the Chinese economy and the simultaneous collapse of oil prices (around -60 per cent compared to 2013) triggered the inflection of the sale price of raw materials traded by Africa, such as nickel and lead (both down by 45 per cent); iron (-40 per cent); timber (-15 per cent) (Cf. Wengraf, 2018, p. 188). The consequences of these turbulences in Sub-Saharan Africa were the rise of inflation; bankruptcy or sale of economic activities; layoffs in the public sector; austerity plans; and loans from national and international banks (Ighobor, 2017). However, such economic configuration, which appears to penalize Africa in global exchanges, is not just the result of decisions taken internally in the continent by its political leaderships. As mentioned, the state of things calls for responsibilities also on the part of non-African actors. It is argued here that the last consideration should be taken into account to better frame the IUU phenomenon dealt with in this article. In fact, it was during the colonial period of European domination that Africa became markedly dependent on extractive activities. Colonizers did not even engage in developing adequate industrial sectors that could be capable of processing raw materials, so to sell finished products on more profitable economic conditions (Kennedy, 1988, p. 78). This was not part of their plan for the continent for many years.

Moreover, the overall historical processes through which African countries integrated into the world economic and financial system, especially since the end of European colonial domination, were very often disadvantageous for Africa. Starting in the 1970s, most of the African states have experienced the financial intervention in their internal affairs of international organizations clearly inspired by western-born ideologies regarding markets and communities (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank): as a condition for granting international loans, these two organizations have often promoted the implementation of so-called neoliberal reforms that was made of privatization and the abolition of tariffs in African economies their pillars. To be sure, the evaluation of the results obtained through neoliberal measures remains controversial, to say the least. At the beginning of the new millennium, for example, UNCTAD (2001) estimated still that for every US dollar invested in Africa, the continent was losing 106 cents (51 as a result of adverse trading conditions; 30 as capital flight and 25 as interest on debt and taxes on remittances). In other words, "as Africa remains at the base of the value chain with its stock of primary produce, much of the surplus from world trade goes to the industrialized nations" (Kalu & Falola, 2018, p. 4), due to the low prices at which raw materials are sold and the high cost of finished products; or again because of the unfavourable trade reason. UNCTAD's World Investment Report emphasizes that the volatility of commodity prices also affects the flow of foreign direct investments, whose return in the African continent is less profitable than elsewhere (UNCTAD, 2018, p. 3).

In a nutshell, Africa may be benefitting more from the globalized market and, in light of the Western involvement in the architecture of the global economy, specific co-responsibilities of international organizations for such underperforming condition emerge in determining the present situation of many of its countries (Shivji, 2008). The reason for throwing a light on Africa's export outlook is underlining how a set of dynamics have left as their legacy a continent that is on the one hand open to international trade, but on the other also plagued by fragility and "institutional impediments" (Kalu & Falola, 2018, p. 4). The latter have historically limited the possibility of ensuring control and repression of forms of predatory capitalism, something that is still taking place today. Building on the arguments above, this article analyses the phenomenon of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (from now called "IUU") in West African waters, paying particular attention to the activities of vessels flying the Chinese flag or that of members of the European Union (EU), as these are the most numerous in the area. IUU fishing costs to involved countries almost one and a half billion dollars per year in lost income, with tangible consequences for the wellbeing of coastal populations linked to the fishing sector, and is therefore considered by the author an emblematic case in which the scramble for resources in progress in Africa appears particularly evident and problematic. This question becomes possibly more relevant if seen through the lens of the historical relations between Africa and the European Union, since between the two continents there is one of the most articulated forms of interregional partnership in the world, that is based at least formally on equality, respect,

alliance and cooperation, and that is supposed to represent a transformation of the previous colonial phase (Mangala, 2013, p. 3).

The article will shed light on an important dynamic: opening to the international market without an efficient control capacity by national institutions makes it difficult to prevent some negative externalities generated by global actors, even when regulations and cutting-edge policies actually exist. At the same time, the current race for African resources also reveals that Western and non-Western actors are at the forefront in influencing the socio-economic conditions of African communities: they share responsibility for the negative consequences associated with IUU fishing, such as decline of resources, risks posed to the environment, as well as the crisis of local fishing sectors. On a more general level this article, while limited in its representativeness, will offer useful perspectives to reflect on the role of Africa in the mechanisms of the international economy, and on the challenges and opportunities arising from the global market. With reference to the EU, some gaps will be noted in partnership agreements for sustainable fishing with the countries of West Africa, highlighting also in this case a divergence with the rhetoric of helping Africa and Africans «at home», which according to a part of European political debates should constitute the European approach towards countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Caselli, 2019). To do all that, the analysis offered in this article first of all uses official documents, reports and academic literature produced on the subject. In addition to this, it also draws on an in-depth interview, carried out in the aftermath of a complaint delivered to the European Commission in February 2019 against the Italian naval authorities for failure to control the activities of Italy's national fishing fleet operating in West African waters.

1.1 Predatory Capitalism, Illegal Fishing and (Un-) Sustainability of the Sector in West Africa

In recent years there has been a comeback of narratives about an ongoing “New Scramble for Africa” among the main world powers to access the rich natural resources scattered across the African continent - with such intensity as to remember precisely the better-known colonial scramble of the previous century. The element of novelty of this alleged revival has been undoubtedly the expansion of China into African dynamics, pointing both at guaranteeing a market for its manufacturing products as to sustain the pace of its internal demand. In fact, the growth of China has made that country the world's top consumer of commodities like cement, steel and coal, and among the top ones of oil, pushing the Asian country towards the inevitable search for spaces for new commercial expansion (Okolo, 2017). China formally affirmed its influence sphere in Africa in 2010, when it became the first trading partner of the African continent at the expense of the United States and the European Union (Hodzi 2019, p. 8). Also in terms of development aid, China has succeeded in consolidating its presence in numerous African countries over time, building roads, bridges, ports, refineries, barracks and providing expertise in the agricultural, health, energy and security sectors. Many of these interventions follow the framework of action outlined by the so-called new Silk Road (the Road and Belt Initiative), the Chinese strategy for improving infrastructure connections across the various areas of the Eurasian continent and with the latter and Africa. Against this backdrop, China's entry in Africa has not led to substantial changes though: on the one hand, it has been noted that exchanges between China and Sub-Saharan African countries represent an instance of south-south partnership that is potentially more equal than the established trade pattern between developed and less developed countries (Broadman, 2008). A vision that would be reinforced by the fact that China is itself a developing country that still receives international aid (Brautigam, 2011). However, although the entry of China has been ideologically favoured by the absence of an uncomfortable colonial past, Chinese activities have often pursued goals that are all in all similar to those of the European actors, and that at times resemble more closely forms of rapacious capitalism rather than partnership for development purposes.

Indeed, current Chinese policy implies at the very least adherence to the economic principles of capitalism, which inevitably has internal repercussions on the market and society of the countries with which China interfaces (Gonzales-Vicente, 2015). This challenges at its core the Chinese doctrine of «non- interference» in the internal affairs of partner countries, which has shaped China's external policies since the 1950s. Consequently, the notion of “novelty” often evoked in association with the Chinese case in Africa must be taken with a grain of salt because of these ambiguities, which seem to turn Beijing in a player within the ongoing game of tensions and anxieties between old and new competitors, rather than in a player able to change the very same rules that have so far allowed its own expansion. IUU fishing in West Africa represents in this sense an ideal case study to focus on the

dynamics of international economy and to evaluate the historical phenomena of “accumulation by dispossession” of African resources (Harvey, 2008). In fact, the race for African resources affects indiscriminately mineral wealth and oil fields (Wengraf, 2018); the soil, for the purposes of food production or biofuel from third countries (Moyo & Yeros, 2019); and also fish resources off the territorial waters of African countries. The appetite for African resources, which is expressed through both legal and illegal forms of extraction, ends up bringing to the fore an old dilemma: is the abundance of natural resources a blessing or a curse for Africa? (Alao, 2007).

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is a phenomenon that endangers marine ecosystems, biodiversity, and not least food security and thus survival of fishing communities. IUU fishing includes a wide range of illicit behaviours and violations of requirements as regulated by both international and national regulations. The rules that are most often violated concern various types of restrictions: limitations in the access to certain fishing areas (for example, in protected areas or closer than 12 miles from the coast); limitations in the use of specific fishing tools and techniques (the width of the meshes of the nets or pair trawling); limitations in the fishing of some marine species; in the number of days that is possible to stay at sea fishing; in the amount of fish that can be fished and landed (Cf. Gutierrez, Daniels & Jobbins, 2018; Viridin *et al.*, 2018). Then there are other practices, prohibited or limited to varying degrees by states, which are often co-present in cases of IUU fishing. An example of that is the overcoming of limits for accessory catches, when these limits are imposed by the authorities. Or again, the current ban implemented in many countries (including Senegal and Ivory Coast) on transfers catches offshore from a fishing vessel to a large refrigerated cargo-type ship (known as *reefer*). Transshipping in fact allows fishing vessels to remain at sea for longer periods of time, thus saving on fuel costs and on the time needed to return to ports (Tickler *et al.*, 2018). Above all, recourse to refrigerated and refuelling vessels prevents fishing vessels from returning to local ports, avoiding controls and depriving the latter of port revenues and fishery products, which will instead be landed, processed, taxed and sold elsewhere making seafood traceability nearly impossible.

IUU fishing primarily affects countries that are unable to put in place effective monitoring and control systems in their “Exclusive Economic Zone” (EEZ), namely that marine area extending up to 200 nautical miles from the baseline. In principle, in this area the given country can exert exclusive rights of sovereignty for various activities, including resource management. However, in the absence of adequate controls, authorized vessels may fish within EEZs in unpermitted ways, or vessels without authorization to carry out fishing activities in the EEZ of the state concerned may instead cross over for that purpose illicitly. West Africa presents coastal countries where these problems are particularly felt, as in the last decade the area has attracted industrial fishing boats from all over the world, while controls remain completely inadequate. No fewer than 340 Chinese industrial vessels, plus 100-120 Europeans and a few dozen from Russia, South Korea and other countries have been reported in the seas of countries such as Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In the face of the large presence of external fleets, some countries have few military boats – or just one, as in the case of Sierra Leone - for control activities (Allison, 2019). Therefore, considering the limited resources available for the monitoring of so many fishing vessels, preventing IUU fishing in these countries is a particularly arduous task in the absence of a decisive support from their flag countries.

IUU fishing phenomena are also favoured by a series of non-transparent practices, often aimed at making authority checks more difficult. A first type is represented by the frequent change of the ship owner, who can also change flag country, being therefore registered with new authorities. Maintaining an updated vessel database (and their navigation record) represents thus a significant challenge for state authorities and non-governmental organizations active in the sector (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2018). It is also necessary to mention irregularities in the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and the non-use or improper use of the satellite-based vessel monitoring system (VMS): the former is a satellite tracking system or terrestrial radar stations that allows to acquire information in real time on position, size, speed and boat owner, associating all this with an ID code that is in principle unique for each vessel. As reported by Kurekin *et al.* (2019, p. 14), however, it is still possible to obtain false registrations or avoiding recognition at sea through other means. VMS is a satellite tracking system that, when installed on board, communicates geospatial data about the boat position. In addition to discovering possible trespassing in no-go areas, VMS signals allow authorities to remotely determine if the boat is actually carrying out fishing (for example through its cruising speed): for these reasons, many crews engaged in IUU

fishing in West Africa seas turn off the AIS transponder. In this case, getting on board of uncooperative boats can be the only way to ascertain potential infringements. A recent report by Greenpeace (2015) revealed that 74 of the 92 Chinese vessels in West African waters had shut down or had no AIS on board; moreover, out of the 18 boats with active AIS, at least 10 transmitted incorrect positioning information. Even in the pilot test conducted by Kurekin and his team in the second half of 2018, more than 75 per cent of the boats in the exclusive economic zone of Ghana were identified as “non-cooperative” because they had completely disguised or shut down their systems. Researchers argue that the probability that these vessels are involved in IUU fishing is high (Kurekin *et al.*, 2019, p. 24).

The description of the most frequent IUU fishing activities presented above does not complete the analysis of all critical points afflicting the fisheries sector in the countries of West Africa. Even regulated fishing, by boats with regular fishing licenses, can be dangerous for marine resources. Additional research has indeed brought to light a thriving system of corruption of public officials to allow, for example, activities of vessels potentially engaged in IUU fishing (Okafor-Yarwood, 2019, p. 417). Furthermore, as the interview with the coordinator of the *Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements* (CFFA) will clearly show, the process of license granting by African governments is not immune to corruption and favouritism that led to issue a disproportionate number of permits that in the long run endanger the sustainability of what is supposed to be regulated fishing activities.

Therefore, the greater focus usually put on IUU fishing does not mean that all regulated fishing activities are necessarily sustainable, let alone that those in possession of a regular license comply with the limits established by law in the absence of strict control by the authorities in charge. Against this background, we need to look at the most important consequences of IUU fishing. First of all, there are repercussions on the environment: among the most significant problems deriving from IUU fishing must be noted the high exploitation of fish resources, which takes place at a greater pace than the capacity to repopulate marine species, with disastrous consequences for the survival of the species in question (Guggisberg, 2016, p. 10). According to FAO (2016), all fish stocks in West Africa are currently being fully exploited or are beyond the restocking limit. This situation is aggravated by cases of deliberate fishing for the capture of juveniles or small pelagic fish, of which an example is the so-called “saiko” fishing, destined mostly to markets abroad (EJF, 2018, p. 4). The decline of marine resources is closely linked to another problem, that of food security: in fact, in an area where malnutrition already affects 30 per cent of the population, almost two thirds of animal proteins assumed by people derive from fish (Belhabib *et al.*, 2015, p. 73). Malnutrition is also caused by poverty, that is the impossibility of buying fish and food, and this allows us to analyse now also the economic effects of IUU fishing.

In many Western African countries fishing is carried out through artisanal means still. An example are the wooden pirogues largely in use from Mauritania to Senegal, on which a crew composed of less than ten people usually embarks and stays at sea for few days. Canoes, gillnets and handlines are widespread throughout the area, while the diffusion of indigenous industrial vessels is still scarce (O’Neill, Asare & Aheto, 2018, p. 303). The activities connected to this sector, which are evidently characterized by high labour intensity and low capital, employ more than 6.5 million people throughout West Africa (besides fishermen, those working in ports, processing plants, sales) (Belhabib *et al.*, 2015). At the same time, fishing represents a significant backbone of national economies, with an average contribution to GDP higher than 4 per cent in the countries of the area, with peaks estimated to be around 15 per cent in the case of Sierra Leone and Senegal (FAO, 2014, p. 8).

The prevalence of artisanal fishing has guaranteed the sustainability of activities over time, but it is now threatened by modern foreign vessels, whose IUU fishing is equivalent to no less than 37 per cent of all catches in West Africa (Asemota, 2019). From the technological point of view, the differences between traditional boats, tuna boats and industrial boats are considerable. According to Greenpeace, approximately 56 pirogues are needed to equal the amount of daily catch obtained by a single fishing vessel such as the ones coming from Europe, Russia, Korea and China abundantly fishing in the area. The damages of IUU fishing are therefore remarkable: the most conservative estimates indicate economic losses of USD 1.3 billion per year, while others have raised that up to about 2 billion, half of which lost by Senegal alone. The already mentioned Kurekin *et al.* quantify IUU fishing costs Ghana in about USD 100 million every year (Kurekin *et al.*, 2019, p. 1). A series of articles recently published

in the Sierra Leonean press underlines that in the last decade, local fish markets have progressively been emptied of products and customers: local fishermen openly link IUU fishing with the sector decline, and also denounce manoeuvres with which vessels foreigners cut their fishing nets (Standard Time Press, 2019). For them, these vessels are almost always named Chinese or “European”, as reported by Béatrice Gorez, coordinator of the CFFAⁱ, a platform of non-governmental organizations based in Belgium that documents the developments and impact of fisheries agreements between the EU and African governments on artisanal fishing, with particular attention to sustainability and food security. It is interesting to report here his explanation:

For coastal communities, they are all Europeans. When they see an Italian trawler, for them they are Europeans. They will not make a difference between whether it is Italian, Greek or whatever. They are Europeans for them. That means as well, fairly enough, that is really a concern for the other European vessels, because some of them have been obliged to improve their activities, and in the fishing sector when you improve the sustainability of your activities, this has a high cost. You don't go in very rich area for fishing, you have to go further away and spend more hours fishing etc. because you don't get access to some fragile zones. It will cost one much. So, now you have some concerns expressed by some of the European fleets that have been obliged to operate more sustainably, because they are in competition with some other vessels, including EU vessels like the Italian ones, which have lower running costs and also because the bad behaviour of some of them is kind of detrimental to all European fleets, because for most African citizens Europeans are Europeans without distinction.

1.2 The European Union and the Regulation for Extra-EU Fishing

This section clarifies with what tools and agreements the EU has secured access to West African fish resources. While the Mediterranean is the most exploited sea in the world, and even the North Sea presents alarming data in this sense, the EU remains the largest market for fish products in the world (FAO, 2016). As a result, demand is necessarily met through imports (around 60 per cent of the total) and also through fishing in non-EU waters by fleets of EU members, as seen in the previous section. To safeguard the possibility of operating these fleets also in the EEZs of non-EU countries, the EU has implemented two main types of bilateral agreements: the “Northern agreements” for the joint management of stocks with the non-EU territories of northern Europe (Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands); and the “Sustainable fisheries partnership agreements” (SFPAs), which is the name for those agreements signed with countries in the global South and which will therefore be analysed in more detail here. SFPAs may relate to tuna fishing or can be of “mixed” nature, in the sense that they regulate the fishing rights of various species of fish. The functioning mechanism of the SFPAs foresees that access to the EEZs of third world countries be compensated by the EU with a direct financial contribution, and also with support to the sustainable development of the sector in the signatory country. That is, SFPAs must be beneficial to the EU, its fleets and the third countries involved (including their populations and in particular those employed in the fishing sector), thus with a clear and distinguishable dimension that we could define as “moral”. Only in this way, in fact, the bilateral agreements can reflect the European sustainability agenda aimed at “the sustainable management of seafood resources that enhances food security and offers opportunities for trade and growth” (EC, 2015). While it is clear that these agreements allow EU countries to have sufficient quantities of fish products for their markets without weighing further on European ecosystems, the point of benefits for third countries appears less obvious (Transnational Institute, 2017).

The lack of controls and of conservation strategies continue to affect the sustainability of fishing activities, and there have been cases of impoverished fishermen who have used their boats to transport drugs, and even public officials who for the same purpose have used boats purchased precisely through the revenues linked to SFPAs agreements (Cf. Okafor-Yarwood, 2019, p. 419). At the time of writing this article, 8 SFPAs agreements are active, almost all signed with West African countries, divided as follows: 6 for tuna fishing (Ivory Coast; Senegal; Liberia; Seychelles; Cook Islands and Mauritius. Cape Verde and the Gambia should be added soon to the list); 2 mixed agreements with Mauritania and Greenland (Morocco and Guinea-Bissau are currently in talks with the EU). In addition to these, there are also so-called “dormant” agreements with 7 other countries, namely agreements signed in the past but that are currently not operational and await a possible renewal: Gabon and Equatorial Guinea in West Africa are among them. It is important to underline that there is an exclusivity clause in the partnership agreements providing that EU vessels can operate only in the waters of a third country with which a bilateral

agreement has been concluded and there is an operational protocol in force: in essence, fishing it is not authorized in the waters of countries with dormant agreements, not even in the case of direct private agreements between vessel owners and governments.

1.3 Recent Cases and the Complaint of Early 2019 against Italian Fishing Boats

In recent years, some boats flying European flags have been reported conducting IUU fishing in West Africa. Between 2012 and 2015, as many as 19 Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish ships illegally fished for a total of 31,000 hours in the waters of the Gambia and Equatorial Guinea, basing their activities on a private agreement that is in contrast with the EU legislation just described (Oceana, 2017, p. 6). Furthermore, on 12 February 2015 the "Idra Q" fishing boat owned by a shipping company based in Italy was seized in Gambia when fishing nets having meshes smaller than what is established by law were found on board. The events of April 2017 denounced by Greenpeace in a statement of which the initial excerpt is provided:

During monitoring activities against illegal fishing in the West African seas conducted in recent weeks along with the authorities of coastal nations such as Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, Greenpeace's Esperanza ship has discovered several cases of illegal fishing, one of which is registered last April 15, which directly involves a fishing vessel flying the Italian flag. This is the «Eighteen» fishing boat, owned by the Sicilian company Asaro Matteo Cosimo Vincenzo srl., engaged in fishing activities in the Sierra Leone seas.

As the rest of the document explains, cut shark fins were found on board, being the result of the so-called shark finning, a practice that is usually followed by the discarding of the carcass at sea - all prohibited by EU regulations. Less than two years later, a new case involves again Italian ship crews in West African waters. The reiteration of events leads three organizations, including the aforementioned CFFA, to send a formal protest to the European Commission. The complaint of the three organizations is addressed both to the Directorate General of sea fishing and aquaculture belonging to the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and to the General Command of the Port Authorities, and is accompanied by the list of violated regulatory articlesⁱⁱ. The fishing boats Idra Q and Eighteen are again involved in the alleged IUU fishing activities, together with the Twenty, the Myra Q, the Pegaso Q and the Orione Q. Also the shipping companies would be the same two already involved in the cases of the past years. In the document provided to me by the interviewee we read that the Italian authorities cited "failed to comply with their obligations under EU law to monitor and, where relevant, sanction the activities of the trawlers flying their flag in the waters of Sierra Leone. These activities should be characterised as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing". These activities have been denounced by local fishermen organizations and then verified with the help of VMS and AIS satellite data. Here is a significant excerpt from the complaint that chronicles the events:

We have identified six Italian trawlers that have been carrying out fishing activities in Sierra Leone these past years, with direct authorisations delivered by Sierra Leone authorities for shrimps or cephalopods, or both. Recently, in October 2018, new authorizations have been delivered to three of them for shrimps (EIGHTEEN) and cephalopods (TWENTY and ORIONE Q). According to our sources and VMS/AIS data, several of the trawlers have not complied with the provisions of the authorisations delivered by Sierra Leone which are the following: 1) The prohibition to fish in the inshore zone reserved for artisanal fishing; 2) The need to request permission for transshipments at sea and 3) The prohibition to catch octopus and cuttlefish in zones where they are coming to spawn. These vessels also have a history of illegal operations (they have caught sharks without respecting the rule related to shark finning, made illegal incursions in neighbouring countries waters, fished under dormant agreements, etc.), which has been documented in the past years by Greenpeace and Oceana.

Some additional details have surfaced during the author's conversation with Béatrice Gorez. First of all, about the context:

There is a problem with illegal fishing, but there is yet a problem with legal fishing that is at least as big or even bigger. It is unsustainable. In the case of the Italian trawlers in West Africa, we have got both issues: in a way, one could say that there are not many of these trawlers. In fact, there are 7 Italian vessels in the Gulf of Guinea, and then you have hundreds of Chinese trawlers. It is thus not the majority of the problem, but still these few Italian

trawlers can make a lot of damage because they are very efficient kind of trawlers, much more efficient than the Chinese ones, and I also think that there is a political responsibility of the EU to ensure that its vessels do behave properly because we have got legislation in the EU against illegal fishing, but we have also got an equally important legislation, a new one from last year, which is called "Sustainable management of external fishing fleets". This legislation's objective is ensuring that all EU vessels fishing outside EU waters, distant water fleets, fish sustainably. I think this is as important as focusing at the fight against illegal fishing. So we have this legislation, and this is clear EU responsibility to make sure these legislations are implemented, and in the case of Italy, until now, this has not been done. As for illegal activities, some have been witnessed or taken into account and registered. Like they did in Guinea-Bissau and in the Gambia in 2015-2016. Some have been witnessed in Sierra Leone by local observant fishers, who gave testimony that some of these Italian and Chinese trawlers have been fishing inside the zone reserve for hazarded fishes. But Sierra Leone has not done anything about it. Because Sierra Leone is a country where there are difficulties, very low capacity to monitor fishing, difficult political situation and not so much political will to act. At least, that was the case in the last years.

A similar dynamic occurs in the other coastal countries of West Africa, and is thus described by the same interlocutor:

You see countries like Guinea-Bissau that are very poor, with limited means in terms of controlling fishing, very weak government, and unstable politically; and still there are more than 200 trawlers in their water, which is crazy. They are all legal. For me that is the main problem. Of course, illegal fishing is there as well, not only fishing without license, but coming into small-scale fisheries zones etc.

The serious damage that trawlers can bring to the environment when they fish in prohibited areas or with non-compliant equipment is explored in the next section of the interview with Gorez shown below. In fact, this type of fishing lets a net, like a pocket, drop onto the seabed, equipped with wheels that "walks" on the seabed following the navigation direction of the ship. While the wheels often damage the seabed, it is also essential that the meshes of the nets used are not less than 40 mm (foreseen by EU standards), so as not to capture specimens of species that are too small, putting fish repopulation at risk.

For the local fishing communities, one of the most detrimental impacts is having a trawler coming into their fishing zone, because (...) as for foreign fleets, and that include European fleets, you have got fleets that are fishing in the high seas. (...) If you think in terms of impact on the local fishing sector and local development, these are not the worse, because they are fishing very far from the coast, so there is no direct competition with the local sector. Most of the time – at least for the tuna sector – they are landing in local ports like Abidjan and Dakar, so you could say that from the economic point of view they create jobs in ports etc. The fish is landing locally. Tuna fisheries are very separate from the others. Then the other big category are trawlers. Trawler is basically a trawl gear, a pocket if you like, that the vessel will drag along the bottom, often is on the bottom if they are fishing in the coastal area, so it catches everything and is quite destructive on the environment. It catches everything: fish, crustaceans, everything that is there is caught. So is very unselective and destructive. When we talk about what has really become a detrimental impact, often you will find that the most detrimental impact comes from trawlers. Often, the coastal trawlers catch things like shrimps and cephalopods and these species live quite close to the shore. So they want to come there, they want to come in an environment, in an ecosystem which are quite fragile, because you do not always have rocky bottom but also coralline reef and they are coming there with these kinds of gear that are very destructive. The only way for small-scale fisheries to be protected, is to stop these trawlers from coming to this environment and to these fishing zones. That's where the illegality happens: because many times the country cannot monitor that, so you have these trawlers coming even by night, they come and they kind of drag there, and they destroy things, they destroy vessels as well. They damage the small-scale fishers, because they catch everything that is in their way. In terms of illegal activities, I would say that these are the most detrimental of all, and the Italian trawlers we are talking about are coastal trawlers: they are fishing unselectively because the gear is like that. And they have a [negative] impact on the availability of resource for the local sector and also in terms of destruction of the environment.

1.4 Countering the Globalization of IUU Fishing

In the face of economic, social and biodiversity challenges, it is appropriate to reflect on the remedies available to combat IUU fishing and mitigate its negative effects. Taking a cue from the news, one of the recently implemented measures of contrast is the detention of foreign vessels decided by the Sierra Leonean authorities for the whole month of April 2019, in order “to protect our fish stocks from exhaustion”, as declared by the president of national consortium of fishermen of the country (Allison, 2019). This decision was accompanied by the obligation to sell the fish exclusively in the local markets throughout the month, while the industrial boats had to keep their goods in cold storage to avoid price increases and compensate for any potential shortcomings. As emerged in the first weeks after the stop, the ban produced poor results in terms of fish repopulation and led to the arrest of a handful of fishermen, all local ones, caught while using unauthorized nets or while trying to sell fish to exporters bypassing thus the ban imposed by national authorities (France 24, 2019). Although the Sierra Leonean initiative represents a “test” measure to combat IUU fishing, the first evidence therefore suggests that it cannot be considered as a long-term solution. When blocking all industrial vessels, the existence of a bigger problem is indirectly confirmed, namely overfishing, which is obviously caused also by those who fish with a regular license? The priority measure seems to be then the increase of surveillance, control activities and sanctioning of boats operating in West Africa, both from the countries in the area and from those where these boats are registered. In this way it is possible to reduce the negative impact of predatory activities in the region. A positive example in this sense comes from the recent decision of the Chinese government to withdraw the subsidies to 264 fishing vessels involved in IUU fishing (for a total value of 100 USD million) and to revoke the fishing licenses to several dozen national shipowners: 30 were just those operating in West Africa (Quartz, 2019). In addition to control of the seas, it is important to extend control to the digital information sector regarding the companies operating in the area, and the development of databases that can facilitate the identification of boats suspected or accountable for cases of IUU fishing, also through sharing of information between states, would represent a big step forward (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2018, p. 7).

For their part, African states, characterized by a chronic lack of funds to carry out the functions of surveillance and prevention of IUU fishing at sea, have at least two ways to maximize their efforts: technological progress, for example, makes it possible to carry out remote control operations, installing video cameras on board the ships to monitor the activities and limit the need for direct intervention. Another important resource is cooperation in the field of safety and security of the seas both with external parties and with the countries of the area, which in recent years has already registered positive signals with joint simulations of sea interventions (Africa Defense Forum, 2019).

These measures will strengthen institutions and their ability to control the fishing sector, especially since the free market seems to favour various modalities to circumvent the restrictions that have been implemented at the national level: an example of that is the import in West Africa of fishing boats from abroad that are then “naturalized” through local companies: the latter carry out fishing activities with regular license, however in compliance with various types of agreement of the books with foreign companies (the payment of quotas, for instance) (EJF, 2018, p. 12). Control measures should be the national priority and also the aim of development cooperation offered by international powers, as they enable African institutions to stem the phenomena of predatory and illegal accumulation that seem to accompany the capitalist penetration in West Africa. This consideration can also be extended to other sectors of African economies and represents in fact a salient feature of the current positioning of Africa in international markets (Wengraf, 2018). Considering the facts described here, it is essential reflecting on the persistent scramble dynamics and unsustainable exploitation that characterize some of the European companies operating abroad. In this perspective, many current political narratives summarized in the slogan “help them at home” reveal the total absence of a historical conscience and, if you wish, of a moral dimension embracing the long European influence in Africa and the distortions it has generated. Not just that: this kind of reasoning continues to ignore what is happening in the present, that is the continuation of those dynamics of capitalist enrichment that slow down African development. Similarly, the dramatic consequences that IUU fishing can have for Africa and Europe are partly overlooked: in fact, there are documented cases of fishermen that, faced with the progressive depletion of fish resources, have converted their boats into transport vessels for irregular migrants to Europe (Okafor-Yarwood, 2019, p. 417). The stories of the two continents are therefore

intertwined, and a real resolution of at least part of the African problems must therefore necessarily pass through a remodulation of the European economic aims in Africa and of the modalities of resources exploitation.

2.0 CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have analysed the phenomenon of IUU fishing in West Africa, indicating entities, consequences and focusing on some recent cases. As emerged, IUU fishing simultaneously poses environmental, economic and social risks as it exploits marine resources beyond the threshold of sustainability; it denies the states of the area of significant revenues deriving from the activities of the sector, and not least because it deprives local fishermen of livelihood activities. Therefore, this phenomenon is very significant both to evaluate the dynamics of African participation in the global market and in the EU sustainable partnership agreements, as to highlight the inherent challenges in the global market. In particular, the data and the interview provided suggest the need to strengthen the institutions as a priority task, specifically the strengthening of the maritime control authorities of West Africa, in order to make them more effective in the fight against IUU and non-sustainable fishing. This goal - more than the signing of additional bilateral agreements like the SFPAs, seems to represent the solution that best protects the environment and coastal societies of the area from the risks of rapacious capitalism.

REFERENCES

- Alao, Abiodun (2007). *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: the Tragedy of Endowment*. Rochester: Rochester University Press.
- Allison, S. (2019). *Stemming the tide of illegal trawling in Sierra Leone*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Asemota, B. (2019). Stop Juvenile Fishing in Our Waters, *The Point*. Retrieved from: <http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/stop-juvenile-fishing-in-our-waters>.
- Austin, G. (2009). Cash Crops and Freedom: Export Agriculture and the Decline of Slavery in Colonial West Africa. *International Review of Social History*, 54(1), 1-37.
- Bayart, J. (2000). Africa in the World: a history of extraversion. *African Affairs*, 99, 217-267.
- Belhabib, D., Sumaila, U. R., & Pauly, D. (2015). Feeding the poor: Contribution of West African fisheries to employment and food security. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 111, 72-81.
- Bond, P. (2008). Accumulation by Dispossession in Africa: False Diagnoses and Dangerous Prescriptions. In J. Mensah (Ed), *Neoliberalism and Globalization in Africa*, (pp. 17-31). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bockarie, A. O. (2019, April 27). Stealing from the Poor? Illegal Fishing in Sierra Leone, *Standard Times Press*. Retrieved from: <https://standardtimespress.org/?p=2294>.
- Brautigam, D. (2010). *The Dragon's Gift: the Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Broadman, H. G. (2008), Chinese-African Trade and Investment: The Vanguard of South-South Commerce in the Twenty-First Century. In R.I. Rotberg (Ed), *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (pp. 87-108). Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Caselli, M. (2019). «Let Us Help Them at Home»: Policies and Misunderstandings on Migrant Flows Across the Mediterranean Border. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, pp. 1-11.
- Dent, C. M. (Ed) (2011). *China and Africa Development Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Environmental Justice Foundation, EJF (2018). *China's Hidden Fleet in West Africa*. London: EJF.
- European Commission, EU (2015). EU helps developing countries to ensure sustainable fisheries and food security. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/eu-helps-developing-countries-ensure-sustainable-fisheries-and-food-security_it.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of The United Nations, FAO (2014). *The Value of African Fisheries*. Rome: FAO.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of The United Nations, FAO (2016). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture*. Rome: FAO.

- Gonzalez-Vicente, R. (2015). The limits to China's non-interference foreign policy: pro-state interventionism and the rescaling of economic governance. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 69(2), 205-223.
- Greenpeace (2015). Africa's Fisheries' Paradise At a Crossroads: Investigating Chinese Companies' Illegal Fishing Practices in West Africa. *Greenpeace Report*, 29, Amsterdam: Greenpeace.
- Guggisberg, Solène (2016). *The Use of CITES for Commercially exploited Fish Species*. Cham: Springer.
- Gutierrez, M., Daniels, A., & Jobbins, G. (2018). Fishing for data. *ODI Briefing Note*. London: ODI.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hodzi, O. (2019). *The End of China's Non-intervention Policy in Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ighobor, K. (2017, March 10), Commodity prices crash hits Africa. *African Renewal*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2016-march-2017/commodity-prices-crash-hits-africa>.
- Kalu, K., & Falola, T. (2018). Introduction: African in a Globalized World. In T. Falola, K. Laku (Eds), *Africa and Globalization: Challenges of Governance and Creativity*, (pp. 5-18). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kennedy, P. (1988). *African Capitalism: the struggle for ascendancy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kurekin, A. A., Loveday, B. R., Clements, O., Quartly, G. D., Miller, P.I., Wiafe, G., & Agyekum, K. A. (2019). Operational Monitoring of Illegal Fishing in Ghana through Exploitation of Satellite Earth Observation and AIS Data. *Remote Sensing*, 11(3), 1-28.
- Moyo, S., Jha, P., Yeros, P. (2019). *Reclaiming Africa: Scramble and Resistance in the 21st Century*. Cham: Springer.
- Oceana (2017). *Fishing the Boundaries of Law*. Washington: Oceana.
- Okafor-Yarwood, I. (2019). Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the complexities of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for countries in the Gulf of Guinea. *Marine Policy*, 99, 414-422.
- Okolo, L. (2017). Introduction: The Global Shift in Economic Power to Asia and the Challenges of Africa's Industrialisation in the Twenty-First Century. In Y. Kim (Ed), *China and Africa: a new Paradigm of Global Business*, (pp. 1-19). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- O'Neill, E. D., Asare, N. K., & Aheto, D. W. (2018). Socioeconomic dynamics of the Ghanaian tuna industry: a value-chain approach to understanding aspects of global fisheries. In *African Journal of Marine Science*, 40(3), 303-313.
- Shivji, I. G. (2008). *Accumulation in an African Periphery: a Theoretical Framework*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyoka Publishers.
- Sumaila, U. R. (2018). Illicit Trade in the marine resources of West Africa. In *Ghanaian Journal of Economics*, 6, 108-116.
- Tickler, D., Meeuwig J. J., Palomares, M., Pauly, D., & Zeller, D. (2018). Far from home: Distance patterns of global fishing fleets. In *Science Advances*, 4, pp. 1-6.
- Transnational Institute (2017). EU Fisheries Agreements: Cheap Fish for a High Price, *TI Policy Brief*, Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD (2001). *Economic Development in Africa: Performance, Prospects and Policy Issues*. Geneva: UNCTAD.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD (2018). *World Investment Report*, Geneva: UNCTAD.
- Viridin, J., Kobayashi, M., Akester, S., Vegh, T., & Cunningham, S. (2018). West Africa's coastal bottom trawl fishery: Initial examination of a trade in fishing services. In *Marine Policy*, 100, 288-297.

Wengraf, L. (2018). *Extracting Profits: Imperialism, Neoliberalism, and the New Scramble for Africa*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

ⁱ CFFA Website is the following: <https://cape-cffa.squarespace.com>.

ⁱⁱ There is mention of violation of articles contained, among others, in the Common Fisheries Policy; in the Regulation (EU) 2017/2403 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets; in the regulation against IUU fishing; in the Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009 of 20 November 2009 establishing a Community control system for ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries; and finally in the Council Regulation (EC) No 1185/2003 of 26 June 2003 on the removal of fins of sharks on board vessels policy.