



stop illegal fishing



STOP ILLEGAL FISHING  
CASE STUDY SERIES **12**

December 2016

## Illegal fishing on Lake Victoria

How joint operations are making an impact

### Background

Lake Victoria is an important source of freshwater fish, contributing significantly to the economies of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda and the livelihoods and nutrition of three million people.

Nile perch, introduced in the 1950s, became the most important species in the lake decimating the endemic fish and, creating a lucrative commercial fishery. Over-fishing and the use of destructive fishing gear has reduced the stock of larger, legal sized Nile perch<sup>1</sup>, resulting in the illegal trade of undersized fish. The Chinese market for dried swim bladders has removed spawners from the stock, further affecting its ability to recover.

The Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO) was formed in 1994, but illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to have a severe impact on Nile perch<sup>2</sup> reducing its biomass from 2.3 million tonnes in 1999 to less than 300 000 tonnes in 2008. Current estimates of illegal fishing in Lake Victoria vary from 40% to 60%, amongst the highest rates in the world.

Many initiatives have been undertaken – especially in the area of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) – to address the challenges of illegal fishing on Lake Victoria. For example, community-based Beach Management Units (BMUs)<sup>3</sup> have been established to legally represent each fishing community and undertake MCS activities; an MCS Regional Working Group (RWG-MCS) has been established to coordinate MCS activities; and the industrial fish processors exercise self-regulation in order to sustain their exports. However the problem continues, to an extent due to a lack of equipment and financing as well as technical capacity to implement MCS operations.

Faced with a continuing decline in the Nile perch stocks, the LVFO Council of Ministers asked the SmartFish Programme to work with all three member states to strengthen MCS of the lake fisheries. This took the form of capacity building in the first year, to develop professional MCS teams, followed by practical operations for the remaining three years. These were initially joint operations with all three member states taking part, and in the last year nationally in Uganda and Tanzania.

#### STOP ILLEGAL FISHING CASE STUDIES aim to:

Define best practice by analysing practical examples of different approaches in the fight against IUU fishing. They also demonstrate the magnitude of activities and partnerships underway to stop illegal fishing and provide the basis for policy advice.

A series of MCS training workshops were held, focusing on operational planning for multilateral MCS operations. This was followed by operational exercises, with each exercise following the same pattern: an 'Exercise Warning Order' was issued two weeks prior to the start date in order to encourage a pre-training operational mind set. This was followed by a one-day refresher training session to reinforce previous lessons; a planning session with the Operation Commander, Section Commanders and BMU representatives; and the presentation of this plan to all participants. The Joint Operation was typically a nine-day exercise using a local vessel as a 'mothership' to transport the personnel to target locations around the lake where support vessels then transported the teams to shore.

After the operational exercises, SmartFish conducted additional training for senior management and fisheries officers to further strengthen operations in the region. This included reviewing the challenges and solutions for fisheries management, both for offshore fleets and local small-scale

## Drivers

The main driver to reduce and eliminate the illegal fishing was the continuing decline in Lake Victoria's fish stocks. The lack of effective control measures in place to address the problem and the failure of previous initiatives prompted the SmartFish intervention.

fishing fleets. SmartFish also evaluated the Standard Operating Procedure for Joint Operations Training developed by the LVFO to ensure that it was effective, harmonized and efficient.

Recognising the importance of publicity, in 2013 the SmartFish Programme invited about 20 journalists from Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to take part in an information workshop on IUU fishing and how it impacts the region's fish stocks. Journalists even joined MCS officials at a roadblock to inspect trucks for undersized and unlicensed fish, as well as on lake patrols to observe the confiscation of illegal gear.

Finally, in 2015, six national operations took place. National teams planned, coordinated and executed operations using formal procedures, supported by SmartFish experts.



## Key features and outcomes

- **Training and capacity building by experts in MCS planning and execution** has resulted in fully trained, professional MCS leaders and teams with the ability to plan and carry out national and joint patrols where and when required.
- **Carrying out operational exercises** resulted in the confiscation and destruction of a large amount of illegal fishing gear and boats. For example, during the first two days of one exercise, 48 beach seines, 252 undersize gill nets, 193 monofilament nets and 3 dagaa nets were confiscated and burned, along with illegal boats and large quantities of undersized fish.
- **Capitalising on the media potential of the operations** was key to informing a wider audience of the issue of IUU fishing as well as of the MCS operations, serving as a further deterrent. For example, after one exercise, a ceremony was held for the presentation of certificates to the participants. At this ceremony, attended by Uganda's Minister of State for Fisheries, confiscated fishing gear was burned in order to stimulate news stories in the local press that actions were being taken to stop IUU fishing.
- **Protesting against the patrols, local fishers sometimes responded with extreme hostility**, including physical violence, throwing stones and even using bows and arrows. This level of protest indicates how important fishing is as a source of food and livelihood; as resources become scarcer, fishers resort to illegal methods to ensure they still can maintain a living and provide for their families.

## Challenges

- **Lack of supplies** such as spare parts for the outboard motors, life jackets, torches, cameras, GPS devices, uniforms and protective gear compromised safety and the professional appearance of the team.
- **Hostility shown by the local fishers** towards the MCS teams made the operations difficult and challenging and at times threatened the safety of the teams.
- **Illegal fishing gear** is easy to obtain so whatever is confiscated is easy to replace. There is a need to ban the import and sale of undersized mesh and to train customs officials to spot and confiscate illegal gear at borders.
- **Current low levels of financial commitment** are insufficient to meet the operational costs of required MCS operations.
- **Open access nature of the fishery** facilitates a 7% annual growth in number of fishers and vessels and in all likelihood is unsustainable without the implementation of MCS and effort reduction mechanisms.



## Lessons learned

- **The results of the joint operations** demonstrate that when working together to share expertise and to ensure wider coverage of operations, the LVFO partner States can organise and implement effective regional MCS operations.
- **Refresher training of the operational team** is essential prior to departing on a joint MCS operation to ensure everyone is fully prepared and engaged in the operation.
- **Night operations are effective** as they incorporate an added element of surprise, catching illegal fishermen off guard.
- **Involvement of senior officials and politicians** boosts the operational team's morale and brings increased exposure to the MCS efforts and the issue of IUU fishing.
- **Involvement of local fishers and their communities in developing and enforcing fisheries regulations** is key to ensure lasting results. However, MCS efforts alone will not be enough to save Lake Victoria's fish stocks. Until the issues of dwindling fish resources and the provision of alternative livelihoods are addressed, illegal fishing is likely to continue.

## Players involved

- The EU-funded and IOC-implemented SmartFish programme provided funding, training and expertise for the project.
- The LVFO provided a framework for the operations to sit within.
- National heads of fisheries MCS spearheaded the operations.
- Local government authorities provided the day to day management of the resources.
- Local political leaders supported the operations in the three countries.
- Beach management units operated at grass roots levels to explain the importance of fisheries management and resource management to fishers and traders.
- Industry organisations (such as UFPEA) improved controls at factories and supported the MCS.
- The FAO component of the IOC-SmartFish project contributed to management advice and support to the implementation of management measures.
- Local media raised awareness of the issues and actions.

## Next steps

- **Support the three countries in developing a longer term strategy** for stable and consistent funding to strengthen the LVFO.
- **Engage with local communities** to sensitize them to the consequences of IUU fishing.
- **Support economic development and livelihood diversification** so that fishers do not have to rely on IUU fishing practices in order to support themselves and their families.
- **Support BMUs** to eradicate corruption and illegal activities within their ranks, and to foster commitment to fisheries management measures by providing training, regular MCS support and benefits or incentives to ensure their commitment.
- **Support the RWG – MCS** so that it can provide technical assistance, coordination and leadership in the future.
- **Support priority setting for enforcement operations** so that funding will be used more effectively, results will be tailored to the largest problem areas and planning will be more manageable.
- **Encourage improved internal coordination** between the various ministries that govern over fisheries and fishing communities.

## Policy implications

- LVFO decisions remain ineffective unless they are adopted in national legislation, implemented and enforced<sup>4</sup>; failure to enforce a decision in one or more member states leads to inconsistency within the LVFO area.
- A licensing scheme is needed to limit fisheries access, protect the livelihoods of long-time resident fishers and control the influx of migrant fishers. A licensing scheme would also fund MCS operations<sup>5</sup> and assist in providing fisheries and intelligence data for management purposes.
- A major increase in sanctions, including increased compounding of sanctions, is required so that all those involved in IUU fishing are seen to be brought to justice and sanctioned at a meaningful level.

## Further Information



### Indian Ocean Commission

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### SmartFish Programme

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> As recorded in 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> IUU fishing is not the only threat to the lake's fish; growth in agriculture has caused increased use of fertilizers, increased run-off, and hence increased silting and eutrophication. Increased development of industry and lakeside towns also places pressure on the lake environment.
- <sup>3</sup> Lake Victoria has 1 087 registered BMUs, but they have largely failed to control illegal fishing.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, an LVFO decision to ban fishing within 1 km of the shore to reduce catches of juvenile perch and tilapia has not been enforced by any member state.
- <sup>5</sup> It has been estimated that the implementation of a low cost tag-type license system for fishing units and fishers would realise more than four times the revenue needed to sustain the operations license system for fishing units and fishers would realise more than four times the revenue needed to sustain the operations.



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