



Statement

Addressing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the context of effective fisheries management, FAO COFI Sub Committee on Fisheries Management, January 2024

We agree with the FAO that combating IUU fishing in all types of fisheries, including small-scale fisheries, is crucial to effective fisheries management. For Africa's small-scale fisheries, IUU fishing, in particular incursions by vessels using destructive gear in coastal areas, such as coastal trawlers, remains a scourge as it is directly linked to overfishing and therefore poses a risk to food security.

To combat these incursions, participatory surveillance has been touted for several decades in Africa, but it has not been legally defined in most countries and generally lacks administrative, logistical and financial support. Among the problems reported by fishers involved in participatory surveillance are the lack of boats, the fact that fishers have to provide their own fuel for surveillance trips, and the frequent lack of reaction from the authorities when it comes to enforcing regulations on boats identified by artisanal fishers as being involved in IUU fishing.

This means that artisanal fishers who try to defend their local fisheries do so at their own expense and at considerable risk, often with no guarantee that the authorities will actually arrest the offenders.

For the system to work, artisanal fishers must be provided with adequate equipment to enable them to inform the authorities directly of suspicious activities, and the respective roles and responsibilities of fishers and the authorities must be clearly defined. **We call on the FAO to organize a discussion, with interested members and fishers, on how to promote efficient participatory surveillance.**

We also agree with the FAO that, in order to combat IUU fishing in small-scale fisheries, it is necessary to design and implement solutions tailored to the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which small-scale fisheries operate.

This means ensuring that the informal, traditional management that exists in many small-scale fisheries is recognised and taken into account when designing new regulations. In some cases, when new regulations are introduced without sufficient consultation, artisanal fishers who are doing what they have always done come to be regarded as illegal fishers, as criminals. In the past, some fishers have been the victims of violence for fishing in their traditional fishing zone, which had been declared a closed area without consultation. This has serious consequences for communities, including fishers, women fish processors, and for food security.

To avoid criminalising the traditional behavior of fishers, the solution lies in involving them in fisheries management, including for the design and introduction of mechanisms to combat IUU fishing in small-scale fisheries. Fishers themselves can contribute to this fight, in particular by using inexpensive digital technologies on vessels and at landing sites, for example, to record their catches and thus avoid their fishing being considered undocumented.
