Photo credit: Stop Illegal Fishing

# FISH-i in East Africa
## Stop Illegal Fishing

## Summary

FISH-i Africa was established by Stop Illegal Fishing in 2012. Uniting the eight East African coastal countries of Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, and Tanzania, FISH-i created an informal network that shares information and intelligence through a shared communications platform. This regional cooperation, coupled with dedicated data analysis and technical expertise, has catalyzed enforcement actions and created transparency to challenge corruption. Sharing real-time vessel data and accessing satellite tracking expertise enables authorities to identify and act against illegal operators and will ultimately contribute to the end of illegal fishing in the Western Indian Ocean.

## Problem

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing poses unique enforcement challenges. Crimes mainly take place at sea – and out of sight – making the true extent of it difficult to quantify. Global losses from illegal fishing are estimated to be as high as $23.5 billion annually. Illegal operators motivated by profit target key hotspots for their operations, including the major tuna fishery in the Indian Ocean. FISH-i countries all feel the economic, social, and environmental harm caused by illegal fishing, yet have limited resources and capacity to effectively monitor and regulate it.

Illegal fishing frequently goes hand-in-hand with other crimes such as vessel identity fraud, document forgery, and human trafficking. Fisheries enforcement officers are at the front line of identifying and tackling these issues, but often receive inadequate or insufficient training. With crimes and violations taking place across multiple jurisdictions, addressing them requires the collaboration of multiple agencies at the national, regional, and international levels. The opportunity for failure of enforcement is high, as language barriers, bureaucracy, lack of will, and corruption all present formidable barriers to the effectiveness of enforcement actions.

> ### Learning Question Addressed:
>
> What factors are necessary for effective cooperation among national, sub-national, and local authorities, especially for Wildlife Enforcement Networks?

## Approach

FISH-i established a shared communications platform to establish direct contact between fisheries enforcement officers. This platform contains information on licensed vessels, inspections, suspicious activity, and alerts; analyses trends and anomalies in data; communicates requests for support; and shares lessons learned and experiences. Alongside fisheries authorities from the FISH-i countries, member organizations include the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Southern Africa Development Community, and technical experts. The level of transparency of this shared information is significant and has enabled systematic monitoring of vessels through satellite tracking. This communications platform has circumvented bureaucratic processes and facilitated the rapid exchange of information to inform decisions about issues such as allowing or denying port access to a vessel. Ongoing expert support is also made available through the platform.


Illegal fishing goes hand-in-hand with crimes such as vessel identity fraud.

Photo credit: Stop Illegal Fishing

FISH-i has encouraged and supported the process of due diligence checks when licensing or flagging fishing vessels and helps to identify high-risk vessels and operators. Information-sharing at regular FISH-i task force meetings fosters collaborative relationships and strengthens organizational capacity for enforcement.

Complex investigations have been supported through technical assistance, including legal advice, undercover investigations, and inspection assistance. Analysis of cases has produced new evidence-based understanding of the challenges and potential solutions to the complex problem of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Through this support, local expertise is being built to implement a durable solution.

Additionally, structured training with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has focused on national, regional, and international laws and policy, and best practices for investigation, collection, and presentation of evidence processes to bring about enforcement action.

## Results

More than 30 FISH-i investigations have resulted in enforcement actions against illegal operators, including:

- A $2 million fine settled by the vessels the Premier and the Solevant.
- Dismantling a counterfeit licensing operation in Tanzania, resulting in increased license revenue of $300,000.
- De-flagging of two vessels listed as illegal, unreported, and unregulated by Tanzania.
- Tracking of high-risk vessel Nessa 7, resulting in crew arrest and vessel seizure.
- With funding from USAID, securing a $65,000 fine from the owner of the Greko 1 and uncovering a potential fraud linked to a European Union decommissioning scheme.
- Payment of a $700,000 fine for illegal fishing by the owners of the Txori Argi.
- FISH-i countries uniting to deny port access to vessels such as the Premier, forcing the vessel out of the region.

*About this case study series: In 2017, USAID collected case studies addressing the questions posed in the Combating Wildlife Trafficking Learning Agenda. The finalists represent both USAID-funded and non-USAID-funded activities from around the world. The information provided in the case study series does not necessarily represent the views or positions of USAID or the U.S. Government.*

## Lessons

- **Operating outside of a formal intergovernmental structure can offer the flexibility needed to make decisions quickly and to act in creative and innovative ways.** Countries have willingly participated because they see the value of the organization, rather than because they are required to.

- **Building relationships between individual officers is vital.** Regular task force meetings offer the opportunity to build direct connections and create understanding, respect, and support. They are an important component of the success of FISH-i.

- **An effective virtual communications platform is key for bringing regional players together.** It is low cost and connects people in real time, easing communication strains, and building transparency, awareness, and trust.

- **Expert technical support for government officials is needed,** both virtually and on the ground, to build confidence in national level decision-making and its ability to address challenges involved in enforcement action.

- **Taking a regional approach can provide programs with a better picture of what is happening, how, and why. The analysis of the body of evidence** drawn from program research and investigations leads to better priority setting and more targeted efforts.

- **Scaling the approach is necessary to continue success. FISH-i will need to expand its reach, creating connections to port, flag, and market states to strengthen the enforcement network.** Displacement is a clear factor in the world of illegal fishing, as operators seek out the weakest areas to target. However, resources are always a challenge. Taking action against the organizations and kingpins who have been uncovered through the work of FISH-i will require additional funding.

To learn more about Fish-i Africa, visit: https://fish-i-africa.org