

Criminal fisheries practices and their perverse effects in West Africa

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Background

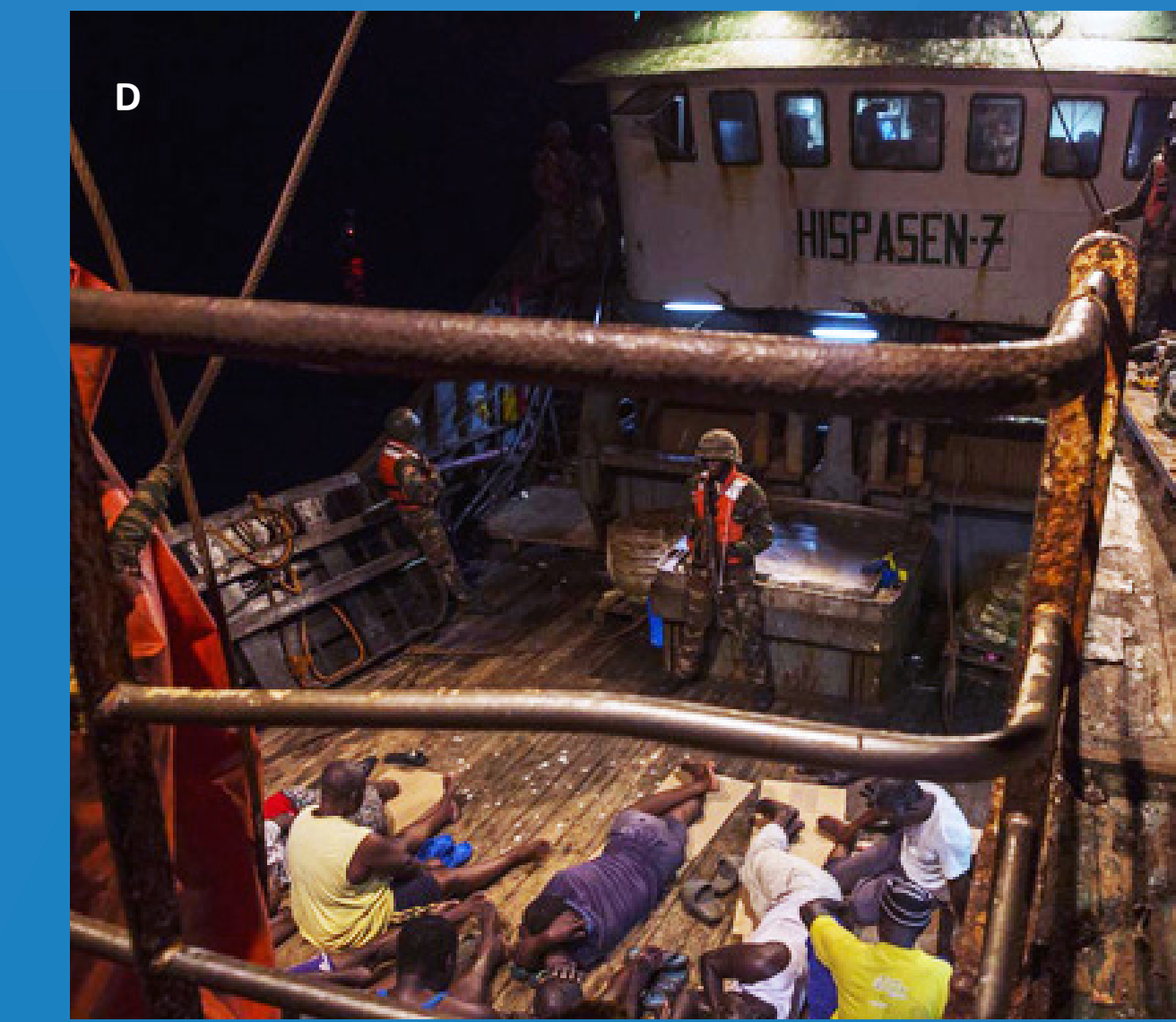
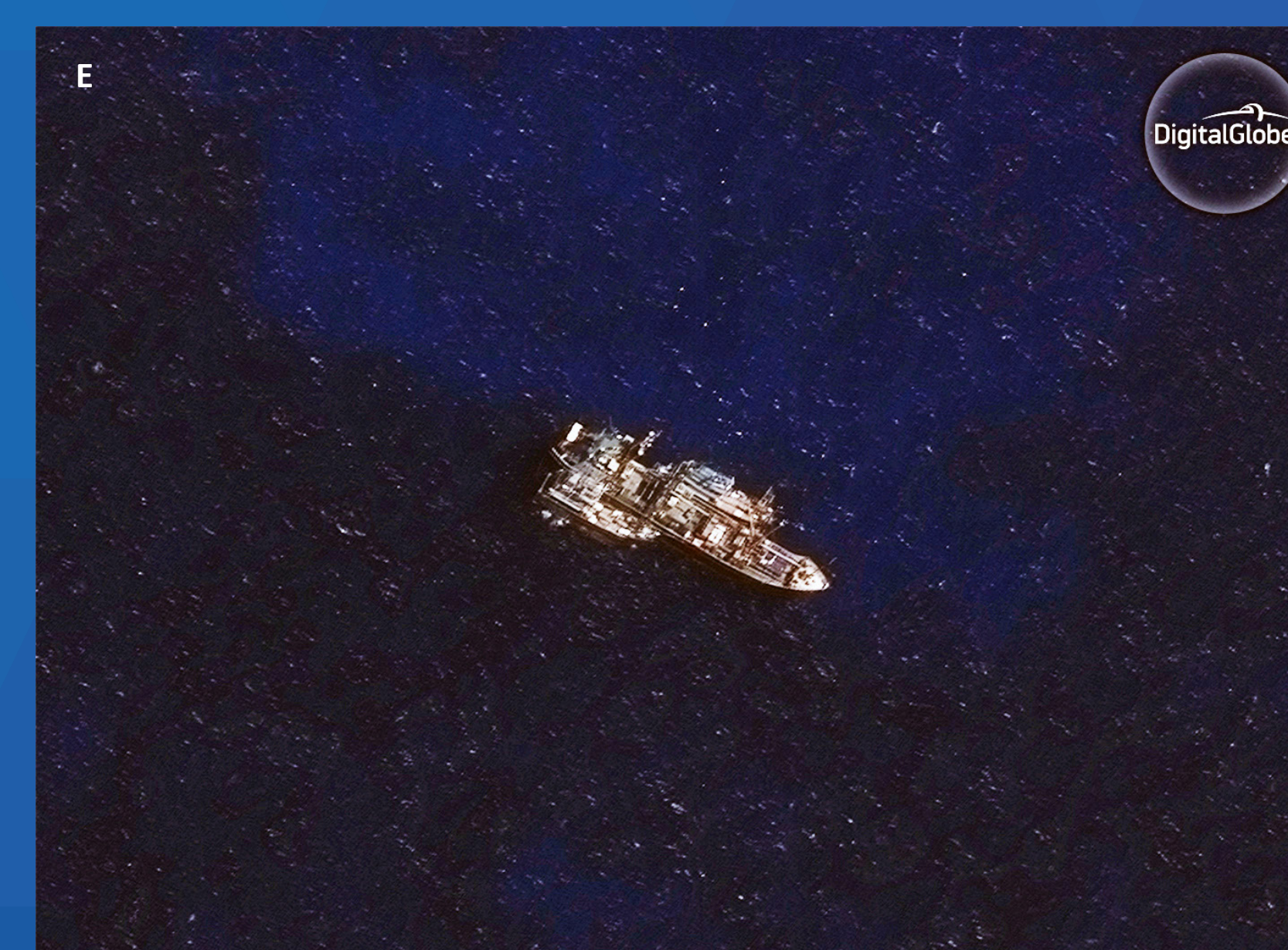
Living and non-living marine resources have multi-faceted interactions influencing ocean productivity, oxygen production, the climate and more. Enforcing sustainable use of natural resources is a challenging task, particularly for developing countries, although modern earth observation technologies can help. The extent of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing reaches very high proportions in North-West Africa (Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone) and accounts for some 65 percent of legal extractions¹.

Field research among small-scale fishers

Based on field research in Senegal and neighbouring countries², we argue that the scale of illegal practices, needs to be classified as criminal and no longer as a fisheries management problem.

The perpetrators are mostly international industrial fleets operating across borders alternating between organised crime and activities within legitimate agreements. This makes prosecution particularly difficult for under-resourced authorities in developing countries with insufficient means for monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) and little capacity to use earth observation technology to track exploitation patterns. The net results are firstly significant financial losses for the countries, estimated by Doumbouya et al. (2017)¹ for the North-West African countries at US\$ 2.3 billion per year.

The perverse social, institutional and environmental effects may even turn out to be more far-reaching. Among these are the reduction of women entrepreneurs in the dynamic local small-scale fishing industry to low-paid labour in industrial processing plants. Other effects are break down of traditional solidarity chains within the small-scale sector under excessive economic pressure from industrial competition, corruption and other forms of delegitimisation of public institutions driven also by degradation of the marine ecosystems with serious effects on local food security.



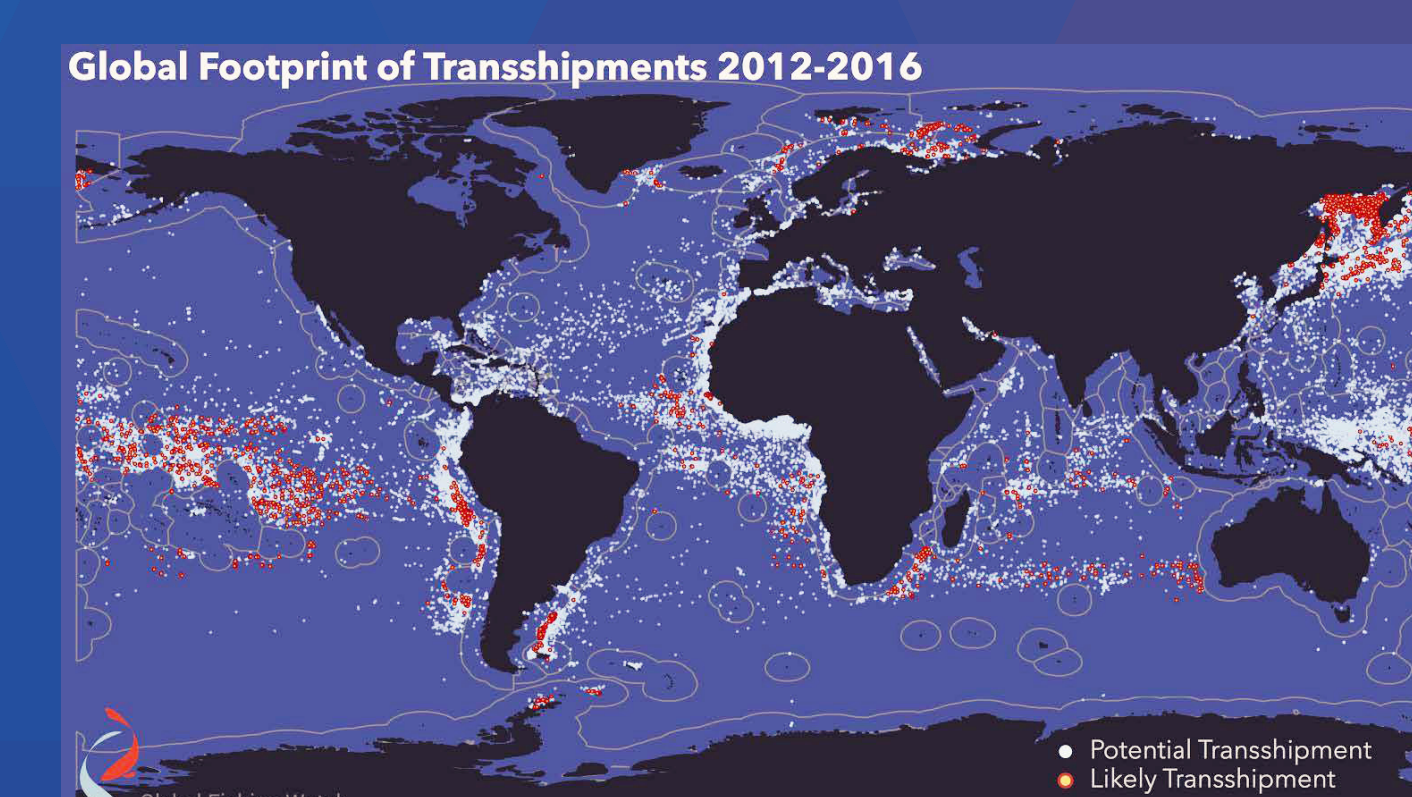
What can and should be done?

We discuss these effects in the light of field research carried out mostly in Senegal and recommend that such practices be addressed at several levels:

1. systematic prosecution by national and international anti-crime procedures³,
2. increase of public awareness and change in perceptions, including through more critical engagement of scientists,
3. prohibition of transshipments,
4. adoption of global catch registration schemes, and
5. capacity strengthening of both public institutions and humans suffering the consequences.

Some steps are underway, but more is needed

1. The Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission of seven Northwest African states has seized the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in 2014 seeking advice on the obligations and responsibilities of coastal states and flag states of vessels involved in IUU fishing⁴ in order to start addressing institutional dimensions.
2. Different initiatives, mostly by big international NGOs, produce encouraging results of tracking fisheries operations from space.
3. These should be better connected to in-country MCS and law enforcement e.g. in international trade, and flanked by consistent policies in favour of decent jobs in local industries.



References

- 1 / Doumbouya, A. et al., 2017. Assessing the Effectiveness of Monitoring Control and Surveillance of Illegal Fishing: The Case of West Africa. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, Vol. 4, Art. 50:10 p. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2017.00050
- 2 / Sall, A. and C.E. Nauen, 2017. Exploring alternatives and complements to top down approaches to research on small-scale fisheries. Ch. 29 in S. Jentoft, N. Franz, M.J. Barragan Paladines & R. Chuenpagdee (Eds.), *Unpacking the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries - From Rhetoric to Action*. New York, London, Springer.
- 3 / Interpol, Sous-Direction de la Sécurité environnementale (ENS), 2014. Etude sur la pêche illégale au large des côtes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. Lyon, Interpol, 72 p.
- 4 / International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, 2014. Minutes of public sittings held from 2 to 5 September 2014. Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC). Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted to the Tribunal. 134 p. HYPERLINK "https://www.itlos.org/fileadmin/itlos/documents/cases/case_no_21/Minutes.Case21.pdf" https://www.itlos.org/fileadmin

Picture Reference

- A / Migrant fishers in Sombédioune, Senegal. They suffer from illegal fishing competition by industrial vessels (Photo: A. Sall)
- B / From the pirogues in Guet Ndar, Senegal, most landings go straight to refrigerated trucks heading for regional markets and factories (Photo: P. Bottom)
- C / Much less fish is available to the women for local processing and marketing (Photo: P. Bottom)
- D / Inspection in Liberia of the vessel HISPANEN after multiple illegal operations (Photo Interpol)
- E / Reefer Leelwadee with 2 likely fishing vessels alongside transshipping (Image: DigitalGlobe)
- F / Global view of transshipments (Map: Global Fishing Watch)
- G / Chinese vessel at sea for 503 days with three reefer encounters facilitating illegal operations (Map: Oceana)