UN expert advises govts to promote local, small-scale fisheries

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Aggressive industrial fishing by foreign fleets is jeopardising food security in emerging nations, where governments should work harder to promote local and small-scale fisheries, according to a study by a United Nations (UN) expert.

Developing nations should make it harder for foreign industrial vessels to access their waters, the report recommends.

"Ocean-grabbing is taking place," said Olivier de Schutter, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food and the report's author, Reuters reports. "It's like land-grabbing, just less discussed and less visible."

The 47-page report titled "Fisheries and the Right to Food" will be presented to the UN General Assembly.

Ocean-grabbing involved "shady access agreements that farm small-scale fishermen, unreported catch, incursions into protected waters, and the diversion of resources away from local populations," de Schutter explained.

His report cited the example of islands in the western and central Pacific that give away all but 6 per cent of the value of a US$ 3 billion-tuna fishery to foreign fishing fleets. Guinea-Bissau keeps less than 2 per cent of the value of the fish caught off its coast per a deal struck with the European Union (EU).

De Schutter said some countries that possess industrial fleets were moving to tighten laws.

"What's getting worse is that the capacity of industrial fishing fleets is increasing," he said.

Governments earmark an estimated USD 30-34 billion in subsidies for fishing every year, and that money is often used on boat-building or fuel to thwart competition.

"We need to do more to reduce the capacity of the industrial fishing fleets and to manage the fish stocks in a much more sustainable way," said de Schutter.

He noted that 88 per cent of all aquaculture production is concentrated in Asia, leaving "huge potential" for Africa and Latin America.

The report states that local fishing is both more efficient and less wasteful than industrial fishing, and the writer called for measures that promote small-scale fishing, such as the establishment of "artisanal fishing zones."

"Small-scale fisheries actually catch more fish per gallon of fuel than industrial fleets, and discard fewer fish," the report reads.

Right now, total global fish production stands at about 143 million tonnes -- 90 million from fishing and 53 million from aquaculture, and the latter would have to swell to feed a rising world population. Population growth will raise demand by an anticipated 27 million tonnes over the next 20 years, de Schutter added.

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Olivier de Schutter, the UN special rapporteur. (Photo: UN Photo/Jeannot Ferre)
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