Even with an increase of fish production from 41,664 tonnes in 2021 to 43,560 tonnes in 2022, inexorable illegal fishing activities continue to threaten the water body's potential in Rwanda.

According to the 2021-2022 report by the Ministry of agriculture and Animal Resources, various poachers and equipment were seized through regular surveillance and monitoring of fishing activities.

In collaboration with Police Marine, Army Marine, and Cooperative Union, at least 6,790 nets, 759 poaching boats, 3,937 supersnets, 462 seine-nets, and 196 poachers reported to Police and Army Marine stations.

However, the trend is expected to reverse following the increase of lake surveillance in collaboration with Police Marines, Army Marines and fishing cooperative unions.

"In order to decrease illegal uncontrolled and unregulated fishing, 10 lake surveillances were conducted in collaboration with Police marine in eastern Lakes, where 1,507 illegal fishing gears, and 600kg of fish illegally captured were seized and destroyed in open view" the report states.

In addition to lake surveillance, regular sensitization meetings were held in different fishing zones namely; Muhazi, Gisaka, Nasho, Kivu, Bugesera, Northern, and Akagera to use good fishing techniques with legal fishing nets catching mature fish.

In the development of aquaculture, different production systems are being used and their capacity is increasing every year.

Fishing activities are now carried out in 17 lakes and 4 rivers located in 15 districts with aquaculture production being done in 3 production systems such as earthen ponds (324 ha), floating cages (59,390 cubic meters), and 41 dams with a total capacity of 31,360,000 cubic meters.

An online training of technicians from 12 tilapia hatcheries was conducted as planned in June last year, as well, over 40,000 brood stocks were being distributed to 13 hatcheries for tilapia breeding.

"Efforts have also been deployed to promote modern fish farming in cages, dams, tanks and ponds where 43,560 metric tonnes of fish and 43,747,270 fingerlings were produced" According to the report.

David Niyonizera a farmerman from Kiramuruzi says that illegal fishing means we’ll have fewer and fewer fish to catch ahead because other greedy fishmen use fine-supernets that catch even the fishlings, and which prevents fish from maturing and breeding.

“Authorities need to increase the crackdown on illegal fishing poachers and boats given that unregulated fishing has also resulted in declining fish stocks.” he noted.

Sam Manzi a fisherman at Lake Muhazi explains that fish poaching is practiced by both non-members and members of cooperatives.

“Dealers who sell illegal nets and low quality fishing materials from neighboring countries are also hurting the industry. The other plausible cause of depletion of stocks in lakes is excessive fishing and use of destructive gears” he added.

“We welcome all efforts by the government to combat illegal fishing,” added Manzi.