



**WELCOME REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR OF AU-IBAR
EXPERT CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN
AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA**

**CONSERVING AQUATIC BIODIVERSITY IN AFRICAN BLUE ECONOMY
PROJECT**

**05-07 OCTOBER, 2022
NAIVASHA, KENYA**

- Representative of the Kenyan Government
- Representatives of AU member states
- Representatives of Regional Economic Communities and Specialized Regional Bodies
- Development and Technical Partners
- Experts
- Non-State Actors
- Distinguished Participants, Ladies, and Gentlemen

Good morning to you all.

On behalf of Her Excellency the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, Amb. Yosefa Sacko, I warmly welcome you to this first expert consultative workshop on Gender Mainstreaming in the *“Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity in African Blue Economy Project”*.

I convey sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Kenya for hosting AU-IBAR and accepting my request to organize this workshop here in Naivasha. As you may recall, the inception meeting of the Project was held in this beautiful town last year and I clearly remember the enthusiasm and great support shown by all stakeholders towards successful implementation of the Project. It is a pleasure to be back to deliberate on pertinent issues related to gender inclusivity in the Project's implementation process.

I also wish to express profound gratitude to the Swedish government for their immense support to the development of Africa's blue economy through the "*Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity in African Blue Economy Project*", which seeks to strengthen gender inclusivity in aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management in Africa, among other objectives.

To the Regional Economic Communities, Regional Sea Conventions, Regional Fisheries Bodies, Experts, Non-State Actors, represented today, my sincerest appreciation goes to you for your unflinching support to AU-IBAR's initiatives on projects and programmes relating to animal resources development, including fisheries, aquaculture, bee, livestock and wildlife, and now all living blue economy resources. Your cooperation and support are most cherished.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the AU is implementing two policy instruments namely; Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS) and Africa Blue Economy Strategy (ABES). A major objective of these policies is to empower women and youth in fisheries and aquaculture, and strengthen their role and capacity to take full advantage for blue growth, poverty alleviation, food and nutritional security and socio-economic benefits in Africa. The

Sustainable Development Goal 5 - gender equality, further underpins the fact that the role of women and girls in conserving aquatic biodiversity often goes unrecognized.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, even though women and men undertake different roles in the use and management of natural resources, women mostly act as primary caretakers and natural resource managers. They control as much as 60-80% of the world's food production and play a relevant role in both water management and forestry. In fisheries and aquaculture development and management, women are involved in diverse ways, particularly in the area of marketing and processing. They make up 85% of the workforce in post-harvest fishery related jobs, involving in fish processing (sun drying, frying, salting and smoking) and fish trade, being boat owners, financing fishing expeditions and engaging in fish farming. Some women are also involved as managers and researchers in the sector. Also, women are heavily involved in estuarine and mangrove ecosystem-based shell fisheries. They are dominant users of estuarine shellfish resources, constituting more than 70% of coastal shell fishers. Women are thus particularly vulnerable to the effects of biodiversity loss and are poised to participate fully in conservation initiatives since it has direct implications for their livelihoods. Women have thus been at the forefront of mangrove restoration efforts to curb climate change and also demonstrating a pathway for food security through rights-based co-management of shell fisheries in estuarine and mangrove ecosystems. Consequently, these gendered roles have provided women with vital technical and traditional knowledge on managing natural resources, particularly in terms of preservation, conservation and innovation.

Distinguished Delegates, considering the high representation of women and the crucial roles they play in the use and management of aquatic resources, we would expect them to be fully integrated at all levels in the use and management of these resources. This is however not the case. In many African settings, women are often marginalized and under-represented in decision-making and active participation in the management of aquatic resources. These challenges are mainly rooted in certain cultural and social norms and practices and unequal rights over land and other natural resources.

In order to develop effective solutions for conserving biodiversity, gender differentiated roles of natural resource management must be fully analyzed to ensure that both women's and men's specific knowledge in these areas are being equally integrated into programs and policies. Subsequently, women's equal access to rights and engagement in decision-making processes on resource management must be promoted. By strengthening the role and participation of women in policy and decision making, they have the potential to contribute highly to achieving conservation goals for sustainable development.

Dear Delegates, in the light of this, AU-IBAR has convened this consultative workshop to engage experts in the Continent to identify priority issues to be addressed by the Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity Project, to strengthen gender inclusivity in aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management in AU member states and Regional Economic Communities. This is a crucial step to developing a continental strategy for gender inclusivity in aquatic biodiversity and environmental management in Africa. I strongly believe that *“Empowering every*

man and woman to play a role in conserving aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems is our best bet for developing Africa's blue economy”.

I humbly invite you all to engage actively in each of the activities lined up for this august meeting so we can collectively achieve the good purpose of the meeting.

On behalf of Her Excellency Amb. Yosefa Sacko, I thank delegates from AU member states, Regional Economic Communities, specialized institutions, experts and partners for your acceptance of the invitation to this important meeting. I wish to reiterate Commissioner's gratitude to the Government of Kenya for the unyielding support to AU-IBAR in particular and to the larger African Union in general.

Once again, welcome, Karibu as is said in Swahili.

I wish you successful meeting outcomes.