



AFRICAN UNION
INTERAFRICAN BUREAU
FOR ANIMAL RESOURCES



AUDA-NEPAD
AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



POLICY BRIEF

Improving Data Collection, Dissemination and Sharing for Small-Scale Fisheries Development in Africa

This Policy Brief is a consolidation of outcomes of the deliberations by the stakeholders at the inaugural meeting of the revised African Fisheries Reform Mechanism (AFRM) Think Tanks Executive Committee, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 9th - 11th March 2022, organized by AU-IBAR in collaboration with AUDA-NEPAD. The Policy Note has been prepared in collaboration with the AFRM Small Scale Fisheries (SSF) Working Group (WG) members and experts from the region.

Summary

The African SSF account for more than 60 % of Africa's fisheries production and almost all the catches from the sector are destined for human consumption. The sector provides significant employment opportunities, incomes, and food and nutrition security for poor rural communities in Africa. In 2014, the contribution of SSF to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and to Agriculture Gross Domestic Product (GDPA) on the African continent were estimated at 0.76 % and 3.44 respectively. In 2011, it was estimated that over twelve million Africans relied on SSF as their primary livelihood, and a further 90 million (farmers and resource poor) depended on fishing as part of a diversified livelihood strategy. More than 200 million Africans rely on fish as an affordable source of protein and important micro-nutrients made available mostly by African small-scale fishers¹. A 2008 study by NEPAD estimated that fish contributed 33% of animal protein consumed by Africans. Fish is a rich source of easily digestible high-quality protein that contains all essential amino acids, essential fats and other important nutrients not found in most other protein sources. In addition, fish is usually high in unsaturated fats and thus provides health benefits, especially protection against cardiovascular diseases and also helps foetal and infant development of the brain and nervous system. Thus, fish can have significant positive nutritional impact on plant-based diets even when taken in small quantities, which is the case on our continent. Also important is that SSF provide a welfare function by absorbing labour in rural areas and providing a safety net in times of hardship. African SSF have strong gendered labour divisions, with men associated with the catching of fish and ownership of boats, and women with processing and trading

Because of the foregoing different values and assets, SSF in African countries has taken on an important role at continental level to the extent that the African Union has declared it as a priority area of the Policy Framework and the Reform Strategy adopted in June 2014 and later revised in 2021. Other commitments

¹ de Graaf and Garibaldi, 2014.

and initiatives adopted at the pan-African and global level (FAO, United Nations) for example the Tenure Guidelines and the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines (VGSSF) and the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) have come to confirm this importance and priority in policy of SSF in terms of its role in meeting nutritional needs, and improving the living conditions of small scale fishing communities.

The` recognition of the contribution of SSF to the development of the continent must not obscure the difficulties and challenges faced by Member States in the governance of small-scale fisheries² . In 2010 already, the first Conference of African Ministers of Fisheries and Aquaculture (CAMFA 1) recognised that the benefits from Africa's fisheries sectors are under threat as a result of: ineffective governance; lack of accurate data; open-access character of capture fisheries; illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; insufficient financial investments; poorly conceived and implemented policies; insufficient organisational structures; high post-harvest losses; poor value chain development and inadequate benefits from trade in fish and fish products. These factors contribute to the biological and economic overexploitation of many small-scale fisheries leading to negative impacts on the fish stocks, nutrition and food security, and jobs and livelihoods on the continent.

Vital to the strategic planning for communities that rely on SSF, is data to inform policy decisions for the sustainable development and management of fisheries. A key concern for fisheries data collection activities is freshness, accuracy, completeness, and accessibility of the collected data. Therefore, it is recommended to improve the frequency and accuracy of the data collection, processing, presentation, dissemination and sharing for SSF development in Africa. At continent AU level, the problem of data can be seen in the fact that the figures being used in the preceding paragraph are mostly from a study done in 2011 and reported in 2014 (de Graaf and Garibaldi, 2014).

Preamble

- Access to fresh (latest) accurate data and information are key in the sustainable management and utilisation of SSF to support decision making.
- Types of relevant data and information include but are not limited to: numbers of fishers (desegregated into boat owners and crewmembers), number of fishing boats, number and types of fishing gears, quantities of fish catches, number of traders and processors, quantities of exports and imports, fish value, revenues, consumption, etc. Such data also needs to include the number of women participants at the various value chain nodes (e.g. boat and gear ownership, processing, trading) in the various activities including management and decision-making bodies.
- Under Fish Gov 1 (2014 - 2018) a Technical Guide to harmonised fisheries data collection, interpretation and management was developed and Directors of Fisheries and /or Fisheries managers from African Union (AU) Member States (MS) were trained on application of the guide³.
- AU MS differ in terms of capacities, capabilities and resourcing of data collection. Consequently, the development of policies guiding improvement of fisheries data and information collection at national level, sharing and dissemination at sub-regional (Regional Economic Communities -RECs and Regional Fisheries Bodies -RFBs) and continental level need to take these differences into cognisance.

² African Union, 2016a & African Union, 2016b

³ Informal Cross-Border Trade (ICBT) refers to 'trade merchandise which may be legal imports or exports on one side of the border and illicit on the other side and vice-versa, on account of not having been subjected to statutory border formalities such as customs clearance' (Afrika and Ajumbo 2012: 1). ICBT involves bypassing border posts, concealment of goods, under-reporting, false classification, under-invoicing and other similar illicit practices and activities.

Problem

Despite the development of the guide under FishGov 1 and the support from other initiatives (e.g. FAO), the veracity and quality of the fisheries data and information, and the frequency of the data collection leaves a lot to be desired. In most countries the data is simply not trustworthy for planning and fisheries management. In addition, the data and information is not good enough for solid and accurate for assessment of the contribution of SSF to various important metrics such as GDP, GDPA, landed volumes, landed values, income from value chain activities for the various value chain actors at the various value chain nodes, food and nutrition security, employment and AU Agenda 2063.

This undermines the competitiveness of the sector compared to other sectors both national and regional levels. Poor governance of the sector resulting from lack of accurate and timely relevant data as basis for management decisions risks sustainable management and development of the sectors, thereby threatening the livelihoods of fishing communities and the aquatic ecosystems upon which productivity is based, , and marginalises and hinders the sector from attracting sufficient resources for management and development.

Key issues (root causes)

- Weak institutional capacities to collect, process, interpret, present and disseminate data for informed decision making.
- Inadequate data and information to inform formulation of policies, management decisions and development plans for SSF.
- Lack of coherent and aligned policies and legal frameworks to facilitate sub-regional (RFBs and RECs) data and information exchange and sharing, especially for shared stocks.
- Complexity of SSF (many actors involved, illegalities, illegal practices (IUU), open access, geographically spread (no requirement for centralised landing and launching), no limits on output (not managed on quota basis) non-organisation of fishers and fish workers.
- Under declaration of fish catches, processed fish, mainly to avoid taxes results in data inaccuracies. This is particularly common among cross-border fish traders.
- Inadequate funding and low investment in data collection. Some of the consequences of this is that the data collectors do not have good and reliable means of transport for their enumeration tasks and activities, they are poorly remunerated, and they are poorly supervised (a common occurrence is that they sometimes fill-in the forms at home)
- It is estimated that large volumes of cross-border fish trade is conducted as informal trade. It is estimated that about 70% of cross-border fish trade in Africa is conducted by women. Apart from to seeking to evade taxes or fees imposed by governments, traders try to avoid administrative formalities related to areas such as health, import of agricultural products, security and immigration, which are perceived as costly, complex and time consuming.
- Poor valuation of the contribution of fisheries to the national economies and low visibility of Fisheries Departments, which results in limited awareness of the importance of SSF among key government departments (e.g. Treasury and Ministries of Finance) and policy makers. This usually translates into poor funding for Fisheries Departments and fishing sectors.
- Inadequate data on small lakes, rivers, swamps, which have inaccessible landing sites and lack infrastructure, because the focus is usually on main fishing water bodies. This under values the contribution of such water bodies to food security and nutrition, rural livelihoods and hinders their inclusion in policy decision making processes and sustainable fisheries management.

- Limited adoption of modern technologies for data collection and dissemination. In most instances, data collection for SSF is still based on estimates from boat-based or gear-based catch survey assessments
- Limited capacity at community and institutional level in statistical and research data collection, collation and analysis for informed decision making.

Main actions for successes

- Pan African Fisheries Data collection Strategy needs to be widely disseminated by AU-IBAR and implemented by the AU MS.
- Conduct training to target Directors and Fisheries Managers, and lower level officers responsible for data collection and analysis in the AU MS.
- Source for adequate funding for AU MS to develop appropriate systems of data collection, analysis and dissemination.
- Incorporate as a priority fisheries data and information in the Animal Resource Information System (ARIS-3) at AU-IBAR,.
- Promote application of modern technologies for data collection and dissemination by the AU MS.

Policy recommendations

- Fast track the incorporation of fisheries data and information in the ARIS at AU-IBAR.
- Build capacity at community and institutional level in data collection, analysis and dissemination.
- Promote participatory approach in data collection - all actors should be able to collect data (fishers, NGOs, scientists etc.).
- Standardize and harmonize data collection protocols.
- Create awareness among actors on the importance of data in decision making.
- Improve access to relevant information by diversifying communication platforms and uptake pathways.
- Enhance application of modern technologies for data collection and dissemination
- Package appropriate information for targeted stakeholders.
- Develop appropriate policies to facilitate data collection, sharing and dissemination.
- Diversify data and information sources.

Conclusion

For many millions of people in Africa, fishing and aquaculture is the only available source of employment, income and animal protein. The constraints associated with these sectors – particularly in the context of open access and depleted fish stocks, and lack of effective management in the marine and inland small-scale fisheries - represent a significant policy and governance challenge for many African governments.

Inadequate and infrequent data collection, lack of information sharing and dissemination puts fishing communities at a disadvantage in terms of competing and showing their contribution to the national economies. It is therefore important to develop robust and frequent (routine) data collection, information sharing and dissemination mechanisms that can support appropriate policy decision making processes and sustainable management of the SSF.

Sources of further information

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