



POLICY BRIEF

COST EFFECTIVE MECHANISM FOR STAKEHOLDER'S PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL IN THE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR IN AFRICA

KEY MESSAGES

- Stakeholder consultation workshops/meetings are cost effective for state actors and Non-state actors to consult stakeholders at national and regional level in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa. Other key stakeholder consultation channels include structured questionnaires, think tank fora and key informant interviews (KIIs).
- There is need to use an effective method or combination of methods for consulting particular stakeholders on a particular topic.
- Low cost stakeholder consultative approaches are not necessarily cost effective in terms of time utilized and value for money as well as maximizing stakeholder participation.
- A comprehensive stakeholder consultation plan is necessary to ensure stakeholders are effectively engaged in the consultations and legitimate contributions are documented.
- Virtual consultation channels are key for consultations during pandemics, epidemics and emergencies
- The stakeholder consultations yield outputs addressing the topic(s) of concern but the prevailing weak institutional structures; with logistical and financial challenges constrain the application of the recommendations from the consultations.

BACKGROUND

The African Union-Inter African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) is a specialized technical office of the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission, mandated to support and coordinate the utilization of livestock, fisheries, aquaculture and wildlife as resources for both human wellbeing and economic development in African Union Member States (AU-MS). The interventions of AU-IBAR in the fisheries and aquaculture sector are guided by the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS). The PFRS was formulated to promote policy coherence and improved governance of African fisheries and aquaculture to facilitate sustainable African Fisheries Development. This is envisaged to contribute to increased and sustainable contribution of African fisheries and aquaculture to food security, improved livelihoods, and wealth creation. In line with this, from 2014, AU-IBAR facilitated the establishment of regional and continental Fisheries and Aquaculture Platforms and Networks to foster effective participation and consultation of stakeholders in policy development and implementation. The revised African Fisheries Reform Mechanism (AFRM) also extensively utilizes consultative processes geared towards rational management of fisheries and aquaculture

resources in Africa. In line with the PFRS and AFRM, several studies involving stakeholder consultations have been carried out and yielded enormous information geared towards rational and coherent management of the fisheries in Africa. However, there is poor implementation of the recommendations/outputs from the studies by African Union Member States (AUMS), regional institutions for policy change or governance reform. This was attributed to the ineffective stakeholder consultative processes. Hence, in 2022, AU-IBAR commissioned a study to develop mechanisms for effective stakeholder participation and cost effective stakeholder consultation (engagement). This policy brief is based on findings from a study that identified cost effective stakeholder consultative mechanisms in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa and recommendations for improvement. The information was derived through opinions of continent-wide actors (governmental, development partners, and civil society) in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa as well as literature review.

CONTEXT OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Stakeholder consultation involves the development of constructive, productive relationships over a long term. Effective stakeholder consultation enables identification and monitoring of trends, challenges, concerns and perceptions over time with specific groups of stakeholders. Stakeholders' concerns and feedbacks are valuable sources of information that can be used to improve project design and outcomes. Continuous consultation also ensures buy-in from stakeholders and ensures that the project is not diverting from the expectations and needs of those who have an interest in its affairs. This ensures that decisions made are based on stakeholder views and aligned with those whom the actions will affect. It also leads to more satisfaction from stakeholders with the outcome leading to a high chance for successful implementation of the project. It is envisaged that effective stakeholder consultative mechanisms in the African fisheries and aquaculture sector will lead to more rational utilization and effective

management of fisheries and aquaculture resources in Africa for food security and wealth creation.

The level of effectiveness of a stakeholder consultative process is dependent on selecting relevant stakeholders to consult, clarity of the topic or matter to be discussed and ensuring mutual participation of the stakeholders. Careful consideration needs to be made in order to select the rightful stakeholder consultative approach to use. The consultative approach will depend on a number of factors. For instance, how knowledgeable the stakeholder(s) is on the topic/issue of concern, extent to which the issue of discussion affects the stakeholder(s), the reason/purpose for the consultation, literacy level of the target stakeholder and their social status.

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIVE MECHANISMS USED BY STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR IN AFRICA

Following interviews with state actors (SAs) such as Directorates of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DoFA) and RECs as well as Non-state actors (NSAs) such as fisheries and aquaculture networks/platforms and implementing partners of AU-IBAR (FAO and AUDA-NEPAD) in January-February 2023, it was noted that SAs and NSAs interface with a range of stakeholders in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The stakeholders include fishing communities, fish farmers, fisheries and aquaculture state and non-state actors, academic and research institutions, policy makers, fish traders, fish processors, fish consumers, fisheries and aquaculture input suppliers, manufacturers of fisheries and aquaculture equipment, environmental, agencies, law enforcement agencies, development agencies, and intergovernmental organizations. These stakeholders are consulted by DoFA, RECs, fisheries platforms/networks, FAO, and AUDA-NEPAD at national/regional level to obtain information for planning and implementing reforms for improving and sustaining fisheries and aquaculture production in Africa. The most commonly used stakeholder consultation

mechanisms were physical consultative meetings/ workshops and Email communication (Table 1 and 2). Other consultative channels utilized included physical conferences, telephone, virtual meetings, FGDs, KIIs, structured questionnaires, think tank forum, whatsapp, training, and facebook (Table 1 and 2). Stakeholder meetings/workshops, Email communication, Conferences, and virtual meetings have enabled AU-IBAR to facilitate establishment of regional and continental fisheries and aquaculture coordination platforms and

networks, anchorage of some Regional Fisheries Bodies to RECs, and development/revision of Policy Framework such as PFRS, AFRM and others. Some consultative mechanisms are used complementarily to support one another. For instance, the e-mail and telephone communications can be used to mobilize stakeholders for the consultative meetings/ workshops. However, the email might not be effective for stakeholders with low literacy level.

Table 1: State Actors’ opinions on the stakeholder consultative mechanisms / approaches often used in the fisheries and aquaculture sector

Type of stakeholder consultative mechanism/approach	Number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism is often used	Percentage (%) number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism is often used
1. Physical Consultative meeting	19	82.6
2. Physical Consultative workshop	14	60.9
3. Email communication	16	69.6
4. Physical Conference	6	26.1
5. Virtual meeting	9	39.1
6. Focus group discussions	9	39.1
7. Think tank forum	1	4.3
8. Whatsapp	6	26.1
9. Training	11	47.8
10. Key informant interviews	9	39.1
11. Telephone	11	47.8
12. Facebook	2	8.7
13. Structured questionnaires	6	26.1
14. Websites	2	8.7
15. Brochures	1	4.3

The stakeholder consultation mechanisms/ channels are paramount and pertinent, and differ in the approaches used to apply them. They have different purposes, scopes of responsibility and reach, and levels of engagement that are expected from the stakeholders involved. For

instance, consultative approaches that involve social media/ICT channels such as whatsapp, facebook and websites/portals were found to be more appealing for consulting youth but not elderly stakeholders.

Table 2: Non-State Actors' opinions on the stakeholder consultative mechanisms often used by AU-IBAR, and fisheries and aquaculture platforms and networks

Type of stakeholder consultative mechanism/approach	Number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism is often used	Percentage (%) number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism is often used
1. Physical Consultative meeting	7	63.6
2. Physical Consultative workshop	6	54.6
3. Email communication	5	45.5
4. Physical Conference	4	36.4
5. Virtual meeting	4	36.4
6. Focus group discussions	3	27.3
7. Think tank forum	2	18.2
8. Whatsapp	2	18.2
9. Training	2	18.2
10. Key informant interviews	1	9.1
11. Facebook	1	9.1

OPTIONS FOR COST EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL IN THE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR IN AFRICA

Following a questionnaire survey conducted from January – February 2023 to collect opinions of SAs and NSAs on which approaches are cost effective for stakeholder participation and consultation, stakeholder consultative workshops/meetings were identified as the most cost effective mechanism for consulting national and regional stakeholders in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa (Table 3). Cost effectiveness was considered as the cost of time utilized in the consultation and value for the money spent.

Effective participation was considered the extent of stakeholder involvement and level of clarity of stakeholder responses. While consultative workshops might appear costly, the value achieved in view of the realization of the expected results takes precedence above other relatively important considerations. The cost effectiveness of consultative workshops/meetings is reflected in their ability to ensure that different stakeholders come together and effectively share experiences and collectively discuss issues of concern to them as well as proposing solutions. Ultimately, the consultations result into mutually agreed positions about the subject matter of discussion, including obtaining clarity about issues of contention.

Table 3: Opinions of respondents about the level of effectiveness of each stakeholder consultative mechanisms used by AU-IBAR

Type of consultative approach	Number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism ensures effective stakeholder participation	Number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism is highly cost effectiveness (value for money)
1. Consultative meeting	23	14
2. Consultative workshop	27	18
3. Think tank forum	15	11
4. Conference	13	11
5. Virtual meeting	03	9
6. Telephone	03	9
7. Structured questionnaires	16	10
8. Email communication	10	8
9. Focus group discussions	12	9

Type of consultative approach	Number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism ensures effective stakeholder participation	Number of respondents indicating that the consultative mechanism is highly cost effectiveness (value for money)
10. Key informant interviews	14	10
11. Website/ online portal (Questions and answers)	05	07
12. Training	12	7
13. Whatsapp	02	7
14. Facebook	02	5
15. Exchange visits	01	0
16. On-field trials	01	0
18. Blog	03	0
19. Research Presentation	01	1
20. Electronic media	02	0
21. On-farm trials	01	0
22. Research presentations	01	0
23. Radio	01	0
24. Print media	01	0
25. Electronic media	02	0

The study also established that effective consultations could be achieved through Structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The structured questionnaire requires a low cognitive and thinking load because it consists of standardized closed questions, asked in a set sequence and requires respondents to choose from a set of predefined answers. This makes it less time consuming to fill up and easy for the data collectors to code and analyze the responses. For national and regional consultations, the structured questionnaires can be emailed or the survey monkey tool can be used to send the questionnaires to the stakeholders and receive them back. The survey monkey has an advantage of doing some computations of the data received. On the other hand, KIIs are a good mechanism to identify important areas that should be incorporated into planned discussions. It involves interviewing people with specific knowledge/experience about certain aspects of interest in the consultations. KIIs are of benefit when carrying out national, regional and continent-wide consultations. They can be conducted on phone or using virtual meetings. The challenge would be accessing the persons required to participate in the interview on phone.

Think Tank Fora and Focus Group Discussions were also identified as feasible since they involve few carefully selected persons deemed to have expert knowledge about the subject matter of discussion. This could be achieved in meetings that are physical, virtual or hybrid (physical and virtual provision run concurrently).

Under unfavourable circumstances constrained by pandemics, epidemics, and limited resources (funding), physical stakeholder consultative workshops may need to engage a few stakeholders represented by a limited number of Working Groups (WGs) or think tank fora. The WG representatives may then cascade and disseminate or conduct the various forms of consultative mechanisms to the specific regions/ countries/networks or platforms in the African Union dimension. Then, for evaluation or monitoring or validation, or subsequent follow-up at the continental level (AU), a virtual meeting/ conference may be employed. In addition, in situations when AU IBAR has limited funds and other logistics, the physical workshops meetings, conferences as well as think tanks might attract less preference compared to the virtual consultative meetings/events.

The experiences from the Covid-19 pandemic, epidemics and emergencies indicated that the use of virtual platforms might lessen the risk of exposure to infections and burden of costs and time for organisations/institutions to hold stakeholder consultations. The most commonly used virtual meeting tools/electronic applications (apps) include skype, zoom, google meet and Microsoft teams. Each of the apps has provision for HD audio, video conferencing, raising hands when ones need to speak, muting, screen sharing, recording, and exchange of messaging among others. The apps can be installed in laptop computers, tablets, phones and/or watches, and used to follow/hold virtual meetings.

In case of future pandemics, epidemics and emergency situations, the following innovative approaches are proposed for enhancing virtual stakeholder consultations:

- a. Orient the virtual meeting applications to have provision to automatically translate/change the speakers speech to other languages. This real-time translation makes it possible to communicate with global stakeholders.
- b. Automatic background noise removal could also be incorporated into the apps to automatically remove distracting and unwanted sounds.
- c. Have provision for replacing distractive and unattractive backgrounds of the meeting attendees with more pleasing and appreciate scenery.
- d. 360o video conferencing to see everyone around the meeting table/conference to create an in-person feeling/experience in the meeting.
- e. Have provisions for voice commands to enable meeting facilitators and attendees to get live help to adjust settings or enable features.
- f. Include gesture recognition abilities in the applications to allow attendees can send reactions during meetings, apart from raising their hands.

In order to effectively use the apps for virtual meetings, there is a need for stakeholders to be knowledgeable on how to operate/navigator-

through them because the apps have some differences. Each application has tutorials to guide the users. However, virtual consultations might not be feasible for stakeholders with low literacy level. This often the case with grassroots communities, and yet they play key roles in the fisheries and aquaculture value-chains.

The respondents noted that while virtual consultative approaches (meetings, workshops, conferences, or think tanks) might appear to be less costly compared to the physical stakeholder consultative mechanism, poor internet connectivity is often a challenge and there is a risk of registering a less attentive and effective audience in comparison to the physical meetings. Apart from these challenges, virtual meetings appear to be appropriate for the platforms and networks given that the members on the platforms are in different countries and do not physically meet regularly. Most of the members of the platforms and networks revealed that the only time when they get to meet physically is when AU-IBAR invites them for a stakeholder consultative workshop. This is when they create time after the workshop sessions to discuss issues of concern to their platforms and networks.

GUIDELINES FOR COST EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS, AND ACCURATELY DOCUMENTING AND REPORTING STAKEHOLDERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

i. Develop consultation plan / Preparation stage

Stakeholder consultation is dynamic and may consist of several complementary consultation activities, therefore, it is important to have a comprehensive plan to guide the consultation process and facilitate accurate documenting and reporting of stakeholder contributions.

The stakeholder consultation plan should details the subject and purpose/objective of consultation and expected impact of the consultation. It should focus on those aspects, which stakeholders can influence, with all stakeholders having opportunity to express their views on the plan. Early involvement of stakeholders in framing the

subject matter for consultation can help to ensure the relevance and uptake of the recommendations from the consultation. Provide adequate time for them to prepare feedback and advice, to achieve meaningful input. The stakeholders should also be given advance notice about the planned stakeholder consultation, its objective, and how they will be consulted, what to expect during and after the consultations.

It is important to carry out a Stakeholder analysis to properly identify stakeholders to be consulted and the best method and form for consulting the target stakeholders. The stakeholders targeted are those likely to be interested in the topic to be addressed in the consultation, and/or who will be affected by the topic addressed, and who is likely to be able to influence decisions. Do this while ensuring gender and social inclusivity by involving diverse groups to participate. A promotional campaign for the consultations could be conducted using specialist media or events.

The plan should also detail where the consultations will be carried out cost effectively, the likely number of participants to manage cost effectively, the logistics required and associated cost, the people who will be facilitating the consultation process, and tasks assigned to them prior to, during and after the consultation, and a schedule for the consultations, (realistic date and time for the consultation process). Setting realistic time limits for presentations and discussions is key. It is important to take into account seasonal pressures on the stakeholders e.g. festive seasons, public holidays, the end of financial year and holiday periods, and other competing activities (taking children to school, agricultural activities) etc. In the case of emergencies, an explanation should be given why the timeframe for consultation is short.

Where stakeholders are feeling over-consulted, then targeted or group requests could be considered to reduce the burden on stakeholders and improve efficiency.

ii. **Conducting stakeholder consultations cost effectively**

The study identified stakeholder workshops as the most cost effective method for stakeholder consultation. Other consultative methods that were ranked as cost effective included Structured questionnaires, Think tanks, and KIIs.

In order to conduct stakeholder workshops effectively (time spent and value for money), its is important to ensure that:

- a. **Informed consent of the stakeholders** should be sought to determine stakeholders' willingness to participate in the consultations. Stakeholders should not be forced to participate; rather, they should be convinced to participate by enlightening them on the objectives and benefits of the consultations.
- b. **Facilitators arrive at the venue early to confirm that every** thing needed for the workshop is in place before the start of the program/ consultations
- c. **Have a back-up plan.** E.g. in case some technology fails. E.g. internet, computer, flash disc etc.
- d. **Follow the agenda of the workshop** that should have the purpose/objectives of the workshop and should be presented at the start of the workshop.
- e. **Create a participatory atmosphere** and set clear expectations at the beginning of the workshop and clarify if participants' expectations are outside the objectives of the consultation.
- f. **Have structured and guided/facilitated discussions** with stakeholders in workshops, KIIs and think tanks to guide stakeholders in reaching consensus on the subject discussed
- g. **Presentations should be in format and platform easy for the stakeholders to understand** and through a means that enables stakeholders to consult in the easiest way to suit their needs.
- h. **Adapt or modify the consultation approach** depending on the need of the stakeholder/s.
- i. **The language used should to be simple and understandable** by the stakeholders.
- j. **Gather participant's input** using different techniques during workshops/meetings. E.g.

creative techniques for brainstorming use small group work with pre-selected members and have plenary sessions after group discussions. Ensure that all stakeholders are provided an opportunity to contribute.

- k. The facilitator should communicate persuasively** using simple language, be curious, and ask stakeholders probing questions politely and not with demands.
- l. Note non-verbal messages of participants** because they pass a message on whether the participants are happy or not e.g. body language and tone of voice.
- m. Gather/record stakeholders input.** This requires effective listening to the contributions and concerns of the stakeholders, understanding, analyzing and capturing or recording of stakeholder concerns and feedback.
- n. Transparency:** The facilitators should not influence the opinions of the stakeholders and take all opinions in good faith and use the stakeholder views in decision-making. Where stakeholder input cannot be incorporated, it should be clarified and a reason given for not considering those views.
- o. Confidentiality:** Confidential information should not be publicly shared and where necessary keep anonymous the provider (e.g. individual, institution) of the information.
- p. Get feedback from stakeholders.** Informal opportunities can also be used to seek feedback/monitor and review performance of the consultative process. The consultants should respond promptly to the queries of stakeholders and show interest in their input.

Document stakeholder views using an appropriate approaches using the options below:

Converging: This approach involves putting together similar ideas to derive key aspects to address. Once a critical mass of stakeholders' ideas has been reached, it might become unproductive to keep collecting more ideas. The facilitator should stop collecting more stakeholder views and focus on evaluating, comparing, categorizing, ranking, and clustering the ideas that have been collected in order to come up with key issues, solutions or strategies to be acted on.

It is advisable not to discard unused ideas because they may prove useful as idea triggers during future consultation sessions.

Voting: This involves writing on individual sticky notes one idea generated during the brainstorming session. Then letting all participants to choose and write down three to four key ideas that they feel need to be intervened on. The most common ideas are identified and ranked based on the number of votes. Other voting attributes that make sense can be invented. Overall, this process allows every member to have an equal say in the prioritization of ideas.

Best practice approach: The stakeholders being consulted decide upon one or two ideas for each of the key issues/categories being discussed.

Purposely evaluating and considering ideas:

This is accomplished by engaging various mindsets so as to bring out a range of possible interventions on the ideas being assessed. It helps keep stakeholders away from their set styles of thinking and forces them to look at the ideas being assessed from multiple points of view and assessment criteria. This avoids bias in decision-making and evaluates ideas based on a more holistic outlook. The stakeholders may then analyze the various ideas and objectively identify the best and feasible ideas.

Recordings, pictures and observations: The key findings from recordings, pictures and observations have to be precisely documented and properly stored.

iii) Communicate and disseminate results of stakeholder consultations to stakeholders.

The findings from the consultations should be communicated to the target stakeholders. Ensure that the stakeholders who participated in the consultation process get the feedback on the outputs from the consultations and inform them on how the stakeholders' input will be used in decision-making. The stage is considered the accountability measure of consultations. It might be necessary to availing all information on the

consultations. This includes the record sheets (hard and soft copy), notes taken, recordings, and pictures. When using website or platforms to publish/provide feedback, use easily searchable websites/platforms.

iv) Review the consultation process / evaluate

Review is an integral part of the overall consultation process. It allows an organisation to examine the effectiveness of the consultation process and provides a basis for refining the process for future use. A review should be conducted when the consultation process has been completed. The results should be included in the final consultation report. It should consider whether the objectives of the consultation have been met, including whether the methods used were appropriate to the objectives and the cost-effectiveness of the consultation process. It should also identify any lessons learned to inform future consultation processes.

CONCLUSIONS

- The findings of this study indicated that physical stakeholder workshops/meeting were the most commonly used mechanisms for consulting stakeholders at national and regional level in the fisheries sector in Africa. In addition, stakeholder workshops/meetings were the most effective in terms of value for the money spent, ensuring full stakeholder participation, and meeting the objectives of the consultation. This is because participants can brain storm and mutually agreement on the matters of concern. Other consultative channels that were considered cost effective included structured questionnaires, think tanks and KIIs.
- Consultative workshops/meetings, structured questionnaires, KII and think tanks have yielded valuable information and policy documents for guiding sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management in Africa. However, there are institutional, logistical and financial challenges constrain AU-MS and NSAs from effectively implementing the outputs from the consultative processes.
- Effectiveness of physical consultative

workshops can be affected during scenarios where there are pandemics and epidemics and it is dangerous for people to congregate; or under emergency situations; and under limited funding to implement the workshop.

- Creating a stakeholder consultation plan can help ensure stakeholders are meaningfully engaged in a cost effective manner.
- No single consultative mechanism is sufficient in itself. Other supporting mechanisms such as email, whatsapp etc. facilitate smooth planning, stakeholder mobilization, and holding / carrying out consultative workshops/ meetings and other consultative approaches such as conferences, think tanks, KIIs among others.
- During times of pandemics, epidemics and emergencies virtual consultative approaches become inevitable.
- Low cost consultative approaches may not necessarily be cost effective in terms of time spent, value for money, maximizing stakeholder participation (e.g. virtual meetings).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. The consultancy dealt more on stakeholder consultations at national, regional and continental level. It is recommended that future studies be carried out to develop cost effective mechanisms for consulting/engaging grassroots communities in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in AU-MS. This is because grass root communities are key actors in the fisheries and aquaculture value chains and place a key role in rural food security.
- II. The stakeholders noted that AU-MS, RECs, RFBs, and NSAs in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (national regional and continental) have institutional, financial and logistical challenges that affect their capacity to effective implementation recommendations from stakeholder consultative engagements. To address these challenges, it is recommended that institutions involved in the fisheries and aquaculture sector are mobilized to build synergies and partnerships amongst

themselves to complement each others efforts.

- III. During the stakeholder consultative meeting held in Naivasha, Kenya from 7th – 10th March 2023, about 30 stakeholders in the fisheries and aquaculture sector were trained on how to facilitate/conduct stakeholder consultations using the cost effective approaches identified in the consultancy. However, the stakeholders trained were a small fraction of the stakeholders in the AU-MS. It is recommended that more institutions involved in stakeholder consultations in the fisheries sector be trained in cost effective approaches for conducting stakeholder consultations.
- IV. Stakeholders who will be consulted need be involved in planning the consultative process so that they give input into the designed/drafted questions or questionnaire and thereafter, it should be pre-tested. In case of continental-wide consultations, a virtual meeting could be organized to discuss the questionnaire before it is used to conduct the study. This will ensure that the questionnaire is well designed to collect the relevant, comprehensive, precise, and quality information for the study.
- V. There is need to develop/update institutional communication strategies and implement them.

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