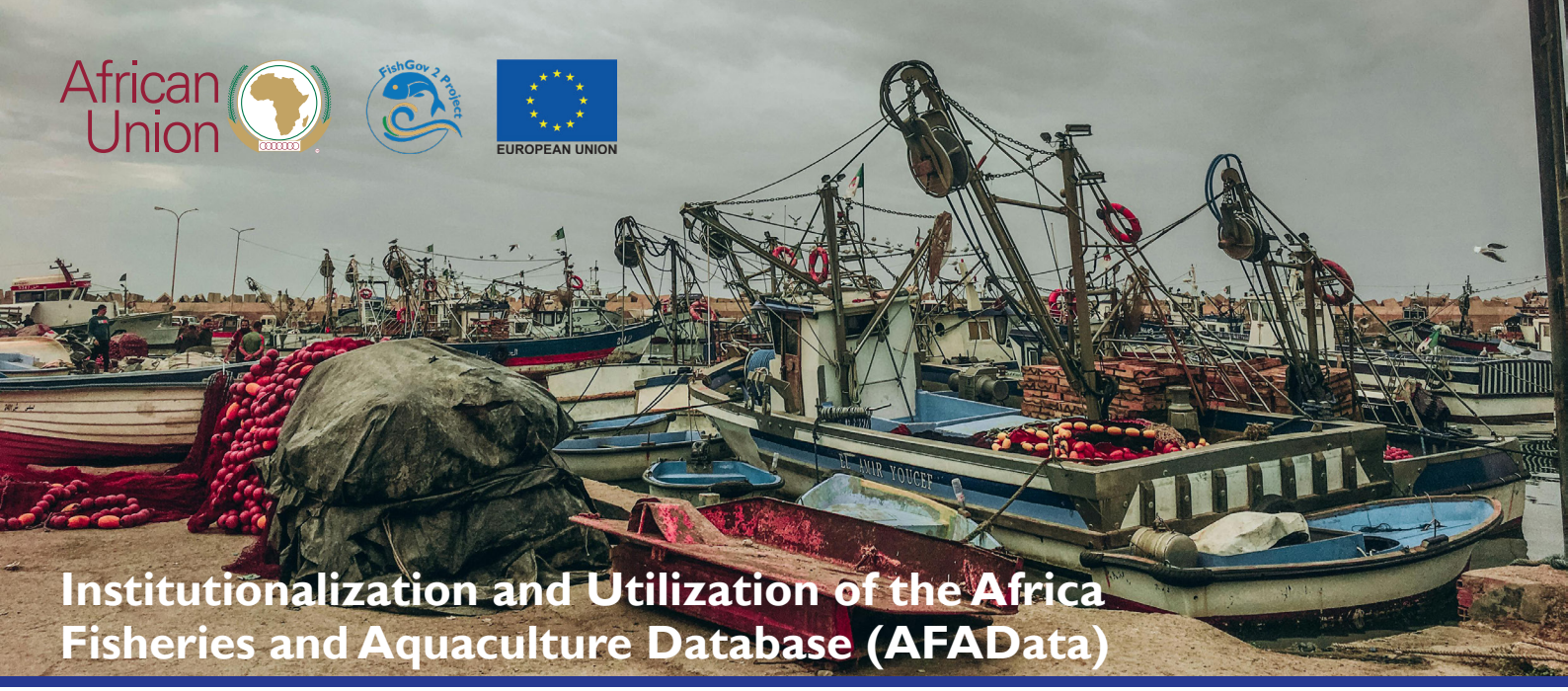


# Institutionalization and Utilization of the Africa Fisheries and Aquaculture Database (AFAData)

## Introduction

The fisheries and aquaculture sector play a pivotal role in contributing to employment, nutrition, food security, revenue and foreign exchange of States, Gross Domestic Product and other socio-economic development in Africa. In 2011, the sector was estimated to contribute over US$24 billion to the African economy, representing 1.3% of the Africa's total GDP. The fisheries resources are derived from capture fisheries (marine and inland) and aquaculture, with annual production on the continent estimated at 11 million metric tonnes. The sector is very pivotal in providing employment for roughly 12 million people on the continent, with 27% being women of which about 50% are mainly engaged in post-harvest related activities such as processing and marketing.

Small pelagics continue to provide an affordable protein source for nutrition and food security for about 400 million Africans living in rural and urban areas. Despite the immense contribution of the fisheries and aquaculture sector to African countries, the sector is faced with numerous challenges that hinder its growth and development, broadly covering IUU fishing activities, weak capacity for law enforcement, lack of policy coherence and regulation among AU member States, lack of effective coordination among actors, lack of adequate data for evidence based to rational and Science-based decisions and policies, among others. Additional, resource allocation regimes used in many states undermines sustainable exploitations. Efforts to address these challenges led to the development of the policy framework and reform strategy for fisheries and aquaculture in Africa (PFRS) taking advantage of the existing conservation and management measures being actively implemented by Regional Fisheries Management Organizations.

The prioritized key results areas of FishGov 2 project, among others, is to ensure that African Union decisions on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture policies are evidence based. To adequately address this priority area, there is the need for

- Effective data collection that will inform sound decision making,
- A continental database to serve as a unified platform for collation, curation and harmonizing fisheries and aquaculture production and trade statistics, as well as environmental and socioeconomics data.

## Problem statement

Although some member states collect data for decision support at national and/or regional levels, they are either inadequate or of poor-quality data for evidence-based decision-making in many States and especially at the regional and continental level, retarding contribution of the fisheries sector to socioeconomic development.

Currently, data on Africa's fisheries and aquaculture resources are scattered across different national archives, international repositories and platforms that do not necessarily target providing evidence-based decision support in Africa. Although the FAO platform serves the interest of AU-MS to some degree, it does not comprehensively address the development needs of AU-MS in terms of science-based policy and governance decisions. Given that sustainable fisheries and aquaculture policies along with better management of both marine and freshwater resources should be at the heart of African long-term transformational agenda, there is a critical need for more cross-sectoral approaches and strategic decisions and policies based on improved

knowledge and data management. An AU system for data collation, analyses and dissemination is even more critical in understanding the myriads of issues and undertaking programmes for rebuilding of depleted fish stocks, managing shared stocks, and conservation/restoration of degraded ecosystems. This is important to enhance production and productivity of fish stocks and consequently, ensure the sustainability of the vital socio-economic fishing activities.

## What has been achieved so far

To strengthen awareness of scientifically based sustainable fisheries management across Africa, the AU Centre of Excellence (University of Cape Coast), Ghana, developed the Africa Fisheries and Aquaculture Database (AFAData) for the African Union Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) with the support of the European Union through the Fisheries Governance (FishGov2) Project.

A secured and user-friendly database characterized by a simple interphase has been designed for managing national-level fisheries and aquaculture production and trade data. The database could be accessed through the AU-IBAR password-protected web site: https://afadata.au-ibar.org/login has in-built protocols for harmonized data collation and sharing among AU-MS.

Validation workshops and training have also been conducted for the five regional blocks of Africa (North, West, Central, East, and Southern Africa) with published outcomes/reports[1].

Presently the database is being piloted in seven AU member states to collate, analyze and share respective harmonized fisheries and aquaculture data.

## Proposed Actions

1. To technically upgrade the database to include statistical tools and the reporting in accordance with the Kampala Declaration to the CAADP Biennial Review Reporting for enhanced utilization.
2. AU-MS to make available on AFAData, the data submitted to FAO, to AU, to RFMOs, RECs and RFBs, using standardized formats.
3. Support AU-MS to build their capacity in quality data collection for informed decision making.
4. To support AU-MS to set up quality data collection systems and data statistics units to ensure the success of AFAData.
5. To fully institutionalize AfaData and structure it as a stand-alone project due to its magnitude, resource intensity and necessity for addressing data needs of all AU-MS. This will also ensure its relevance and sustainability.
6. Design and conduct training sessions for Training of Trainers (ToTs) for focal persons at the national level. Member States should be encouraged to conduct training for their own technical staff after undergoing periodic ToTs.

## Expected Outcomes

- ***Enhanced Data Accessibility:*** Consistent sharing of data submitted to FAO with the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs), and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) will lead to a more integrated approach to data utilization and management.
- ***Improved Data Collection Systems:*** By prioritizing quality data collection systems and establishing dedicated data statistics units, the AU-MS will enhance the reliability and availability of fisheries and aquaculture data across Africa.
- ***Institutionalized sustainable AFAData:*** The establishment of AFAData as a stand-alone project for AU will ensure its long-term sustainability, allowing for continuous updates and maintenance of the database to meet the evolving needs of AU-MS.
- ***Developed Capacity for Effective Implementation:*** Training of Trainers (ToTs) will equip local focal persons with the necessary skills to conduct effective training sessions, leading to improved local capacity in data collection, sharing and usage.
- ***Informed Decision-Making:*** With better data management and accessibility through AFAData, policymakers will be able to make evidence-based decisions, ultimately enhancing the sustainability of the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa.
- ***Strengthened Regional Cooperation:*** By facilitating better coordination and data sharing among AU-MS, regional cooperation in fisheries management will be strengthened, leading to more cohesive policies and practices.

## Way Forward

Requisite steps must be taken to:

1. Achieve the full institutionalization of AFAData at the African Union Level.
2. AFAdata will be considered for submission by AU IBAR to the STC-ARDWE 2025 for adoption.
3. Effectively operationalize AFAData.
4. Ensure sustainable funding for AFAData

[1] *Asare et al. (2023) Consultancy to Develop and Update Database on Fisheries and Aquaculture and Develop Mechanism for Data Management*