

African Union

FishGov 2 Project

EUROPEAN UNION

Fishing for the Future:

How FishGov2 is Transforming Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa

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Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa

Introduction

Since 2014, the African Union–Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) has spearheaded three transformative projects aimed at driving economic growth, food security, and sustainable livelihoods in Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector. These flagship initiatives— improving food and nutritional security and reduce poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (the Fish Trade Project), the Strengthening Institutional Capacity to Enhance Governance of the Fisheries Sector in Africa Project (FishGov1), and the Enhancing Sustainable Fisheries Management and Aquaculture Development in Africa: A Programme for Accelerated Reform of the Sector (FishGov2)—have not only strengthened governance but also ignited real change across the continent.

This publication captures the powerful stories of impact emerging from FishGov2, showcasing ground-breaking milestones and game-changing innovations. From empowering women in fisheries with greater market access to unlocking new economic opportunities in aquaculture, these initiatives are revolutionizing the sector. The ripple effects are profound: improved governance, strengthened sustainability, and the widespread adoption of best practices that are shaping a more resilient future.

Beyond numbers and policies, these stories bring to life the real impact of FishGov2—how strategic interventions are creating a ripple effect of transformation. Whether it's boosting food security, enhancing climate resilience, or fostering a culture of learning and collaboration, the momentum is undeniable. Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector are on an upward trajectory, and these success stories stand as a testament to what's possible when vision meets action.

Background

The fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa has unrealised potential to generate economic growth, contribute to food security and increase livelihoods across the continent. Africa has an extensive network of lakes covering an area equivalent to 240,000km², transboundary river basins that account for 64% of Africa's land area and a coastline of 26,000km, all of which contribute to a significant commercial, environmental and developmental potential within the continent's maritime domain.

But notwithstanding its enormous potential, the sector for decades has been stymied by systemic challenges, such as:

- **Fragmented Coordination:** Lack of collaboration between relevant stakeholders.
- **Governance Gaps:** Fragmented and incoherent policy frameworks.
- **Illegal Practices:** Widespread illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
- **Data Deficiency:** Lack of evidence-based knowledge for policymaking.
- **List the needs:** Weak capacity, lack of facilities
- **Exclusivity:** Restricted involvement in decision-making processes.

Acknowledging the pressing reform imperative, African Union Member States framed the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Africa (PFRS) in 2014 as a road map towards unlocking the potential of the sector. With support from the EU, AU-IBAR established Fisheries Governance Project I (FishGov1) to speed up implementation of the PFRS and to address gaps, and to complement existing initiatives such as the Fish Trade Project.

More recently, Africa made a bold leap forward by adopting the Africa Blue Economy Strategy an integrated framework to grow the continent's water resources sustainably. This strategy is more than fisheries and aquaculture, anchoring marine transport, renewable energy, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience in Africa's ocean and water-based economy.

As the continent progresses towards a transformation to a blue economy, strengthened governance, commitment to investment in infrastructural development and regional collaboration will be fundamental to making Africa's extensive aquatic wealth a source of inclusive growth, economic resilience and environmental sustainability.

Fish Trade

The Fish Trade Project was jointly implemented WorldFish Center, AU-IBAR and AUDA-NEPAD between 2013 and 2018, to improve food and nutritional security and reduce poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Its implementation Strategy was to Enhance the capacities of regional and Pan-African organizations to support their member states to better integrate intra-regional fish trade into their development and food security policy agendas. The project achieved the following:

1. Deepened understanding of the extent, challenges and opportunities of cross-border informal fish trade and its contribution to food and nutrition security, livelihoods and employment, especially for women and youth.
2. Identified and tested policy options and strategies for facilitating cross-border fish trade within the framework of existing free trade area instruments, e.g., infrastructure for women cross-border traders.
3. Enhanced capacities for increased market access through fisheries improvement projects for eco-labelling and sustainability.

FishGov1

Fisheries Governance Project 1 (FishGov1) was implemented between 2014 and 2018. Its objective was to improve the institutional and policy environment for sustainable management and utilization of fisheries resources in Africa. The four expected results were:

1. Improved institutional capacity and regulatory frameworks for sustainable fisheries management.
2. Enhanced sustainable fisheries management in small-scale fisheries including inland water bodies.
3. Strengthened institutional capacity and regulatory framework for aquaculture development.
4. Enhanced advocacy, lessons learning for knowledge sharing capacity for increased investments, and fostering reforms in the fisheries sector.

Achievements:

1. Awareness raised on the importance of the sector.
2. Enhanced institutional collaboration and coordination.
3. Championed implementation of the PFRS.

FishGov2

Building on the successes and lessons of FishGov1, the FishGov2 Project was born to deepen reforms and create transformative change for Africa's fisheries and aquaculture. FishGov2 addresses persistent challenges while scaling up successes to ensure the sustainable management and governance of fisheries and aquaculture in Africa.

Fisheries Governance Project 2 (FishGov2)

Project Period: January 2021 to June 2025
Project Budget: €12.000.000 (EU) and €1.200.000 (AUC)
Project Duration: 54 months

With achievements of FishGov1, there was a need to implement FishGov2 to establish emerging priority areas in the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy in Africa (PFRS) for future implementation, and to resolve sustained challenges in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The overall objective of FishGov2 Project is to improve food security, livelihoods, and wealth creation in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, aligned with African Union Agenda 2063. Its vision is grounded in a triad of specific objectives as illustrated below:

The specific objectives are:

1. African Union decisions on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture policies are evidence-based.
2. Fisheries and aquaculture policies in Africa are coherent with the PFRS and other AU priorities and coordinated at continental, regional, and national levels.
3. Africa is adequately represented and effectively participates in international fisheries and aquaculture fora and ably domesticates and effectively implements relevant global instruments.



01 Making every AU level decision on the sector evidence-based (data-driven) to solve current challenges and anticipate future needs.

02 Africa is adequately represented and effectively participates in international fisheries and aquaculture fora and ably domesticates and effectively implements relevant global instruments.

03 Harmonizing and aligning continent-wide fisheries and aquaculture policies to the PFRS and other AU priorities for coherence and easy national-level, regional-level and continental-level coordination for sustainable outcomes.

Implementation Modalities

AU-IBAR is the lead implementing agency responsible for coordinating and achieving the goals of the FishGov2 Project, while its implementing partner, AUDA-NEPAD ensures effective Africa wide execution through collaboration and technical support.

"Africa's fishery and aquaculture non-state actors are integral stakeholders constituted within the African Fisheries Reform Mechanism (AFRM) that is founded on the principles of inclusivity, representation and collectiveness,"

- Dr. Huyam Salih. Director, AU-IBAR

The FishGov2 Project is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiative that includes policymakers, researchers, industry professionals, and community representatives. For sustainable governance, it partners with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and African Union Member States (AU MS) and leverages the expertise of Africa's Centres of Excellence (CoEs) and other premier knowledge institutions to ensure that its initiatives are inclusive, evidence-based and aligned with regional and continental priorities. The collaborative approach strengthens governance structures, enhances capacity, and promotes sustainable practices in the sector, laying the foundation for long-term socio-economic and environmental benefits.

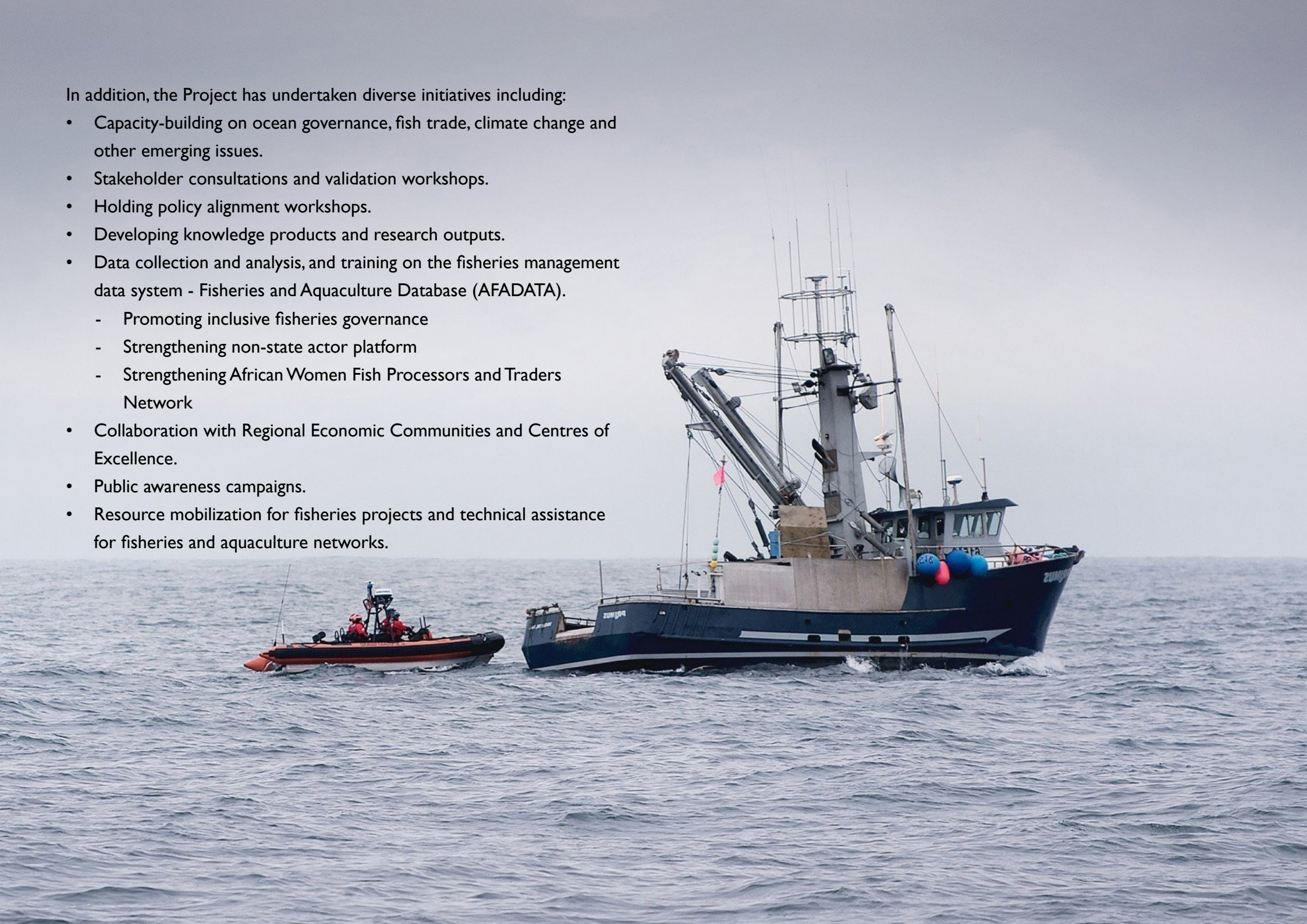
Implementation Strategy

FishGov2 commissions AU recognised CoEs or similarly qualified African institutions to conduct studies that guide and enhance fisheries governance, and address policy development, advocacy, foresight analysis, information dissemination and documenting best practices. The studies provide the evidence base for informed decision-making at continental, regional, and national levels. This approach emphasizes African-driven solutions, reinforcing the project's commitment to leveraging the continent's knowledge and expertise.



In addition, the Project has undertaken diverse initiatives including:

- Capacity-building on ocean governance, fish trade, climate change and other emerging issues.
- Stakeholder consultations and validation workshops.
- Holding policy alignment workshops.
- Developing knowledge products and research outputs.
- Data collection and analysis, and training on the fisheries management data system - Fisheries and Aquaculture Database (AFADATA).
    - Promoting inclusive fisheries governance
    - Strengthening non-state actor platform
    - Strengthening African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network
- Collaboration with Regional Economic Communities and Centres of Excellence.
- Public awareness campaigns.
- Resource mobilization for fisheries projects and technical assistance for fisheries and aquaculture networks.



Project Governance Structures

The project is governed by a Project Technical Coordination Committee (PTCC) and a Project Steering Committee (PSC). The PTCC is responsible for technical guidance and coordination, ensuring that activities align and are strategically designed for long-term impact. The PSC serves as the project's strategic compass, providing high-level guidance, performance review, approval of annual work plans, and budgetary allocations. The project has eight staff members, two of whom are fixed term technical staff.



Stories of Change or Impact

These Stories of Change or Impact under FishGov2 are intended to inspire sustained progress through the recorded tangible benefits and replicable practices. They focus on achievements aligned to the following three broad project objectives:

1. African Union decisions on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture policies are evidence-based.
2. Fisheries and aquaculture policies in Africa are coherent with the PFRS and other AU priorities and coordinated at continental, regional, and national levels.
3. Africa is adequately represented and effectively participates in international fisheries and aquaculture fora and ably domesticates and effectively implements relevant global instruments.

More specifically, the Stories of Change or Impact illuminate how FishGov2 has:

- Shaped a resilient and prosperous fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa (directly improving the lives of individuals, from empowering fisherwomen with better market access, to creating new job opportunities in aquaculture).
- Contributed to promoting the uptake and implementation of innovative knowledge and best practices in fisheries management and aquaculture development.
- Reshaped governance through the culture of learning and collaboration, thus advancing food security, economic growth and climate adaptation.





Resilient and Prosperous Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

The FishGov2 Project has shaped a resilient and prosperous fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa, directly improving the lives of individuals.

AWFISHNET - Amplifying Women's Contribution to Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chain

> *"Given the different roles women play, improving opportunities for women across the fisheries and aquaculture value chain holds more significant benefits for whole communities,"*
>
> – Madam Emma Metieh Glassco, Director General of Liberia's National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA)

Women in Decision-Making is not only an issue of gender equity within the practice, but also that of community well-being.

Marine resources contribute significantly to the livelihoods of women in many coastal areas of Africa. From launching nets to post-harvest handling, their contributions fuel food security, household incomes, and local

economies. Their multiple roles are critical for the development of the sector, and in their absence, the best interests of the industry could suffer immensely, suggests Madam Glassco. But their indispensable contribution is often unrecognized in policies and projects.

In some regions, cultural traditions prevent women from accessing land and water to farm fish, which constrains their growth and income potential. In addition, the lack of modern processing technologies and dangerous working environments limit their capacities.

To tackle these challenges directly, the FishGov2 project has been a breakthrough success. It elevates women's voices in policy making and extends their access to resources and decision-making platforms. One key strategy has been establishing and strengthening women's organizations such as the Africa Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFishNET), which empowers women by increasing their visibility, representation, and bargaining power while opening doors to new markets.

Since its founding, AWFishNET has touched lives throughout the continent, with 15 national chapters helping women hone their skills in value addition. These also include smoking and drying, as well as freezing and canning; these methods do not just prolong shelf life but also enhance the quality of fish. By providing hands-on demonstrations, expert-led learning sessions, and workshops on marketing, branding, and export strategies, women have learned how to produce high-quality fish products using environmentally sustainable methods. In doing so, they're protecting Africa's fisheries while addressing the increased demand for processed fish products.

This initiative is not only about empowering women; it's about driving regional economic development. It is promoting value chain development in line with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and finding what options exist in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); AWFishNET advancing regional fish trade and integration.

Through collaboration with the National Fisheries Resources Research Institute (NAFIRRI) Centre of Excellence, the initiative has developed an advocacy strategy and gender sensitive systems for policy dialogue and networking. These initiatives focus on local production and fair-trade initiatives that empower women's voices and ideas.

The message is unequivocal: investment in women in fisheries and aquaculture is investment in the industry as a whole. Its success is crucial to the economic development of African countries, showing that if women succeed, communities do too.

Empowering fisherwomen with better market access, and job opportunities in aquaculture

Janet Chedutum, a fish farmer from Kapenguria, Kenya, is among the women who steered the launch of AWFISHNET Kenyan Chapter, in February 2022. Her joy was evident at the launch that took place during a fisheries workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. "It is easier to advance in a group than individually, she said happily, adding, "I look forward to learning more from fellow women in the sector."

More Kenyans are increasingly taking up aquaculture, with small-scale commercial fish farmers earning up to US$6,000 per acre of water surface. Some of the farmers want to produce for the local and export markets, increasing the likelihood that aquaculture will make a significant contribution to food security and foreign exchange earnings in Kenya in the next three years (FAO, 2024). Chedutum is among fish farmers who aspire to trade in continental and global markets.

The Liberian chapter of AWFISHNET was also established in February 2022, during a two-day international consultative fisheries meeting, where the government applauded its women's impact in the industry. "The role of Liberian women to the economic growth of the country's fisheries sector is pivotal. They not only determine the overall quality of the fish we consume, but they also own vessels, process the fish, and send it to the market. The entire sector is reliant on them," said Madam Emma Metieh Glassco, the Director General of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA), Liberia.

AWFISHNET and similar platforms were outcomes of the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. Supported by AU-IBAR, AWFISHNET provides a platform for African women fish processors and traders to collaborate and cooperate; share best practices, experiences, technologies, and joint learning. Through the platform, the women advocate issues affecting their activities and facilitate enabling policy environment to enhance their role in the fisheries sector in Africa. The network also helps members to expand their market and marketing opportunities, resulting in improved intra-regional African fish trade for food security and nutrition.



Integrating Climate Resilience in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

As climate change continues to reconfigure ecosystems all over the planet, Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector is experiencing unprecedented challenges as well as extraordinary opportunities. To do so, the FishGov2 Project commissioned a study to examine how shifting fish populations and increasing risk of extreme weather events could change fisheries across the continent. The study transcended a traditional cost-benefit economic analysis by emphasizing the value of ecosystem services — biodiversity, water purification, carbon storage, fish production — that can be easily lost in the mainstream economic calculus.

The results reaffirmed an important fact: fisheries and aquaculture are not just production, they are parts of the backbone of Africa's economy. These sectors generate direct revenues and also play vital ecosystem services that underpin much broader, multi-level socio-economic development. "This is different from other sectors; we are moving to a blue economy where you want to see an integrated development of the sector so that the countries can harness in terms of social economy from the aquatic environment.

"It wouldn't just be fisheries but tourism and offshore energy maritime shipping being conducted at a sustainable and responsible level," Dr. Mohamed Seisay, AU-IBAR's Sustainable Blue Economy Expert, said. He also added, "All these are actions that affect the economic growth of AU Member States.

The study not only detailed challenges but also laid out a path forward. It called for better integration of policies on climate resilience, more investment in climate-related research and data collection, and strong stakeholder engagement to develop inclusive solutions. This will assist national and regional planners in integrating sustainable and climate-resilient fisheries and aquaculture investment plans within National Agriculture Investment Plans (NAIPs) and Regional Agriculture Investment Plans (RAIPs).

In 2022, the FishGov2 Project carried out training for fisheries professionals, policymakers and stakeholders across Africa to adopt the cage farming sustainable and innovative aquaculture practice, and this has paved the way for enhanced fisheries production, particularly in areas with restricted access to conventional fisheries resources. The training highlighted the need to adopt climate-resilient practices to ensure healthy aquatic ecosystems and meet Africa's increasing demand for protein.

The report on the training also provides a key pathway towards aquaculture scaling, economic growth and a Blue Economy that is resilient to climate change. As Africa makes strides towards integrated aquatic development, the FishGov2 Project remains an example of sustainable progress, helping to ensure that the continent's fisheries and aquaculture sectors can navigate the challenges posed by climate change with success.

From Marginalization to Global Influence: How African SIDS are Shaping Global Ocean Governance

The story of African Small Island Developing States (SIDS) has shifted dramatically from marginalization to empowerment. Historically, African SIDS such as Seychelles, Mauritius, Comoros, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, and Madagascar struggled to gain meaningful representation in international discussions on fisheries, aquaculture, and biodiversity. Their geographical isolation, small economies, and vulnerability to climate change often left them side-lined in crucial negotiations, jeopardizing their food security, economic stability, and environmental sustainability. The lack of negotiation skills compounded other challenges faced by SIDS leaving them vulnerable in international forums where key agreements on ocean governance, climate change, and biodiversity are formulated.



The FishGov2 project through the collaboration of AU-IBAR, and AUDA-NEPAD, addressed the gaps by organizing strategic meetings and capacity-building initiatives. These included the establishment of the African SIDS Fisheries and Aquaculture Platform in 2022, which marked a significant milestone in the journey. The platform has strengthened the collective capacity of these nations, helping them to develop strategic positions, enhance coordination, and actively engage in international negotiations. "The FishGov2 project has been a transformative force, breaking down barriers and enhancing the capacity of SIDS to participate actively and cohesively in global governance discussions," Koko Chantal de Cupertino, Directeur Régional de la Pêche et de l'Economie Bleue, Madagascar, attests.

The second meeting of SIDS in February 2023, focused on enhancing negotiation capabilities and building mechanisms for coordinated advocacy. As a result, representation of the SIDS is not only amplified, but their interests are secured in global policy discussions, ensuring that issues that are critical to their survival and the broader global community are addressed. For instance, with a unified voice, the African SIDS have advocated for the integration of climate change and marine pollution into global discussions, thus advancing their priorities within the framework of international agreements. This has been particularly important for aligning their needs with the broader objectives of Africa's Agenda 2063 and the Malabo Declaration, both of which emphasize the transformation of African agriculture and sustainable development.

Mr. Delvis Fortes, Senior Fisheries Officer, AU-IBAR attributes these successes to strengthened capacity in negotiation skills. "These

measures have provided the nations with the tools to coordinate their efforts, enabling them to speak with one unified voice in international negotiations," he adds. A notable example of this progress was the third SIDS meeting in Rome during the FAO's 36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI). Here, SIDS leaders articulated the urgency of addressing climate change and marine pollution in global ocean governance, successfully integrating these concerns into their shared agenda.

The African SIDS are no longer passive participants in ocean governance but are recognized as crucial players in shaping the future of global ocean sustainability.

> *"The African SIDS are now positioning themselves as key players in the global blue economy, amplifying their voice on issues crucial not only for their survival but for the global community's commitment to environmental sustainability and ocean governance,"*
>
> - Mrs. Hellen Moepi-Guebama, Fisheries Officer at AU-IBAR.

This transformation underscores the importance of collaboration, capacity building, and strategic positioning in empowering marginalized nations to take centre stage in global policy dialogues, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed in global policy discussions.

Driving Policy Alignment through High-Level Endorsements

The FishGov2 Project achieved significant milestones with the endorsement of key frameworks and strategies at the 5th Session of the AU's Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water, and Environment (STC-ARDWE) in 2024. The endorsements underscore a unified commitment by AU Member States to advance sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and animal health initiatives, reinforcing the sector's critical role in Africa's development agenda.

The Aquaculture Network for Africa (ANAF) and the Africa Platform of Registered CSOs (AFRIFISHNET) were endorsed as central players in advancing aquaculture in Africa. AFRIFISHNET's role in linking traders with policy instruments, positions it as a vital platform for fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and innovation across the continent's aquaculture landscape while ANAF's endorsement will further facilitate regional integration and promote sustainable aquaculture practices across African nations, ensuring that the sector's growth aligns with the continent's broader development goals.

Besides, the Continental Inland Fisheries Strategy was endorsed as a comprehensive framework for the sustainable management and development of Africa's inland fisheries. This strategy focuses on alignment with continental objectives related to food security and livelihood improvement, highlighting the importance of sustainable resource utilization and ecosystem preservation.

Key Impact Areas

Policy Alignment and Regional Integration: The endorsement of these frameworks aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Malabo Declaration, creating a cohesive policy environment that fosters sustainable growth and regional cooperation.

Strengthened Governance: The harmonized frameworks enhance governance across Member States, promoting equitable resource management and transparent decision-making.

Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement: The endorsement of the PPP framework and ANAF platform ensures robust engagement of public, private, and community stakeholders, facilitating inclusive and participatory growth.

Resilient Fisheries and Aquaculture Systems: The Animal Health and Biosecurity Framework plays a crucial role in safeguarding Africa's aquatic ecosystems, ensuring they remain resilient and productive in the face of emerging challenges.





The Animal Health and Biosecurity Framework was also endorsed, underscoring the AU's commitment to safeguarding aquatic animal health and bolstering biosecurity measures to mitigate the risks posed by disease outbreaks, enhancing the resilience of fisheries and aquaculture systems.

The Framework for Harmonized Minimum Conditions for Access to Fisheries was another major endorsement, introducing a consistent, equitable approach to fisheries access. By promoting better governance and regional cooperation, this framework seeks to ensure sustainable and fair resource distribution among Member States, addressing disparities in access to fisheries resources and fostering collaboration.

These endorsements, while integral in advancing policy alignment, also amplify the voices of small-scale operators, ensuring their active participation in shaping the future of Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The alignment of these frameworks with Africa's broader policy agendas, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Malabo Declaration, further underscores their role in achieving sustainable development across the continent.

Moreover, the Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) Framework, endorsed during the same period, marks a transformative shift toward leveraging private sector investments in the sector. This framework is designed to catalyse innovations, enhance value chains, and stimulate economic growth, driving sustainable development within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

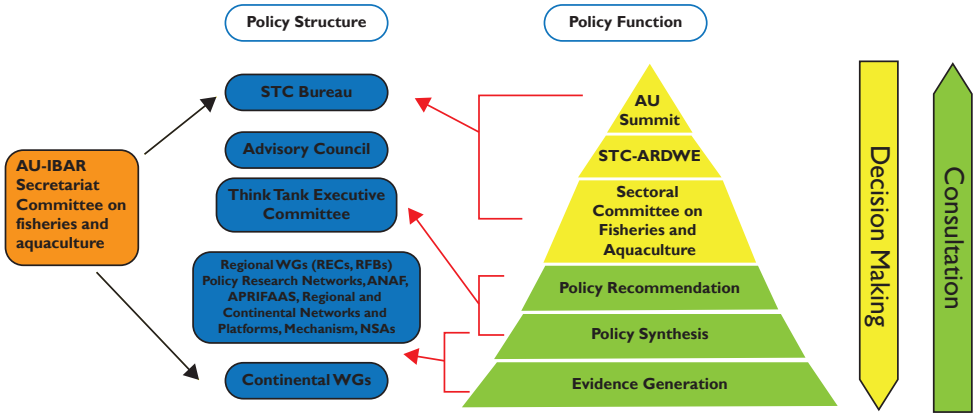
Committing further to strengthening the capacity of African institutions, the Second Extraordinary Session of STC-ARDWE in October 2024 also endorsed the establishment of new AU Centres of Excellence for training and research. These centres are a direct outcome of the FishGov2 project, which identified leading African institutions capable of driving transformative change in fisheries and aquaculture training and research. The endorsement marks a significant milestone in fostering the development of cutting-edge skills and knowledge across the continent, empowering the next generation of fisheries and aquaculture professionals.

As these frameworks move from endorsement to implementation, they will serve as the foundation for innovative projects, capacity-building initiatives, and policy reforms that will propel Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors toward sustainable growth, regional integration, and long-term prosperity.



Innovative Knowledge and Best Practices

Leveraging Expertise, Collaboration, and Innovation through the AFRM



The African Fisheries Reform Mechanism (AFRM) is reaching a pivotal moment in the evolution of fisheries and aquaculture in Africa. AFRM is crafted to induce evidence-based progress and augment regional integration to not only promote sustainability and spur economic growth, but it is also directly in accordance with the objectives of AU Agenda 2063. The ongoing restructuring of the thematic working groups and stakeholder consultations to steer the development of a relevant, inclusive and responsive 360-degree policy framework is positioning the AFRM at a unique intersection for identifying potential policies conducive to enabling environmental resilience and sustainable development within the continent.

A key trajectory of the adapted thematic working groups (TWGs) during the tenure of FishGov2 have been several working group meetings focusing on the areas organized around: Aquaculture, Small-Scale Fisheries, and Governance, Policy and Institutions. The groups worked together to review and co-create knowledge products that inform evidence-based fisheries and aquaculture development policies, providing a pathway of where the sector can go in Africa.

The FishGov2 Project has played a key role in bringing the AFRM to life, motivating its strategic initiatives. Utilizing AFRM's framework, FishGov2 has equipped the thematic working groups with the necessary resources and technical know-how to produce actionable insights and policy recommendations. Such an approach has made evidence-based policymaking more effective as the strategies formulated have accessed every single level of data and stakeholders.

Additionally, FishGov2 has played a crucial role in promoting engagement among stakeholders and integrative efforts in the region. This has enabled the AFRM to bring together different sectors of society from around the continent, such as policy makers, researchers, and community leaders, to take a united stance on addressing challenges facing fisheries and aquaculture. By establishing this inclusive platform, policy-making has become enriched with high-quality deliberations and the sharing of knowledge has been widely acknowledged, leading to relevant policies that are accepted and implemented effectively.

Better coordinating fisheries and aquaculture through improved project design and implementation by the Governance, Policy and Institutions Working Group was one notable highlight from utilising the AFRM approach. The group also put in place strategic follow-up systems, with support from FishGov2, so that recommendations can be acted upon, and cascaded out to maximise their impact across the continent.

In fact, through the operationalization of the AFRM, a strong ecosystem has been developed that drives evidence-based policies in line with Africa's common aspiration for sustainable development and enhances regional integration. This framework solidifies the pillars of long-term economic and environmental resilience which will propel Africa's transition to the socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable Blue Economy.

By operationalizing the AFRM, an ecosystem that fosters evidence-driven policies that align with the shared goal of sustainable development, strengthens regional integration, and lays the foundation for long-term economic and environmental resilience was instituted. The AFRM will continue to champion knowledge-driven reforms, leveraging its working groups to advance sustainable fisheries and aquaculture while supporting the aspirations of Agenda 2063. With a robust structure and strong outputs, it remains a cornerstone of Africa's journey toward inclusive and sustainable growth in the blue economy.

Rhodes University Champions Best Practices in Fisheries and Aquaculture through FishGov2

The Department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Science at Rhodes University in South Africa has been at the forefront of documenting critical lessons learned and validated best practices for transforming Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector. These insights were developed through the FishGov2 Project, which has generated a robust knowledge base to guide future interventions across the continent.

The lessons compiled by Rhodes University are designed to ensure that fisheries and aquaculture initiatives are grounded in proven success and tailored to Africa's unique contexts. By applying these lessons, African countries can build a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous fisheries and aquaculture sector—one that fosters long-term food security, economic growth, and improved livelihoods.

The validated best practices documented by Rhodes University include:

i. Building institutions to support value chain development
ii. Understanding the value chain
iii. Moving from policy and projects to long-term programs
iv. Including women in the fisheries and aquaculture value chain

These best practices continue to serve as a reference point for governments, development partners, and industry stakeholders seeking to unlock the full potential of fisheries and aquaculture in Africa.



Building institutions to support value chain development



Understanding the value chain



Moving from policy and projects to long-term programs



Including women in the fisheries and aquaculture value chain

Strengthening African Fisheries Governance through Centres of Excellence

A critical element of the success of the FishGov2 project was strengthening the operational capacity of the Centres of Excellence (CoEs). The CoEs serve as knowledge hubs for research and capacity-building in fisheries governance across Africa, to ensure that African Union (AU) decisions on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture policies are evidence-based.

AU-IBAR, leveraged the expertise of AU CoEs and established academic and research institutions specializing in fisheries and aquaculture, to generate high-quality research and studies that could support Evidence-Based governance reforms, policies and practical solutions. By harnessing the expertise of local institutions, the project not only enhanced the capacity of individual CoEs but also built a network of institutions across the continent that can drive innovation and provide solutions for the long-term sustainability of Africa's aquatic resources.

Six new AU CoEs for training and research were endorsed in October 2024 during the second extraordinary session of the STC-ARDWE. "This marks a significant milestone for Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector," stated AU-IBAR Director, Dr. Huyam Salih, after showcasing the rigor employed in selecting the institutions. The centres are poised to become hubs of innovation, fostering cutting-edge research, high-quality training, and collaborative learning. Their output will enable Africa to remain at the forefront of sustainable fisheries practices and technological advancements,

directly contributing to the continent's blue economy goals.

The institutions focusing on fisheries, aquaculture, and aquatic biodiversity are:

1. **Makerere University, Uganda –** College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources, and Biosecurity

2. **Stellenbosch University, South Africa –** Division of Aquaculture

3. **University of Namibia, Namibia –** Department of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences

4. **Pwani University, Kenya –** School of Pure and Applied Sciences

5. **University of Ghana, Ghana –** Department of Marine and Fisheries Sciences

6. **University of Nairobi, Kenya –** Departments of Biology and Geography

This endorsement builds upon key initiatives and policies aimed at strengthening Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors, fostering sustainable development and ensuring the rational utilization of aquatic resources. Adopted in November 2023 during the Fifth Ordinary Session of the STC-ARDWE at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, the initiatives include:

i. Improving Aquatic Animal Health and Biosecurity
ii. Report on the Pan-African Platform of Non-State Actors (NSAs), i.e., the Africa Platform for Registered CSOs (AFRIFISHNET) in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector
iii. Aquaculture Network for Africa (ANAF)
iv. Framework for Harmonized Minimum Terms and Conditions for Fisheries Access in AU Member States
v. Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Fisheries and Aquaculture
vi. Strategy for the Rational Management of African Inland Fisheries

The CoEs are being strategically empowered through appropriate policy frameworks as well as knowledge-driven initiatives to set the course for the required transformation within Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors. FishGov2 not only positions the continent to become a leader in the management of aquatic resources, it will also contribute to food security and economic growth as well as the Blue Economy through the promotion of research, innovation and sustainable practices.

The FishGov2 Project is a testament to Africa's ability to work together toward sustainable development and resilience, as the continent continues to harness the power of knowledge and collaboration.

Advancing Fisheries and Aquaculture Data Management

The FishGov2 Project has established a clear path toward enhanced data systems that can adapt to evolving environmental conditions and economic needs. Prof. Noble Asare from the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, University of Cape Coast (AU Centre of Excellence in Fisheries and Aquaculture) underscores this progress, emphasizing the project's role in strengthening data-driven decision-making in the sector.

A significant milestone in this effort is the establishment of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Database (AFADATA), positioning AU-IBAR as the central hub for fisheries and aquaculture data management in Africa. This centralized repository provides stakeholders with access to reliable, high-quality data. Mrs. Moepi-Guebama notes that this development addresses a longstanding challenge:

"The lack of a centralized, user-friendly, and reliable database has hindered efforts to enhance governance, sustainability, and economic growth in fisheries and aquaculture," she explains.

To operationalize AFADATA, the FishGov2 Project facilitated training for AU Member States on database management, data entry, retrieval, and transmission. Mrs. Moepi-Guebama highlights the importance of ensuring equitable access to information:

> *"A system that effectively gathers, consolidates, and shares knowledge across all sector levels is crucial for sustainable development and inclusivity."*

In parallel with database development, targeted research efforts have been undertaken to map and consolidate existing fisheries and aquaculture data across Africa. At the University of Cape Coast, researchers are compiling critical socio-economic and environmental data from West and Central Africa, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the sector.

A similar initiative was completed in South-Eastern Africa by Uganda's National Fisheries Resources Research Institute (NAFIRRI). This study catalogued key data sources, identified critical gaps, and laid the foundation for harmonized data collection and sharing mechanisms.

Meanwhile, in North Africa, the Central Laboratory for Aquaculture Research (CLAR) in Egypt, an AU Centre of Excellence in Fisheries and Aquaculture, completed a study aimed at improving data accessibility. This research has enhanced the ability of policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to manage and utilize aquatic resources more effectively. Reflecting on these achievements, Dr. Mohamed Seisay, AU-IBAR's Senior Fisheries Officer, concludes:

"The FishGov2 Project has laid the foundation for a more resilient and data-driven fisheries and aquaculture sector, ensuring better governance and sustainability for future generations."

Driving Policy Change through Research and Collaboration

By harnessing the expertise of local institutions, the Project not only enhanced the capacity of individual CoEs but also built a network of institutions across the continent capable of driving innovation and providing solutions for the long-term sustainability of Africa's aquatic resources.

The collaboration between CoEs, the AU, and other stakeholders will continue to evolve, with a focus on capacity building, knowledge sharing, and sustained investment in local expertise as more research is completed and more policies informed by these studies, toward a more sustainable and resilient future for its fisheries and aquatic ecosystems.

The research conducted by the CoEs directly informed fisheries policy at national, regional, and continental levels. For example, Pwani University's work on aquatic biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management in Kenya contributed to new strategies for protecting aquatic ecosystems. This research helped shape policy discussions around environmental protection and sustainable fisheries practices across East Africa.

Similarly, Makerere University's research on aquatic animal health provided invaluable insights for improving fish farming practices in East Africa, leading to more sustainable aquaculture operations. The studies from Stellenbosch University in South Africa led to the development of training programs that helped smallholder farmers adopt sustainable aquaculture techniques, reducing environmental impacts while improving production.

Furthermore, the collaboration between institutions from different parts of Africa fostered cross-border knowledge sharing and regional cooperation. These partnerships helped address fisheries challenges that spanned national borders. For instance, research on marine biodiversity from the University of Ghana was used to inform regional agreements on transboundary fisheries management in West Africa, ensuring that collective action was taken to protect shared resources.

By involving CoEs in the design and execution of research studies, the project provided a platform for local researchers and academics to lead the conversation on fisheries management. This not only built the capacity of these institutions but also empowered them to take a more proactive role in shaping policies that directly impacted Africa's fisheries. Through these efforts, the CoEs played a vital role in gathering and disseminating critical data, which fed directly into policy development and implementation at both continental and regional levels. This ensured that policy recommendations were informed by the best available science and practical experience, making them more relevant and effective.

Enhancing Climate Resilience and Fisheries Governance Through Knowledge

The FishGov2 project contributed to enhancing sustainable fisheries management by collecting essential data on fish stocks and understanding climate impacts across the five African regions. As a result, significant strides have been made towards advancing climate resilience and improving fisheries governance across Africa by enhancing data systems for better decision-making and producing valuable knowledge to support sustainable fisheries governance across the continent.

For instance, the University of Rhodes, South Africa, completed a comprehensive study which assessed the economic value of aquatic ecosystem goods and services and analysed the impact of climate change on fisheries. The study provided critical insights into how African fisheries are vulnerable to climate change and has spurred important discussions around policy interventions and the implementation of climate-resilient practices in the sector. "Trade in fish and fishery products now constitutes the most highly traded food commodities internationally, leading to an increase in demand which has some negative impacts on the fishing ecosystems and environment as well as declining fish stocks," says Hon. Abdallah Ulega, Deputy Minister for Livestock and Fisheries, Tanzania.

Similarly, to anticipate the future needs of Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors, in 2023, the FishGov2 project supported, University of Rhodes, its CoE , to carry out foresight studies to address critical issues in African fisheries and aquaculture, including food security, per capita fish consumption, climate change impacts, and gender mainstreaming. The studies provide a forward-looking perspective, helping stakeholders anticipate future trends and develop strategies. These findings were widely disseminated through awareness-raising workshops such as the African Small-Scale Fisheries Summit and the FAO COFI36 event, where key stakeholders from across the continent were able to engage and discuss the reports' implications through a validation process in October 2023. These studies have positioned fisheries and aquaculture at the heart of broader discussions on sustainable development and climate resilience.

Building on a long-standing FAO study from 2014, the FishGov2 project updated the Value of African Fisheries study in collaboration with AUDA-NEPAD. The updated study addresses data gaps from the original report and strengthened the data collection and analysis systems across the continent. To support this effort, AUDA-NEPAD secured USD 35,000 in additional funding, which will be used to expand the scope of the study, improve data collection, and enhance institutional frameworks for data management. The updated methodology will be validated through training sessions and expert workshops to ensure its effectiveness and wide adoption.

Enhanced Governance through Learning and Collaboration

FishGov2 has reshaped governance through the culture of learning and collaboration, thus advancing food security, economic growth, and climate adaptation. In its mission to drive sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development, the AU has made significant strides in operationalizing the AFRM, the blueprint for restructuring the sector, to create an ecosystem that fosters evidence-based policymaking, strengthens regional integration, and supports sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development.

Enhancing Reporting Systems and Policy Frameworks for Africa's Blue Economy

Guided by the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS) and the Africa Blue Economy Strategy (ABES), the Project has established a robust reporting system to track implementation progress. In 2022, key indicators aligned with the Malabo goals were developed to monitor this process, and these are now being refined into a comprehensive handbook. As part of this effort, the University of Rhodes and the University of Ibadan are developing a performance snapshot based on these indicators. A critical aspect of this process is documenting lessons learned and best practices, which enhances informed decision-making, strengthens policy frameworks, and helps identify scalable and replicable solutions across the continent.

AU-IBAR and various project implementers also remains committed to aligning Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector with global sustainability goals. To achieve this, mechanisms are being developed to support the domestication of global instruments in the sector. This initiative is expected to build capacity among AU Member States, foster international collaboration, and ultimately ensure the long-term sustainability of Africa's blue economy. By engaging with global frameworks and tailoring them to the African context, AU-IBAR is enabling Member States to adopt best practices while maintaining regional priorities.

Additionally, a study is underway to promote coherent African positions in AU-EU dialogues on fisheries and aquaculture. This study aims to equip African Union Member States (AUMS) with strategic materials and recommendations to effectively articulate their priorities during these discussions. The key focus areas include mapping EU fisheries and aquaculture initiatives, assessing the needs and priorities of AUMS, proposing actionable recommendations to help AUMS present unified positions, and developing strategic communication approaches for AU-EU meetings.

This initiative is not only about strengthening Africa's voice in international dialogues but also about fostering learning and adaptive strategies. By analyzing past engagements, identifying gaps, and understanding EU priorities, African nations can enhance their negotiating power, ensuring that discussions on fisheries governance, economic development, and food security reflect Africa's interests. Strengthening Africa's visibility and influence in global fisheries governance will enable the continent to proactively shape policies, rather than merely responding to external agendas.

Through these efforts, the FishGov2 Project aims to facilitate a learning-driven, evidence-based approach to fisheries and aquaculture governance. By continuously refining its reporting mechanisms, fostering international cooperation, and strengthening Africa's position in global dialogues, the institution is laying the groundwork for a more sustainable, resilient, and prosperous blue economy for future generations.

Advancing Fisheries Sustainability Through Regional Aquatic Animal Health Networks

As part of its mission to strengthen institutional capacity and optimize operations in Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors, the FishGov2 Project has focused on reviewing, rationalizing, and operationalizing existing platforms and networks to ensure effective stakeholder participation in policy development and implementation. By rationalizing these platforms, the project ensures that they are institutionally anchored at relevant levels, which enhances their ability to implement identified activities and pilot projects effectively.

A key collaboration under this initiative is between AU-IBAR and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), which are working together to establish Regional Aquatic Animal Health Networks (RAAHNs) across Africa. These networks aim to bolster the continent's capacity to manage aquatic animal health risks, improve biosecurity, and support the sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The focus of this initiative is to create frameworks for surveillance, disease control, and rapid response mechanisms to address emerging aquatic animal health risks.

The second RAAHN was launched in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2023, following the successful launch of the North African network in Tunis. The Lusaka workshop aimed to conduct a situational analysis, develop terms of reference, establish an institutional framework, draft an inaugural action plan, and foster stakeholder collaboration. The establishment of RAAHNs is expected to bring several significant benefits, including enhanced technical capacity, better application of WOAH standards, increased collaboration among member states, policy harmonization, and strengthened biosecurity, all contributing to the long-term sustainability of Africa's fisheries and aquaculture industries.

Fisheries Integration in Post-Malabo, CAADP Agenda and AU Strategic Framework

The integration of fisheries and aquaculture into the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has gained considerable momentum, marking a significant step in aligning the sector's priorities with broader African Union goals, particularly the Malabo Declaration. This integration, achieved through the FishGov2 initiative and robust collaboration between AU-IBAR, AUDA-NEPAD, and the African Union Commission, has embedded fisheries and aquaculture more deeply within continental agricultural policy and development frameworks.

A key outcome of this process is the inclusion of fisheries and aquaculture data in the Biennial Review (BR) process, which evaluates progress against Malabo commitments. This inclusion enables the sector to be assessed through critical indicators focused on resilience, gender, youth, and financial services for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). AU-IBAR has actively contributed to shaping the Post-Malabo CAADP Agenda, ensuring that recommendations related to livestock and fisheries are incorporated into the three key work streams: stakeholder consultations, analysis and drafting, and political mobilization across Africa.

In 2024, AU-IBAR, alongside AUDA-NEPAD and AUC, made significant contributions to the development of the Post-Malabo CAADP Agenda, which saw the integration of fisheries and aquaculture chapters into the new ten-year action plan for CAADP. These efforts culminated to the Kampala Declaration 2026 to 2035, which was declared by African Heads of State and Governments in January 2025. This declaration fulfills the Malabo Commitment 7 goal of ensuring stronger sectoral integration into agricultural frameworks.

Furthermore, the inclusion of fisheries and aquaculture in the CAADP Biennial Review reporting process ensures that the sector is represented in Africa's broader agricultural performance metrics, providing visibility and tracking for future policy development. A key milestone in this regard was the Continental Stakeholder Dialogue Meeting held in Livingstone, Zambia, in 2024 which facilitated sector representation and dialogue on agricultural performance.

Additionally, a consultancy by NAFIRRI, Uganda, has led to improved engagement mechanisms and consultation across Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector. This initiative has helped streamline stakeholder networks, enhance collaboration, and reduce duplication, while ensuring inclusive decision-making. As a result, stakeholders are now more empowered to actively participate in governance and development processes. To date, national fisheries and aquaculture policies for 15 AU Member States have been completed, with transformative support provided to countries such as Madagascar, DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Sudan, Liberia, Burkina Faso, and Central African Republic.

Summary of Key Achievements and Strategic Next Steps

The FishGov2 Project has made tremendous progress towards strengthening sustainable fisheries and aquaculture governance throughout Africa. Despite continued problems, such as delays in crucial research, the project's successes demonstrate a strong commitment to protecting Africa's marine, coastal, and freshwater ecosystems in the face of climate change.

Notably, the project has assisted nine nations in harmonising their policies with regional frameworks, encouraging a more consistent approach to fisheries governance. The continual process of revising policies across Member States reinforces the basis of sustainable fisheries management and improves regional cooperation. Furthermore, the project Established the Platform of African Small Island Developing States and built their capacities in international negotiations.

It established six Centres of Excellence that serve as knowledge hubs for research and capacity-building in fisheries governance across Africa and strengthened their operational capacity. Similarly, the AU-IBAR hub for fisheries and aquaculture data management was operationalized with centralized information and research related to fisheries and aquaculture, and climate resilience was integrated in the Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors.

FishGov2 remains committed to its objectives to ensure that Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors are resilient, sustainable, and well-positioned to grow despite persistent challenges. At the Fourth Steering Committee Meeting of FishGov2, on December 6, 2024, in Addis Ababa, the following six proposals were made to assure the project's continued success and expansion:

1. Building on the momentum created by FishGov2, by planning for a third phase of the project, focusing on scaling-up successes and addressing emerging issues.
2. Ensuring increased funding for Regional Aquatic Animal Health Networks, critical for supporting long-term aquatic animal health management, which is essential for the resilience and productiveness of Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sectors.
3. Promoting private sector involvement in driving innovation, boosting aquaculture productivity, and creating job opportunities.
4. Organising capacity-building activities to improve the capabilities of fisheries and aquaculture stakeholders to ensure effective management and governance.
5. Assisting AU Member States in using fisheries and aquaculture data for long-term plans and informed decision making.

6. Streamlining cash distribution and utilisation processes to enable the timely and efficient implementation of project activities to ensure successful implementation of current and future FishGov project phases.

For more details visit:

FishGov 2 Microsite:
https://www.au-ibar.org/projects/enhancing-sustainable-fisheries-management-and-aquaculture-development-africa-programme

Access the various knowledge products via: *http://repository.au-ibar.org/handle/123456789/1551*



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