Analysis and Actions Considered on Policies, Institutions and Governance Issues for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development in Africa



Executive Summary

Aquaculture in Africa holds immense potential for driving food security, nutrition, livelihoods, job creation, and economic growth. The continent benefits from abundant natural resources, diverse aquatic ecosystems, favorable climates, a growing youthful workforce, and supportive policy frameworks with strong political will. Established commercial technologies, such as; tilapia farming in Egypt, Uganda, and Ghana, and catfish aquaculture in Nigeria, already provide a strong foundation for expansion of aquaculture production and value chains.

However, the sector still faces significant weaknesses, particularly in aquatic animal health and biosecurity, inadequate infrastructure across the value chain, lack of quality seed and feed, limited investment and financing options, and low public awareness. In many African countries, policies on veterinary input use, disease surveillance, and traceability are either weak or absent.

Opportunities lie in closing Africa's fish supply deficit, leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), fostering intra-African trade, expanding aquaculture value chains, and adopting innovative systems such as Integrated Agri-Aquaculture Systems (IAAS), Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS), and renewable energy-powered operations. Additionally, international partnerships, indigenous species development, and youth and women engagement present major growth avenues.

Threats include biosecurity risks from uncontrolled fish movements, climate change impacts, extreme weather events, and water pollution from industrial, agricultural, and urban sources.

The role of African organizations is central in addressing weaknesses and unlocking opportunities;

- The African Union (AU), through the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy (PFRS) and the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, provides the political and policy umbrella for sustainable aquaculture development.
- AU-IBAR leads continental coordination, including the African Fisheries Reform Mechanism (AFRM), which promotes regional policy harmonization and technical support for aquaculture and fisheries.
- Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (ECOWAS, SADC, COMESA, IGAD) have developed regional aquaculture action plans, harmonized regulations, and facilitated cross-border trade and disease surveillance.
- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) expands market opportunities by reducing barriers to intra-African trade in fish, feed, and aquaculture inputs.
- Continental laboratory networks and partnerships supported by AU-IBAR and WOAH strengthen aquatic animal health surveillance, diagnostics, and early warning systems.
- PPP and regional cooperation models already implemented include:
  1. AU-IBAR's Aquaculture Action Plan (2016–2025), which promotes public–private partnerships for aquafeed, seed production,

and biosecurity.

2. Nigeria's catfish PPP model linking private hatcheries and feed mills with government extension services.
3. Ghana's tilapia feed and hatchery PPPs, co-developed with development partners and private investors.
4. Egypt's commercial aquaculture clusters, supported by government facilitation of water access, land allocation, and private sector investment.
5. ECOWAS Aquaculture Action Plan, which harmonizes aquaculture policies and standards across West Africa.

Way forward:

To achieve sustainable aquaculture growth and contribute to Agenda 2063, Africa needs a coordinated strategy at continental, regional, and national levels. This should include harmonized aquatic disease surveillance systems, strict biosecurity measures, contingency planning, promotion of climate-smart and resource-efficient systems, and facilitation of PPPs. African organizations—AU, AU-IBAR, RECs, AFRM, and AfCFTA—must continue leading policy harmonization, capacity development, financing facilitation, and regional market integration to transform aquaculture into a sustainable driver of the Blue Economy.

Introduction

Effective and sustainable management of Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector is critical for food security, economic development, and environmental resilience. However, the sector faces persistent challenges, including inadequate policy awareness, weak monitoring systems, limited data availability, and the growing impacts of climate change. A SWOT analysis was conducted to assess the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats, affecting the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Africa, in order to inform evidence-based policies, guide strategic interventions.

A. SWOT ANALYSIS ON POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
- Existence of platforms in fisheries network to support policy and institution advocacy. - Most AU-member States have policies and institutions governing. - The presence of coordination platforms contributes to fisheries governance to exchange and sharing of information. - The presence of the policy guidance, e.g. PFRS, Regional Policies in fisheries and aquaculture and the efforts (consulted efforts) to align them with global and regional best practices. - Availability of prioritised global instruments for domestication in alignment with national policies. - The existence of African fisheries Reform Mechanism and its strategic implantation including the policy, institution and governance Working Group as an organ in its structure. - The contribution of AU- CoEs (Centres of Excellence) in the development of new knowledge products in priority areas. - Active participation of non-State actors in policy formulation and implementation.	- Inadequate awareness creation on policy mechanisms and benefits on domestication of global instruments. - Reliance on foreign donors to implement projects. - Inadequate capacity and resources on fisheries management. - Weak monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems. - Inadequate and inaccessible fisheries data on fisheries resources (statistics and science). - The Working Group only meet to endorse knowledge products generated by CoEs with limited participation in joint group sessions on cross cutting issues. - Ineffective mechanisms on dissemination of knowledge products to member States and other stakeholders. - Poor coordination among sectors on aquatic resources and management. - Ineffective use of appropriate instruments for trans-boundaries fisheries management both freshwater and marine fisheries. - Lack of understanding of the BBNJ agreement and its impact. - Despite many Member States adopting Blue Economy, knowledge products on specific themes have not been developed

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATHS
- The existence of Fish Gov Projects (EU-funded). - A lot of AU-member States are making a reference to the continental instruments. - Many Regional Economic Communities (RECs) consider fisheries and aquaculture in their development agenda. - The emergency of the Blue Economy is an opportunity to strengthening sustainable fisheries management in the fisheries sector.	- Lack of concerted effort in addressing aquatic plastic pollution on fisheries and aquaculture. - Most fisheries policies do not adequately consider unintended consequences of implementation. - Corruption and interference with management decisions including adverse impact of political consideration on fisheries management issues. - Implementation of fisheries management plan (including fishing efforts reduction time and area of fishing etc.) are likely to affect livelihood, food and nutrition security of fishing communities. - Adverse impact of climate change is reflected in decline of fish stocks and disruption of fish production including aquaculture.

B. ACTION PLAN ON POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES FOR FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The following action plan draft outlines strategic interventions aimed at strengthening governance, enhancing stakeholder engagement, securing sustainable funding, and building the technical capacity required to unlock the sector's full potential. It identifies key issues, proposes targeted actions, assigns responsibilities, and provides indicative timeframes. This framework is designed to guide African Union Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs), and other stakeholders towards coordinated, results-driven implementation.

Issues	Proposed Actions	Interventions	Responsibility
-Inadequate awareness creation on policy mechanisms and benefits on domestication of global instruments	Identify and synthesize best practices on the policy mechanisms and benefits of domesticating global instruments.	Policy Brief and communication drive - targeting policy & lawmakers	AU-IBAR, RECs, MS, Biennial forum for monitoring adherence and domestication og Global instruments
- Poor allocation of domestic financial resources towards projects	Conduct studies to determine factors that can enhance allocation of domestic financial resources towards projects.	Advocacy note on exploring alternative funding opportunities for sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture in Africa notes	AU-IBAR, Governance WG
	Generate sensitization tools for public sector investments in the fisheries	Advocacy note, PPP guide implementation	AU-IBAR, NSA, Private Sector
-Inadequate capacity and resources on fisheries management	Identify capacity gaps and recommend appropriate measures to achieve sustainable fisheries management.	Gap analyses for FishGov3 proposal	AU-IBAR, AU-CoEs, Specialized institutions in fisheries and aquaculture
Weak monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems	Generate evidence to inform member States to develop effective MCS Systems	Concept Note and Policy brief	AU-IBAR, RECs (regional MCS coordination centers)
-Inadequate and inaccessible fisheries data on fisheries resources (statistics and science).	Determine appropriate approaches for Member States to apply the AU Data Collection, Analysis & Dissemination Strategy.	Gap analysis for FishGov3 proposal Concept notes and policy brief Sustainable funding mechanism for the implementation of AFADAta	AU-IBAR, MS, RECs, AU-CoEs,

Issues	Proposed Actions	Interventions	Responsibility
-The Working Group only meet to endorse knowledge products generated by CoEs with limited participation in joint group sessions on cross cutting issues.	Develop mechanisms for appropriate involvement of Working Group Members in generating knowledge products, jointly with CoEs. Engage AFRM WGs in the implementation of relevant project activities. Promote Joint Working Group Sessions on cross-cutting policy and governance matters.	Review WG ToR to capture stated actions as well as joint WG sessions on crosscutting issues.	AU-IBAR, Stakeholders
-Ineffective mechanisms on dissemination of knowledge products to member states and other stakeholders.	Identify best mechanisms that can be used to easily disseminate knowledge products to member states.	Capture recommendations at plenary	AU IBAR knowledge management
-Poor coordination among sectors on aquatic resources and management	Design systems that will strengthen coordination among aquatic resources and management sectors. For instance, support set up blue economy governance and sectoral coordination structures and mechanisms at regional and national level	Coordinate with relevant AUC institution.	AU-IBAR, DARBE RECS RFBs
-Ineffective use of appropriate instruments for trans-boundaries fisheries management on both freshwater and marine fisheries.	Identify best practices on trans-boundaries fisheries management, including good coordination on MCS for both freshwater and marine fisheries.	Identify gaps for FishGov3 proposal Knowledge product in this regard	AU-IBAR, RECS, RFBs, RFMOs
-Lack of understanding of the BBNJ agreement and its impact.	Raise awareness about the importance of ratifying the BBNJ Enhance the African voice for negotiation in BBNJ agreement Domestication of the BBNJ agreement	Development of Policy briefs on the action points Biennial forum to examine the action points	AU-IBAR, RECs, MS, RFMOs
-Despite many Member States adopting Blue Economy, knowledge products on specific themes have not been developed	Identify and synthesize best practices and guidelines for proper implementation and coordination of Blue Economy Strategies.	Policy briefs Concept notes National meetings	AUC, AU-IBAR, RECs, RFBs, MS, Other stakeholders
-Lack of concerted effort in addressing Aquatic plastic pollution on fisheries and aquaculture	Generate knowledge to inform discourse on global legally binding Plastic Treaty as well as national aquatic plastic pollution strategies (to be continental/regional strategy both marine and freshwater ecosystems).	Development of Policy briefs on the action point Biennial forum to examine the action point	AU-IBAR, RECs, MS, RFMOs
-Most fisheries policies do not adequately consider unintended consequences of implementation.	Develop risk assessment for policy implementation	Risk analysis of policies Development of policy briefs on policy impacts and directions	National, Regional and Continental Fisheries and Aquaculture Institutions

Issues	Proposed Actions	Interventions	Responsibility
-Lack of transparency, Corruption and interference with management decisions including adverse impact of political consideration on fisheries management issues	Determine Political Economy of Policy and Governance reforms; and recommend measures to guide Member States appropriately. Promote transparency and compliance of relevant national, regional and international fisheries laws and regulations.	Policy briefs on fisheries governance, surveillance and quotas Policy briefs on political economy and the impacts of non- transformation Develop concept notes	National Governments
-Implementation of fisheries management plans (including efforts reduction, time and area of fishing etc.) are likely to affect livelihoods, food and nutrition security of fishing communities	Determine appropriate approaches (e.g. food environment) for sustainable aquatic food systems polices/strategies. Determine alternative livelihoods programmes (e.g. aquaculture, horticulture, algaculture, etc.). Determine appropriate social security programmes at the national levels.	Development of concept notes emphasizing strong participation of stakeholders in the development of management plans Development of advocacy note on social security programmes to cover fishing communities at the national levels	AU-IBAR, MS, NSA
-Adverse impact of climate change is reflected in decline of fish stocks and disruption of fish production including aquaculture.	Determine appropriate mitigation and adaption measures on impact of climate change on fishing communities, fisheries and aquaculture. Recommend appropriate approaches to establish capacity for climate change analysis and prediction centers. Determine appropriate approaches (e.g. food environment) for sustainable aquatic food systems polices/strategies. Determine appropriate social security programme.	AU-Development of concept notes Research on Climate impact, mitigation and adaptation measures Implementation of the continental strategy on climate at the regional and national levels.	AU-IBAR, RECs, MS, Regional Sea Conventions, AU-CoEs

Conclusion

This action plan provides a roadmap for addressing the most pressing governance, capacity, and sustainability challenges in Africa's fisheries and aquaculture sector. By aligning actions with continental strategies, leveraging regional cooperation, and promoting knowledge-driven policymaking; African Member States can optimise resource use, improve livelihoods, and ensure the long-term health of aquatic ecosystems. Implementation will require strong political will, domestic resource mobilisation, and inclusive engagement of all relevant actors, from policymakers to fishing communities. If executed effectively, these interventions will not only strengthen fisheries management but also position the sector as a key driver of Africa's blue economy and sustainable development agenda.