



POLICY NOTE

AFRICA INLAND FISHERIES – UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL FOR FOOD SECURITY, LIVELIHOODS ENHANCEMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

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Key Messages:

1. Management options for African inland fisheries must have a trade-off between the attainment of food security, enhancing livelihoods and promoting rational fisheries resources exploitation and conservation.
2. The strategic approach to the management of trans-boundary inland fisheries resources should be underpinned by a comprehensive regional fisheries management plan, coherent with national plans, developed in a participatory manner and informed by evidence
3. Externalities such as threats of climate change, natural disasters and environmental issues require monitoring and periodic evaluation of fisheries resources should be integrated in Inland fisheries management plans.
4. Identification and promotion of alternative sources of livelihoods should be highlighted in management processes for inland fisheries such as stock recovery strategy, as well as special considerations for women and youth empowerment.
5. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) should develop regional policy and frameworks and the Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) should develop the tools for the implementation of these policies and frameworks as well as for monitoring their impacts
6. The participation and partnership of all stakeholders especially women and youth in inland fishery management process is important and should be enhanced and institutionalized

Introduction:

The continent has extensive water bodies that are mostly bordered by two or more countries. These shared water bodies include Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Albert, Zambezi River, and the Nile River. Africa has about 80 trans-boundary water basins that serve multiple functions. The trans-boundary water basins cover approximately 64% of the continent's land area, which contain 93% of the water resources and are inhabited by 77% of the population. The water basins contain fisheries resources and a wealth of aquatic and other biodiversity. The Inland fisheries have enormous potential for significant contribution to nutrition and food security, employment, income generation and improvement of livelihoods to populations in African countries. In several countries, especially land-locked countries and riparian communities along major rivers and lakes of the continent, fish is a major protein source.

Importance of Inland Fisheries to Food Security and Livelihoods

The total inland fisheries production in 2014 is 2.9 million metric tonnes and therefore a vital source of fish supplies in the continent as well as employment for about 5 million people. Inland fisheries subsector is therefore of immense importance to rural communities in Africa, especially with regards to food and nutrition security. The subsector's contribution to national GDPs is about 0.33 %.



Figure 1: Women in inland fisheries- Fish marketing; need to improve hygienic conditions (Photo ©: Professor Eyiunmi Falaye, Ffs)

Africa Inland water bodies have competing uses including power generation from hydroelectric dams, water transportation and agriculture. In deprived fishing communities with limited opportunities, especially in rural areas, inland fisheries are critical to the food security needs and livelihoods. These poverty-prevention functions of the fisheries bring social stability and confidence amongst the rural communities; mitigate rural-urban and overseas migration tendencies. The inland fisheries subsector therefore plays the role of social protection safety nets in the absence of central government support to these communities. The subsector therefore constitutes a powerful rallying point and a source of social security for the women and youth with inherent potential to be a viable engine for social-economic growth in Africa. However, the real importance of inland fisheries is likely under-estimated due to their complex nature. The multi-gear and multi-species nature, scattered or highly dispersed fishing operations, and the informal trade compound the problem. Thus adequate information on the socio-economic impact of these highly diverse economic activities of the fisheries sector cannot be accurately ascertained.



Figure 2: Domestic activities on inland water bodies (Photo ©: Professor Eyiunmi Falaye, Ffs)

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Figure 3: Fisherman at Gambia River: Use of Monofilament Net which is banned (Photo ©: Professor Eyiunmi Falaye, Ffs)

Current Management Approaches and Underlying Challenges:

Inland water bodies are natural capital assets which must be managed in a manner to not only maintain existing benefits (food security, livelihoods and income), but also to significantly increase the sustainable contribution of the sub-sector to the blue economy growth of member states. The current benefits are however under threat from a variety of sources, key amongst which include poor governance frameworks, incoherent policies and legislative frameworks. The underlying challenges are the open access nature, weak capacity, threats of climate change, receding water levels, mining activities with resulting effluents, hydro-electric development, weed invasion, species diversity and the associated taxonomic and life history challenges.



Figure 4: Competing uses of inland water resources (Photo ©: Professor Eyiunmi Falaye, Ffs)

Invariably the existing national instruments for overall inland fisheries management have not, as compared to marine fisheries, proportionately focused on redressing the issues in inland fisheries giving its crucial role in food security, social welfare and income. This is with the exception of notable few like the code of conduct for responsible fisheries, voluntary guidelines for small-scale fisheries and the policy framework and reform strategy for fisheries and aquaculture in Africa. In general, however, where inland fisheries management measures are included, the focus is mainly on technical measures which include seasonal and area closures to fishing activities, fishing gear restrictions and mesh size regulation, annual registration of fishing gears and crafts, licensing, catch assessment surveys (including annual frame surveys and collection of catches and fishing effort in few cases).

Without the provision of alternative livelihoods, and amidst low catch, high poverty level and weak surveillance, these regulations are hardly enforced or adhered to.



Figure 5: Aquatic plants in inland water environments: providing ecological niche as e.g. nursery areas or obstructing fishing activities? (Photo ©: Professor Eyiwunmi Falaye, Ffs)

Fisheries Governance Issues in Shared Water Bodies:

The issues and challenges which affect and could potentially impact on the sustainable exploitation and management of the inland lakes fisheries are related to inadequate fisheries governance. The main issues include:

- Absence of coherence in laws, policies, regulations and standards
- Absence of Weak fisheries management plans hamper good governance possibilities
- Poor compliance to fisheries laws and regulations and inadequate enforcement
- Non- effective involvement of all stakeholders in the management process;
- Limited evidence to guide resource management;
- Rapid population growth leading to increasing demand for ecosystems' goods and services; excessive pressure on fisheries and other basin resources;
- Environmental degradation, climate change and pollution

Management Scenarios – Moving Forward on Food Security and Pro-poor Growth

The fisheries governance issues together with the prevalence of poverty and increase in population around the lake's basin contribute to exertion of excessive pressure on the inland fisheries resources and their basin ecosystems. The existence of accredited RFBs or Water Basin Commissions (WBCs) provides opportunities for coherent and coordinated management of the fisheries resources in these shared water bodies.

Any management option for African inland fisheries must have a trade-off between attainment of food security, livelihoods and fisheries resources conservation. The strategic approach to the management of trans-boundary fisheries resources should be underpinned by regional fisheries management plan, coherent with national plans as well as regional integration objectives, developed in a participatory manner. The RECs should develop regional policy and frameworks and the RFBs should develop the tools for the implementation of these policies and frameworks as well as for monitoring their impacts

It is therefore important to involve stakeholders in the management process, ensuring compliance and enforcement, but also put in place Conflict Resolution Mechanisms for territorial disputes, identify and promote alternative sources of livelihoods, and introduce appropriate management options or tools such as rights-based management, Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries (EAF), interactive governance and community-based Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The underlying principles in any of these approaches, tools or measures should be made clearly understood by stakeholders and the mechanism for their implementation developed in a participatory manner so that there will be general consensus.

Although most of the catch of inland water fisheries is consumed locally, products from inland fisheries are also important in regional, intra- and international trade. Where there is surplus fish production above the national demands, the products from the sector could be packaged for international markets for foreign exchange generation and economic growth.

The regional fisheries management frameworks, policies and plans should be tuned to addressing:

1. Building adequate human and institutional capacities for efficient harvesting, reduction in post-harvest losses, trade and marketing
2. The organization capacity of stakeholders must also be built for efficient co-management of the resources
3. Creation of alternative sources of livelihoods by national governments through for instance, market gardening, apiculture, and livestock raising; skills empowerment in form of literacy and numeracy training programmes for boat building and mending. These will reduce pressure on the resources while improving income generating capacity of fishing communities as well as enhance food security and standard of living of fishers
4. Reducing the vulnerability of fishing communities through local adaptation plans to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change and other associated disaster
5. Improvement of the legal and regulatory framework for harmonization and coherence, strengthening the frameworks for concerted action and promoting joint management
6. Institutionalizing the role of stakeholders in regional and national frameworks and promoting pro-poor growth development activities
7. Promoting conservation and sustainability of fisheries resources and biodiversity through adoption of appropriate management approaches, tools and measures (User-Rights, EAF, interactive governance approaches, Community-based MPA, area or seasonal closures, etc.)
8. Promoting social cohesion and conflict management/resolution mechanism: Natural resource conflicts emanating from disagreements and disputes over access, control and their use. These conflicts often emerge because people have different uses for the resources

Note:

*This paper has been prepared within the broader objectives of the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for fisheries and aquaculture in Africa and the 2014 Malabo Declaration with specific regards to food security, livelihoods and poverty reduction. The paper is a synthesis of outcomes of the studies conducted on fisheries management and development issues in shared water in Africa under the Project **'Strengthening Institutional support to enhance Governance of the fisheries Sector in Africa'** implemented by African Union (AU-IBAR and NEPAD) with funding from the European Union. The management and development issues identified are intended to inform and guide the formulation (or strengthening) of rationale, evidenced-based regional fisheries management plans on these shared water bodies.*