

World Fisheries Day 2022

The 21st of November is dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of a healthy and sustainable marine ecosystem. This year marks the 7th observation of the day.

World Fisheries Day pivots on worldwide support for all fishermen and women in the value chain, actors, and stakeholders in the sector. The global objective for the day is to bring focus on the increasing challenges of the sustainability of both marine and inland water fish species. Some notable challenges of fisheries are IUU fishing, ecological damage to the environment, and the growing impacts of climate change on marine habitats.

CEMLAWS Africa shares and supports the significance of the commemoration of World Fisheries Day. The Centre, since its inception in 2014, has undertaken initiatives and projects which have contributed to dialoguing opportunities, capacity-building and training, policy highlights, and research in support of enhancing sustainable management and governance of the marine sector.

The Centre's HOPE (Healthy Oceans for People and Economy) initiative is aimed at advancing socio-economic development and food security on the African continent for current and future generations through effective conservation, management, and sustainable use of the vast wealth of ocean resources. The unequivocal role of fisheries in Africa's Blue Economy agenda demands attention to realize the intended objective of HOPE. The interdisciplinary approach of the HOPE initiative gave precedence to undertaking fisheries-related projects in more recent years.

From 2019-2020, CEMLAWS collaborated with major government entities under a funded project of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to develop a **National Integrated Maritime Strategy (NIMS) for Ghana** and a **National Maritime Strategy for Nigeria (NMS)** which serve as blueprints for guiding activities within the maritime domain. Fisheries governance is highlighted as a priority area for multi-sectoral collaboration and management in the NIMS & NMS. While the detailed Implementation Plans (IP) accompanying the Strategies indicate clear deliverables, policies and resource injection required to achieve a better fisheries sector in Ghana and Nigeria. This surely aligns with other West African countries, albeit with nuances. set to resolve bottlenecks of developing and benefitting from a multiple-use resource.

The Bloomberg Philanthropy's funded Vibrant Ocean Initiative project, titled **Enhancement of Transparency in the Fisheries Sector**, is ongoing as the Centre coordinates and leads research through a network of experts and stakeholders to improve transparency in the fisheries sectors of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Senegal. The project has provided opportunities for inclusion by all stakeholders towards recommendations to enhance accountability and information-sharing. Key in this regard is the inclusion of fishing communities, the artisanal sector, and women in the dialogue process.

Another project aimed at improving monitoring, reporting, and awareness of the maligning impacts of IUU fishing and activities of foreign vessels in the Gulf of Guinea, by CEMLAWS Africa, which has been awarded by the US Embassy is titled **Promoting Transparency, Accountability, and Local Capacity to Address the Destabilizing Impacts of Foreign Distant Water Fishing Vessels in the Gulf of Guinea and the waters of Mauritania**. The project which is being implemented from 2022 to 2024 brings on board a global network of

experts to address concerns about opaque access agreements, licensing regimes and weak enforcement in the sector.

CEMLAWS and the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI) have also begun an online **Taking Stock Assessment of Ghana's Fisheries Management**. The Report is to be released in April 2023 for a baseline approach to improving public access to reliable fisheries information and to include all stakeholders in the governance processes ranging from decision-making to implementation of policies and regulations in the sector.

The fisheries sector in West Africa is undoubtedly under imminent threat, but the Centre rests on its optimistic view of enhancing sustainability and transparency in the fisheries sector through strong international and regional collaborations. The Executive Director & Team Lead, Dr Kamal-Deen Ali, has this to say, “...*our Centre will continue to direct optimal attention to restoring the ocean environment through research, capacity-building and strong advocacy for governance changes and interventions in support of our fisheries*”.

We wish all our assiduous fishers, actors, and stakeholders well-deserved congratulations on this day! We can do better...but together!