

Roles of Regional Fishery Bodies: Observations on the Committee for Inland Fisheries of Africa (CIFA)

John Moehl¹ and Ndiaga Gueye²

BACKGROUND

In 1971, the Fifty-Sixth Session of the FAO Council, under Article VI-2 of the FAO Constitution, established the Committee for Inland Fisheries of Africa: CIFA. The Committee, composed of African member nations, was intended to, among others: (i) promote, co-ordinate and assist national and regional fishery surveys, research and development leading to the rational utilization of inland fishery resources; (ii) assist member governments in establishing the scientific basis for regulatory and other control measures for conservation and improvement in inland fishery resources; (iii) prevent damage to the environment on national and regional levels; (iv) assist in the development of fish culture and stock improvement; (v) promote the utilization of effective gear and techniques; (vi) encourage education and training; (vii) assist in the collection, interchange, dissemination and analyses of data and information; and (viii) assist in formulating national and regional programmes to achieve the preceding objectives¹.

The potential importance of regional bodies for networking has long been appreciated. In 1975, the First Regional Workshop on Aquaculture

Planning in Africa noted the need for close cooperation among countries in a region in such areas as introduction of non-indigenous species, control and prevention of disease and pollution, and regulation. The Workshop further noted that bodies such as CIFA could be suitable media for channelling such cooperative efforts².

The reliance on regional bodies for co-ordination and networking remains. In 2006, the recently concluded Third Session of the COFI Aquaculture Sub-Committee noted a need *"to establish cooperation networks, to collaborate with regional organisations and to re-enforce information networks to enhance knowledge and to disseminate processes... also facilitate the sharing of national experiences in relation to successes and failures of policy formulation and outcomes and adoption of conflict mitigation mechanisms"*.

Today, CIFA has 36 member nations and has held thirteen sessions. For the four sessions over the past 10 years, participation has ranged from 36 percent in 1997 to 75 percent in 2000.

THE DILEMMA

The 1970s were the heyday of donor-supported fisheries in Africa. The majority of sub-Saharan countries had externally-assisted fisheries and/or aquaculture programmes in one form or another; these resources being used to provide public sector services and support national staff, including their participation in such events as meetings of regional bodies.

These bodies served as venues for on-the-job training and informal networking. They created a sense of camaraderie and offered an opportunity for the presentation of a wide variety of technical papers from the esoteric to the practical.

The years 1997 to 1999 showed a shift in the FAO policy towards Regional Fishery Bodies. At the Twenty Second Session of COFI (1997), the Committee considered action necessary to strengthen the FAO fishery bodies, bearing in mind the financial and resource implications involved.



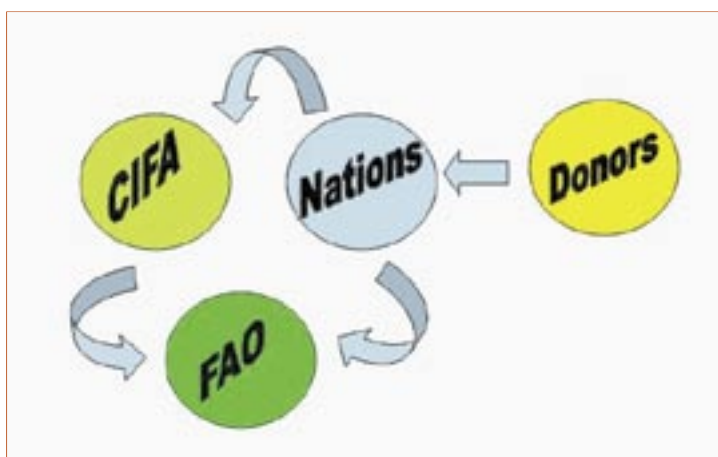
Meetings have been integral parts of fisheries development programmes for decades

With respect to FAO inland fishery bodies, including CIFA, there was a reinforcement of their advisory role: *"Inland aquatic resources and water bodies (except in large lakes and some large rivers which often have independent authorities) are generally under the managerial responsibility of a single sovereign country and therefore, the role of FAO inland fishery bodies have been, and will remain largely that of an international forum where experiences and data are exchanged and where general advice for management is elaborated for consideration, but eventually for action by individual members. In addition, inland fishery resources are, to a large extent, conditioned by non-fishery activities affecting the aquatic system and the water resources, beyond the control of fishery managers."*

In the case of CIFA, few of the regional regulatory, conservation, co-ordinating or networking functions were accomplished in an organized and sustainable way.

The organizational structure of CIFA can be approximated by Figure 1: member nations interacted with both CIFA and FAO, these interactions often heavily subsidized by donor support. CIFA served as a conduit and an archive, but provided **modest returns** in terms of applicable services or value added for those countries which were members³.

Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the tripartite relationship between CIFA, FAO and Member Nations, with a strong helping hand from the donor community



In the current millennium, the face of the fisheries sector in the Region has changed significantly. High levels of extra-budgetary support are no longer available and most member nations are faced with the realities of undertaking those activities that can be accommodated by shrinking national budgets. Those investments of public funds that are attracting support are those that have multiplier effects across multiple layers of society.

In extreme cases, public investments in the fisheries sector have been radically cut. This reduction has applied not only to regular services such as extension, monitoring, control and surveillance, but also to exceptional services (e.g., input supply, subsidies and gifts) undertaken with the assistance of now no longer existent external funds.

The present period of penury has led to a challenge for both member nations and FAO. Regional bodies such as CIFA were established to assist member nations and to be supported by these same member nations – intuitively the nations’ investments in CIFA offering sufficiently high returns to justify the opportunity cost of these scarce funds. If Members do not prioritise support to CIFA, this can only be interpreted as meaning that CIFA does not provide adequate value to defend the costs of this support. If members do not support an organization that was established to support them, then support by the FAO is called into cause; the likely outcome being the dissolution of the organization.

REVISITING REGIONAL BODIES

Returning to the initial Terms of Reference for CIFA, the activities listed in the first paragraph remain as important today as they were 35 years ago. There are unquestionably well-justified co-ordination and networking roles where the economies of scale weigh in favour of a regional approach and oversight by a group such as CIFA. The predicament is not in terms of the identification of activities but rather with the means identified to address these issues; bi-annual fora cannot effectively assume any realistic coordinating or networking roles just as feeding fish once a month cannot produce a good crop.

CIFA, and other regional bodies, must evolve into a structure that accommodates more than the expectations of the public sectors of member nations. It must serve as the nexus for the sector, effectively linking with civil society, the private sector (including producer organizations) as well as FAO and its development partners (Figure 2).

However, to-date, member states have often not accepted ownership and responsibility for the FAO Regional Fishery Bodies. The consequences of this are multiple. Members show little willingness to delegate to these bodies sufficient responsibility for enforcement and management measures. Members also frequently do not prioritise funds to supporting these bodies and FAO is faced with the debacle of how to pay participants to attend meetings. Stronger commitment and interest from member states are needed to ensure the effective implementation of whatever understanding is

reached with regard to the functions of Regional Fishery Bodies.

In addition to expanding its scope and assisting a wider array of partners, CIFA must restructure and determine a solution to the bi-annual syndrome which, at best, provides intermittent thrusts of support as opposed to the sustained backing needed. Figure 3 offers one possible configuration for a restructured CIFA.

The restructured CIFA retains its political oversight and coordinating role, practically implemented through bi-annual sessions. However, member nations would be serviced by a set of subsidiary and associated structures, functioning under the CIFA umbrella, but as full-time service providers. These service providers would initially be set up using external resources with the *proviso* that member nations would pay for the services provided, these monies progressively able to assume the operating costs of the service providers.

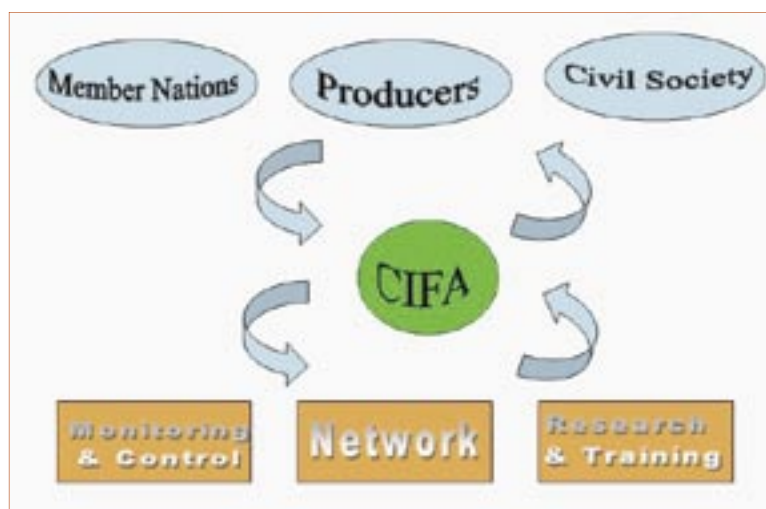
Examples of regional services could be regional training programmes [including degree programmes] along with regional research agendas. These would offer top quality products using economies of scale available from the regional approach. Such services could be complemented with regional certification [standards for inputs, including technical assistance, as well as food products] and monitoring programmes including such practical matters as regional criteria for environmental impact assessments, regional user groups and regional information systems.

But, none of the above is possible without political and financial support from member nations. In the absence of this, the future of regional bodies, including CIFA, is bleak. Definitely CIFA needs adequate support to respond better and more efficiently to the needs of their members and the region.

Figure 2. CIFA revisited and seen as a hub for a regional programme, assisting all major stakeholder groups



Figure 3. CIFA could serve as a hub and overarching organization to link subsidiary and associated permanent regional service providers to the consortium of regional stakeholders including governments, producers and civil society



¹John Moehl
FAO Regional Office for Africa
E-mail: John.Moehl@fao.org

²Ndiaga Gueye
International Institutions and Liason Service
E-mail: Ndiaga.Gueye@fao.org

¹Committee for Inland Fisheries of Africa (CIFA) Statutes and Rules of Procedure. FAO. Rome 1983.

²Aquaculture Planning in Africa, Report of the First Regional Workshop on Aquaculture Planning in Africa, Accra, Ghana, 2-17 July 1975, Aquaculture Development and Coordination Programme, FAO/UNDP, Rome, September 1975.

³Some sub-Saharan countries have yet to join CIFA, including Angola, Equatorial New Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa.