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y la
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FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC

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FIRMS DATA OWNERSHIP

SUMMARY

FIRMS (The Fishery Resources Monitoring System) is a formal Information Partnership arrangement launched in February 2004 which currently brings together 13 International Organizations. FIRMS's objective is to provide information users with a better means to monitor the status and trends of world fishery resources and their management, based on authoritative information sources. Although part of FIRMS original vision, national institutions are not yet members of the Partnership which so far only includes regional fishery organizations and other inter-governmental organizations.

When FAO Fisheries Department became a FIRMS member in 2004, CECAF (together with other FAO regional bodies) became de facto part of FIRMS. Although CECAF is not yet a named "FIRMS partner", as a FAO body it is de facto a Partner and a contributing data owner.

After a review of recent developments in FIRMS, and of responsibilities and opportunities of a data owner as illustrated for CECAF, this document discusses the role which CECAF can play in FIRMS for reporting on fisheries of the West African region. In a context where the fisheries governance landscape is sharply evolving with the emergence of sub-regional organizations with mandates in support to fisheries management, and where the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries will require increasing provision of information across disciplines and institutional levels, CECAF is seen as the authority in a position to define and implement a strategy for encouraging and organizing in a most efficient way status and trends reporting on fisheries.

1. Recent developments in FIRMS

1.1 FIRMS and national level information

The FIRMS Partnership has not so far been open to national membership. However the expansion of FIRMS to national members is a question under regular review by the FIRMS Steering Committee and is something which has been agreed in principle: the main driver to this expansion lies in FIRMS aspiration to be a global monitoring system, implying that it should be able to cover resources and fisheries within national jurisdictions and in areas where regional fishery bodies do not exist. Constraints to this expansion include the need for a strong and

consolidated platform before any substantial growth in the Partnership, the need for increased financial resources, and for a suitable quality assurance scheme able to ensure an adequate level of quality, and for an appropriate governance process. It was however recognised that a number of regional FIRMS Partners such as FAO/CECAF handle inventories including national level information, and that this information can become part of FIRMS under the responsibility of such a regional partner.

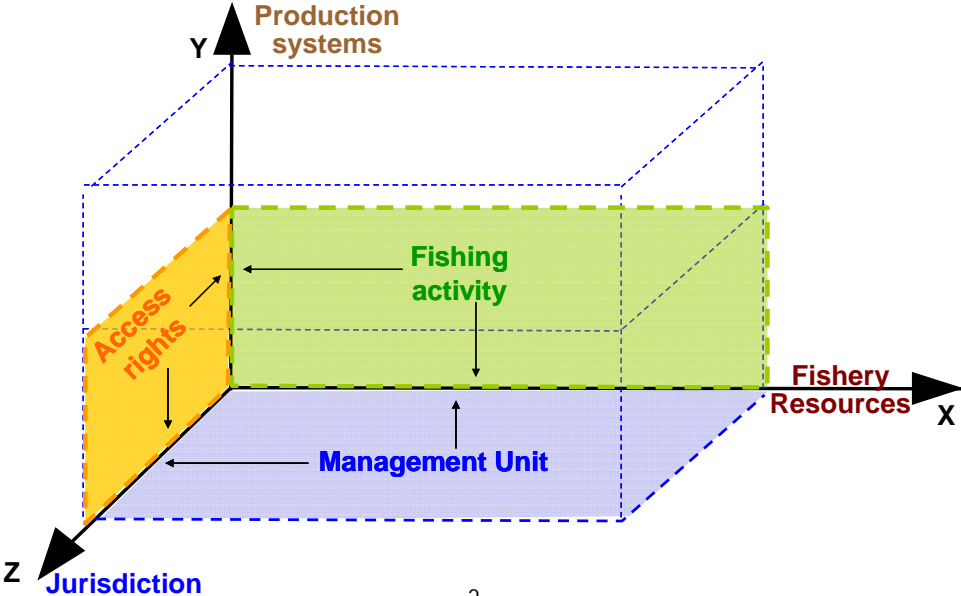
Following this logic, the role of the FIRMS regional partner is therefore no longer restricted to that of a contributor of its regional scale information e.g. on the status of shared stocks, since this Partner might also provide a channel to national level contributions provided some peer review process and quality assurance rules are applied. Considering workflow processes in a context where national entities do not have ownership in FIRMS for dissemination, the 2nd FIRMS Technical Working Group confirmed that the FIRMS Partners should validate any national input they desire to include in FIRMS under their ownership, upon which time it can pass FIRMS publishing clearance rules and be “published” by the FIRMS Partner.

1.2 FIRMS Fisheries module: new horizons offered for knowledge exchange

The initial priority of the core FIRMS partners was for a Marine Resource module able to disseminate their regional level fish stock assessments. This module was released in May 2006 and since then the FIRMS efforts have been directed to the development of the Fisheries module which should satisfy Partners’ needs related to the monitoring of fisheries.

The 5th FIRMS Steering Committee meeting (FSC5) which met in July 2008 approved the design of the Fisheries module, and the first release to the internet is planed shortly. The design of the Fisheries module encompasses the inherent complexity of the multifaceted approach to fisheries, as suggested by the conceptual model represented in Figure 1: the 3 dimensional diagram helps visualise the various perspectives/perceptions people have on fisheries. Three fundamental approaches, represented on the main axes of the diagram, are proposed as the Fishery resource (biological view), the Production systems approach (socio-economic view), and the Jurisdictional approach (legal view); other perspectives at the cross-road of these main ones are represented on the plans of the diagram: a Management unit approach, a Fishing activity (métier) approach, an Access rights approach. FIRMS Partners believe that most existing definitions of fisheries can be mapped to this standard framework, without pre-empting the possibility to extend the standard framework if required.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the multifaceted approach to fisheries



This model gives insights to FIRMS efforts to organize and structure the information so that it is comparable, and to enable linkages and interactivity between the approaches. FIRMS Partners believe that such a model encompassing multiple views can contribute to and eventually support the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF), as this vision leads to a strong and integrated information and management system for aquatic resources and environments and their usage.

The design of the Fisheries module is bound to FIRMS principles: Partners commit to report on status and trends for a list of fishery units (called the inventory) for which they have a monitoring, assessment, or management mandate.

2. Data ownership in FIRMS, and implications for CECAF

Responsibilities: the notion of data ownership in FIRMS vests a very strict meaning. The data owner is the FIRMS signatory partner, ie the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department for what concerns FAO. The data owner has primary reporting responsibility regarding Marine resource or Fishery units constituting its inventory; it is responsible for and has ownership of its contributed information which must comply with the FIRMS Information Management Policy, which implies meeting minimum levels of quality assurance.

Data ownership is distinct from authorship of the source document. A FIRMS partner is entitled to officially register one or more Associate Partners. Documents authored by such an Associate Partner are typically used as sources of information for data owner's (ie the full Partner) contributions to FIRMS. In the absence of an Associate Partner, a FIRMS partner might also endorse (as part of its peer review process) documents authored by a third party as its contribution to FIRMS.

Delegations: depending on its internal structure, a FIRMS Partner might at operational levels delegate implementation of responsibilities contracted under this data ownership to sub-levels. Thus in the case of a FAO Article VI body (under which CECAF is established), the ultimate responsible entity (formally holding the copyright and the obligation¹ to provide information) is FAO/Fisheries and Aquaculture Department under which aegis the committee is established. Practically, the Department delegates implementation of this responsibility to FIEL (the Institution and Liaison service in charge of FAO statutory bodies) which has to ensure that information contributions are made; FIEL requests the information management support of FIES (Information and Statistics Service), and the technical clearance of FIMF (Fisheries Management and Conservation service) before publishing.

This arrangement aims to ensure CECAF information contributions to the FIRMS Marine Resources module, and CECAF was informed about this at its 18th Session (document CECAF/XVIII/2006/5). In practical terms, concerned units at FAO headquarters repackage in FIRMS the information elaborated through CECAF resource assessment working groups. It should be noted that Headquarters units support the extra costs related to repackaging the information according to FIRMS template.

At the 5th Session of the Scientific Sub-Committee (SSC5), the CECAF Marine Resources and Fisheries inventories and related status and trends reporting in FIRMS were presented for their review, validation, and updating. The outcome was as follows:

- The Subcommittee stated that the design of the FIRMS site is valid, valuable and subject to modifications as necessary.
- The inventory of resources poses fewer problems for validation as it mostly

¹ In the case of FAO, the collection, processing and distribution of data is indeed statutory and foreseen in the FAO Constitution.

reflects the work of CECAF and refers to its mandate.

- The inventory of Fisheries is a more complex question because it involves different scales of perception, different disciplinary approaches, and distinct purposes. It was noted that the inventory presented to the Sub-committee had been mainly developed from a biological perspective, while other on-going initiatives are proceeding with fisheries inventories according to similar (CECAF artisanal working group leads a typology of the gears and mapping of the fishing units) or alternative perspectives (the Big Numbers Small Numbers (BNP) project works on a socio-economic study of fishery Production systems).

This more complex reality suggests that the validation of the fisheries inventories requires drawing upon the competences and mandates of the regional, sub regional and national institutions which already exist or are emerging in the region. Although this should be a guideline for medium-term process, the Sub-committee agreed that the issue of data ownership and of institutional mandates was not within its competence. The latter issue should be raised at the CECAF Committee.

In practice and in the short term, the sub-Committee agreed to proceed with the validation of the Fisheries inventory as follows: since fisheries are primarily defined at national level, a first step will consist of a validation by the national delegate serving in this Sub-Committee; a second step under the auspices of a CECAF working group will then consolidate a regional version of the inventory by ensuring consistency among national inputs.

It was concluded that CECAF through its scientific Sub-Committee must be for the moment the institutional entity responsible for the consolidation and validation of the inventories and the information published in FIRMS. The Sub-Committee agreed to systematically register on its agenda the review and validation of information submitted to FIRMS. Regarding the update mechanism, and in the absence of other FIRMS institutional partners in the region, the Sub-Committee recognized that in the current situation it is not in a position to recommend decentralized contributions in the CECAF area, and accordingly this responsibility must remain at FAO level.

3. Discussion

CECAF, with its exclusive FIRMS partner status in West Africa, can strongly contribute to organize status and trends reporting on multifacets of fisheries, thus promoting information exchange in West Africa. This in turn will be key to the implementation of the EAF which requires an increasing need for information generation and exchange across disciplines and institutional levels.

It is suggested that CECAF can play this role as follows:

1. through its Scientific Sub-Committee and its working groups, CECAF should keep under review the inventories and status and trends reporting which evolve from various projects or initiatives in the region; where applicable, CECAF should set-up the required peer-review process eventually leading to publishing in FIRMS under FAO/CECAF data ownership.
2. through its members and network, CECAF should promote FIRMS inventory approaches, advocate FIRMS data sharing mechanisms and contribute to raise/channel funding in support of this dissemination effort.

3. through its Committee, CECAF should provide strategic guidance for encouraging, coordinating and organizing reporting responsibilities among concerned institutions, while recognizing the following principles:

- each institution should provide information in accordance with its mandate and identified information requirements; this implies that the nature of fisheries identified in an inventory is tightly related to the institutional mandate and the geographic scale of action;
- sub-regional and national institutions should be encouraged to develop their inventories, avoiding duplicate information. This should be conducted keeping in mind that clear data ownership in processes such as FIRMS pledges smooth data exchange;
- data ownership by CECAF in FIRMS can be applied as a mentoring approach during the early stages of other institutions' involvement, and can be later transferred as these institutions decide to become FIRMS members in their own right.
- as their capacities strengthen, sub-regional institutions should be progressively encouraged to join FIRMS and exert their data ownership responsibilities;

The Committee is invited to debate on these proposals, and to develop a statement regarding a strategy to encourage a more efficient dissemination of information on fisheries and their status and trends, building on the FIRMS framework.