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# Doc 07: FOSTERING COMMUNITY -DRIVEN SOLUTIONS AND BUILDING LAWS AND ENFORCEMENT

*(Prepared by the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group)*

## 1. REGIONAL LAWS AND POLICIES RELATED TO THE PROTECTION OF AQUATIC WILDLIFE SPECIES.

### 1.1. Global Biodiversity Conventions and Treaties

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971); The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (1973); The ECOWAS Charter (1975); The Abidjan Convention (1981); The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992).

### 1.2. Regional Policies and strategies

African Strategy for Combating illegal exploitation and Illegal trade in wild fauna and flora in Africa (2015); ECOWAS Environment Policy (2008) and Environmental Action Plan (2017); ECOWAS Forest Convergence Plan (2013) and (West Africa Strategy for Combatting Wildlife Crime (Technical validation: 2020)

### 1.3. MOUs

Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa (1998); Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia (2008); Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (2010)

### 1.4. Conservation Action Plans

Action Plans on the Protection and Management of Sharks (1995); Sub-Regional Action Plan for the Protection and Management of Sharks (2002); Dakar Action Plan for the protection of sharks and rays along the West African coasts (2014), Liberia Conservation of the Pygmy hippo (2012); Protection of West African dwarf crocodile (2010) and African slender-snouted crocodile (1992); Protection of marine turtles developed by the IUCN SSC / Marine Turtle Specialist Group (1996).

## 2. LEVELS OF COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS

Compliance levels differ across West Africa. Benin, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Senegal have created Marine Protected Areas and / RAMSAR sites with varying levels of functionality. National Legislation exists in most of these countries, to protect turtle nesting sites, but enforcement is weak with few cases of arrests, seizures and prosecution recorded. **Where traditional laws exist for protecting aquatic wildlife, these are often more effectively enforced than national legislation.** The low compliance can be attributed to:

### 2.1. Lack of Awareness and Education:

Local communities claim ignorance of existing policies and legislation on aquatic wild meat species and show limited conservation consciousness. **Lack of awareness of existing policies is also true for enforcement agency personnel.**

### 2.2. Law Enforcement Challenges:

When laws and policies exist, penalties are often weak and insufficient deterrents to criminals. Enforcement agencies lack training, human, financial and material resources, and are sometimes corrupt, coupled with the logistical challenge of monitoring vast and often remote areas. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing is a major problem in many parts of West Africa even

where laws and regulations exist to combat IUU fishing. Enforcement is often lacking and is worsened by lack of collaboration and coordination between fisheries, wildlife, and other law enforcement.

### 2.3. Poverty and Dependence on Aquatic Resources:

Fishing is an essential part of the local economy and food security for many communities. Following certain laws (e.g. seasonal fishing restrictions) may mean losing their primary source of income or food. Fishermen complain of destruction of their nets by sea turtles or crocodiles and therefore try to sell these animals whenever they can, in order to recoup their loss or earn extra cash. Nesting turtles are captured on beaches and eggs dug up for sale.

There is insufficient data to objectively measure compliance at the Regional Level, but current efforts are clearly insufficient as attested by the trends in sea turtle populations below:

Common name	Latin name	IUCN status	Population trend
Green	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	Endangered – EN	Decreasing
Hawksbill	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	Critically endangered – CR	Decreasing
Leatherback	<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>	Data deficient – DD*	Unknown
Loggerhead	<i>Caretta caretta</i>	Endangered – EN**	Unknown
Olive ridley	<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>	Vulnerable – V	Decreasing

## 3. FOSTERING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS TOWARDS COMPLIANCE AND REDUCED AQUATIC WILD MEAT UPTAKES

Community driven solutions should include raising awareness among local communities, improving knowledge about threatened species and sustainable management of aquatic wildlife, but also dissemination of existing legislation, and promotion of livelihood alternatives. Involving the community in management is also critical. These solutions can be implemented through:

### 3.1. Education and Awareness:

Local communities are not always aware of the importance of conserving biodiversity or the long-term consequences of overexploitation. Education and awareness programs can help them understand the importance of sustainable resource use.

### 3.2. Community-Based Management:

Encourage local communities to take an active role in the management of their aquatic resources e.g. through local committees or councils, which can set their own regulations (within the confines of national/international law), monitor compliance, and manage conflicts.

### 3.3. Participatory Monitoring:

Community involvement in monitoring of resources will build a sense of ownership, and generate valuable data for management. Techniques could include community-led patrols or citizen science initiatives where locals report sightings of particular species.

### 3.4. Alternative Livelihoods:

Overexploitation often stems from a lack of alternatives. Providing training and support for alternative livelihoods (in agriculture, aquaculture, ecotourism, or artisanal crafts) can help reduce the pressure on aquatic resources.

### **3.5. Benefit Sharing:**

Compliance is more likely if stakeholders see direct benefits from conservation activities. This could involve sharing revenue from tourism, creating jobs, or providing clean water, education, and healthcare.

### **3.6. Cultural Practices, Traditional Knowledge, Empowerment and Legal Rights:**

Many local communities have cultural practices and traditional knowledge for sustainable use of natural resources. Recognizing, respecting, and incorporating these can contribute to more effective and accepted conservation strategies. Ensuring communities have legal rights to their lands and waters can give them a stake in the conservation of these resources. Empowering communities to enforce these rights can also help them resist external pressures that might lead to overexploitation.

## **4. BUILDING REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY**

- Training (legislation, species, monitoring, enforcement, etc.)
- Databases (ecological, seizures, prosecution, etc.)
- Coordination (sharing of information, joint planning and implementation, resources)

## **5. FUNDING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS AND BETTER LAW ENFORCEMENT**

- Mapping donors in terms of geographic and thematic focus
- Institutional mechanisms for sustainable fundraising and management

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Traditional laws for protecting aquatic wildlife, are often more effectively enforced than national legislation. Community driven solutions can therefore be powerful tools for conserving aquatic wildmeat species, but must be aligned with global, regional and national policies.
- Lack of awareness of existing policies is a major threat to conservation of aquatic wildmeat species and this is true for community members as well as for enforcement staff. Other constraints include lack of human, technological and financial resources available for enforcement; poverty; and lack of alternative community livelihood options.
- Conservation of Aquatic wildmeat species has been largely conducted in sectorial silos and by inadequately trained enforcement agents.

### **Recommendations:**

- Identify, document and disseminate experiences and best practices in using traditional laws for conservation of aquatic species.
- Design education materials and campaigns around existing policies and legislation for conservation and sustainable use of aquatic wildmeat species; develop project proposals and fund raise towards addressing human resource and logistics gap in enforcement whilst providing diverse livelihood alternatives that are context acceptable to communities.
- Redesign local biodiversity governance systems and tools to include community institutions and local knowledge, secure access to resources for community conservation groups, enhanced coordination and equitable benefit sharing between all stakeholders.
- Conduct gap analysis and needs assessment to identify existing manuals and training programs or develop where necessary and raise funds for rolling out training programs for enforcement agencies.

- Establishing a database of donors and their interests can be combined with the design of sustainable institutions and partnerships for effective conservation of Aquatic wildmeat species.

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