



AFRAQ25 Special Session



Towards Strengthening National Capacities for Fish and Fishery Product Certification in West Africa: Challenges and Opportunities

Session Chair: WAS Africa Chapter President Foluke Areola and Prof Lanre Badmus

Invitation for Contributions

We invite papers, case studies, and practical experiences that examine the complexities of fish and fishery product certification in West Africa. Submissions should focus on challenges, innovative practices, institutional experiences, or regional collaborations that can inform policy and practice. The session particularly encourages submissions from government agencies, certification bodies, research institutions, private sector actors, and researchers studying fisheries policy, trade, or food safety standards.

Session Rationale

Despite making significant contributions to aquaculture production in Africa, many West African countries face challenges in complying with international certification standards for fish and fishery products. This issue often stems from inadequate national certification infrastructure, including a lack of accredited laboratories, unclear legislative frameworks, and insufficient regulatory oversight. Furthermore, although international certification schemes like Codex, HACCP, and SPS provide benchmarks for safety and quality, their implementation remains the sovereign responsibility of individual countries.

The goal of this session is to unpack these challenges from a national perspective, stimulate experience-sharing among stakeholders, and identify actionable recommendations for improving compliance and competitiveness in global markets. While regional and continental collaborations (e.g., through AU-IBAR or ECOWAS) may play a supportive role, certification remains fundamentally a national competency. This session will critically explore how regional initiatives can complement national efforts without duplicating existing international frameworks.

What Participants Will Learn:

- Specific national-level challenges related to fish certification and trade.
- Strategies for improving institutional readiness and infrastructure.
- Insights from countries that have made progress or faced obstacles in certification.
- The roles of regional organizations in supporting national certification systems.

Issues Presenters Are Invited to Address:

- Institutional gaps in fish certification systems.
- Legal and policy barriers to aligning with international standards.
- Case studies on national responses to certification requirements (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana).
- Perspectives from certification bodies, laboratories, and exporters.
- Regional frameworks or donor-supported programs aiding certification.

Proposed Agenda Outline:

Time	Topic	Speaker/Role
10 mins	Welcome & Session Overview	Moderator
30 mins	Selected Paper Presentations (2-3 Papers)	Authors of Accepted Papers
15 mins	Case Study: Certification Challenges in Nigeria	National Expert
15 mins	International Standards: Role and Limitations	FAO or Certification Body Rep
15 mins	Regional Support: AU-IBAR, ECOWAS and RECs	Regional Expert
20 mins	Panel Discussion and Q&A	All Speakers
10 mins	Wrap-up and Participant Recommendations	Rapporteur

Expected Outcomes:

- Shared understanding of key barriers and enablers of certification compliance.
- Documentation of best practices and policy gaps.
- Recommendations for national governments and regional bodies.

This session aims to foster constructive dialogue and mutual learning, ultimately contributing to more robust certification systems that support the growth of West Africa's fish and aquaculture trade.

Enquiries: Session Chair: Foluke Areola foareola@gmail.com