



联合国
粮食及
农业组织

FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS

ORGANISATION
DES NATIONS
UNIES POUR
L'ALIMENTATION
ET L'AGRICULTURE

ORGANIZACION
DE LAS NACIONES
UNIDAS PARA
LA AGRICULTURA
Y LA ALIMENTACION

منظمة
الغذية
والزراعة
للأمم
المتحدة

OPENING STATEMENT

BY

Mr. Oloche A. Edache
**Assistant Director-General/
Regional Representative for Africa**

FOR

**14TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR INLAND FISHERIES FOR AFRICA
(CIFA)**

M-PLAZA HOTEL, ACCRA, GHANA, 22 NOVEMBER 2006

Honourable Minister of Fisheries,

Country Delegates,

Observers,

Gentlemen of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly delighted to welcome you to the 14th Session of CIFA -- the Committee for Inland Fisheries for Africa and for the honour of assisting with the preparations leading to the opening session this morning.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our region's aquatic resources are endowments that have provided livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of Africans for centuries. However, the waters that provide sustenance and wellbeing, are coming under increasing, often dramatic, pressure from our burgeoning populations and expanding economies. The sustainable and equitable use of our aquatic resources is, therefore, one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century.

At the Fish for All Summit, held last year in Abuja, Nigeria, NEPAD recognised the crucial contributions made by the region's inland fisheries to food security, poverty reduction and economic development. It further recognised the rapidly rising importance and emerging successes of aquaculture in Africa. In this regard, within the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), it elaborated the *NEPAD Action Plan for the Development of African Fisheries and Aquaculture*.

The Action Plan described investment areas for inland fisheries and aquaculture including such topics as: governance, resource access and use; strategic development and monitoring, transboundary management and commerce; private sector investment and enterprise development; institutional strengthening; environmental sustainability; market development and regional trade; and, maintaining Africa's comparative advantage. It was foreseen that investments in the identified areas could stabilise stagnating or declining fishery production, while increasing the sector's contribution to socio-economic development.

NEPAD, through its fisheries Action Plan, has clearly emphasised the importance of aquatic resources for Africa's development and the importance of taking a regional approach to the development of these vital resources. Many of our waters and problems are shared; many of our institutions can and should work together, and much of our expertise is applicable to the region as a whole. We should, may I even say **MUST** work and collaborate regionally if our aquatic resources are to be sustained to serve future generations as they served our ancestors.

Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

CIFA offers a critical platform from which to organise and initiate regional action. CIFA was established in 1971 with the mandate to promote, coordinate and assist national and regional fishery research and development programmes leading to the rational utilisation of inland fishery resources. The Committee was also charged with the responsibility of promoting and coordinating efforts on national and regional bases to prevent damage to the aquatic environment. These tasks that catalysed the establishment of CIFA thirty-five years ago are even more needed and urgent today.

It is in the sense of this urgency that the FAO Regional Office for Africa has decided to host the 14th Session of CIFA at what may be a unique opportunity for Member Countries to decide how the Committee can assist Africa to use wisely her invaluable water resources and the aquatic organisms that rely on these ecosystems for their existence and who, in turn, play such an important part in our own.

As you will be hearing in the presentations and discussions over the next three days, the theme of this session is to answer the question: how can CIFA help? The aim of this session is, through your deliberations, to define roles and responsibilities for CIFA such that the committee can contribute in a meaningful way to the implementation of the NEPAD Action Plan and to your own national programmes.

CIFA is your committee. In 1971 African Member Nations requested FAO to establish the Committee. The request was endorsed by the Sixth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries. In honouring the request, in the statutes of the Committee, it is noted that expenses incurred by representatives of Member Countries shall be borne by the representative governments. It is your committee and it is up to you to support its operations.

Certainly, your investments in CIFA should provide returns. You should see your contributions to CIFA as an investment in your national aquatic resources; an investment that will reap returns in improved production combined with enhanced sustainability.

This session of CIFA offers you the opportunity, distinguished delegates, to decide how CIFA could and should provide these returns.

As with most previous sessions, it has been difficult for some delegates to attend this session, with several Member Countries citing prevailing economic woes making participation a financial impossibility. We certainly understand all too well the most difficult economic times being experienced in many parts of the region. However, we are also keenly aware and in full support of the popular news now coming more frequently from the region that real and sustainable economic growth is underway. There is reason for optimism and a need to plan for an optimistic future. This requires investing in the future and, if CIFA is indeed providing a worthwhile service, participation should be seen as a worthy investment in spite of prevailing short-term financial difficulties.

Within this context, I ask each and every one of you to take the task at hand most seriously. Devote all your considerable energies to the discussions and, as a group of the region's key decision-makers for aquatic resource management, define realistic and doable roles and responsibilities for CIFA such that the Committee will be a long-term asset to your national programmes. Decide what CIFA should do and how it should function. Then, with conviction that a reinvigorated Committee owned by African Member States is necessary, commit to its support.

I close with a West African Proverb to guide your deliberations TOK NO DI PUT BRIS FO FAYA – chatter doesn't fan the fire: in other words – a job well done requires dedication, skill and attention.

I thank you for your kind attention.