Uganda will soon have a new Fisheries and Aquaculture law, if the proposed Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill, 2018, is reviewed and approved by Cabinet and the Legislature. The proposed law is a revision of the Fish Act of 2000 Cap 197, which only regulates capture fish and does not address aquaculture activities such as management of commercial fishing, fish selling, post-harvest handling, fish transportation, surveillance and control monitoring of fisheries units as well as fisheries research.

The proposed Bill is part of efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) to provide an enabling policy and regulation framework to the stakeholders engaged in fisheries and aquaculture activities. The fisheries and aquaculture sub-sectors contribute significantly to Uganda’s national economic growth, development as well as food and nutrition. In fact, Uganda has one of the largest fresh water resources in the world and almost 20 percent of its surface area is water. This expansive water resource has supported fisheries sector, enabling both capture and farmed fisheries since 1920s.

While fisheries contributes 12 percent of agricultural GDP of Uganda and supplies 50 percent of animal proteins consumed in the country, a number of challenges, which seriously affect the economic and social contribution of fisheries and aquaculture, cripple the vibrancy of the sub-sector.

Some of the challenges include over fishing caused by increasing demand due to population growth, use of illegal fishing gear, poor quality of fish seeds, limited access to fish seeds and feeds, as well as continued trade in illegal and unrecorded immature fish hence costing the country about USD 429million in income lost.

These, coupled with weak legal and institutional frameworks are major bottlenecks to the development of a favorable fisheries and aquaculture sub-sector in Uganda. The proposed Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill, 2018 will therefore help to address some of these challenges and foster a sustainable fisheries and aquaculture sub-sector. As part of the review process of the proposed Bill, MAAIF and FAO, through the Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) Project, organized a National Validation Workshop of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill, 2018, on Friday 25 January 2019 at Colline Hotel in Mukono. In Uganda, FIRST Project provides policy assistance and capacity development to the Government, to review current national policies in selected agricultural sub-sectors such as Fisheries and Aquaculture and Veterinary Drug Regulation and Administration) while facilitating evidence-based and inclusive policy dialogue and stakeholder coordination.

Workshop participants therefore, who included key stakeholder in the sector reviewed the current version of the draft Bill, validated it and a final version will of the Draft Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill, 2018 is being produced and will subsequently be sent to cabinet for approval. The validation workshop was held on the backdrop of regional and country-wide consultations that generated views from relevant regional and local government stakeholders, on the proposed Bill.
While officiating at the validation workshop, Minister for Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) - Honorable Vincent Sempijja commended FAO and other stakeholders for prioritizing the fisheries and aquaculture sub-sectors and promoting relevant laws to ensure sustainability.

"While the Fish Act, Cap 197, provides for the control of fishing, fish conservation, purchase, sale, marketing, processing of fish, it is now outdated to address current technological advancement and the changed fisheries sector," he said.

He added that "The Fisheries and Aquaculture Bill is long awaited in Parliament and should be finalized as soon as possible" to facilitate its enactment into law.

Speaking during the workshop, FAO Representative in Uganda, Antonio Querido said that the proposed Bill will help to regulate developments in the fisheries and aquaculture sub-sectors, while fostering sustainable and nutritious food production in Uganda.

"If not regulated, aquaculture can become a potential risk to the environment such as increased water pollution and loss of biodiversity. Unplanned aquaculture can also lead to competition among other resource users that can degenerate into conflicts", he said.

"The proposed law will also help to address post-harvest losses resulting from inadequate fish handling facilities and poor hygiene while also increasing availability of fish and fisheries products for marketing and consumption," he added.

This Bill for an Act entitled the Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2018 seeks to:
- Provide for the conservation, capture, farming, rearing, processing and marketing of fish, the licensing and registration of fishing vessels and fishers;
- Provide for the control and regulation of all fisheries and aquaculture production activities and practices, the methods of fishing and fishing gear;
- Provide an enabling environment for equitable sharing of increased benefits from a more productive fisheries sector;
- Allow for fisheries mechanisation;
- Provide for the establishment and regulation of lake management organisations and landing site management units;
- Consolidate and reform the law relating to fisheries and fisheries products;
- Provide for the retention and utilisation of funds by the Directorate of Fisheries Resources.

Overall, improvement in the above areas is expected to cause positive economic impact on the contribution of the sub-sector but also sustainability of the benefits such as improved food security, nutrition and employment opportunities.

FAO remains committed to supporting MAAIF to develop and finalize necessary regulations and standard operating procedures required to adequately operationalize the fisheries and aquaculture policy and law in Uganda.