



Event summary

The case for aquatic blue food in achieving SDG 2 (zero hunger) -Reducing hunger and improving nutrition outcomes

COFI 36 Side Event

This side-event organized in the context of FAO's COFI (Committee on Fisheries) 36th Session addressed the contribution of aquatic blue foods towards the achievement of the SDGs, improving the health and well-being of people all around the world.

Opening remarks:

Within her opening remarks, **Marianne Sivertsen Næss**, Norwegian Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Policy, welcomed all speakers and attendees, underlining that as leader of the Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition, Norway is proud to co-organize this event with its network participants and the Blue Aquatic Food Coalition. Highlighting the importance of sustainable aquatic food systems in reducing hunger and improving global food and nutrition security, Ms. Sivertsen Næss mentioned that sustainable aquatic food systems should be part of the solution, as they are a source of essential nutrients with small environmental footprints and provide a vital income and livelihoods, especially for small scale fishers and coastal communities. As a result, food security strategies should be nutrition-sensitive and based on knowledge of nutritional needs, nutritional status of the population, and knowledge on food composition.

Panel 1: Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition with Aquatic Food Data:

During the first panel discussions, Dr. **Rita Hannisdal**, Senior Researcher at the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research, presented her work on Seafood Data, an open access database on nutrient composition and contaminants in fish and other seafood. The primary emphasis is on species geographically related to Norway, the available data are however of significant interest for people from various countries and regions of the world, given the species' international trade. The main focus has been on contaminants in order to document that the seafood is safe, however there is ongoing work to increase data for nutrients. She highlighted that there is currently data on around 80 nutrients and 100 contaminants. She then moved on to present the organization's work on the process of sampling, analyses, and database creation, and the importance of making these analytical data accessible. Representing FAO, Dr. **Fernanda Grande**, Nutrition Officer (food composition) at the Food and Nutrition Division, took the floor to showcase FAO's contribution to improve food composition data. As unfortunately many data gaps exist and for many geographies, species and food types, data are either unavailable or expensive to analyze, there is a lack of understanding regarding the potential contribution of aquatic foods to healthy diets. Therefore, FAO is taking an active role to enhance data availability via important databases on nutrient composition, looking into more up-to-date and

accurate data to improve nutrient intake estimations, and working on enhanced global availability statistics to look beyond calories, protein and total fats. Last but not least, **Sitilitha Masangwi**, Youth representative, Food Composition Data Compiler at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Malawi, provided an insightful presentation on ‘Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition: The Power of Collaborations in Building a Robust Knowledge Base on Aquatic Foods Composition’. Within that, Ms. Masangwi called for the need for collaboration across disciplines, organizations and databases; furthermore she reiterated the importance of expert pooling, data sharing and standardization. With regards to methodical constraints, Ms. Masangwi highlighted the need for more time investment, the lack of information and aquatic nutrient data from specific regions of the world, and the limited coverage of nutrients, specific species and products. All in all, collaborative engagement in data generation, including running collaborative analytical programs, can really magnify our efforts further, as “together we can unlock the full potential of aquatic foods to sustainably nourish the world”.

Panel 2: Small-Scale Fisheries and Aquaculture:

Moving on, the second part of the event focused on small-scale fisheries (SSF) and aquaculture’s contribution to food security, as **Oluwafunmilola Shelika**, Chairperson of the AWFISHNET in Nigeria, was the first speaker to take the floor. Ms. Shelika began her intervention by underlining the need to implement community-based fishery management, allowing for local fishers to participate in the decision-making processes, moreover she mentioned the need to implement programs to educate communities on the nutritional benefits of fish and how to incorporate it in their diets. In addition, she called for support towards SSF communities in diversifying their livelihoods to include aquaculture or other income-generating activities, as well as for the creation of direct market linkages between SSF and urban markets through cooperatives or farmer-fisher market models. Last but not least, Ms. Shelika also mentioned that improved storage and processing is a key element, as it can significantly reduce post-harvest losses. When it comes to aquaculture, it was also highlighted that it is important to promote integrated aquaculture-agriculture systems, to enhance access to nutritious species, support small-scale aquaculture, and empower women and youth via targeted training programs and support schemes. **Bernice McLean**, Senior Program Officer at AUDA – NEPAD and an Aquatic Blue Food Coalition Member, quoted that sustainable fisheries and aquaculture are essential for Africa, and play a key role towards achieving food security. As underlined in the SOFIA report, undernourishment is set to increase, therefore the need to support aquaculture in Africa is urgent. At the same time, Ms. McLean echoed previous speakers’ points with reference to the fact that women have a very important role to play in aquaculture and sustainable food systems’ development in general. Reflecting on challenges regarding SSF, there’s indeed high costs of doing business and a strong reliance on external supply chains, while current geopolitical challenges and the COVID-19 crisis have raised additional barriers on affordability, alongside the high impact and risks posed by climate change and disasters. At a strategic level, the African Union has taken plenty initiatives to support the visibility and development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and provide them with a voice in the policy-making processes, and it is continuously calling for increased financing and investments, simplified and standardized ways to ensure market access, alongside the need to strengthen communities in practice. Wrapping up the second panel discussions, **Rebecca Wintering**, Foreign Affairs Officer at the US Office of Marine Conservation, mentioned the importance of sustainable blue foods towards ensuring food security, providing key nutrition and livelihoods for people all around the world. Ms. Wintering focused her intervention on the vital role that small-scale actors play in the sector, as they are at the same time producers, employers and consumers of seafood – therefore need to be involved more. Meanwhile, the US is treating blue foods as a high priority, being an active

partner in the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, and designing many programs on blue foods, supporting local fishers in various regions and raising the profile of women, youth and other groups. All in all, while recognizing the international momentum for blue foods, Ms. Wintering called for science-based management of resources in a way that is sustainable, inclusive and equitable, moreover called for more partnerships to improve climate resilience, biodiversity loss, food and nutritional security worldwide.

Q&As and discussion:

Responding to some questions from the audience, speakers addressed the existence of communication gaps, the importance of providing visibility for the sectors' representatives, alongside a more inclusive strategy to promote the gender transformative approach, and last but not least, the need to focus on the nutrition perspective, as fisheries and aquaculture are mainly managed from a production point of view.

Closing remarks:

During the event's closing remarks, **Jon Erlingur Jonasson** took the floor as the Icelandic Special Envoy for the Oceans and incoming Chair of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition. Mr. Erlingur Jonasson thanked all speakers and attendees for their presence and active contribution, and moved on to summarize the discussion's key take-aways. Although oceans cover 70% of the Earth, aquatic foods have often been overlooked in the discourse. While the nutritional value is key, we need to be serious on implementation, and not to forget the small-scale actors in that regard. Underlining the importance of fisheries and aquaculture towards food security, it was highlighted that unfortunately we are still far from where we want to be. "We must move beyond general statements and dive into specific policies and actions in our respective countries", look into what laws and regulations need to be changed, to ensure that we achieve the full potential of aquatic blue foods. As a result, it is key to engage further, promote multi-stakeholder and inter-ministerial collaboration, and take action towards meaningful and lasting change for our planet, oceans, a healthy climate and food security.



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