



## Global Action Network Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition

Summary from the Network Meeting, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023, FAO Headquarter Rome/Virtual on zoom

This was the Global Action Network's [annual meeting](#), aimed at sharing relevant actions, knowledge and experiences promoting sustainable aquatic food systems for food security and nutrition, reporting on the development of the Network, and planning future work. 165 participants from 59 countries, spanning government, institutions, NGOs, and industry, joined the meeting, either in person at FAO headquarter or virtually via Zoom.

**Welcoming remarks were held by the joint FAO/WHO leadership of [the UN Nutrition Decade Action](#).** Despite global focus on nutrition, food systems, impact on human and planetary health -we are not on track to meet the targets for the 2030 Agenda. Aquatic foods play a vital role and deserve more emphasis- nationally and globally. Significant attention is given to what to exclude from diets, more should be given to foods that contribute positively. Aquatic foods provide good proteins, valuable vitamins, and minerals. We need more data on nutrients in aquatic foods, emphasise aquatic foods in food based dietary guidelines and engage ministries of fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition.

**FAO presented [The Blue Transformation](#).** 800 million people are undernourished and 3 billion cannot afford a healthy diet. The Blue Transformation seeks to make the sector more productive, sustainable and equitable, contributing to food security, nutrition and livelihoods. It is a strategic vision for enhancement of aquatic food systems, driven by very clear objectives and quantifiable outcomes related to aquaculture, fisheries management, and aquatic food value chains. Various stakeholders, partners, and governments must be involved globally for the implementation.

**The European Union presented the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#), focusing on aquatic foods.** This strategy, along with the biodiversity strategy, is pivotal in the transition to circular, sustainable economy and sustainable food systems. It will be implemented through various initiatives, including legislation, public consultations, and impact assessments, covering environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Examples include the EU fisheries control system to combat fraud with advanced monitoring and traceability and policy measures to enhance sustainability in the EU's fisheries and aquaculture sector. Innovative initiative aims to harnessing the potential of seaweed within the EU.

**Other participants also shared activities relevant for the [networks mission](#)**

**IFAD** informed about work on sustainable aquatic foods, emphasising climate resilience, sustainable aquatic ecosystems, value chains established through partnerships and a strong focus on nutrition. This year IFAD has committed to five new programs touching on aquatic food systems in addition to over 25 ongoing programs. Substantial efforts are directed towards inland aquaculture, the potential role of small-scale fisheries in enhancing food security and nutrition receives less attention.

**CGIAR** highlighted that transformation of food systems for nourishing people and planet cannot take place without the inclusion of diverse aquatic foods. This understanding is new and much more work needs to be done. The Global Action Network can support this through its participants from 115

countries. In the Micronutrient Forum 2023, at the Session: recipes from over 20 countries for young children were presented, all included small fish species. All National Pathways must include policies, investments, and approaches on the inclusion of aquatic foods in the transformation of food systems for the benefit of all, leaving no one behind.

**The high-level Panel for Sustainable Ocean Economy** (the Ocean panel Expert Group) [informed about](#) a new report on the [Ocean as a Solution to Climate Change](#): Updated Opportunities for Action. Updating a formal report from 2019 on opportunities for actions for using the ocean as a solution to climate change. Food from the ocean is an important focus in the Ocean panel.

**Wageningen University & Research** presented research on the [fish value chain in Kenya](#). **The Norwegian Institute of Marine Research** informed about their preparation of a background document for the update of the FAO/WHO report on risks and benefits of fish consumption. **Iceland shared information about the [Aquatic Blue Food Coalition](#)** including among other promoting aquatic foods in COP 28, and in the School Meal Coalition and advocate for updating the CFS HLPE report 7 on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture for Food Security and Nutrition.

**During the discussions** several other themes were highlighted as important themes for the Network to follow up on. The importance highlighting **seaweed/macroalgae** was mentioned by several. This is a prominent topic within the network, with shared information on the webpage. Participants discuss ongoing work on seaweed and may share knowledge in the Gain and Share tool. The topic is also part of the Food Composition Data working group. Seeking ways to **engage young people** is also important their voices are welcome in network events. **Emphasizing the importance of aquatic foods in the broader food security and food systems** discourse was mentioned as vital, noting the limited focus on aquatic foods at CFS 51. Additionally, **promoting inclusive language is crucial**, such as using "Food Systems" instead of "Agri-Food Systems." This makes aquatic foods less visible. This debate persists in various forums. Furthermore, **preventing, controlling, and eradicating diseases in food systems**, especially in aquaculture, was mentioned as a relevant topic for the network.

Addressing the lack of aquatic food-related content at CFS 51 is essential and should be a priority as we work towards 2027 and the HLPE report update. The Network has been actively involved in Food Systems Summit lead up and follow up. **Staying informed about ongoing activities within coalitions**, such as the School Meals Coalition and Coalition of Action for Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems has been challenging. Iceland as chair of the Blue/Aquatic Food Coalition, and member of the Global Action Network Task Force, may have easier access and agreed to keep the network informed. Many participants also shared links in the chat. These can be found [here](#).

**The Global Action Network leadership informed about Network activities 2023.** General work included: Co-organizing with FAO and others a successful [event on Blue Transformation](#) at the UN Food System Summit+2, **supporting a side event** at the [43rd Session of the FAO Conference](#) producing a [video related to food composition data](#). Many Network participants also **proposed to include an update of the [CFS HLPE report 7](#)**, in the CFS Multi Year Programme of Work, emphasizing the importance of a holistic food system approach and transparency in the work of the HLPE. The proposal was endorsed at CFS51. The network has also disseminated updates and actions through various channels, including the [network's webpage](#) (over 42 000 views in 5 years), [newsletters](#) (4 a year and over 2000 subscribers), [Twitter/X](#), and [LinkedIn](#). Additionally, the [Gain and Share tool](#) is developed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and practical solutions for aquatic food system challenges. The participants were encouraged to give input to the ongoing work on updating the Gain and Share tool, share relevant events to be shared in the networks event calendar, and to share relevant information with the secretariat for distribution through the network's channels.

**The four Network working groups** focusing on specific topics gave a short status of their work and further plans: The **Food Composition Data group**, started up in 2023. The Network applied but did not get a CFS side event prepared by the Food Composition Data working group for CFS51. The group is considering arranging a side event next year. Participants in this working group also informed about relevant ongoing work on [updating the U-Fish database](#). The **Small-Scale Fisheries group**, formed in 2022, arranged a side event on [Empowering Women's Engagement in Aquatic Food Systems](#) at CFS50. They are looking into possibilities to organise a side event in 2024 on lessons learned and practical examples from different countries that has tried to implement the small-scale fisheries guidelines. The **One Food System working group**, formed in 2022, arranged a [side event](#) on the intersections between aquatic and terrestrial food systems at the UN Ocean Conference in 2022. The group are discussing to launch a call to young researchers and local communities to present their solutions on how to bridge the terrestrial and aquatic food systems. **The Working group on Bridging the Decades** was initiated in 2023. The efforts to **bridge** the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition with the UN Decade of Ocean Science for sustainable development will persist. Participants have actively engaged in both smaller workshops and significant conferences to raise awareness within the ocean science community about the potential benefits of ocean resources in promoting a healthy diet and sustainable global food supply. Considering this progress, organizing a satellite event at the [Ocean Decade conference](#) in 2024 is a promising means to showcase these endeavours.

**The Network Task Force** includes participants who wish to partake actively during the year. Contributions from the Task Force 2023 was highly appreciated. Network participants were invited to join the Task Force for 2024. Stefan Hafstein (Iceland), Shakuntala Thilsted (CGIAR), Despina Symons (European Bureau of Conservation and Development), Richard Abila (IFAD), and Matilda Steiner (University of Ghana)), expressed their interest in being part of the Task Force in 2024 at the meeting. **It is possible to contacting the Network's secretariate to join working groups or Task Force.**

Summing up and closing remark were given by IFAD pointing out that these meetings have a valuable function, enabling experts and partners to share their work on sustainable aquatic food systems, demonstrating that sustainably managed aquatic foods, make important contribution to food security, nutrition and the livelihoods of small, small-scale communities around the world. The range of topics covered by different partners speaks loudly on our collective efforts in placing aquatic foods at the center of ensuring access to sufficient safe nutritious foods, meeting dietary needs and food preferences.