



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



**(DRAFT)**

**Inputs of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and its Sub-Committees to the thematic review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2022**

***“Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”***

**ANNEX 3**

**Inputs by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI)**

The two main functions of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) are to review and guide the programmes of work of FAO in the field of fisheries and aquaculture and their implementation, and to conduct periodic reviews of global issues in the field of fisheries and aquaculture with a view to developing concerted action by nations, inter-governmental bodies and civil society. COFI is also a forum in which global agreements and non-binding instruments are negotiated to address identified fisheries and aquaculture issues. COFI also reviews and decides on the recommendations of its two COFI Sub-Committees on fish trade and aquaculture, respectively.

The 34<sup>th</sup> Session of COFI was held from 1 to 5 February 2021. Agenda 7, Contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was particularly focused on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 35<sup>th</sup> Session of COFI is scheduled to be held from 5 to 9 September 2022 and therefore the inputs are prepared based on the outcome of the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of COFI and the relevant COFI document. The current Chairperson is Mr Shingo Ota, Japan.

**a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and**

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in its 34<sup>th</sup> Session from 1 to 5 February 2021 commended FAO for the 2020 State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) publication, including the addendum on the impacts of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>, and reiterated that SOFIA serves as the benchmark publication for global status and trends in fisheries and aquaculture<sup>2</sup>. An information paper on the Impact of COVID-19 on Fisheries and Aquaculture Food Systems-Possible Responses (COFI/2020/Inf.3.2) was also prepared by the Secretariat<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/publications/269225>

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 9 b) of the report of COFI 34 (NFIF/R1336) (<https://www.fao.org/3/cb8322en/cb8322en.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/ne814en/ne814en.pdf>

In the 2021 COFI Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture, adopted in the Session, the Committee also noted with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to aggravate poverty, hunger and malnutrition, including an unprecedented impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sector<sup>4</sup>.

The Committee noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified data scarcity problems, jeopardizing timely policy responses<sup>5</sup>, and emphasized that according to WHO, the international trade of animals and animal products is not contributing to the spread of COVID-19. There is currently no scientifically based evidence that humans can be infected with COVID-19 through food, including fish and fish products, or the packaging in which they are stored. In this regard, Members were encouraged to refrain from imposing restrictive measures, and the need to avoid unnecessary barriers to trade was emphasized<sup>6</sup>.

The Committee noted with concern that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected many global and regional processes related to fisheries and aquaculture, including Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) and Regional Fisheries Advisory Bodies (RFABs)<sup>7</sup>;

**b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**

The Committee recognized that COVID-19 has had a particularly negative impact on small-scale and artisanal fisheries and aquaculture, and stressed the need to provide the appropriate support and foster resilience for the sustainable development of this sector<sup>8</sup>.

The Committee welcomed the Draft Vision and Strategy for FAO’s Work in Nutrition and requested FAO’s support in capacity development, stressing the need to strengthen gender equality, and gender and youth empowerment issues within the strategy<sup>9</sup>.

- (a) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review; and*
- (b) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda;*

---

<sup>4</sup> Appendix E of the report of COFI 34

<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 12 d) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 12 h) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 15 a) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 13 b) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>9</sup> Paragraph 12 i) of the report of COFI 34

The Committee called on FAO to continue supporting Members to overcome challenges in implementing the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries<sup>10</sup>, especially in view of the added complexities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>11</sup>.

The Committee expressed its commitment to the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) in 2022, welcomed the proposed planning roadmap and invited countries and partners to be part of the activities; emphasized the opportunity to focus attention on the role of small-scale and artisanal fisheries and aquaculture in poverty eradication, ending hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition; also emphasized the need for IYAFA to increase awareness and understanding of this sector for the social and economic development of coastal communities and the provision of food of high nutritional value, sustainable use of natural resources, and COVID-19 response and recovery; recognized that IYAFA would also create a positive narrative through promoting partnerships, effective participation of small-scale and artisanal producers and exchange best practices, technical assistance and capacity building, taking into account the diverse nature of small-scale and artisanal fisheries and aquaculture<sup>12</sup>;

The Committee recommended the relevant FAO Governing Bodies duly consider integrating actions identified in the 2021 COFI Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture, as well as additional actions concerning post COVID-19 response and recovery, as priority areas, while examining the draft strategic framework and the Medium Term Plan, and to improve the visibility of the sector within FAO<sup>13</sup>;

### **c) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF.**

(General statements<sup>14</sup>)

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Urgent targeted action is needed to ensure aquatic foods and products continue to provide inclusive, effective and sustainable pathways to COVID-19 recovery and the achievement of the goals set in Agenda 2030, including poverty reduction, securing livelihoods and supporting food security and nutrition.
2. In the fisheries sector, we need to implement and improve fisheries assessment and management systems in all regions, particularly in those where fish stock status is declining or unknown, including through coordinated capacity building programmes that address the needs and priorities of developing countries, with particular attention to data-poor regions.
3. Recognizing the increasing contribution of aquaculture to the provision of food and livelihoods for a growing population, we need to ensure that the aquaculture sector promotes

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/v9878e/V9878E.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 9 l) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 13 h) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>13</sup> Paragraph 19 f) of the report of COFI 34

<sup>14</sup> Based on the 2021 COFI Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture (Appendix E of the report of COFI 34)

sustainable feed sources, and develops in a sustainable manner, including by improving aquatic health and biosecurity.

4. We also need to strengthen the scientific basis in support of fisheries and aquaculture management decisions, including through the use of new technology, such as electronic monitoring and reporting, and the promotion of international scientific cooperation, especially transdisciplinary research, capacity-building, education and training, and ensuring that the best available scientific, sector-based advice is duly considered in the decision-making process.
5. Aquatic foods should be fully considered in national, regional and global food security and nutrition strategies, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of food systems to eliminate hunger and address the triple burden of malnutrition, and reducing diet-related diseases.

(More specific statements in particular with regard to the impacts of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture<sup>15</sup>)

6. Food itself is not responsible for the transmission of the disease to people. According to both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the OIE, the COVID-19 pandemic is being sustained through human-to-human transmission and not through international trade in animals and animal products. There is currently no evidence that people can catch COVID-19 from food or food packaging. The application of sound principles of environmental sanitation, personal hygiene and established food safety practices further decreases the likelihood of cross-contamination.
7. Each stage of the fisheries and aquaculture supply chain is susceptible to being disrupted or stopped by measures arising from COVID-19 restrictions. Only by protecting each stage of the supply chain, the continued availability of fish and fish products can be ensured. In aquaculture there is growing evidence that unsold production will result in increasing levels of live fish stocks, creating higher costs for feeding as well as risks of fish mortalities.
8. Disruptive border restriction measures on trade in food should be minimized for food security. The dissemination of information on food-related trade measures is fundamental to avoid food shortages.
9. Consumer demand for packaged and frozen products increased from the second quarter of 2020 as households looked to stock up on non-perishable food. High-value fresh fish and seafood demand has fallen as restaurants and hotels have closed, or partially closed, owing to COVID-19 and related restriction measures.

---

<sup>15</sup> Paragraphs 4-15 of COFI/2020/Inf.3.2 (<https://www.fao.org/3/ne814en/ne814en.pdf>)

10. In developing countries with large informal sectors, the lockdown measures and social distancing have especially impacted vulnerable small-scale and artisanal workers and communities. Many of these workers do not belong to producer organisations that represent their combined interests, making it challenging to access government support. Adequate coverage of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, including informal workers, should be provided.
11. It is important to work with sectoral and regional organizations to develop a range of adaptations to manage fisheries and aquaculture during the pandemic, that support job protection and ensure a fast recovery of the sector without compromising sustainability, including by assessing and adjusting transport and market development options.
12. Online distributors report increased use of web orders and home delivery services, as house-bound consumers accelerated their adoption of e-commerce alternatives during lockdowns.
13. Recognizing their specific vulnerability, as food producers, processors, vendors and carers, the impact of COVID-19 on women should be considered, and access to government support should be secured for women along the fish value chain.
14. Levels of Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) of fishing activities need to be strengthened to ensure management control measures are enforced and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities do not increase. The most common impact on MCS activities being reported is the disruption to at-sea observer programmes.
15. Uncertainty continues to dominate the outlook for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, particularly with regard to the duration and severity of the pandemic. Investment in the fisheries and aquaculture sector will be impacted by the pandemic. The availability of investment funds for future production may be limited by the falling demand and lower prices. This is likely to bring long-term transformations to the sector.
16. When envisaging the post-COVID context and recovery, the sector should always bear in mind the principles outlined in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to ensure that effective fisheries management and sustainable aquaculture development, support the needs of people for years to come and contribute to the transformation of agri-food systems towards more sustainability and resilience.