

A Firm Agenda

The contribution of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition was discussed at the 41st session of the FAO's Committee on World Food Security

Participants at the 41st Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 41) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) were asked to engage in an “open and substantive debate so as to contribute to concrete policy recommendations for consideration by the CFS” on the role of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition. This was the first time in its 40-year history that the CFS had given any importance to the contribution of fisheries to food security.

Indeed, it has been argued that it was the eating of clams, frogs, bird eggs and fish from shoreline environments that created the necessary physiological conditions for the growth of the human brain that led to the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. Shore-side communities had the necessary food security and nutrient density prerequisite for developing brains capable of devising complex languages and tool making, it is said. By extension, unless measures are taken to ensure that catches from wild fisheries are sustained, and aquaculture developed in a non-destructive way, the future prospects for securing food and adequate nutrition for human society are bleak.

But food security is much more complex than just having access to food. Increasing production does not in itself lead to greater food security and better nutrition; imbalances of power in food-production systems and value chains, social and economic inequality, and discrimination against women, amongst other issues, must be addressed to achieve food security for all.

Inclusive platform

Set up in 1974 as an inter-governmental body to serve as a forum for review and follow-up on food-security policies, the CFS underwent a fundamental review in 2009. It now aspires “to be the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together in a co-ordinated way to ensure food security and nutrition for all.” The CFS is unlike other FAO committees that are technical in nature, such as the FAO Committees on Agriculture

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According to FAO, food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

By this, or any other definition, the implication is that without access to fish and fishery products, there can be no food security or adequate nutrition.

Fish provides a source of essential proteins, vitamins, minerals and omega-3 fatty acids (notably DHA—docosahexaenoic acid) and other nutrients not readily available in other foods. These nutrients are vital for foetal and infant development, as well as for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

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(COAG), Forestry (COFO) and Fisheries (COFI) that report to the FAO Conference on policy and regulatory matters; the CFS reports to the FAO Conference and to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Conference.

Also, unlike other FAO committees, the CFS includes civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their networks as full participants. In the 2009 CFS reform process, Member States recognized the right of CSOs to “autonomously establish a global mechanism for food security and nutrition which will function as a facilitating body for CSO/NGOs consultation and participation in the CFS”. The resultant Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) is the largest international mechanism of CSOs seeking to influence agriculture, food security and nutrition policies and actions—nationally, regionally and globally.

The CSM is an inclusive space open to all CSOs, with priority given to the organizations and movements of the people most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, that is, smallholder producers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, urban poor, migrants, agricultural workers, and so on. Members of the CSM can participate in activities through the 11 constituencies and the 17 sub-regional groups.

The two World Forums representing fisherfolk—the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF)—are Members of the CFS, whilst the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), as an international NGO, is an observer. WFFP, WFF and ICSF agreed to work together to raise the profile of the small-scale fisheries sector in the CFS through the CSM; the 41st Session of the CFS (CFS 41) gave them ample opportunity to do so.

Interestingly, companies involved with industrial production in the food and feed sectors are also represented under the ‘Private Sector Mechanism’ (PSM). Present at the CFS, under the

PSM banner, were the Marine Ingredients (or International Fishmeal and Fish Oil Organization, IFFO), the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) and the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA). These organizations also had ample opportunity to raise the profile of industrial fisheries at the CFS 41.

Fisheries and aquaculture issues were discussed in plenary as one of two ‘policy round tables’ organized at the CFS 41. “The Role of Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture for Food Security and Nutrition” round table presented a report undertaken by the CFS’s High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) at the request of the CFS 39 in 2012. The report, like the CSM’s Forum prior to the CFS 41, was dedicated to the memory of Chandrika Sharma, who had been actively advocating for small-scale fisheries and aquaculture to be included on the CFS agenda.

The CFS process to arrive at recommendations on fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition followed a three-step process:

(i) a fisheries task team to work on a draft set of recommendations (known as a ‘Decision Box’) to be submitted to the CFS 41 to provide the basis for discussions and negotiation;

(ii) A policy round table (in plenary) to discuss the HLPE report

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Side event on the SSF Guidelines with FAO and CSOs. For the first time, importance was given to the contribution of fisheries to food security

Fisheries and Aquaculture on the CFS Agenda

In May 2012, the 38th (Special) Session of the CFS (CFS 38) adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), and so fisheries crept onto the CFS agenda. Later that year, in October 2012, the CFS 39 requested its High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) to undertake a study on the role of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition, and to present its report to the CFS Plenary in 2014. The timing of this HLPE publication and its discussion during the CFS 41 in October 2014 is crucial, coming as it does just ahead of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), due to take place from 19 to 21 November 2014 in Rome. Its release also coincides with the adoption of the SSF Guidelines by COFI 31 in June 2014.

The ICN2 is to be organized by the FAO and the World Health Organization, and comes 22 years after the first 1992 International Conference on Nutrition. The ICN2 is to be the first global intergovernmental conference to address the world's nutrition problems in the 21st century, setting itself the goal of improving nutrition through national policies and effective international co-operation. With more than half the world's population adversely affected by malnutrition, the conference plans to keep nutrition high on the international and national development agendas. It is important that small-scale fisheries and aquaculture are afforded proper attention at the meeting; the HLPE report will assist that. 

and to respond to the draft Decision Box recommendations; and

(iii) Formal negotiations amongst interested parties with the rapporteur for the policy round table on fisheries and aquaculture to refine and agree on recommendations to the CFS.

The Task Team, including WFF, WFFP and IPC, met twice prior to the CFS 41. The Task Team recommendations were grouped under eight headings:

- Give fish the position it deserves in food security and nutrition strategies, policies and programmes;
- Design climate change adaptation strategies in fisheries for food security and nutrition;
- Seize the opportunities and address the challenges of aquaculture development;
- Recognize the contribution of small-scale fisheries;
- Enhance fish markets' and trade's contribution to food security and nutrition;
- Improve social protection and labour rights;
- Fully address the gender dimension of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; and
- Integrate food security and nutrition concerns into the

governance of oceans, fisheries and aquaculture.

Within ICSF, the draft task team recommendations were discussed and suggestions made for their improvement. These suggestions, along with a draft statement, fed into the CSM process. The suggestions and statement were subsequently adopted by the CSM with some minor modifications for the CFS negotiations.

The policy round table at the CFS 41 on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition was informed by the author of the HLPE report and his recommendations.

Editrudith Lukanga, Co-President of WFF, who was invited by the FAO Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture to be a panelist, responded. She only had 10 minutes, and she used the time to draw attention to, and defend, the roles of women in the fisheries sector, playing as they do a "vital but largely unrecognized and undervalued role in realizing the right to adequate food".

Discrimination

"Perhaps in no other sector", she observed, does one find "such a high level of discrimination against women." She urged the CFS "to target

their support, and to gear policies towards women in the fisheries sector”, calling on it “to promote and engage in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines as these give visibility to the rights of women.”

Starting an hour later than scheduled, the round table was cut short by one hour, squeezing the time available to intervene. On behalf of the CSM, delegates of WFF (Zoila Bustamante, Ujjaini Halim and Cairo Laguna) and WFFP (Naseegh Jaffer) made interventions based on the prepared statement.

The ‘discussion’ that followed consisted of statements prepared in advance by several delegates, some more interesting than others. There was disappointingly very little input from African countries.

Although no unified position emerged from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries in the United Nations (GRULAC), Peru extolled the virtues of the fishery for anchoveta, noting the strides the country was taking to promote direct human consumption, and defending the fishery for fishmeal.

Argentina came out against global governance of the oceans, noting that governance was a political concept with many implications, some of which

were dangerous. In a separate meeting, the Argentine delegates explained that they had serious reservations about Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), and that they felt that a hidden political agenda is behind the concept of high-seas governance. They were entirely in favour of governance at the local and national levels, involving citizens’ participation.

The Asia Group, represented by Bangladesh, had reservations about ratifying the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C.188). Both Pakistan and India endorsed Bangladesh’s statement. The United States (US) highlighted the serious impact of agricultural run-off on coastal fisheries, and promoted “climate-smart agriculture”.

Despite being informed by a very comprehensive HLPE report, with strong recommendations, negotiations on a CFS Decision Box text proved difficult. The negotiations that followed the plenary were undertaken under the direction of the rapporteur for the policy round table. During these ‘Friends of the Rapporteur’ sessions, non-English speaking delegates were unable to participate meaningfully due to a lack of interpretation. Working late into the

In Memory of Chandrika Sharma

This report is dedicated to the memory of Chandrika Sharma, who disappeared tragically on March 8, 2014 on board the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370. Chandrika participated in the elaboration of this report as one of the peer reviewers, sending a very detailed and constructive review just a few days before the tragic event. Chandrika was a most pleasant and constructive team player and will be sorely missed. She will be remembered by the international community for her great passion and devotion to the support of fishworkers, especially women, and marginalized fishworkers’ communities, for their rights for better justice and for progress to reduce inequalities and hunger.”

—*from the HLPE Chair’s Forward to the HLPE report on the contribution of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture to food security and nutrition*
<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3844e.pdf>

Chandrika Sharma has been a grand example of a person who has expressed and shown us the spirit of the CSM: to be strongly dedicated and committed with the struggles of communities and social movements, and engaged with great capacity in the articulation of civil-society efforts on the global level, particularly within the space of the CFS.

— *appreciation of Chandrika Sharma by the CSM Secretariat*

night and during the day, the CSOs found their suggestions for a stronger text either rejected or much watered down.

CSO concerns about the rapid and uncontrolled growth of aquaculture were not taken on board, nor were recommendations to promote a low-trophic approach to aquaculture development. Peru wanted to seek for alternatives in aquaculture feeds, rather than promoting alternatives to fishmeal and fish oil. Norway wanted to promote further development of the marine ingredient industry in order to ensure full utilization of harvested marine resources. The European Union (EU) pushed for disease control and reduced antibiotic use in aquaculture, and for it to be recognized that (environmental) sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture is a prerequisite for food security and nutrition.

Norway emphasized the need to raise awareness of food-safety issues and to encourage pregnant and breastfeeding women to eat fish. There was considerable discussions on subsidies and their association with overfishing, overcapacity and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. India did not like the idea of banning such harmful subsidies, but preferred redirecting them. In the CSO group, Cairo Laguna from Nicaragua, speaking on behalf of WFF, wanted any bans or redirection of subsidies not to harm small-scale fisheries (fuel subsidies are important in Nicaragua).

For their part, the Argentinean delegation wanted to include reference to the WTO subsidy negotiation linked to the Doha Development agenda, and to emphasize the need for Special and Differential Treatment for developing and least developed countries in all trade agreements.

The CSOs pushed for the section on the contribution of small-scale fisheries to be strengthened. This was largely supported by the EU, which was also very supportive of women's roles being better recognized. Under social protection and labour rights, India, Egypt and Indonesia felt that the suggested language of "ratifying

and implementing ILO C.188" was too prescriptive. They felt it inappropriate for the CFS to be calling for ratification of ILO C.188. The EU and CSOs were the only ones to defend a recommendation on implementing C.188.

On gender, the EU supported the CSOs' suggestions to give a high priority to the support of women in fisheries and aquaculture, and to recognize, defend and protect those forms of work typically practised by women throughout the value chain. But others, notably the US and Canada, insisted that only the work of women in the harvesting sector be recognized and afforded social protection.

The final Decision Box was certainly not as strongly or as explicitly worded as the CSOs would have liked. But importantly, it has given the CFS a nuanced, if rather watered down, set of recommendations on fisheries and aquaculture issues that go beyond a narrow productionist focus. 

For more

www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/en/

FAO Committee on World Food Security

www.csm4cfs.org/

Civil Society Mechanism

www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1314/CFS41/CFS41_Report_for_Adoption.pdf

CFS 41 Report

www.participationpower.wordpress.com/2014/06/16/understanding-food-security-through-a-gendered-lens/

Understanding Food Security through a Gendered Lens

www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378014001010

Fishing for Justice: Human Rights, Development, and Fisheries Sector Reform, Ratna, Asgard and Allison 2014