

CFS Partner Event: Building Forward Better with Aquatic Foods

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Partner Event: Building Forward Better with Aquatic Foods on Tuesday, 13 October 2020, brought together a truly diverse panel made up of government officials, entrepreneurs and development and food system specialists to explore aquatic food systems, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition.

With just 20 percent of water utilized for food production, panelists pointed to the untapped potential for growth that can be realized in a sustainable way, in order to transform global food systems to do better for people and planet. Panelists highlighted the unique role of not just fish but other aquatic foods - alongside land-based crops and livestock - to address complex and critical global challenges - nutrition and public health, climate change and resilience, gender equity, social inclusion and sustainable growth within planetary boundaries.

The panelists from the Pacific, South Asia and Africa all raised the need to fill critical gaps in the understanding of the contributions of all stakeholders in aquatic food systems - and the ability of aquatic foods to nourish people and the planet. In this respect, FAO, WorldFish and Duke University are collaborating on the *Illuminating Hidden Harvests initiative* - to be released in 2021. This provides robust evidence on the contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development in 58 countries and supports the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. Panelists also highlighted increasing evidence on the nutritional power of fish and other aquatic foods. Aquatic foods are essential for sustaining the nutrition and health of pregnant and lactating women, for optimal birth outcomes and, importantly, for the cognitive development of children in the first 1000 days of life.

The panelists shared a united call to integrate aquatic foods throughout the entire food system. They highlighted urgent need for integrated policies and investments. Departments of Fisheries can no longer work in silos, but must take, a holistic and longer-term strategic approach. They called for integration with agriculture, health, education and finance ministries to raise awareness and utilize the full potential of the nutritional and economic value of aquatic foods for national development. The importance of engaging youth across aquatic food systems to help us to accelerate the recovery from disruptions of COVID-19 - and at the same time - tackle the threats of climate change. In the face of shocks, all actors in aquatic food systems - producers, processors, sellers - as well as consumers must be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to build forward better.

The discussion highlighted how collaboration through initiatives, such as the CFS High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition; The Blue Food Assessment; the High-Level Panel for Sustainable Ocean Economy; the Decade of Ocean Science; UN Standing Committee on Nutrition and the UN Food Systems Summit 2021, can ensure that the benefits of aquatic foods to nutrition and health as well as environment are incorporated from the very beginning - and that actions are put in place to monitor and report on these benefits.