

WorldFish comments on 34th Session of the Committee of Fisheries (COFI)

Agenda Item #4: Status, trends, emerging issues and innovative responses to ensure responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture: Building back better

WorldFish and our partners within the CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems and CGIAR COVID-19 hub have conducted research on the impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture and on the aquatic food system at various levels, from global reviews to in-country analyses to support policy development, some in close cooperation with FAO. The results and relevant publications can be found on a regularly updated and dedicated web site - <https://worldfishcenter.org/pages/covid-19/> and <https://a4nh.cgiar.org/covidhub>.

Our research has shown that emergency measures for containing COVID-19, though critical for protecting public health, have severely disrupted fish and aquatic foods value chains, and the livelihoods and wellbeing of actors within food systems. Most impacts on the availability and accessibility of fish and aquatic foods and production inputs have been relatively short-lived, but demand for fish and aquatic foods has yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels in many countries. Demand for inputs and services such as seed, feed, transport, labor also remains low. Businesses and workers throughout value chains are experiencing substantially lower incomes for as compared to 2019. Pre-existing social and economic inequalities are widening. The asset-poor and those in precarious occupations in fish and aquatic foods value chains are most vulnerable to financial, food and nutrition insecurity and health risks.

Fish and aquatic foods play a unique role in diets, as a leading source of relatively affordable and accessible nutrient-rich animal-source food. Fish and aquatic foods value chains support livelihoods and generate employment and income for millions of women and men. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamism of fish and aquatic foods value chains and potential to drive progress toward development goals made them important sites for investment and intervention by governments and development agencies. This potential makes renewed investments in fish and aquatic foods value chains of even greater importance in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery efforts. The revitalization of fish and aquatic foods value chains has a critical role to play in protecting livelihoods, wellbeing, and human nutritional status by boosting employment and income and contributing to demand for aquatic foods and other goods and services.

In the short term, keeping fish and aquatic foods value chains functioning smoothly is of paramount importance. Special consideration should be given to the mitigating the effects of policies on migrant workers, who make up a significant part of the workforce in many fish and aquatic foods value chains. Capture fisheries play an important safety valve function during shocks such as COVID-19 and should be accorded higher recognition and priority in development planning processes. Over the long term the development of more comprehensive systems of social protection and public health care will be key to pre-empting poverty and food and nutrition insecurity when shocks occur. In determining recovery strategies, the lived experiences and voices of actors within fish and aquatic foods value chains, and food systems more broadly, are critical for ensuring this build back is indeed better. We welcome the continued opportunity to work closely with FAO, connecting research to policy development and support to countries as the response to this unprecedented pandemic continues.



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Read our WorldFish 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy
(available to [download here](#))