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'Aquaculture could feed the world,' concludes International Labour Organization

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Technical meeting highlights the need to promote sustainable business practices to achieve sector success

In December 2021, an **International Labour Organization (ILO) technical meeting** (https://www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS_815527/lang-en/index.htm) affirmed that aquaculture has enormous potential to feed the world's growing population in upcoming years. But harnessing the sector's full power will require "concerted efforts to promote sustainable enterprises and decent work for its workforce."

The meeting, which focused on the future of work in aquaculture in the context of the rural economy, brought together representatives from governments, employers and workers at the ILO to discuss the decent work challenges and opportunities in the sector.

"Sustainable and inclusive growth in the aquaculture industry could further be beneficial in terms of increasing income and livelihoods for many rural communities, both coastal and inland, and in this process, also contribute to governments' efforts in alleviating rural poverty," said Fatih Acar, the government group vice-chair.



An ILO technical meeting backed the potential of aquaculture to feed the world. Photo courtesy of ILO/WorldFish.

With the climate crisis and a burgeoning global population, aquaculture is increasingly recognized as a sustainable solution for addressing food security and nutritional issues. For many developing nations, the sector also provides “enterprise development, job creation and livelihood diversification, especially for the rural poor.” But success largely hinges on addressing employment and labor challenges faced by the sector.



(<http://info.globalseafood.org/goal-2022-save-the-date>).

“If we are to ensure that the aquaculture industry will contribute to inclusive growth and decent work opportunities for more women and men, we must create a level playing field and an enabling environment for sustainable production and for workers to enjoy their rights at work,” said Magnús Magnússon Norðdahl, chairperson of the meeting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented unprecedented hurdles, hitting businesses and workers in the sector hard. With long working hours in close quarters and low temperatures, workers – especially in processing – are at heightened risk of exposure to the virus. Businesses have struggled to survive, reflected in reduced working hours or layoffs, which ultimately affect the livelihood of workers and their families.

“The current pandemic has exacerbated decent work deficits in the sector. But many of these deficits had existed long before its outbreak,” said Krisjan Bragason, Workers’ group vice-chair. “Social dialogue, based on the respect of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, is the key to finding solutions that work for all.”

The meeting adopted conclusions that will assist governments, workers and employers to take measures to tap into the potential of the sector to support employment, as well as contribute to food and nutrition security. One takeaway included encouraging reforms towards “more sustainable and resilient aquaculture and food systems more generally.”

“Coherent policy frameworks should be created that focus on sustainable enterprise development and productivity improvements, the promotion of inclusive labour markets, skills development and adequate social dialogue mechanisms which involve Employers’ federations,” said Henrik Munthe, Employers’ group vice-chair. “All these elements will drive and enable the future growth of the sector.”

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Author



RESPONSIBLE SEAFOOD ADVOCATE

editor@globalseafood.org (<mailto:editor@globalseafood.org>).

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