

Sustainable Fishing

Effective fisheries management is essential to guarantee the environmental sustainability of fisheries and ensure equitable development for all stakeholders involved in the fisheries industry.

Capture fisheries are the only major human food source that relies on a wild food. Ensuring that fish stocks are monitored and managed in such a manner as to ensure their sustainable exploitation is key to maintaining the important role that fisheries have played for millennia in local economies and in terms of food security. Today, sustainable fisheries account for approximately 0.1 percent of global GDP; in certain regions and least developed countries, this share stands at between 0.5 percent and 1.5 percent, reflecting the greater dependence of the world's poorest on fisheries. The sustainable management of fish stocks remains crucial to ensure that fisheries continue to generate economic growth and support equitable development, meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same.

As the global population continues to grow, so too does the demand for fish. Fisheries are now able to feed more people than ever before, providing livelihoods for millions worldwide while alleviating hunger and malnutrition. As fisheries and aquaculture have expanded, so too have the economic dividends from the sector and its contribution to sustained economic growth. At the global level, the value added of this sector has increased consistently by several percentage points year-on-year. This has led to a positive trend in the contribution of sustainable fisheries in regions such as Western Africa, where it rose as a proportion of GDP from 0.24 percent in 2011 to 0.34 percent in 2019.

Wild stocks face a number of human-induced external pressures, such as overfishing, plastic pollution, habitat loss and climate change. The economic dividends from fisheries can only be sustained through the prudent management of fish stocks, avoiding overexploitation and depletion. At the global level, the decline in fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels continues, highlighting the need for improved regulations and effective monitoring. The declining sustainability of several stocks in the Pacific Ocean has led to a worsening overall trend for regions such as Eastern and South-eastern Asia, where sustainable fisheries fell from 1.06 percent of GDP in 2011 to 0.80 percent in 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses further challenges for the industry. Reduction or

postponement of fish assessment surveys, temporary suspension of obligatory fisheries observer programmes, and postponement of science and management meetings will delay the implementation and monitoring of a number of necessary measures. On the economic side, demand declined immediately after the implementation of the first lockdown measures, with the drop in hospitality sales being particularly significant. Together with the broader logistical challenges and disruptions to production, this has negatively impacted the profitability of the sector. While many of the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 remain to be seen, it is essential that the right government policy framework is in place and that fisheries management is improved to ensure that fisheries recover in a sustainable manner and the sector's benefits are maximized.

Since 2015, the adoption of regulatory frameworks supporting small-scale fisheries and promoting participatory decision-making processes has expanded in most regions. The average global score has risen to 5 out of 5 in 2022, up from 4 out of 5 in 2020, and 3 out of 5 in 2018. Regional scores have generally remained stable or improved, with most regions earning a score of 4 out of 5. However, Northern Africa and Western Asia scored lower in 2022 than in 2020. The number of countries reporting data has been lower in 2022 than in previous years for all regions except Latin America and the Caribbean, indicating that efforts to encourage countries to report must be stepped up, and that there is no room for complacency.

The International Year of Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 has catalysed efforts toward providing access for small-scale fishers to marine resources and markets. Almost half a billion people depend at least partially on small-scale fisheries, which account for 90 percent of worldwide employment in the capture fisheries sector. Accelerating progress in the degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework that recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fishers is much needed. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected small-scale fisheries communities, who were unable to catch, process or sell fish for long periods due to sanitary restrictions and collapsing markets, in particular those depending on tourism.

(Adapted from *Tracking Progress on Food and Agriculture-related SDG Indicators 2022*)