

# Fishing to Feed Nine Billion

**Incorporating fisheries and aquaculture into nutritional programmes, alongside a human-rights-based approach, can help reach food security and nutritional goals**

**F**oods from the aquatic environment are a complete and unique source of both the macro- and micronutrients required in a healthy diet. Yet, until recently, fish and fisheries have been noticeably absent from, and undervalued by, the wider policy debates on food security and nutrition. Fish has also been strikingly missing from strategies to reduce micronutrient deficiency, precisely where it could have the largest impact. These are the observations of two recent peer-reviewed papers informing policymakers at the highest level.

For the first time in its 40-year history, at its 41st Session, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 41) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) gave fisheries a high priority (see *A Firm Agenda*, pg 4). This set the stage for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), organized by the FAO and the World Health Organization. Ministers from 193 countries and other delegates faced two main challenges: how to address the problem of malnutrition in the world today, and how to gear up the food system to ensure that by 2050 the planet produces enough food to feed the projected population of 9 bn people.

Fisheries and aquaculture have a central role in helping solve both these questions, but only if developed in a regulated and sensitive manner that is both environmentally and socially responsible. The civil society organizations (CSOs) participating in CFS 41 had argued that this must involve addressing the imbalances in power in the food system and throughout the fishery value chain, and by effectively supporting the efforts of small-scale fishworkers to feed their families and communities. The FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), if implemented appropriately, are a vital tool in this regard.

Solving the problem of malnutrition is theoretically within our grasp. People don't go hungry because there is a lack of food in the world. They go hungry because nutritious food is not accessible. The problem is a lack of access to land and water to produce food, or a lack of means to purchase food. This is, in part, due to the privatization of coastal areas and water bodies, and to the

degradation of the aquatic environment by both fishery and non-fishery activities. The brute force of industrial fisheries and aquaculture and activities that degrade the aquatic environment must be reigned in, and small-scale fisheries and aquaculture given the priority they deserve.

Often, fish reaches our plates at a high social cost. Small-scale fisheries and aquaculture produce most of the fish we eat—as much as 60 per cent—and employ at least 90 per cent of the workforce engaged in fisheries and aquaculture activities. Yet, poverty and underdevelopment plague small-scale fishing communities, rendering them vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters and the predatory activities of industrial interests, isolating them from the mainstream, socially and economically.

The work and contribution of women, who comprise at least 50 per

cent of the workforce, to producing and providing fish for human consumption also goes largely unrecognized and poorly rewarded. In fisheries, as in other sectors, women are discriminated against and ill-treated. Women form a large part of the migrant workers who are playing an ever-increasing role in fisheries and aquaculture, and are also subjected to harsh working conditions. This is why CSOs called on CFS 41 to give high priority to supporting women in fisheries and aquaculture through affirmative action, adequate planning, legislation, recognition or allocation of rights and resources, and the promotion of their contribution to food security and nutrition.

It is high time that fisheries and aquaculture are incorporated into national nutritional programmes. But the achievement of food security and nutritional well-being should not breach the human rights of the world's fishery and aquaculture workers and the fishing communities whose livelihoods, incomes, welfare and prospects depend on living aquatic resources. Meeting nutritional goals must go hand in hand with a human-rights-based approach to food production, and meeting the development goals set out in the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, 'The Future We Want', and in establishing the conditions for decent work in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, as laid out in the International Labour Organization conventions, including the Work in Fishing Convention (C.188). 

