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UN report urges improved fisheries management to help ensure food security



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The United Nations food agency today urged countries to effectively manage their fisheries and aquaculture sectors to help ensure the food security for millions of people, warning that failing to do so would have serious environmental, economic and social consequences.

“Fisheries and aquaculture are making a vital contribution to global food security and economic growth,” the head of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s ([FAO](#)) Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, Árni M. Mathiesen, said in a news release. “However, the sector faces an array of

problems, including poor governance, weak fisheries management regimes, conflicts over the use of natural resources, the persistent use of poor fishery and aquaculture practices.

“It is further undermined by a failure to incorporate the priorities and rights of small-scale fishing communities and the injustices relating to gender discrimination and child labour,” Mr. Mathiesen added.

According to the latest issue of its report on the matter, entitled [*The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2012*](#), world fisheries and aquaculture produced a record 128 million tons of fish for human food last year – an average of 18.4 kilograms per person. In addition, the report notes that the sector is a source of income for 55 million people.

It goes on to note that the primary threats undermining the food and nutrition security potential of fisheries and aquaculture result principally from ineffective management coupled with poor conservation of habitats – and states that a transition towards people-centred approaches is required to enhance the sector’s contribution to food and livelihoods security.

In the report, FAO calls on governments to boost their efforts to ensure sustainable fisheries around the world, noting that many of the marine fish stocks monitored by the agency are under great pressure as nearly 30 per cent of them are overexploited, and 57 per cent are fully exploited, meaning that they are at their maximum sustainable production.

“Overexploitation not only causes negative ecological consequences, but it also reduces fish production, which leads to negative social and economic consequences,” the report states. “To increase the contribution of marine fisheries to the food security, economies and the well-being of coastal communities, effective management plans must be put in place to rebuild overexploited stocks.”

In the news release, FAO’s Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, said that fisheries and aquaculture play a vital role in the global, national and rural economy.

“The livelihoods of 12 per cent of the world's population depend directly or indirectly on them. Fisheries and aquaculture give an important contribution to food security and nutrition,” he said. “They are the primary source of protein for 17 per cent of the world’s population and nearly a quarter in low-income food-deficit countries.”

The report argues that strengthened governance in this sector is required to provide incentives for sustainable ecosystem mechanisms, and recommends the development of voluntary guidelines to attain a global sustainable food production system which takes into account the role of small-scale fisheries.

“Enabling fisheries and aquaculture to flourish responsibly and sustainably requires the full involvement of civil society and the private sector,” Mr. Mathiesen said. “Business and industry can help develop technologies and solutions, provide investment and engender positive transformation. Civil society and international and local non-governmental organizations can hold governments accountable on agreed commitments and ensure that the voices of all stakeholders are heard.”

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