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YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE THIRTY-SEVENTH COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES (COFI 37)

Strengthening youth engagement in fisheries
and aquaculture under Blue Transformation

FOREWORD

The fisheries and aquaculture sector is undergoing profound changes. Aquatic foods make an ever-greater contribution to healthy diets and to the livelihoods of some 600 million people worldwide, while innovation, digital technologies and the continued growth of aquaculture are reshaping how aquatic foods are produced, processed and traded, and creating real opportunities to do so more sustainably. The success of this transformation will depend to a great extent on young people, not only for generational renewal as the sector's incoming workforce, but as innovators, entrepreneurs, custodians of local knowledge and participants in the decisions that shape it.

This document is the work of that generation. Since the Global Youth Constituency on Fisheries and Aquaculture was launched at the Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries in July 2024, under the World Food Forum Youth Assembly, it has grown into a global, youth-led network of more than 750 members, engaging many more in every region through consultations, events and activities. What has emerged is not a list of aspirations, but an evidence-based set of priorities grounded in the daily realities of young fishers, fish farmers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs and researchers.

The recommendations make clear that the barriers facing young people are interconnected, and that responses must be as well. The four pillars set out here – meaningful access, capacities and skills, participatory governance and decent livelihoods – are not four agendas but one and they give readers a practical framework for acting on it, adapted to regional, national and local realities. This is the ambition of Blue Transformation and of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, in which youth is a cross-cutting priority across the Organization's work.

The Committee on Fisheries marks its sixtieth anniversary this year. Six decades on, it remains the world's leading forum for evidence-based dialogue and decision-making on fisheries and aquaculture, and an anniversary is a moment both to take stock of what has been achieved and to look ahead. We commend these recommendations to Members, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia, and encourage their use in shaping youth-responsive policies, programmes and investments. The FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division and the FAO Office of Youth and Women will continue to work together and with the Constituency, to support their implementation.

To the young leaders who shaped this document: thank you. You have made your case with evidence and with clarity. It now falls to all of us to act on it, so that this generation is not only consulted on the future of aquatic food systems, but trusted to shape and lead it.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Global Youth Constituency on Fisheries and Aquaculture

The [Global Youth Constituency on Fisheries and Aquaculture](#) (GYCFA or the Constituency) is a global, youth-led network established under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)'s World Food Forum (WFF) Youth Assembly. It was launched at the Thirty-sixth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI 36) in July 2024, following a series of consultations with young people engaged across aquatic food systems.

Supported by FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Division and Office of Youth and Women, it convenes youth and youth-led organizations through inclusive dialogue, capacity development, policy engagement and collaborative action, ensuring that the needs and priorities of young people in aquatic food systems are understood, shared and represented. The Constituency's work is anchored in FAO's [Blue Transformation](#) and guided by the [GYCFA Youth Manifesto](#), which articulates the shared principles, priorities and commitments of young people working across aquatic food systems.

1.2 Youth as drivers of Blue Transformation

Aquatic foods make an ever-increasing and critical contribution to human nutrition, providing essential micronutrients, omega-3 fatty acids and high-quality proteins that support healthy diets. In 2023, aquatic animal foods accounted for at least 20 percent of per capita animal protein supply for over 40 percent of the world's population, underscoring their importance in food security and nutrition. They also make a significant contribution to economies, with about 600 million people depending on the sector for their livelihoods, the large majority in the developing world.

[FAO's Blue Transformation Roadmap 2022–2030](#) provides a strategic framework for enhancing the contribution of aquatic food systems to better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life. Achieving this vision will depend in part on ensuring that younger generations have the opportunities and capacities to participate in and shape the future of the sector.

Young people already contribute across fisheries and aquaculture, particularly in harvesting and production, while also engaging in processing, marketing, distribution, logistics and trade. They contribute as fishers, aquaculture producers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, researchers, innovators and policy advocates. Most are engaged in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, where they also contribute to the continuity of traditional and local knowledge, as members of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, while bringing new skills, technologies and approaches to the sustainability of aquatic food systems.



Yet, young people face significant barriers to entering, remaining and progressing within fisheries and aquaculture. These constraints are compounded by limited opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making and by gaps in access to markets, infrastructure, technology and productive resources. This interconnected set of barriers calls for integrated approaches that create an enabling environment for sustainable youth participation and entrepreneurship.

At the same time, digital innovation, value addition, sustainable aquaculture and new market opportunities are creating pathways for young people to develop businesses, strengthen their livelihoods and contribute to more sustainable aquatic food systems. As barriers and opportunities vary across regions and contexts, interventions need to be tailored to local circumstances while ensuring that young people have the resources, skills and voice in decision-making to build viable futures in fisheries and aquaculture and progressively assume greater roles in shaping the sector.

Supporting the next generation of fisheries and aquaculture professionals, entrepreneurs and leaders is therefore essential to ensuring more dynamic, resilient, inclusive and sustainable aquatic food systems for all.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth Recommendations to COFI 37

The recommendations presented in this document are the outcome of a youth-led consultative process that engaged more than 700 young people in aquatic food systems across all regions. Drawing on their experiences and insights, the process identified the challenges young people encounter in the sector, opportunities to strengthen their engagement and good practices that can inform future action. The recommendations are organized around four interconnected pillars that emerged from the consultations. Together, these provide a framework for supporting young people as active participants, leaders and drivers of transformation.

These evidence-based, youth-led recommendations are addressed to Members, FAO, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, private sector, and other partners and stakeholders. They are intended to inform the design and implementation of youth-responsive policies, programmes and investments and to strengthen the recognition of young people as key actors in the development of sustainable aquatic food systems.

Pillar I

Promoting meaningful access to the fisheries and aquaculture sector

- a. **Integrate youth into relevant fisheries and aquaculture policies, strategies, programmes and investments**, and implement measures to support young people's entry into the sector, including access to practical training, decent employment, entrepreneurship and finance.
- b. **Strengthen cooperation, mentorship, training and knowledge exchange**, with particular attention to young women and youth from vulnerable groups. These efforts should connect young people with experienced practitioners, sectoral associations, Indigenous Peoples, researchers and policymakers, while creating opportunities for youth to progressively assume greater responsibilities and leadership roles and facilitating the exchange of traditional, technical and emerging knowledge and skills.
- c. **Acknowledge practical experience and non-formal skills** as legitimate pathways into the fisheries and aquaculture sector, including through vocational routes and apprenticeships, particularly for young people who face barriers to formal higher education.
- d. **Promote opportunities for young people to contribute to environmental stewardship**, including through community-based conservation, restoration and sustainable resource management initiatives.

Pillar II

Building capacities, skills and knowledge

- a. **Strengthen youth access to education, practical training and extension services** relevant to fisheries, aquaculture and associated value chains, tailored to local contexts and combining, as appropriate, technical competencies with entrepreneurship, business management, financial literacy, marketing, as well as, value chain development, negotiation and environmental sustainability skills.
- b. **Enhance youth access to digital skills, technologies, knowledge and advisory services** to support innovation and enable young people to adopt and advance climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable practices, informed by science and evidence. Where appropriate, support youth access to offline-capable digital tools, community-access hubs and basic digital literacy programmes.
- c. **Leverage diverse delivery models**, such as mobile-based extension platforms (e.g. SMS advisories, voice messages, instant messaging apps) and peer-to-peer learning networks to reach youth in remote communities, complementing in-person training.

Pillar III

Advancing participatory governance

- a. **Consult young people and youth organizations** in the development and implementation of fisheries and aquaculture policies and programmes.
- b. **Strengthen youth participation in governance processes**, including in co-management and community-based fisheries and aquaculture management, such as through local management committees and other collaborative governance mechanisms that enable young people to contribute to resource management, monitoring and implementation of agreed measures.
- c. **Strengthen the collection and use of data on youth engagement** in the sector to inform decision-making and monitor progress, including gender- and age-disaggregated data.
- d. **Recognise and integrate traditional ecological knowledge, local observations and the lived experiences** of fishing communities into relevant policies, assessment and management processes, ensuring that youth are valued and engaged as knowledge holders.
- e. **Promote leadership development opportunities** for young people at all levels, including through youth-led initiatives, networks and platforms that enable them to exchange experiences, develop leadership skills and take on greater responsibilities in decision-making and sectoral initiatives at all levels.

Pillar IV

Promoting decent livelihoods and economic opportunities

- a. **Strengthen youth-responsive and support mechanisms** that facilitate access to affordable finance and start-up capital, productive resources, infrastructure, technologies and business development services, including, where appropriate, through cooperatives, producer organizations and other collective arrangements, with particular attention to young women and youth from vulnerable groups.
- b. **Encourage an enabling environment for youth to add value** across fisheries and aquaculture value chains, including in processing, storage, cold chains, distribution and marketing, supported by appropriate infrastructure, technologies, skills, market linkages and business development services.
- c. **Promote youth entrepreneurship** across fisheries and aquaculture value chains, including through stronger enterprises, incubators, networks, improved access to markets and support for innovative, environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient business models adapted to local contexts.
- d. **Ensure access to decent employment and social protection**, including health insurance, accident coverage and savings schemes, recognizing the high-risk nature of the sector and the informal status of many young workers.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

Principles for implementation

The implementation of these recommendations should follow a core set of guiding principles, including:

Equitable access: Promote equitable access to opportunities for young people, taking into account differences in gender, socioeconomic circumstances, geographical location and fisheries and aquaculture systems, with particular attention to barriers affecting young women and vulnerable groups.

Contextual relevance and inclusivity: Recognize the importance of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, regional, national and local contexts, community institutions and where appropriate, the knowledge and practices of Indigenous Peoples.

Sustainability, resilience and innovation: Integrate environmental sustainability, climate resilience, responsible resource use and digital innovation across youth-focused policies and programmes, in support of sustainable and resilient aquatic food systems and the objectives of Blue Transformation.

Youth mainstreaming: Systematically integrate youth considerations into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of fisheries and aquaculture policies, strategies, programmes and investments, ensuring that the needs, priorities and contributions of young people are considered across sectoral actions, including where youth are not the primary target group.

Decent employment: Ensure that youth have access to decent, just and safe working conditions, enabling them to realize their potential and scale impact, thereby contributing to improved labour standards across aquatic food value chains.

Accountability and adaptability: Establish clear baselines, targets and indicators for youth engagement, where appropriate and adapt policies and programmes to changing needs and context.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our deepest appreciation to the more than 700 young people who participated in the survey and consultation, on which these Youth Recommendations are based.

The document was prepared by the Global Youth Constituency on Fisheries and Aquaculture, with the support of the FAO Office of Youth and Women and FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division.

The Global Youth Constituency on Fisheries and Aquaculture (GYCFA) brings together youth-led, evidence-based recommendations from consultations with more than 700 young people across all regions and presented to the Thirty-seventh Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI 37). The recommendations call for a more inclusive, sustainable, and youth-responsive fisheries and aquaculture sector, built around four interconnected pillars: meaningful access; capacities, skills and knowledge; participatory governance; and decent livelihoods and economic opportunities. Grounded in equity, contextual relevance, sustainability, youth mainstreaming, decent employment, and accountability and adaptability, they offer a practical roadmap for empowering young people as active leaders and shaping the future of aquatic food systems.

