

FAO Committee on Fisheries, 7-11 September 2026

Agenda Item 10: Adaptation and Mitigation of Fisheries and Aquaculture to Climate Change, including Extreme Events

Strengthening climate resilience in small-scale fisheries value chains and coastal communities

We take note of the findings of document COFI/2026/7 on the impacts of climate change. Climate change is no longer a looming concern threatening the future of small-scale fishing communities. Coastal communities are already suffering significant climate-related losses and damage, amplifying existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, reshaping fisheries and jeopardising livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

Small-scale fishers, fish workers, processors and traders are facing major disruptions linked to changing fish abundance and distribution, coastal erosion, rising sea levels, extreme weather events and ecosystem degradation. They are increasingly exposed to storms, flooding, marine heatwaves and other extreme events that damage infrastructure, disrupt fishing activities and threaten lives and livelihoods. Women are at the forefront of adaptation, particularly in processing and marketing and efforts to reduce post-harvest losses, while climate-related disruptions of fish availability affect their working conditions and income, with serious consequences for household nutrition and local food systems. In many of our countries, youth are abandoning fisheries for more secure livelihoods, increasing the challenges of generational renewal.

Yet small-scale fisheries should not be seen only as victims of climate change. They are also part of the solution.

Small-scale fisheries sustain millions of livelihoods and provide affordable, nutritious aquatic foods to domestic and regional markets. They often operate with lower environmental impacts and carbon footprints than more industrial and energy-intensive production models. Supporting small-scale fisheries therefore contributes not only to climate change adaptation, but also to mitigation and to more resilient, low emission food systems.

Small-scale fishing communities possess deep ecological knowledge and long experience adapting to environmental variability through seasonality, diversification and collective action. In many coastal communities, men and women are already restoring ecosystems, reducing post-harvest losses, improving processing practices, diversifying livelihoods and strengthening community-based management. We call upon FAO and its members to give greater recognition and support to these initiatives.

In that context, effective co-management must be recognized as a central pillar of climate adaptation. Healthy fish populations, functioning ecosystems and participatory governance provide fishing communities with greater capacity to absorb climate shocks and adapt to changes in the availability and distribution of resources. Investing in participatory fisheries management, and in

the knowledge and data needed for adaptive decision-making, is therefore one of the most important investments that can be made in the climate resilience of small-scale fishing communities.

Moreover, adaptation strategies must place small-scale fisheries and fishing communities at their centre. Climate policies must move past top-down approaches and recognize fishers and fish workers as essential partners in designing and implementing solutions. In this regard, local and traditional knowledge must be incorporated into adaptation strategies.

To enable this, climate finance must reach small-scale fisheries and the organizations that represent them. Such finance should support effective participatory fisheries management and restoration of fish stocks and ecosystems -including mangroves, estuaries and coastal wetlands-, as well as climate-resilient infrastructure such as landing sites, storage and processing facilities, cold chains, safer vessels and early warning systems. Particular attention should be given to women, youth and community-based organizations, alongside stronger social protection, and access to education and climate-resilient technologies.

In this context, we wish to underline the critical importance of policy coherence. Climate change adaptation cannot be separated from the broader challenges of fisheries governance. Overfishing, pollution, habitat destruction, and unequal access to resources and coastal land significantly weaken the resilience of coastal communities. In many regions, small-scale fisheries are facing growing pressure from industrial fishing fleets and competing industrial uses of fishery resources, including fishmeal and fish oil production. Climate finance, public investment, subsidies, and development assistance must therefore support resilient, sustainable, and equitable fisheries systems, rather than reinforce practices that worsen overcapacity, increase pressure on already stressed fish stocks, or deepen inequalities in access to resources. This also requires assessing and preventing the cumulative impacts of competing blue economy developments on fishing grounds, coastal ecosystems and the access rights of small-scale fishing communities.

Where fishery resources are becoming scarcer due to the combined impacts of climate change and overexploitation, it is essential to ensure fair, sustainable, and socially just allocation of access to these resources. Without this, adaptation efforts will remain insufficient.

We call on FAO and Member States to ensure that climate action in fisheries is guided by the principles of the SSF Guidelines and translated into adequately funded national and regional policies and programmes developed with small-scale fishing communities. This means recognizing rights, strengthening participation in decision-making, promoting equitable access to resources, and ensuring that climate policies reduce existing inequalities.

Climate resilience in fisheries will not be achieved without stronger support for small-scale fishers and fish workers. Building their resilience requires more than adaptation projects: it requires adequately funded policies that protect their rights, strengthen their livelihoods, restore ecosystems and prioritize aquatic foods for food security and nutrition. We therefore urge the FAO and Member States to place small-scale fisheries at the centre of climate adaptation and resilience strategies for aquatic food systems.