

FAO Committee on Fisheries, 7-11 September 2026

Agenda Item 4: State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture and Progress in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and Related Instruments

Addressing Africa's growing fish supply deficit: putting small-scale fisheries and fish farming at the centre of the solution

We take note of the findings presented in document COFI/2026/2 and welcome the clarity with which the trends are set out in the 2026 edition of *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (SOFIA 2026). We thank the FAO for its continued monitoring of global fisheries and aquaculture developments.

The SOFIA 2026 report identifies Africa as a region of particular concern: despite the highest projected growth in total aquatic food availability by 2034, Africa is the only region where per capita availability is expected to decline due to rapid population growth.

This projected fish supply deficit is not merely a statistical trend: it poses a systemic risk to food security and must therefore be recognized as a major strategic challenge for food security, nutrition and livelihoods across the continent. Addressing it requires stronger domestic and regional sustainable fish production systems, especially through small-scale maritime and inland fisheries, complemented by sustainable small-scale aquaculture.

Across Africa, small-scale fisheries and aquaculture already provide food, jobs and income for millions of families. They supply domestic and regional markets, sustain local economies, and support women and youth throughout fisheries value chains. Yet despite this central role, their contribution remains insufficiently recognized in policy and investment decisions.

In our view, addressing Africa's growing fish deficit requires moving from broad commitments towards practical and measurable action. Fisheries policies and investments should be assessed against their contribution to increasing the sustainable availability of fish for African consumers, while securing the livelihoods and rights of the communities that depend on these resources.

Women in particular play a critical role in fish processing, marketing and trade. Their contribution must be recognised and translated into ensuring their effective participation in fisheries governance and into guaranteeing their equitable access to landing site infrastructure, processing facilities, finance, training and markets. Governments and development partners should be able to demonstrate how investments in fisheries and the blue economy benefit women fish workers and strengthen their economic activities.

First of all, fish suitable for human consumption must primarily contribute to food security and nutrition. We are concerned that the SOFIA report gives insufficient attention to the growing diversion of fish for reduction into fishmeal and fish oil, particularly in West Africa where small pelagic species are central to local diets and food security. Diverting edible fish away from local food systems towards reduction for industrial uses raises serious concerns. This concern is consistent with Article 11.1.9 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which calls on

States to encourage the consumption of fish for human consumption. In a continent facing declining per capita fish availability, this is no longer a marginal issue, it is a strategic policy issue: Fish must feed people first.

Secondly, more investment is needed to reduce post-harvest losses and improve value addition. Too much fish is still lost between landing and consumption due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of cold chain facilities, poor storage and limited processing capacity. Investments in landing sites, cold storage infrastructure, ice supply, transport and improved processing can significantly increase the availability of fish for African consumers while improving incomes for fishing communities, especially women fish processors and traders.

At the same time, greater attention should be given to the development of sustainable small-scale fish farming as a complementary pillar of African food systems. Small-scale aquaculture can help increase local fish supply, diversify incomes and improve resilience, particularly in inland and coastal areas. With adequate support, including access to quality inputs, finance, training and markets, small-scale fish farming can make an important contribution to food security, nutrition and livelihoods, while complementing rather than replacing small-scale capture fisheries.

Thirdly, Africa must develop stronger local and regional fish markets. Facilitating regional trade in small-scale fisheries products should become a priority. Too often, trade barriers, administrative hurdles, weak infrastructure limit access to fish across African countries and regions. Stronger regional value chains can improve availability, affordability and resilience of fish supply while generating more local economic value.

This must go hand in hand with the strengthening of value creation in Africa. The goal should not only be to harvest fish, but to create decent jobs, increase incomes and retain more value in local economies through processing, preservation, marketing and distribution.

However, none of these measures will be successful unless the pressures undermining small-scale fisheries are addressed. Efforts to address Africa's fish supply challenge must also tackle the continuing pressures on small-scale fisheries from overexploitation of resources, unequal competition with industrial fleets and IUU fishing.

Finally, governance matters. Small-scale fishers and fish workers must have equitable access to fisheries resources and coastal areas on which they depend on for their livelihoods. This should include effectively enforced zones reserved for small-scale fisheries, protected from incursions and direct competition by industrial fleets, and co-management arrangements through which fishing communities have real decision-making power over the management of these resources.

In view of the above, the implementation of the SSF Guidelines remains vital to ensuring that responses to fish stock depletion are socially just and community-centred. However, more than ten years after the adoption of the SSF Guidelines, the priority must increasingly be their implementation. National plans and strategies can provide useful frameworks, but they must translate into funded actions, clear responsibilities for fisheries administrations and measurable improvements for fishing communities. Progress should be assessed through practical outcomes: whether reserved fishing zones are effectively protected from industrial incursions; whether communities exercise meaningful power through co-management; whether women fish workers have access to infrastructure, finance and decision-making; etc. FAO and its



Members should therefore place implementation and accountability at the centre of the next phase of the SSF Guidelines.

In conclusion, Africa's growing fish supply deficit must be recognized as a strategic policy issue. Addressing it requires prioritizing fish for direct human consumption, reducing post-harvest losses, promoting value addition, strengthening regional trade and ensuring equitable access to fisheries resources. The real challenge for Africa is not only to produce more fish, but to ensure that enough fish reaches enough people. Small-scale fisheries and aquaculture must therefore be placed at the centre of food systems that prioritize local consumption, decent livelihoods, and food security and nutrition.