

Fish caught here should feed people here

Fish caught off the coasts of Senegal, Mauritania, or The Gambia should feed an African family. Today, all too often, it to feed farmed salmon sold in Europe.

This isn't just a metaphor. It's a choice. And that choice is being debated this week in Rome, at FAO headquarters.

What We Dispute

The FAO is pushing for rapid growth in global aquaculture. Its "Blue Transformation" roadmap targets 35 percent growth by 2030. A broader goal, cited by independent researchers, calls for nearly doubling production by 2040. This goal is presented as a solution to world hunger.

We challenge the way it was formulated. An investigation by the Changing Markets Foundation, published this week, reveals that a preliminary draft of the new global guidelines on aquaculture protected the food security of local communities. The final text, published in 2025, removed this safeguard. It replaced it with a vague phrase that merely calls for "minimizing negative impacts on livelihoods, food security, and the environment."

What We Stand For

We are not against aquaculture. We are against growth that is built by taking fish away from our communities.

CAOPA President Gaoussou Gueye made this clear this week: "For artisanal fishing communities in West Africa, the issue is simple. Nutritious wild fish, particularly small pelagic species, must first feed local populations and secure the livelihoods of fishermen, women processors, and fishmongers in the region. The development of aquaculture cannot come at the cost of increased competition for these resources."

He adds: "We call on the FAO and governments to prioritize forms of aquaculture that truly complement artisanal fisheries and that do not rely on whole fish, fit for human consumption, as feed. We also call for the full involvement of artisanal fishing organizations in the decisions that shape the future of our aquatic food systems."

Six Facts the FAO Must Face

1. The calculation of needs doesn't hold up. Every year, more than 500,000 metric tons of small fish are extracted from West African waters to produce fish meal and fish oil. According to Greenpeace Africa and the Changing Markets Foundation, this amount could feed more than 33 million people in the region. Much of this meal and oil is used to feed farmed salmon and shrimp sold in Europe and Asia. These are the same fish-sardinella and bonga-that our women process along the coast. Fewer fish in local markets mean fewer raw materials for them, and higher prices for the families who buy them. We are calling for a clear cap on the proportion of West African small pelagic fish that can be processed into meal and oil.

2. The safeguards were removed from the final text. A preliminary version of the aquaculture guidelines called on governments to ensure that fish farming does not negatively affect the nutritional needs of communities for whom fish is essential to a healthy diet, with a fair distribution of benefits. A later version required that any conflicts of use be assessed. The final text removed both of these safeguards, according to a Changing Markets investigation. Without clear safeguards, there is nothing to prevent a fishmeal factory from being built next to a village that depends on the same resource for food. We call for the reintroduction of a binding clause to protect local communities' access to fish.

3. One country carried more weight than the others. Norway, the world's leading salmon producer, funded the preparatory work for drafting the rules and chaired the initial meetings, according to the same investigation. An FAO study that recommended prioritizing local consumption of West African fish was watered down during a workshop funded by Norway and co-organized with animal feed manufacturers. A country that sells salmon worldwide has influenced the drafting of rules concerning the use of our fish. Our organizations did not play this role. We call for a review of the process, with balanced participation between countries that export farmed products and countries whose populations depend on wild-caught fish.

4. No one has assessed the consequences. The FAO has never modeled the consequences of its own growth target. An independent study by researchers at the University of British Columbia, published this week in collaboration with Changing Markets, estimates that if current trends continue, up to 34.6 million metric tons of wild fish will be caught each year to feed farmed fish by 2040. If growth focuses on feed-intensive species, such as salmon and shrimp, that figure rises to 41.4 million metric tons—roughly half of the entire global catch in 2020. The same study shows that another path is possible. By focusing on shellfish and species that require little or no feed, demand for wild-caught fish could instead decrease by 15.5 million metric tons per year—17 percent less than in 2020—while still meeting the FAO's growth target. More than one-third of the world's assessed marine fish stocks are already being fished at unsustainable levels. We call on the FAO to publish and use these scenarios before setting a growth target, and to direct its funding toward the low-impact pathway.

5. Producing more has not fed Africa. According to the FAO's own SOFIA 2026 report, per capita availability of aquatic foods stands at 26.3 kg per year in Asia, compared to only 9.1 kg in Africa. This disparity persists even as global aquaculture production has just surpassed 100 million metric tons for the first time. Global growth in aquaculture has not translated into more fish on Africans' plates. We demand that any growth target be accompanied by a quantified target to reduce this gap, measured and published annually.

6. Our organizations are not at the table. The broad guidelines for global aquaculture are negotiated primarily between governments and industry. CAOPA has been calling for years to be fully involved in decisions concerning its own resources. A rule written without us still applies to us. We demand a guaranteed seat for small-scale fishing organizations in every forum that decides the future of aquaculture and fisheries.

The alternative model we support

We are not against aquaculture. We support aquaculture that:

- prioritizes local food security;
- reduces its dependence on wild-caught fish;
- focuses on shellfish, seaweed, and species with low feed requirements;
- publishes its figures and sources of raw materials;
- truly involves communities in decision-making;
- protects the stocks of small pelagic fish on which we depend;
- assesses its social and food security impacts before expanding, not after.

Our Demands

1. A cap on the proportion of West African small pelagic fish processed into fishmeal and fish oil.
2. The reintroduction of a binding food security clause in the aquaculture guidelines.
3. A review of the decision-making process, with balanced participation among all affected countries.
4. The publication and use of impact scenarios before any growth targets are set.
5. A quantified target to reduce the gap in fish consumption between Africa and the rest of the world.
6. A guaranteed seat for small-scale fishing organizations in aquaculture decision-making bodies.

What We Want to Build

Global fish production has just reached a record high. So has availability. And yet Africa remains below the global average, year after year.

The real question isn't about producing more. The real question is what kind of food system we want to build-and for whom. Fish caught here must first feed people here.

Sources

- Changing Markets Foundation, investigation into the FAO's Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, reported by The Ecologist, September 4, 2026.
- Greenpeace Africa and the Changing Markets Foundation, *Feeding a Monster: How European Aquaculture and Animal Feed Industries Are Stealing Food from West African Communities*, 2021.
- FAO, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA 2026)*, June 2026.

- Modeling by the University of British Columbia (Muhammed Oyinlola) in collaboration with the Changing Markets Foundation, published on September 4, 2026.
- Statement by Gaoussou Gueye, president of CAOPA, September 4, 2026, reported by The Ecologist and the Changing Markets Foundation.