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# PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Evaluation of FAO's Support to Life below Water (SDG 14)**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Promoting the health and sustainable use of our oceans, seas and marine resources is critical to life and is the focus of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) and its ten targets. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is the custodian, co-custodian, or partner agency of seven of these targets' indicators. In these roles, FAO builds on its long history of leadership in developing normative guidance and formulating and implementing projects in the areas covered by SDG 14 targets, such as sustainable fisheries. This evaluation assesses the relevance, contribution and leveraging of partnerships in FAO's efforts to monitor and progress towards achieving SDG 14 targets (especially those linked to indicators under its custodianship) and broader SDG 14 objectives. Findings show the relevance and contributions of FAO's work, as well as areas to improve. The latter are the basis for six recommendations listed below.
- Based on a theory of change of how FAO seeks to contribute to SDG 14, the Evaluation relies on analyses of FAO's portfolio of work related to SDG 14 (543 projects), more than 800 FAO reports and SDG 14 publications, 256 interviews with stakeholders across sectors (United Nations [UN], international organizations, governments, academia, civil society, etc.), FAO communications and advocacy efforts, and countries' reporting on fish production and FAO capacity development work. The Evaluation also conducted four studies in target sectors (fisheries management and tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated [IUU] fishing; small-scale fisheries; marine and coastal ecosystems; and gender and social inclusion) and six country case studies across FAO regions.
- The evaluation found that, under the Strategic Framework 2022–2031, FAO has aligned its work with SDG 14 goals. FAO's work on SDG 14 responds to the needs and requests of Members as expressed through the Committee on Fisheries (COFI). In addition, FAO has significantly contributed to enhancing fisheries management, fisheries data and international agreements. For example, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (SOFIA), one of FAO's flagship publications, is a global public good that shapes thinking around aquatic food production and trends. Furthermore, FAO has driven the development of normative products and international standards, such as the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* (CCRF) and the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) that have improved sustainable fisheries management and helped tackle IUU. FAO laid the groundwork for the High Seas Treaty with the Common Oceans Program, identifying new vulnerable marine ecosystems to protect. FAO has also increased the visibility of small-scale fisheries by formulating and promoting the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries* (SSF Guidelines) and associated events, such as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture. FAO raised the profile of aquatic food systems in the climate change agenda and supported the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*.
- Evaluation findings also indicate that FAO supported the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity by implementing more projects that promoted the ecosystem-based approach. As custodian of SDG 14 indicators, FAO played a key role in developing methodologies and capacity of key stakeholders to monitor progress on SDG 14. In conducting its work, FAO established crucial partnerships, notably with UN entities, research organizations and other national and international organizations, advancing policy, data and technical expertise. Lastly, FAO actively engaged in communication efforts related to SDG 14, especially in areas such as small-scale fisheries.
- In its strategic and project-based work, however, FAO has been less focused on marine pollution associated with food production. For example, the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 does not explicitly associate marine pollution and food production, and FAO's

work to address nutrient pollution and eutrophication in coastal waters arising from intensive aquaculture has declined in recent years.

- The evaluation found (mis)alignment between SDG 14 indicators and targets, which affects tracking of progress against the SDG 14. The evaluation also found that, despite FAO's considerable efforts and progress, there is room for improving persistent data gaps and discrepancies that undermine data quality. There is no long-term programme for capacity building in fisheries data collection, which is fundamental to improve country reporting of data for SDG 14 progress monitoring. Also, in a few important instances, such as a communication piece on Euronews, public communications on the status of fish stocks contained only partial information, which can confuse and potentially mislead consumers.
- The evaluation uncovered gaps in project design (as the current SDG 14 portfolio pays inadequate attention to people with disabilities, youth and child labour) and gaps in implementation of the normative guidance related to gender and Indigenous Peoples in FAO's SDG 14 portfolio (the evaluation found no evidence of relevant projects conducting free, prior and informed consent among [FPIC] Indigenous Peoples). Other areas that require attention include updating normative documents with the latest scientific evidence on climate change, promoting cross-divisional coordination in support of SDG 14 goals, and devoting more effort and resources to implementing SSF Guidelines.
- Based on findings, the evaluation makes six recommendations for FAO to:
  1. Submit a request to the next 2025 Comprehensive Review of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to review the utility and validity of indicators under FAO's custodianship.
  2. Improve the quality of SDG 14 data published.
  3. Create a sustainable programme to build national capacity for fisheries data collection and robust stock assessments.
  4. Continue to lead a shift to "better" food production by developing an intersectoral approach that addresses tradeoffs posed by aquaculture intensification and reduces risks of food production systems to oceans.
  5. Embed FPIC in FAO's project cycle ensuring that it is designed, implemented, monitored and reported in all relevant projects.
  6. Engage to empower key stakeholders – including women, youth, people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples – to maximize their active participation in, and contributions to, SDG 14-related work.
- The evaluation was conducted by a team of internal and external experts and underwent quality assurance reviews as described in the last section of this document.

#### GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

## I. Introduction

1. The evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)'s support to Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14), Life below Water, assesses FAO's overall contribution to SDG 14 in relation to the four (of ten) SDG 14 indicators under its custodianship and their related targets. These primary targets are: combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) and restoring healthy fish stocks (14.4); fisheries subsidies (14.6); small-scale fisheries (14.b); and economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and least developed countries (14.7). Additionally, the evaluation explores FAO's contribution to the broader objectives of SDG 14, including the targets and indicators not falling under FAO's custodianship, and identifies areas to improve FAO's contribution to Goal 14. Other SDG 14 targets are: reducing marine pollution (14.1); protecting and restoring marine ecosystems (14.2); reducing ocean acidification (14.3); conserving coastal and marine protected areas (14.5); increasing scientific knowledge, research and technology for ocean health (14.a); and implementing and enforcing international sea law (14.c). FAO acts as partner agency of 14.1 and 14.2 and as co-custodian of 14.c. SDG 14 does not include inland fisheries and just one target (SDG 14.7) refers to aquaculture. The evaluation analyses the relevance and appropriateness of FAO Programme Priority Areas on Blue Transformation and the FAO Blue Transformation Roadmap to SDG 14 targets. Both strategic documents serve as the foundation for FAO's forthcoming work on fisheries and aquaculture.
2. The evaluation seeks to assess: the relevance and contribution of FAO's projects, programmes and initiatives in support of SDG 14; FAO's conceptualization, testing and roll out of indicators for which it is custodian; and the extent to which FAO has facilitated transformative change to meet the targets set out under SDG 14. The latter refers to FAO institutional roles, existing capacity and strategies, partnerships to increase resources and synergies, potential trade-offs within SDG 14 and with other SDGs, and cross-cutting themes including gender, youth, people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples.
3. The evaluation focuses on activities from January 2016 to January 2022 and was designed to answer three questions:
  - i. To what extent is FAO's work relevant to and aligned with SDG 14 targets?
  - ii. To what extent is FAO contributing to the achievement and monitoring of SDG 14 targets?
  - iii. To what extent does FAO use partnerships to improve its contribution to achieving SDG 14?
4. Based on a theory of change showing how FAO's work is hypothesized to lead to results contributing to the achievement of SDG 14, the methodology for this evaluation includes:
  - A descriptive analysis of FAO's project portfolio of work related to SDG 14 using data in FAO's systems.
  - Analyses of data from more than 800 FAO reports and SDG 14 publications and interviews with 256 global, regional and national stakeholders in FAO, United Nations (UN) agencies, international organizations, regional fishery bodies, governments, academia and civil society organizations.
  - Four sector studies: fisheries management and tackling IUU fishing (14.4 and 14.6), small-scale fisheries (14.b), marine and coastal ecosystems (14.1, 14.2, 14.3, and 14.5), and gender and social inclusion.
  - Two descriptive studies using quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse i) communication and advocacy; and ii) countries' reporting on fish production and FAO capacity development work.
  - Six country case studies in the following FAO regions: Asia and the Pacific (Bangladesh), Africa (Somalia), Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago), Europe and Central Asia (Albania and Montenegro), and Near East and North Africa (Lebanon).
5. The remaining sections of this report include findings (Section II) and conclusions and recommendations (Section III). The full report is available at [fao.org/evaluation](http://fao.org/evaluation).

## II. Main findings

### EQ 1. To what extent is FAO's work relevant to and aligned with SDG 14 targets?

6. **The FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 is more explicitly aligned with SDG 14 than previous FAO strategic guidance.** The FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 also reflects the interconnected dimensions of agrifood systems. This new systems orientation is a fundamental enabler for FAO success in promoting the achievement of SDG 14. Additionally, FAO's work on climate change and fisheries is closely aligned with Member's needs, SDG 14, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Stronger alignment between the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 and the SDGs and the establishment of the better production 2 Programme Priority Area team may lead to better SDG-level reporting and learning, including on SDG 14.

7. **Despite better alignment of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 with SDG 14, one gap remains: SDG 14.1 (marine pollution). The FAO Strategic Framework omits SDG 14.1, whereas the Blue Transformation Roadmap includes minimal reference to this SDG target and does not place adequate emphasis on the likely pressure on ecosystems arising from expansion and intensification of aquaculture.** The FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 does not mention marine pollution (target 14.1) associated with food production. Omission of 14.1 under the Strategic Framework decreases visibility and potentially undermines ongoing and future work under this target. The Blue Transformation Roadmap seeks to guide FAO towards a coherent programme of work on sustainable aquatic food systems for the period 2022–2030. There is significant emphasis in the Roadmap on “sustainable aquaculture intensification and expansion” to meet global demand for fish products and to support improved nutrition. However, the Blue Transformation Roadmap fails to emphasize the likely trade-offs on environmental sustainability in promoting aquaculture expansion and intensification, including marine pollution, and none of the three Roadmap outcomes is associated with these topics. It is important to note that FAO is making progress through guidance. Specifically, the recently endorsed Draft Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA) contain sustainability principles and call for the further development of sustainability indicators. Prioritizing coverage of SDG 14.1 in future strategic guidance will ensure much needed attention to this topic.

8. **FAO has given primary responsibility for SDG 14 reporting to its Fisheries and Aquaculture Division.** This works well for thematic areas for which FAO acts as custodian agency, as FAO has a long tradition of work in these areas. However, on indicators not falling under FAO's custodianship, such as protecting and restoring marine ecosystems (14.2), there is limited institutionalization of horizontal coordination with other divisions. This can undermine FAO's efforts requiring a holistic and interdivisional approach. Furthermore, there has been limited coordination between FAO headquarters and Decentralized Offices, which hampers learning and advocacy on SDG 14-related matters. FAO has made progress to address this coordination problem through two recently developed mechanisms. These are: (i) a short-term action plan to improve collaboration between headquarters and decentralized offices as part of its Blue Transformation Agenda and (ii) the establishment of the Programme Priority Area teams to foster interdivisional work.

### EQ 2. To what extent is FAO contributing to the achievement and monitoring of SDG 14 targets?

#### FAO's contribution towards the achievement of SDG 14 targets

9. **FAO has played a key role in SDG 14 and, given its technical expertise and convening power, is uniquely placed to contribute to thematic areas for which it acts as custodian agency.** For example, through the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), FAO has driven the development of normative products and international standards, such as the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* (CCRF), the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) and the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries* (SSF Guidelines). Admittedly, most of the SDG 14 targets are unmet, but their actual achievement also depends on factors outside FAO's control.

10. **FAO has improved governance of fish stocks by collating and analysing data to generate information on fish production and stocks, improving fisheries management, and developing Member capacity to collect data and better manage fisheries.** Indeed, FAO has contributed significantly to the collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of information on fish production and the status of fish stocks regionally and globally. FAO further enhances the global knowledge base on fisheries by providing fisheries information on fleets, employment, consumption and trade through its global fisheries data sets (FishStat is one example)<sup>1</sup> and the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) online resource and publications (such as *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture*, SOFIA). SOFIA 2018 and 2020 were the most downloaded publications among FAO flagship publications. These are relied upon by decision-makers around the world. To produce the data included in these publications, FAO collects fisheries production data from Members annually through a self-reporting mechanism. Although FAO has made considerable efforts to enhance data quality, improvements are needed. For example, authors of the Illuminating Hidden Harvest study estimate that 40 percent of marine small-scale fisheries catch data was not reported to species level. FAO and COFI acknowledge the urgent need to improve small-scale fisheries reporting. In addition, FAO uses different approaches to report on fish stock status that do not fully align: one related to indicator 14.1.1 and another one published in SOFIA at regional and global level. FAO is working to address this inconsistent reporting.

11. **FAO has contributed to fisheries management through its flagship national and regional projects and through the development of key normative documents and international instruments.** Analysis of national fisheries production reporting to FishStat shows sustained improvement, in part due to long-term support. The CCRF and its associated technical guidance continue to set the benchmark for good practice in fisheries management. FAO facilitates continued progress in CCRF implementation through policy development, capacity building and extensive support to regional fisheries management, utilizing its well-established global network and recognized technical expertise in fisheries. FAO's regional work through its regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) has yielded positive results, including improved fisheries management and fish stock status. In addition, FAO has developed a range of support services and resources, delivered through virtual research environments and regional workshops. The evaluation found that these support services and resources have improved Members' reporting on fish stock sustainability.

12. **FAO has a gap in its programmes.** Donors' interests and inputs through multiyear programmes have been critical to advancing topics related to small-scale fisheries, IUU and fisheries management. However, FAO lacks a long-term programme aimed at developing capacities to collect and capture fisheries data and support the assessment of fish stocks. In addition, funding support for small-scale fisheries is ending in December 2023.

13. **FAO has contributed to combating IUU fishing and eliminating harmful subsidies,** including in Small Island Developing States. It has done so through its Global Capacity Building programme on the PSMA and technical guidance, by supporting the World Trade Organization (WTO) in delivering the 2022 Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, and by developing and hosting the Global Record of Fishing Vessels.

14. **FAO's work in promoting SSF Guidelines has contributed to several important outcomes:** i) raising the profile and visibility of small-scale fisheries by reporting on its implementation progress in COFI sessions and celebrating the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture with about 300 events reaching 168 million people; ii) strengthening institutions, policies and legislations; and iii) fostering empowerment of men and women involved in small-scale fisheries. The SSF Guidelines are a foundational pillar, but their implementation is still slow as they require strong political will and significant support.

15. **In managing and protecting coastal and marine ecosystems, FAO's work has been somewhat mixed.** FAO has worked on issues of marine litter associated with fishing activities. FAO also has increased projects promoting healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. The Global Environment

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<sup>1</sup> The FishStatJ is a software for fishery statistical time series analysis and contains datasets on fish production, trade and consumption.

Facility (GEF) Common Oceans Program involving FAO has contributed to transformational changes beyond the project cycle, including the Global Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction or High Seas Treaty approved in March 2023 by 190 countries. At the same time, FAO's work to address nutrient pollution and eutrophication in coastal waters arising from intensive aquaculture has declined in recent years, despite increased emphasis on the sustainable intensification and expansion of aquaculture under the Blue Transformation Roadmap.

### **Cross-cutting: communication, climate change and inclusion**

16. **FAO actively engages in communication efforts to advance crucial issues related to SDG 14, including small-scale artisanal fisheries and sustainable aquaculture production.** Platforms used to raise the profile of fisheries and aquaculture are diverse and include international conferences, UN initiatives and proactive engagement with news agencies. However, FAO does not communicate sufficiently on other SDG 14 topics of relevance for FAO's work such as marine pollution associated with food production (14.1), ecosystems and marine protected areas (14.2 and 14.5), and ending destructive fishing practices and aquaculture's potential trade-offs with the sustainability of fish stocks (14.4). For example, when examining FAO's work on communication and advocacy in relation to SDG 14, the evaluation found that references to aquaculture production in FAO's communications to the press were more than ten times higher than references to marine pollution associated with food production, such as plastic debris and eutrophication. This suggests that sustainable aquaculture is not frequently and consistently associated with messages to consumers on potential risks posed by aquaculture intensification. Additionally, communications on the status of fish stocks are sometimes confusing and potentially misleading. For example, based on results from SOFIA 2022, in a communication piece on Euronews, FAO reassured consumers that "80 percent of the fish that arrives to the market is from sustainable stocks." Although the statement is technically correct, it fails to raise consumers' awareness about two known facts: most of the world's fish stocks is unassessed, limiting the accuracy of the 80 percent estimate, and the sustainability of fish stocks is decreasing.

17. **FAO contributed to raising the profile of aquatic food systems in the climate change agenda.** FAO supported the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate* with technical evidence that contributed to mobilizing financial resources to combat climate change. However, more recent evidence of climate change science and solutions needs to be integrated in normative products. For example, networks of marine protected areas, a response option highlighted by the IPCC, is missing from the FAO Technical Paper 627.

18. **FAO progress in developing normative guidance in support of inclusion and implementing existing guidance across its portfolio of projects varies greatly.**

- **Gender.** References to gender are abundantly present in the SSF Guidelines and in other strategic and thematic documents such as the *Handbook for the implementation of gender equitable small-scale fisheries governance and development*, a tool designed for empowering women in the fisheries sector. Through such guidance, FAO seeks to enable empowerment of women fisheries associations in all regions. However, FAO has not systematically addressed gender during implementation and across its SDG 14 portfolio. Only a minority of SDG 14 projects have gender indicators and collect gender data to conduct disaggregated analyses. Also, projects tend to focus on women and value chains and not on women and marine fisheries.
- **Indigenous Peoples.** FAO's normative products on small-scale fisheries highlight the importance of Indigenous Peoples for sustainable fisheries, but this is not reflected in FAO's project portfolio. An analysis of 19 SDG 14-related projects (out of 317 operationally active projects as of November 2022 flagged by the Indigenous Peoples Unit at FAO as relevant for Indigenous Peoples), and interviews with that Unit, revealed no evidence on the conduct of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).
- **Youth.** FAO has been engaged in efforts to identify barriers preventing participation of youth in fisheries. FAO published the Rural Youth Action Plan, but it does not address youth in fisheries. In addition, based on the portfolio analysed for this evaluation, very few FAO projects address youth in fisheries. The final report of the most recent International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and

Aquaculture included a recommendation for FAO to strengthen the role of youth in Blue Transformation.

- **Child labour.** FAO has made more progress in child labour. It has produced normative instruments to address child labour in fisheries and aquaculture, such as the guidance launched in 2013 in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO). FAO has also started introducing child labour reduction indicators in large-scale fisheries and aquaculture projects. This promising work could become the foundation of a more structured and consistent approach to child labour in developing guidance for, and implementing, SDG 14 projects.
- **People with disabilities.** FAO has not developed any guidance material related to people with disabilities in fisheries and aquaculture. It has, however, recently launched a study including an examination of the partial or total disabilities caused by autonomous diving in the dive fisheries sector.

### **FAO's responsibilities as custodian agency of SDG 14 indicators**

19. **In its role as custodian agency for four of the ten SDG 14 indicators, FAO has successfully supported the development of indicators, methodologies for monitoring progress on SDG 14, and capacity development on SDG 14 monitoring and reporting.** The SDG indicators are classified into three tiers based on their methodology and data availability. Thanks to the clear methodology developed by FAO and the availability of data for more than 50 percent of countries reporting on the SDGs, the four SDG 14 indicators under FAO custodianship are classified as Tier I, the highest classification for SDG indicators. Full implementation of reporting on SDG 14 indicators by Members remains a work in progress, especially for less developed countries. Additionally, there is wide recognition among stakeholders interviewed that there is misalignment between some of the SDG 14 targets and their associated indicators. This problem adversely affects progress tracking against SDG 14 targets. For example, although target 14.6 calls for eliminating fisheries subsidies, indicator 14.6.1 refers to international instruments to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. At the 35th COFI session, Members agreed on the need to improve indicator 14.6.1 and its methodology. The new WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies creates an opportunity to revise the indicator. More broadly, the indicator framework review at the 56th session of the Statistical Commission in 2025 is an opportunity to address misalignments and make necessary improvements.

### **EQ 3. To what extent does FAO use partnerships to improve its contribution to achieving SDG 14?**

20. **FAO has forged important partnerships and established key coordination mechanisms with UN and non-UN entities in pursuit of SDG 14 targets.** These include partnerships with ILO, International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), RFMOs and various non-governmental organizations. In particular, FAO fostered innovative partnerships with civil society and academia to implement the SSF Guidelines. These led to the global initiative Illuminating Hidden Harvests among FAO, Duke University and WorldFish.

21. **These partnerships have been particularly strong in creating international standards and policies, generating data, sharing knowledge and utilizing FAO's technical expertise and experience.** Examples include the creation of guidance on decent work for fish workers in partnership with IMO and ILO, the generation of data on fisheries subsidies with OECD, the technical support to WTO with UNCTAD in support of the adoption of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the online fisheries information resource (FIRMS), and new evidence on contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development emerging from the global initiative Illuminating Hidden Harvests.



### III. Conclusions and recommendations for FAO

22. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 and other recent strategic documents are more explicitly aligned with SDG 14 than previous FAO strategic guidance. FAO has recently started using the new strategic guidance in programme and project monitoring. FAO has also recently formulated a headquarters-regions action plan framed as part of the Blue Transformation Roadmap. With time, both initiatives may help create positive learning loops and strengthen capacity to contribute to SDG 14, addressing limitations in knowledge management created by inadequate coordination between headquarters and decentralized offices.

23. Given its technical expertise and convening power, FAO is uniquely placed to contribute to SDG 14, especially in those areas for which FAO acts as custodian agency. Driven by Members' needs, FAO's work has been instrumental to assemble diverse stakeholders for developing, disseminating and promoting the adoption of international guidelines and instruments, such as the CCRF, the PSMA and the SSF Guidelines.

24. As the custodian agency for four out of the ten SDG 14 indicators, FAO developed methodologies and provided learning and capacity building activities for reporting progress. Thanks to the well-defined methodology developed and availability of data for over 50 percent of countries reporting on the SDGs, the four SDG 14 indicators under FAO custodianship are classified as Tier I. This has enabled FAO to monitor and report on these indicators. However, FAO is missing the opportunity to describe the broader situation related to SDG 14 targets. This is particularly evident where targets and indicators are deeply disconnected, such as in the case of fisheries subsidies (14.6).

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***Recommendation 1. Submit a request to the next 2025 Comprehensive Review of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. This request should entail a comprehensive review of the utility and validity of indicators under FAO's custodianship and alignment with targets. The proposal should specifically include the review of indicator 14.6.1 or the framing of one additional indicator related to fisheries subsidies under target 14.6.***

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25. FAO generates fisheries statistics that are used worldwide, shape thinking around aquatic food production and inform global discussions on oceans. SOFIA and FIRMS are two examples of publications and online global resources, respectively. Yet gaps remain in data received from countries, particularly in small-scale fisheries. FAO and partners recently published *Illuminating Hidden Harvests*, which is the most comprehensive, systematic research effort to date to quantify small-scale fisheries. It provides unprecedented data on small-scale fisheries production. This initiative demonstrates the potential for FAO and partners to support countries in identifying data gaps and developing methods to address them. Additionally, national level reporting on stock status indicator 14.4.1 does not always align with the regional level stock status assessment by FAO reported in SOFIA, which can be confusing. FAO is aware of this and working to align reporting on fish stock status.

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***Recommendation 2. Improve the quality of SDG 14 data published. This requires reconciling discrepancies in fish stock status reporting by different sources (national data by governments versus regional and global data by SOFIA), addressing data gaps in small-scale fisheries, improving communications on the status of fish stocks and, to the extent possible, sustaining partnerships established as part of the Illuminating Hidden Harvests global initiative to extend the coverage of data on small-scale fisheries and support to countries providing data.***

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26. Longstanding FAO regional and global programmes exist on small-scale fisheries, fisheries management and IUU fishing, but not on capacity building in fisheries data collection and stock assessment, which are critical for effective fisheries governance. Instead, the latter rely heavily on sporadic, ad hoc funding. This funding approach hampers sustained in-country support and follow-up, which are crucial for maintaining national capacity to collect fisheries data and assess stocks.

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***Recommendation 3. Create a sustainable programme to build national capacity for fisheries data collection and robust stock assessments. This requires leveraging FAO's experience and expertise in fisheries data collection and stock assessment, developing a sustainable funding strategy, and building effective partnerships to accelerate progress.***

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27. FAO promotes monitoring and assessment of the effects of intensive food production on coastal forest and water resources and fosters an ecosystem approach. However, FAO does not place sufficient emphasis on the challenges posed by sustainable intensification of aquaculture in its strategic guidance. The recently developed *Draft Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture* define principles and do not yet include rigorous indicators and standards for sustainability.

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***Recommendation 4. Continue to lead a shift to "better" food production by developing an intersectoral approach that addresses tradeoffs posed by aquaculture intensification and reduces risks of food production systems to oceans. This approach may include strengthening existing strategies, guidelines and policy; leading the development of rigorous global standards and indicators for aquaculture sustainability; and promoting an aggressive consumer awareness strategy to empower consumer choices that promote sustainability of marine ecosystems.***

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28. FAO's normative products and events (such as the SSF guidelines and summit) associated with small-scale fisheries play a crucial role in promoting inclusion of women and Indigenous Peoples. Although FAO's Rural Youth Action Plan does not include any references to fisheries, FAO elaborated normative standards on child labour and started including child labour reduction indicators in large fisheries projects. However, there are gaps in normative guidance (on youth and people with disabilities) and existing normative work has not resulted in adequate attention to all social groups across FAO's SDG 14 project portfolio. For example, the evaluation found no evidence of FPIC conducted in SDG 14 projects relevant to Indigenous Peoples.

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***Recommendation 5. Embed FPIC in FAO's project cycle ensuring that it is designed, implemented, monitored and reported in all relevant projects. This may be included as one of the elements of the action plan recommended below but is a priority that requires immediate action.***

***Recommendation 6. Engage to empower key stakeholders – including women, youth, people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples – to maximize their active participation in, and contributions to, SDG 14-related work. To this end, develop an action plan that values and leverages the knowledge, capacities and needs of different groups—such as people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples. Elements of this action plan may include, for example, embedding FPIC in the project cycle; mapping and developing strategies to address gaps in SDG 14 normative frameworks; strengthening data collection and reporting for monitoring; and possibly expanding FAO efforts in social protection and decent work in fisheries and aquaculture.***

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### EVALUATION TEAM AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- This evaluation was conducted by the Office of Evaluation with a team of internal and external personnel. The internal team included Ms Luisa Belli, evaluation team leader, Ms Lis Pinero, assistant evaluation manager, and Ms Eeman Amjad, evaluation analyst. They worked closely with a team of six international experts: Dr John Hambrey (sustainable fisheries management and aquaculture), Mr Roderick Cappell (sustainable fisheries management and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing), Dr Anna Ludlow (fisheries and inclusion), Mr Hugo Navajas Bennett (coastal and marine ecosystems), Mr Venkatesh Salagrama (small-scale fisheries), and Dr Elham Seyedsayamdost (partnerships and stakeholder engagement). Five national consultants carried out six country case studies: Dr Rigers Bakiu, biologist and fisheries specialist (Albania and Montenegro); Dr Teresita Romero, evaluation specialist with expertise in climate change and environment (Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago); Mr Paul Wilson Namisi, senior fisheries and aquaculture specialist (Somalia); Dr Jean Stephen, sustainable agriculture specialist (Lebanon); Dr Harunur Rashid, fisheries and aquaculture specialist (Bangladesh).
- The evaluation underwent internal and external quality assurance to ensure the methodological rigor of the design and quality of the analysis and report. Internal reviewers were OED senior personnel, including Mr Serdar Bayryyev (design and implementation) and Mr Olivier Cossée and Dr Clemencia Cosentino (final report). External peer reviewers included H.E. Mr Peter Thomson (UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean and ex- President of the United Nations General Assembly), Mr Peter Horn (Project Director of the Pew Charitable Trust's work on ending illegal fishing), Mr Sebastian Mathew (Executive Director of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers), and Dr Deng Palomares (Senior Scientist at the University of British Columbia's Institute for the Oceans). The evaluation team gratefully acknowledges the insights and contributions of reviewers.