



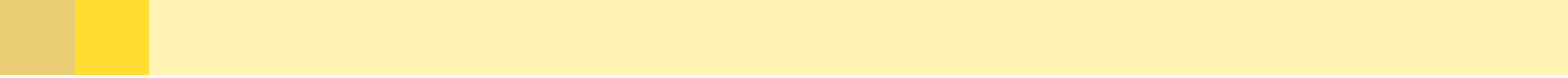
Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# Tackling **child labour** in fisheries and aquaculture



BACKGROUND PAPER





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For the first time in a decade, **child labour is on the increase**, severely threatening the realization of the SDGs.

Of the estimated 160 million child labourers in the world in 2020, **70 percent are engaged in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture**, most in family operations, and there will be no elimination of child labour if small-scale farmers and fishers are not mobilized and supported.

Agricultural work is often an entry point into child labour, and **children working in agriculture are generally very young**. Agriculture accounts for 76.6 percent of all child labour in the 5- to 11-year-old age group and for 75.8 percent in the 12- to 14-year-old age group.

Young people between 15 and 17 years of age are particularly vulnerable to hazardous work though they may legally join the work force in non-hazardous work. **Stepping up the protection of young workers in fisheries, aquaculture and aquatic food processing** must be an urgent priority if the world is to realize the Sustainable Development target 8.7.

For younger children below the age of 14 to 15 years, ensuring that alternatives to child labour are in place for the children and their families is essential. This includes first and foremost **ensuring that all children, including children in remote rural areas and children on the move, have access to free, good quality compulsory education**.



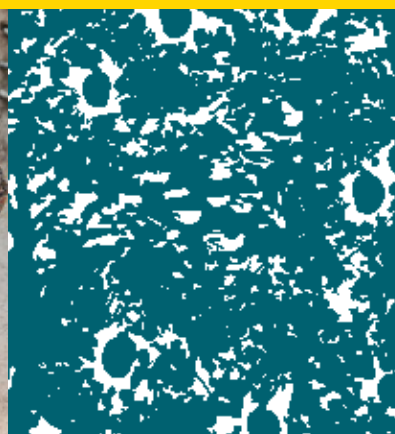
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**Creating decent employment opportunities for young people within the aquatic food sector** itself is a core element of this protection strategy, and not all tasks performed by children are child labour. Age-appropriate tasks, in a safe environment and not interfering with education, may be beneficial to skills acquisition.

**To develop sustainable responses to child labour in aquatic food production,** it will be necessary to develop methods and collect more fine-grained statistical data, beyond the current statistical classification of agriculture. Estimates for the number of children working in fisheries, aquaculture and processing as separate categories are needed to understand the nature and extent of child labour in aquatic food production.

**Increasing attention to aquatic food produced** for local markets and domestic supply chains is critically important to prevent and eliminate child labour in aquatic food production.







# What is at stake?

The global aquatic food industry<sup>1</sup>, long under scrutiny over environmental sustainability concerns, has also come under increased scrutiny within the past decade over poor working conditions and severe human rights violations, including widespread use of forced labour and child labour.<sup>2</sup> However, there is limited research and documentation available on child labour in fishing, aquaculture and fish and aquatic food processing globally. Much of the available evidence is centred on labour conditions in global supply chains. However, due to higher levels of informality, limited law enforcement capacity and so on, it is more likely that children produce fish and aquatic-sourced foods for local consumption and domestic supply chains.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, aquatic food means all foods that come from water, marine or inland, including, but not limited to, fish, crustaceans and seaweed.

<sup>2</sup> Child labour is defined in this paper in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138 as work that is likely to harm the health, safety and morals of children or work that prevents children from attending compulsory education. The paper uses 14/15 years as the general minimum age for full time employment, provided the young worker has completed compulsory basic education and the work is non-hazardous, in line with ILO Convention 138. The paper also recognizes that children can perform non-hazardous, light work for a limited number of hours alongside attending education from the age of 12/13 years. Child labour is different from work as part of socialization, which refers to children assisting with age-appropriate tasks in a safe environment outside their education and thereby learning skills and responsibilities.



Despite the concerns, **aquatic food production plays an important and growing role** in food security and nutrition, securing employment, and the livelihoods of millions of people. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case in low-income countries where small-scale fisheries (from often unregistered vessels) in coastal waters support livelihoods in remote rural areas (World Bank, 2012).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (FAO, 2020a) estimates that between 1990 and 2018 the world's global capture fisheries production increased by 14 percent, aquaculture production by a staggering 527 percent and global food fish consumption by 122 percent. Fifty-nine point five million people work directly in the primary production. Most of them are men and most reside in Asia. Only 14 percent of the world's primary fish and aquaculture workers are women, but women play a key supporting role in aquatic food supply chains, often in less desirable and poorly paid jobs or as unpaid family workers.

To realize Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 and make fish and other aquatic-sourced food production truly sustainable food systems, it will be necessary to step up efforts to eliminate child labour, protect young workers against the worst forms of child labour (including hazardous work, forced labour and child engagement in illegal activities) and invest in a healthy, well-educated work force for the future. This too is necessary to achieve SDG 8 and ensure that the millions of people who derive their living from fishing, aquaculture and aquatic food processing work under decent conditions. This would entail expanding attention to aquatic food production for local and domestic markets in addition to the products that go into global supply chains.





FAO estimates that between 1990 and 2018 the world's global capture fisheries production increased by **14 percent**, aquaculture production by a staggering **527 percent** and global food fish consumption by **122 percent**. Fifty-nine point five million people work directly in the primary production. Most of them are men and most reside in Asia. Only **14 percent** of the world's primary fish and aquaculture workers are women.

(FAO, 2020a)

# The challenges

The latest **global estimates on child labour** (ILO and UNICEF, 2021) indicate that of the 160 million child labourers globally, 70 percent work in agriculture and are more likely to live in rural areas. Agriculture covers farming, livestock keeping, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture as well as postharvest handling of crops (including fish and aquatic-sourced foods). This means that diverse operations, some of which take place on land and some at sea or on inland waters, are classified as “agriculture”. It is thus not possible to determine how many children are engaged in child labour in fishing, aquaculture production and fish processing. Most child labourers are boys, but if domestic chores for more than 21 hours per week are taken into consideration, the gender gap is almost halved. Close to half of all child labourers perform **hazardous work** likely to harm their physical and mental health, and this is particularly prevalent for the 15- to 17-year-old age group.

While no specific estimates exist, it is reasonable to expect that hazardous child labour is prevalent in the fish industry and especially in fishing, given the generally high levels of risks in the sector.

While the fishing and aquaculture sector is diverse and spans multiple operations and supply chains, available evidence indicates that child labour is, to a significant extent, associated with **small-scale, often family-run, activities.**

(FAO and ILO, 2013)



In **small-scale fisheries**, children are typically involved in both fishing activities and land-based activities along **gender** lines. Boys fish the lakes and coastal waters, often alongside their fathers or other relatives. Girls maintain gear, process and market the catch and undertake domestic chores alongside adult women in the family. Girls (and women) also typically carry out shore-based harvesting activities, for example collecting seaweed or mussels.

Boys and girls are therefore exposed to different **risks and hazards**. Boys are subject to the risks associated with being on or in the water. In-water activities include activities such as diving to disentangle nets, chasing fish into a net or diving for shellfish. These carry with them the risks of drowning, injuries from vessel engines and other occupational accidents. On-the-water activities include setting gear and hauling in catch, which is typically heavy work. Heavy work typically carries with it high risks of occupational accidents and, for example, longer term musculoskeletal disorders when performed by children (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2019). Regardless of activities, long hours at sea (or on in-land water bodies) prevent boys in fishing from attending education

regularly (FAO and ILO, 2013). There are also well-documented cases also of boys being trafficked into fishing, for example on Lake Volta in Ghana (MOFAD, Undated; ILO, 2013).

Girls' activities include maintaining nets and other gear, cleaning and processing harvested fish, selling fish in local markets and carrying out domestic chores that underpin the fishing operations. These tasks are also associated with various risks and hazards, such as handling sharp tools and exposure to dust and fumes, and they are often very time demanding.

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**The time spent in family fishing operations and on domestic chores can be substantial enough to prevent girls from attending education.**

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(FAO and ILO, 2013)



In **aquaculture**, both boys and girls typically **assist in family operations**, for example feeding fish, cleaning ponds between crops, guarding ponds at night after restocking and in the post-harvest handling of fish and other aquatic food products. Risks and hazards include heavy lifting, coming into contact with pesticides and other toxic substances, and occupational accidents (slippery surfaces, drowning, etc.).

As discussed above, **aquatic food processing** typically involves women and girls. In addition to processing and marketing for local consumption, child labour in the primary processing of products destined for international markets have been documented (see for example Asia Foundation and ILO, 2015). Using child labour in the processing of aquatic food for the global market is strongly associated with informal sector activities outside formal processing plants, for example, the de-heading of shrimp. Also, children typically accompany their mothers to improve earnings and deliver set quotas in piece-rate systems (Asia Foundation and ILO, 2015). In that sense, child labour in aquatic food processing for international supply chains has much in common with the patterns also observed in commercial plantation and contract farming, where children accompany their parents to keep up the rates (FAO, 2020b).

Child labour in fishing, aquaculture and aquatic food processing has **multiple root causes** that vary across geographical locations and types of operations, etc.

In **fishing**, child labour is woven into a complex web of factors in a sector that is characterized by **high occupational risks**

**levels** overall. It is worth noting that FAO (2021a) estimates that at least 32 000 fishers lose their lives when doing their job every year. Moreover, fishing activities by nature take place away from the public eye on often **remote water bodies**. This makes **public scrutiny of practices and enforcement of legislation** that prohibits child labour challenging. Labour inspectors often do not have the capacity to inspect vessels, or they may not be mandated to do so, and fisheries inspectors do not have the required knowledge on child labour to detect it and take appropriate action. Increasingly, governments put in place multidisciplinary inspection systems, but coordination among different entities can be challenging, as evidenced, for example in Thailand, where multidisciplinary vessel inspection teams were established to strengthen enforcement of legislation to protect fishers and deter Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing on Thai-flagged long-distance fishing vessels. Despite strong political commitment, allocation of resources and so on, teams have faced challenges, for example in communication (ILO, 2020a; EJF, 2019).

The correlation between **overfishing and the dwindling profitability** of fisheries can also lead to the use of child labour. As fishers struggle to make ends meet, hired adult fishers may be replaced by un- or low-paid family members (sons, nephews) or fishers may bring along children to take on additional work required to keep up or increase the catch. A recent study on coastal fishing in Ghana (EJF, 2021) documents how illegal fishing by foreign industrial trawlers has depleted

fish stocks in Ghana's coastal waters. This has led to income and employment insecurity among small-scale coastal fishers, higher school dropout rates in the concerned communities and fishers going further out to sea in small coastal canoes, putting their safety at risk.<sup>3</sup> The effects are exacerbated by inadequate coverage by social protection systems of fisheries and aquaculture households. The lack of access to social security ties very closely also with limited access to education and is intrinsically linked to threats to environmental sustainability and fisheries management practices.

Taking a son or a nephew to fish may however be about more than economic necessities. Fishing is not just an occupation. It is a way of life, and in many communities the only way to learn the trade is on the job with an older relative. Fishers see child labour not as child labour but as **transferring skills and passing on cultural heritage**. When this combines with limited access to education and/or education of poor quality, families may find that their children (boys) are better off fishing full time in the family operation than they are going to school. Therefore, improving the relevance and quality of education and vocational skills training is an essential element of changing social norms and practices (FAO and ILO, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Putting safety at risk means that an individual is in a high-risk situation where severe hazards jeopardize one's safety, threatening life and well-being.

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**Skills transfer and social norms and narratives** around the way of life and **access to education** also combine to push children out of school and into child labour in **aquaculture**, and for fisheries, aquaculture and aquatic food processing alike, economic imperatives play a major role in pushing children into child labour.

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(FAO and ILO, 2013)

**Poverty** (as in the above example from Ghana) is a major root cause of child labour throughout the fisheries value chain, but poverty must be understood **multidimensionally** in the context of child labour. **Lack of access to education, health care and other services** are common in aquatic food-producing communities which are often located in underserved rural areas. Moreover, fishers and aquaculture farmers are extremely prone to the **economic shock** of losing equipment and/or livestock, not least when natural disasters such as storms or flooding strike. When a fisher's family loses the vessel or an aquaculture farming family loses a crop, children may be pulled out from education to help earn a living (FAO and ILO, 2013).

As climate change is set to cause more extreme weather events, there is a risk that natural disaster induced shocks will become more common, placing children in aquatic food-producing communities at increased risk of child labour.

**Limited social protection** also makes aquatic food producers and their families vulnerable to **economic shocks** when the breadwinner falls ill or passes away. Recent research (BILS, COAST Trust and Manusher Jonno Foundation, 2021) has shown how children, whose fathers are lost at sea, are likely to enter child labour as families are unable to access social security grants or compensation. Considering the high levels of occupational risks in fishing, this may be a significant issue in many families.

Fishing, aquaculture and processing often take place in underserviced (rural) areas where **schools and childcare facilities are limited**. This may cause families to bring their children to work or to remove older children (usually girls) from school to mind younger children. Hence, this under servicing of aquatic food-producing communities drives not only child labour in aquatic food production but also in domestic service. It is important to note also that within aquatic food producing communities, some children may be more vulnerable to child labour, for example children in unregistered migrant families and children belonging to indigenous communities (FAO and ILO, 2013).

Lack of access to **financial services** keeps fishers and aquaculture farmers in poverty through **debt cycles**. Often, small-scale fishers and farmers rely on middlemen to both supply inputs, fund running costs

through loans and purchase the harvested fish and other aquatic products. This may lead to debt cycles where fishers and farmers struggle to pay off debt and become dependent on middlemen.

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**Actual debt bonding mechanisms, binding small-scale fishers to middlemen, have been documented in a number of communities, and debt bonding and other debt cycles among vulnerable fisher and farmer families may push children into child labour.**

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*(Manusher Jonno Foundation, 2021; ILO, 2020b; Human Rights Now, 2018; ILO, 2017)*

Finally, **labour demands** may cause particularly small-scale aquaculture farmers, fishers and food processors to draw extensively on family labour. Labour demands may be seasonal (for example, during harvest of ponds or peak fishing seasons), or they may be tied to piece-rate systems as discussed above. It is important to note that peak-season labour demands spill into processing as well. When more fish are caught or harvested, more fish also need to be sorted, cleaned, gutted, smoked and so on. Hence, reducing labour demands is necessary to eradicate the demand for child labour (FAO and ILO, 2013).





**Reducing labour demands is necessary to eradicate the demand for child labour**

*(FAO and ILO, 2013)*

# Opportunities

The fisheries industry is characterized by weak law enforcement and implementation of regulations despite an **internationally agreed normative framework** comprising multiple conventions and agreements defining the regulations that need to be implemented nationally and locally. Fundamental labour rights are protected through the eight International Labour Organization (ILO) fundamental labour rights conventions, regulating freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, non-discrimination in the world of work, eradication of forced labour and elimination of child labour.<sup>4</sup> Child labour is regulated specifically through the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL).

In addition, a number international agreements and guidelines provides a framework on fishers' rights. These include, but are not limited to, the Cape Town Agreement, which sets standards for the safety of crews (International Maritime Organization [IMO] website), the **ILO Convention 188 on Work in Fishing** (NORMLEX, ILO website, 2007), which specifies the working conditions, recruitment and repatriation practices,

living conditions on board vessels and the minimum age (16 years) specific to fishing vessels over 24 meters in length.<sup>5 6</sup>

The **FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication** (SSF Guidelines) (FAO, 2015a) details the principles and steps that must be taken to protect the livelihoods, health, dignity and so forth of smallscale fishers, and the **Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing** (PSMA) (FAO, 2021c) contains agreed measures to deter Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, thus tackling one of the root causes of child labour in fishing.

Hence, there is a substantial international framework that can be domesticated to protect young workers and eliminate child labour in fishing, aquaculture and aquatic food processing.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the ILO fundamental rights conventions, refer to the [ILO Labour Standards website](#).

<sup>5</sup> Governments may stipulate 15 years as the minimum age for work in fishing for an interim period of time. This follows the standard set in the general minimum age convention, ILO Convention 138, where the general minimum age is 15 years, and governments can set the minimum age at 14 years for an interim period of time. Hence, ILO C188 stipulates a higher minimum age for work in fishing than the general minimum age for employment.

<sup>6</sup> Governments may decide to apply the provisions of C188 to smaller fishing vessels as well.

More and more countries are putting in place up-to-date and coherent frameworks on minimum age and education (see the youth employment paper for more on this), but there are also significant movements towards putting in place more extensive **human rights due diligence and chain responsibility legislation** aiming at improved practices among businesses. Examples include the Dutch law on child labour due diligence (Hoof, 2019) and the European Union (UE) human rights due diligence regulations under development (EU, 2021). Such legislation does have potential to strengthen business practices, especially in global supply chains, to protect young workers and eliminate child labour.

However, they cannot replace the **adoption and implementation of solid national frameworks** and therefore, ratification, domestication and implementation of **fundamental labour rights conventions** is essential. This would include not least the adoption of **national lists of hazardous work**, prohibited below the age of 18 years by national authorities, as required under the ILO conventions. Ensuring that hazardous tasks and processes in aquatic food production are included in the regulations, that inspection regimes are in place and that farmers, fishers, fish workers and children know about the regulations is essential to protect young fish workers and prevent child labour. This will be a significant contribution to removing and mitigating the hazards in fisheries for adults and younger workers, especially in small small-scale fisheries. This includes building the capacity of fishers and a safety culture, improving and setting-up national reporting systems on accidents

and fatalities and supporting the design of fishers' insurance services including for assets and for life/accidents insurance.

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## Implementation of national policies and regulations to tackle child labour in fisheries, aquaculture and processing requires practical integration of child labour elimination in fisheries and aquaculture policy and legal frameworks.

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In Cambodia, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has developed multiple tools, based on the SSF Guidelines (FAO, 2015a) and the FAO and ILO Guidance on addressing child labour in fisheries and aquaculture (FAO and ILO, 2013), amongst others. The MAFF initiated a continuous multistakeholder approach, developing and implementing guidelines and national action plans for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture that include components to address child labour, and in 2015, MAFF adopted the National Action Plan 2015–2020 for Gender Equality Promotion and Child Labour Elimination in the Fisheries Sector and updated it to 2015–2024. Furthermore, the Policy on Childhood Development and Protection in the Agricultural Sector (2016–2020) established a strategic framework to protect children

working in the agricultural sector. This strategic framework seeks to prevent and reduce child labour, especially in hazardous work, and improve agricultural vocational training for youth aged 15–17.

Mainstreaming and integration into existing fisheries management and aquaculture governance frameworks is a way to achieve broad outreach to fishers and farmers through channels and mechanisms that they are already familiar with and trust. The mainstreaming strategy has proven effective in other sectors as well (see, for example, the example from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in the background paper on child labour in livestock). Using trusted agents and frameworks makes it easier to broach sensitive topics that may appear to conflict with social norms and narratives in fishing and aquaculture communities.

In addition to fisheries management, government initiatives must include efforts to **improve adequate access to education, social protection** and other services in aquatic food-producing communities and to **protect children who come from particularly vulnerable**

**groups**, such as migrant workers’ children. The protection of migrant workers’ children is particularly important in the global aquatic food industry, which relies heavily on migrant workers in all sectors. Children in migrant families are often especially vulnerable to child labour as they work alongside their parents and face additional barriers (e.g. language barriers or legal impediments) to education and other services. This is particularly so if their families are undocumented migrants working in informal or semi-formal sector jobs. Recognizing this particular vulnerability, Thailand’s “Education for All” Law provides for access to compulsory basic education for all children residing in the country, regardless of their (or their parents’) registration status. Hence, the efforts to regularize migration of adult workers go hand-in-hand with ensuring that unregistered migrant children attend school rather than work in, for example, aquatic food processing (Asia Foundation and ILO, 2015).

Global requirements for, and commitments by, businesses also need to be operationalized to impact children’s lives



and wellbeing. The aquatic food sector has used **voluntary third-party certification and verification schemes** as assurances of sustainability for a significant number of years. There are, however, increasing calls for less reliance on certification as an assurance that aquatic food products are sustainable and ethical (for example, that they are not produced by child labourers) and a growing recognition that certification can neither solve the child labour (and other human rights) problems alone nor create firm assurances that a product is “child labour free”. That said, voluntary third-party verified schemes can bring attention to human rights issues in global and domestic supply chains, and they can be a tool to change systems, procedures and mindsets in business entities (MSI, 2021; Kruijsen *et al.*, 2021). Hence, the growing number of third-party verification and improver programmes currently under development by multistakeholder groups in the global aquatic food industry may be an opportunity to reach additional aquatic food producers and change practices and attitudes.<sup>7</sup> The schemes may also be a

tool to improve consumer understanding of sustainable aquatic food. They cannot, however, be expected to solve the problem alone. Government efforts, as those discussed above, and initiatives to improve social and economic resilience in aquatic food processing communities are crucial.

**Improved resilience in communities** is tied very closely with fishing, aquaculture and processing practices, and **improved practices** can be an effective tool towards child labour elimination and better sustainability simultaneously. Improved fisheries practices and management that protect fish stocks also tend to improve long-term community resilience and livelihoods (APFIC, 2010), but more limited changes in fisheries and fish processing practices can also lead to increased resilience. In the example below from the FAO Thiaroye Technique (FTT)-Thiaroye Ovens project in Côte d’Ivoire, an initiative to improve the productivity of fish processing (smoking) and protect the respiratory health of the women who smoke and sell the fish, may also have an impact on their children’s education, health and work participation rate. In the case from Côte d’Ivoire, (female) fish smokers not only

<sup>7</sup> Improver programmes in reference to market-driven programmes to improve the environmental and/or social sustainability of aquatic food products and verify and document the improvements achieved.



achieved better health, but they also saved considerable amounts of time and money when the new ovens were introduced. Many of the women spent that time pursuing education, learning reading, writing and calculating. Some research (for example, Huisman and Smits, 2015) has shown a positive impact on parents' education, children's school attendance and on their risk of engaging in child labour. Therefore, labour-saving technologies may both have a direct impact on the demand for children's labour and an indirect, positive impact on their labour participation.

It is important to note also, that improved practices to preserve environmental sustainability, and thereby protect livelihoods are an important to improving the resilience of fishers and their families. Ensuring sustainable catch levels that allow for decent livelihoods and wellbeing may require environmental protection measures that, in the short term, will limit fishers' opportunities to make a living from fishing. For example, closed season measures may be necessary to underpin livelihoods and prevent poverty induced child labour in the long run. However, in the short run



fishers may face significant trade-offs as their income declines. An Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) may be a way to integrate human dimensions and trade-offs into fisheries management (FAO, 2019). It may also be useful to explore integrating child labour safeguards and mitigation measures into management plans. In practical terms this might include measures such as conditional cash transfers to fisher families during low- or closed seasons to off-set potential child labour risks.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on integration of safeguards in programmes and the role of cash transfer schemes in the elimination of child labour, please refer also to the background paper on the role of international finance institutions and development banks and the background paper on child labour in livestock keeping.

Improved practices may need to be combined with initiatives to address underlying structural issues that trap small-scale fishers and fish farmers and their families in poverty. In Sri Lanka, an ILO supported project has helped small-scale fishers to **free themselves from debt bonding to middlemen**. The middlemen provided loans for operational costs and for sustaining fishers and their families through low season against extremely high interest rates (up to 300 percent per year); on top of this, they dictated the selling price of catch. The project, through fishers' cooperatives, supported fishers to open bank accounts, pay back loans and free the fishers from the debt cycles (ILO, 2017).

Addressing underlying structural drivers at community level can thus reduce poverty, increase resilience and, by extension, protect children. It is important to bear in mind that often poverty reduction initiatives need to go hand-in-hand with **awareness raising activities** that address deeply ingrained social norms and narratives to ensure that the increased economic resilience translates into less child labour and better protection of young workers (FAO, 2020b).<sup>9</sup> Combining improved technologies and practices, increased access to financial and other business services, expanding access to social protection (and other efforts that cushion against poverty) with educational opportunities for parents (as in the FTT oven project in Côte d'Ivoire) is more likely to have a positive impact on the elimination of child labour. Ensuring also that children and young people have access to education and training opportunities within their community is essential.

<sup>9</sup> For an example of awareness raising materials that may be useful for the protection of young workers in fishing, see for example the recent FAO training guide on **Safety at sea for small scale fishers**.



When it comes to **access to education and training** for children and young people in aquatic foodproducing communities (especially those producing only for own and/or local consumption) it is important to bear in mind that the communities are often in remote areas, with limited infrastructure development and prone to climate change impact. In the Western Zambian flood plains, communities depend on cattle rearing and fishing, and every year schools close during floods. A child-led climate change ambassadors' group, supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), identified this as a major impediment to children's education. In response to that, a canoe service was provided, taking children to school during the annual flooding, which has led to significant increases in school enrolment and retention (UNICEF, 2018).

Ensuring that young people can look forward to **decent employment opportunities** after completing their schooling is equally important. If schooling does not lead to improved career opportunities, children and parents are less likely to prioritise education. The promotion of youth employment in aquaculture must go hand-in-hand with promoting **sustainable aquaculture practices** and strong governance as, for example, FAO experiences from West Africa shows. This includes supporting young people to access farming inputs and resources (including land), business development services, financing etc. If done right, promoting sustainable aquaculture can lead to improved youth employment (FAO, 2018).<sup>10</sup>

Summing up, child labour in aquatic food production is primarily a small-scale fishing, aquaculture and processing issue, though child labour may occur in larger operations as well. Most child labour takes place in family settings producing for local markets and own consumption, but the smallscale production may have links to global supply chains, feeding into the supply chains or being impacted by large scale operations for global markets (e.g. overfishing by industrial vessels and the resulting poverty in small-scale fishing communities). **This ties very closely with fisheries management and the sustainability of practices.** Hence, to address child labour in aquatic food production, it is necessary to **address the underlying sustainability issues related to natural renewable resources, alongside addressing social and economic drivers.**

Responses must therefore be comprehensive, comprising of fisheries management, fisheries and aquaculture practices and systems, and supply chain dynamics, including access to transparent financial services, in both global and local supply chains and so on. Responses must also address general underlying drivers that impact aquatic food and other sectors alike, i.e. access to education, training and other social services, availability of social protection and other measures to cushion against economic shocks and the promotion of youth employment opportunities. In workplaces, putting in place measures to **protect young workers** is essential. While private sector actors in all supply chains must act to bring about change, it is a

<sup>10</sup> In this same series, for more information on the role of youth employment, including youth entrepreneurship, see the background paper on youth employment and child labour.



government responsibility to ensure that **laws and policies** are not child labour blind and that regulations are enforced. Hence, multiple duty bearers need to work together to realize the elimination of

child labour in aquatic production, make production sustainable and ensure that aquatic food can continue to contribute to food security in vulnerable communities.

### Box 1: FAO project to support introduction of FTT-Thiaroye Ovens in Côte d'Ivoire

Smoked fish is widely sold across markets in Côte d'Ivoire, making up a key protein source for local communities. The traditional fish smoking process and the selling of fish is done by women. The smoking process, using traditional open ovens, require large amounts of wood and the smoke escapes the ovens, causing respiratory illnesses and eye problems among the female fish smokers and the children who accompany them to work, not least the babies strapped to their backs. A study found that 60 percent of the women fish smokers suffer from severe respiratory effects.

FAO introduced a new, more fuel-efficient type of smoking oven, called an FTT-Thiaroye Oven. Before the introduction of the new oven, women's cooperatives were formed to provide a solid basis for the management of the ovens and to increase the activities of the participating women fish smokers.

The oven itself is closed and the fish is smoked inside a closed oven chamber, rather than on an open barbecue-type grill. This reduces the amount of firewood needed (from five kilograms to point eight kilograms per kilo of smoked fish). The closed oven also emits significantly less smoke, reducing respiratory illness eye irritation and so on. Importantly, the FTT-Thiaroye ovens reduce the amount of time women need to spend

on the smoking process. Traditional ovens need to be tended to at all times, but once the fish is in the FTT-Thiaroye ovens, the ovens are closed and the fire is going, the women have free time. Many of the women involved in the project use the time to attend reading, writing and calculating classes and improve their business skills. This is combined with support for savings schemes and opening of bank accounts.

The FTT-Thiaroye ovens makes it possible to produce larger quantities of better-quality smoked fish. This has increased the women's fish smokers' income. The additional income is spent on school expenses and improved nutrition for the family. In addition, some cooperatives have used the freed-up time to start producing fish-based products such as pates, croquets and crackers to increase income and sustain the businesses during low fishing seasons.

Hence, a change process, starting with improved techniques and practices, has led to improved health and nutrition status, empowerment of the women fish smokers, improved resilience in the women's families and communities and decreased the risk that their children will end up in child labour.

*Source: FAO, (2016).*

# Recommendations

- ▶ Developing strategies to tackle child labour in aquatic food production are contingent on building a stronger knowledge base, particularly improving statistical data on the nature and extent of child labour and therefore, **more fine-grained statistical classifications and data collection must be a priority**. This will aid development of the right policy mix to create a conducive environment for elimination of child labour in aquatic food systems. It will also enable better risk assessments by policy makers, supply chain actors, civil society organizations and producer organizations in global supply chains and in aquatic food-producing communities. This in turn may enable more comprehensive responses to child labour in fishing and aquaculture.
- ▶ Available evidence shows that child labour is overwhelmingly a family operations activity, linked to locally consumed aquatic food. Therefore, **increasing attention to local supply chains**, without leaving out global supply chains, would strengthen responses.
- ▶ This will take countries adopting/ratifying, **domesticating and implementing the existing instruments** available (fundamental labour conventions, SSF, C188, etc.) through government-led multistakeholder initiatives by means of concerted human rights and child labour due diligence and improvement and compliance measures across both global and domestic aquatic food supply chains.

- ▶ Successful implementation of legal protections will require **putting in place comprehensive responses** that address the underlying root causes of child labour in aquatic food systems. Policy makers need to adopt and implement policy measures that integrate climate change adaptation, sustainable fisheries management and aquaculture governance, safety at sea, social protection, education, migration management and business and financial services to strengthen resilience in aquatic food-producing communities. Gender considerations will be a critical factor in such comprehensive strategies, increasing the recognition of women and girls' contributions to the entire aquatic food sector.
- ▶ Ensuring access to relevant, **good quality education and training** is particularly important in the context of elimination of child labour. This must go hand in hand with measures to **protect young workers** and create **decent job opportunities for young people** in aquatic food-producing communities, including in the aquatic food growth industries.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ At production level, **increasing productivity per person** and reducing the demand for child labour will be an important strategy for producers, their organizations and international partners. Viable strategies include, for example, the introduction of labour-saving technologies or reducing fishing pressure on aquatic resources.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this, please, refer to the background paper on youth employment and child labour.

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