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**Initial comments on the Zero Draft of the CFS HLPE on "The role of sustainable fisheries**

**and aquaculture for food security and nutrition"|** December 2013

IBON International welcomes the High Level Panel of the Committee on Food Security’s (CFS HLPE) recognition that fisheries play a crucial role in food security and nutrition (FSN) — a recognition which has been lacking in many international FSN reports, as the CFS itself acknowledges — and offer some comments on this zero draft.

* ***Food sovereignty.*** This concept goes beyond food security, as it tackles not just the need to ensure that everyone has sufficient food, but also the right of peoples to determine their own food policies and systems of production. Food sovereignty, in general, is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. Any discussion of fisheries and aquaculture — a sector in which small-scale producers are held by consensus to play a central role — would greatly benefit from consideration of a food sovereignty framework.

For instance, food sovereignty includes the right to fight the power of corporations and other forces that destroy the people’s food production systems and deny them food and life. This is a key concept that could help to reframe the discussion of the relationship between small-scale fishers and large-scale, corporate fisheries. Under a food sovereignty framework, the discourse is not limited to a weighing of the pros and cons of both sides, but moves beyond, to recognizing the need to take a stand that would best serve the end of FSM for all.

* ***International fish trade.*** The CFS proposal to move from “pro-cash remunerative fish trade to pro-food security fish trade,” or towards a more regional or domestic-oriented fish trade, is a positive step in the right direction. But it is not enough. Especially troubling is the hesitancy evident in the draft when it comes to asserting the negative impacts of international fish trade on food security and livelihood options for the poor:

“So, does international trade reduce or accentuate food insecurity? Two recent comprehensive reviews conducted independently converged towards the same findings (Allison et al., 2013; Arthur et al., 2013). Their conclusion is: at best, the evidence is unclear and contradicting, and at worse no strong / rigorous evidence exists to substantiate either of the two narratives**.”**

The draft goes on to cite a study that “can help clarify the situation.”

“While there is little doubt... that international fish trade has positive effect on trade revenues and possibly on job creation, these revenues don’t seem to translate into positive outcome in terms of food security... In other words, depending on the criteria used to assess the ‘success’ of international fish trade, the conclusions may differ quite dramatically, even when one is looking at the same case.”

On the contrary, this vacillation in the draft is indicative, not of confusion between “pro-trade” and “anti-trade” narratives, but of a hesitancy to honestly criticize the international trade system.

The CFS should take a firmer stand in its document. After all, the CFS itself cites numerous studies explaining the ways in which the present structure of the international trade system, including the fisheries and aquaculture global value chain, has made fish products inaccessible or unaffordable to the most marginalized sectors of society, even small-scale fisherfolk.

IBON International notes that very manner in which the CFS zero draft frames the issue is flawed. The dichotomy should not be between pro and anti-trade stances; instead, it should be a discussion on how to reshape trade in a way that is more beneficial to more people around the globe.

Trade in fish products does not occur in a vacuum, but within the existing international trade system, with all its problems and weaknesses. Thus, to address the negative impacts of international fish trade requires a study of context and root causes. By recognizing that entirety of the present international trade system is structurally flawed, the dialogue can shift to the establishment of a just trade system, as a necessary requisite for making sure that fish trade, in particular, supports or complements the goal of food security for all.

* ***Climate change and climate crisis issues***. No discussion of fisheries and aquaculture is complete without a serious discussion of the perils brought about by global warming, as well as its economic, political, and social aspects, which have a direct impact on all scales of fisheries and aquaculture. Indeed, any progress made in achieving sustainable catching and harvesting processes may well be undermined by climate change. The CFS should take the opportunity to underscore the urgency of the climate crisis, in order to push the fisheries sector, a primary stakeholder in the issue, to become more actively involved.
* ***Small versus large-scale fisheries***. IBON International lauds the recognition that small-scale fisheries play a central role in FNS. However, it must be noted that supporting small-scale fisheries necessarily entails curtailing — perhaps significantly — some of the irresponsible actions of large-scale, corporatized fisheries and aquaculture industries. The practices of the latter have a direct and negative impact on small-scale fisherfolk, who are by far more numerous and more crucial to the achievement of the goal of FSN. The CFS should emphasize this reality in its document, not as a “necessary trade-off,” but as a problem that can and must be addressed.

In this light, we add that the abovementioned points should be raised in the ongoing drafting process of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. Genuine moves to consider these issues would aid in formulating the VG as an active tool in stemming the ongoing destruction of small fishing communities which are being displaced or replaced by corporatized large-scale fisheries or aquaculture industries .