

CFS49: Side Event No. 1
Transforming food, land and water systems for sustainable healthy diets

Monday, 11 October 2021

On 11th October, 150 participants tuned in to the CFS side event on *Transforming food, land and water systems for sustainable healthy diets*, co-organized by UN Nutrition, World Fish, ILRI, Environmental Defense Fund and Stanford University. Shakuntala Thilsted, Global Lead of Nutrition and Public Health at WorldFish and 2021 World Food Prize Laureate set the stage with a keynote address that underscored the need for stakeholders to come together and act now. She pointed to the coalitions sparked by the recent UN Food Systems Summit and the new CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition as levers, reminding participants that over 3 billion people do not have access to a healthy diet.

“For many people in low and middle-income countries, diverse aquatic foods like fish, crustaceans and seaweeds and animal source foods like milk, meat, eggs are central to local diets, livelihoods and culture. These diverse groups are not only rich in protein, but also rich in micronutrients and essential fatty acids, all crucial to human health and development,” stated Dr. Thilsted. She highlighted UN Nutrition discussion papers, which illustrate that both [aquatic foods](#) and [livestock-derived foods](#) are central to research, policies and investments for holistic food system transformation. Dr. Thilsted then discussed the potential of aquatic foods to support win-wins when sustainable production methods and consumption practices are adopted. Her message was clear: elevating aquatic foods in the food systems agenda “can synergistically improve access to nutritious foods, lower environmental footprints of our global food systems, and provide equitable livelihoods for the world’s most vulnerable.”

Equity and locally-sourced foods remained central to the discussion, moderated by Thin Lei Win, a journalist who covers climate change and food issues. Lora Iannotti, Associate Professor at Washington University in St. Louis reiterated the importance of consuming livestock-derived foods during the first 1000 days of life to meet special nutrient requirements, while cautioning that their overconsumption can have consequences on human and planetary health. She also highlighted the need to rebalance consumption trends by reducing intake in resource-rich areas and ensuring intake in resource-poor settings. Promotion of sustainable production methods, such as mixed agriculture systems, can also mitigate climate change.

The event then showcased examples of programmes from different settings that utilize these foods and target vulnerable populations. Adeline Ufitinema from the Rwanda National Child Development Agency illustrated how nutrition, social protection and agriculture programming have aligned by providing a cow to impoverished families along with social behaviour change communication. Arun Padiyar from WorldFish highlighted a government-run programme in Odisha, India, where the introduction of local aquatic foods has revolutionized the fight against malnutrition while fostering the economic empowerment of women. Jenn Gerard Lovewell, from Real Good Fish, shared an example where local bycatch is used to supply school meals for low-income high schoolers in California, supporting local communities, efficient use of aquatic resources and better adolescent nutrition.

Julie Bissonnette, a young Canadian farmer and member of the World Farmers Organization, spoke of the challenges she faces and her profound respect for the land that yields her earnings. She acknowledged

the need to transform food systems with nutrition and environmental goals in mind and how smallholders need support for that shift. The European Commission's Leonard Mizzi called for multi-stakeholder, inclusive approaches that empower youth and mainstream gender.

Stineke Oenema, Executive Secretary of UN Nutrition, closed the session, embracing the diversity of sustainable healthy diets and positioning them "as the linking pin between health, nutrition, food and environment". She looked ahead to opportunities, such as COP26 and Nutrition for Growth Summit, to continue supporting policymakers to change investments so that people, animals and planet can reap the benefits, today and in the generations to come.