



INFOFISH speaks to.....

DR ALUE DOHONG

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Dr Alue Dohong, the last time we interviewed the head of FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO RAP) was in 2018, when we featured Dr Kundhavi Kadiresan who had held the position at that time. Now, seven years later, it will be interesting to have an update on several key international and FAO initiatives, and with a specific focus on Asia and the Pacific.

Q: *One of the strategic programmes that we had referenced in the 2018 interview was FAO's Blue Growth Initiative (BGI), which built upon the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF). In the period since then, FAO and its Members have developed and endorsed a global initiative for the sustainable development of fisheries, aquaculture and the seafood trade called Blue Transformation. Could you please elaborate on the evolution of Blue Transformation and its relevance to the Asia-Pacific region?*

A: The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), adopted after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, established globally agreed principles for the sustainable use of marine and freshwater resources for food security, decent work and ecosystem health. FAO has built on this since then, through technical guidelines and advice.

Twenty years after Rio, following the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20) and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), FAO developed its Blue Growth Initiative (BGI). In Asia and the Pacific, this was implemented through the Regional Initiative on Blue Growth, to support sustainable practices in capture fisheries, aquaculture, ecosystems, trade, and social protection, with specific attention to Small Island Developing States. FAO's regional fishery body, the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), helped drive this work through regional coordination and technical guidance.

As global pressures like climate change, biodiversity loss and the rising demand for nutritious aquatic foods continue to intensify, FAO and our Members evolved this agenda into the Blue Transformation. Blue Transformation provides a more comprehensive, results-oriented roadmap focused on three priorities: (i) sustainably intensifying and expanding aquaculture, (ii) strengthening the management of capture fisheries, and (iii) upgrading aquatic value chains to enhance social,

economic and environmental performance. By doing this, we aim to expand aquatic food systems and increase their contribution to better production, better nutrition, better environment and better life, especially for those communities that depend on fisheries and aquaculture, ensuring that no one is left behind.

For Asia and the Pacific, the world's largest aquatic food-producing region, Blue Transformation is highly relevant. It promotes innovation and inclusive growth, ensuring that small-scale fishers, aquaculture producers and vulnerable communities benefit, while safeguarding ecosystems. It builds on, and significantly advances, the principles of Blue Growth and accelerates progress toward sustainable, resilient and equitable aquatic food systems in support of the SDGs.

Q: *The Asia-Pacific dominates in global production of fish and fishery products; and yet, food security is not assured across the region. Would you agree with the statement that under the Blue Transformation initiative, the three most important areas of focus for the region should be (i) intensification in aquaculture while ensuring sustainability; (ii) better fisheries management; and (iii) upgrading fish value chains to improve availability, quality and food safety to meet regional and market country requirements?*

A: Yes, absolutely, these areas of focus are fully consistent with FAO's Blue Transformation roadmap and are particularly relevant for the region.

Firstly, **sustainably intensifying aquaculture** is essential as the Asia-Pacific accounts for the vast majority of global aquaculture production and is a major contributor to the region's fish supply. Further, sustainable, expansion – supported by innovation, biosecurity, improved feeds and genetics, and responsible environmental management – will be critical to meet regional demand for nutritious aquatic foods while reducing pressure on wild stocks.

Secondly, **strengthening fisheries management**, including preventing IUU fishing, is central to ensuring long-term resource sustainability and securing livelihoods. Effective, evidence-based decision-making on fisheries resources; improved monitoring, control and surveillance and port controls; ecosystem-based approaches; and regional collaboration are key to maintaining healthy stocks and supporting coastal communities. This is particularly important to the Asia-Pacific region which is home to more than 80 percent of the world's small-scale fishers. (<https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/ihh/en>)

Third, **upgrading regional and international aquatic value chains** is vital to reduce loss and waste, improve food safety and quality, increase value-addition, and ensure fairer and more inclusive distribution of benefits. More efficient, equitable and climate-resilient value chains can unlock new livelihood opportunities and make nutritious aquatic foods more accessible – crucial for improving food security and nutrition.

These three pillars reflect the core intent of Blue Transformation: to deliver sustainable growth of aquatic food systems while leaving no one behind. Importantly, they reinforce one another: improved management strengthens sustainability; responsible aquaculture expansion increases supply; and value-chain upgrading ensures that production translates into better nutrition and livelihoods. I fully agree that these are indeed the most important focus areas for accelerating Blue Transformation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Q: Can you highlight any regional progress in achieving Blue Transformation objectives in aquaculture over the past five years?

A: Over 90% of farmed aquatic foods is produced in Asia and the Pacific and the region is expected to continue leading the sector's growth. However, to sustainably meet rising demand, we must ensure sustainable intensification, better resource use, improved governance, resilient value chains, and enhanced collaboration among governments, private sector, and civil society.

Because aquaculture is so important to the region, FAO has worked closely with the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) to develop a [regional roadmap](#) for Aquaculture Transformation in Asia and the Pacific by 2030. Its vision is to develop more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable aquatic food systems through

innovation, investment, and partnerships especially with private sector investment and venture capital mechanisms. The roadmap focuses on twenty actions areas and priorities for promoting innovation and investment tailored to the Asian and Pacific context, addressing challenges like poor infrastructure, environmental impacts, and social inclusion.

Q: What have been the regional Blue Transformation priorities for the capture fishery sector in the region?

A: We are working with Member countries to strengthen fishery stock assessments so there is a strong basis for evidence-based management and support for Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) decision-making. This is a key element of FAO's updated, [comprehensive global assessment](#) of the state of global marine fisheries resources, which provides an unprecedented understanding of the state of fishery resources in Asia and the Pacific. The assessment shows there are considerable efforts to track the region's resources, but there is mixed news on their status. This underscores the pressing need for more effective management, particularly of coastal stocks in multispecies mixed-gear fisheries in the region.

Many Asian countries are increasingly adopting EAFM in national planning and local fisheries management, improving stock assessments, spatial planning and bycatch/benthic-impact management. This has helped stabilise or rebuild some fish stocks and better balance biodiversity protection with fisheries use. This has been supported by FAO programmes and publications, trainings, case studies, APFIC, and EAF-related projects (including Bay of Bengal/LME partnerships and EAF-Nansen collaborations).

AQUATIC SYSTEMS ARE A POWERFUL SOLUTION: THE NEED FOR A BLUE TRANSFORMATION



OBJECTIVE 1

Sustainable aquaculture intensification and expansion satisfies global demand for aquatic foods and distributes benefits equitably.

OUTCOME

Sustainable aquaculture production grows by at least 35 percent by 2030, especially in food deficit regions.



OBJECTIVE 2

Effective management of all fisheries delivers healthy stocks and secures equitable livelihoods.

OUTCOME

100 percent of marine and inland fisheries is under effective management and IUU fishing is eradicated.



OBJECTIVE 3

Upgraded value chains ensure the social, economic and environmental viability of aquatic food systems.

OUTCOME

Loss and waste halved by 2030, more transparency and traceability is ensured for more inclusive and equitable returns.

Credit: FAO



FAO led the participatory development of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty which are grounded in a human-rights-based approach.

Q: As reported in a news item on the FAO RAP website in April 2025, small-scale fisheries (SSF) are the backbone of many coastal and inland communities in Asia, supporting the livelihoods of approximately 46 million people. Last year (2025) was the 11th anniversary of the [Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries](#). Would you agree that there remains a critical need to ensure that SSF are effectively integrated into national strategies and regional cooperation frameworks? What have been the major challenges that have held back progress towards this goal?

A: Small-scale fisheries play a foundational role in food security, livelihoods and cultural identity across Asia and the Pacific, so it is critical that we ensure that small-scale fisheries (SSF) are effectively integrated into national strategies and regional cooperation frameworks.

Our workshop in March 2025, commemorated the 10-year anniversary of the SSF Guidelines and highlighted that, despite the vital socio-economic and environmental roles SSF play – contributing nearly half of capture fisheries production in Asia and supporting the livelihoods of millions – significant barriers still impede their full and meaningful inclusion in policy and management processes. Many governments and stakeholders lack the technical and financial means to implement the SSF Guidelines effectively. There are also considerable data and knowledge gaps with insufficient information on SSF contributions, needs and vulnerabilities, which in turn restricts evidence-based policymaking and equitable access to investment and social protection. National policies often lack coherence or fail to define

SSF clearly, making it difficult to design targeted interventions. Other issues include weak recognition of customary rights, which leaves SSF communities vulnerable to competing uses of aquatic and coastal space, and the lack of recognition of women's essential contributions across SSF value chains.

Additionally, while SSF are on the frontline of climate impacts, access to early warning systems, safety-at-sea measures and adaptation support remains limited. Building on the findings of the [global study](#) on small-scale fisheries, FAO will work with members to develop specific national plans of action to support their small-scale fisheries (NPOA-SSF).

Addressing these gaps will require collaboration beyond fisheries institutions to include finance, social protection, market development, and stronger national and regional technical support, alongside targeted research and reinforced political commitment, as seen in the National Plans of Action for small-scale fisheries (NPOA-SSFs) in the Philippines and Indonesia.

Q: Another major area of concern in the Asia-Pacific is illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. One of the most important initiatives developed by FAO in this regard has been the [Port State Measures Agreement](#) – at last count, 84 countries had become Parties to the Agreement, of which less than 30 are from the Asia-Pacific region. How does FAO work with regional governments to encourage them to become signatories if they have not already done so; and to support countries which are Parties in their national efforts to implement the PSMA?

A: FAO has worked closely with governments to strengthen action against IUU fishing, including promoting accession to, and implementation of, the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), and improving monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS). This has increasingly reduced opportunities for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and improved compliance in parts of the region. These efforts mean countries can better protect legal fishers, safeguard vulnerable stocks, and maintain access to high-value export markets.

Through its global PSMA programme and regional initiatives with partners such as [SEAFDEC](#) and [BOBP-IGO](#), FAO provides technical guidance, capacity-building, and support for risk-based port controls and transshipment oversight. This includes legal assistance, training for inspectors, and strengthening institutional coordination.

In addition, FAO helps countries understand international trade implications, including World Trade Organisation (WTO) fishery subsidies, to ensure that national support policies contribute to sustainability and do not drive overfishing. Progress has also been seen in the wider adoption of food safety systems, which has helped improve market access, reduced trade disruptions and market rejections, and enhanced consumer confidence.

There is a lot of work that remains to be done, but I am quite optimistic that the region is steadily improving the transparency, sustainability, and performance of its aquatic value chains.

Q: *On 2 September 2025, FAO and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) announced the launch of a new global partnership to help countries monitor and report on ecosystem restoration, including in the Asia-Pacific. One of the aims was stated as to boost countries' capacity for monitoring and reporting on Target 2 of the CBD's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework which commits countries to ensure that at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration by 2030. As at the time of this interview, it may be too early for FAO RAP to go into the details of any initiative or collaboration, but perhaps you could give readers a rough overview of what countries in the Asia-Pacific can expect in terms of possible areas of focus?*

A: Yes, it is still early days, and we have yet to see how this programme will develop, but I expect it will complement FAO's work on fisheries biodiversity and conservation.

Coastal and freshwater environments are some of the most vulnerable to human activities, and it is simple common sense that healthy habitats are essential for productive fisheries and aquaculture. Restoration objectives under Target 2 align well with efforts to rebuild fish stocks and the use of aquaculture to rehabilitate and restore degraded ecosystems. Our focus will be on improved methods of operations that not only prevent degradation, but which actively contribute to restoration.

We are already supporting countries on biodiversity conservation through ongoing initiatives related to Target 3, working with partners

such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Malaysia's Department of Fisheries, the University of Queensland and Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) under Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded programmes. These efforts focus on improving the effectiveness of marine protected areas and other effective conservation measures (OECMs); and addressing freshwater biodiversity and conservation issues.

We are also developing, with The Nature Conservancy, regional case studies and advice on how aquaculture sites can contribute to biodiversity conservation at local and larger scales. This is an exciting new area for the region which is home to some of the largest expanses of open-water aquaculture, where farms can support in-situ conservation of aquatic biodiversity.

Looking ahead, the focus will be on better integrating biodiversity goals with sustainable food production. This is particularly relevant with regard to the Global Biodiversity Framework's Target 10 on sustainable fishery management and the improved footprint of capture fisheries through ecosystem approaches; and Target 5 on impacts on wild species. This requires a balanced framework and tools to assess impacts, cost-benefits, and trade-offs between food production and ecosystem integrity. We also need a better understanding of fishery management and stock assessments that accounts for multi-gear and multi-species interactions and the inevitable trade-offs from managing such complex fishery systems.

Q: *And finally, on a personal note, what do you hope to achieve during your tenure as FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific?*

A: As you can imagine, I have responsibilities across the entire agriculture sector spanning crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. Let me focus on what I hope to do with the fishery and aquaculture sectors. Coming from Indonesia, a country that is defined by its archipelagic nature and huge dependence upon its marine and freshwater resources, the challenges of Blue Transformation for our region is very close to my heart. So too is the knowledge that our region is home to the highest proportion of people dependent upon small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods and food security. The region is also home to the highest global levels of fish consumption, and fish play an iconic role in our diets and food culture.

My goal is to ensure a steady supply of safe, nutritious fish without compromising future resources. Up until now we have benefited from increasing productivity as we developed new technology and expanded the scale of aquaculture and capture fisheries. But we now realise that we are reaching the limits of supply from wild capture fisheries, and that aquaculture operations must improve their resource-use footprint if we want to continue enjoying fish on our plates. We also need to cut waste and improve efficiency across the value chain.

The good news is we have the means to do this, and increasingly there is political will and public support for the innovations and reforms that are needed. My role is to ensure that FAO is there to help countries rise to this challenge by providing the technical advice and capacity-building they need to transform their ideas into action.