

# Talking Points: Blue Foods & Funder Collaboration

September 2024

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## Funder Collaboration

- A group of philanthropies is working together to capitalize on the power of blue foods to help reshape food systems to be sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and healthy.
- Our goal is to integrate and normalize the inclusion of blue foods in food systems transformation efforts by elevating opportunities to responsibly produce climate-friendly food in water.
- We aim to work with other philanthropies, public funders, other financing sources and institutions, and decision-makers for whole food systems transformation - inclusive of both land- and sea-foods.
- There is great opportunity to elevate blue food within broader conversation and highlight the areas of intersection with existing work – so inclusion and integration of blue foods does not need to require a re-think on existing strategies.
- Philanthropy can support through communications, targeted outreach, and co-funding opportunities.
- Our ask is that foundations join the conversation – and particularly note and ask when blue foods could be part of ongoing discussions or consider how blue foods may be relevant to the topic at hand.
- Blue foods should be a part of ongoing conversations around emerging areas, for example, “regenerative,” “nature-based solutions,” and “equity”, as actors aim to develop greater clarity, definitions, and approaches.
- There are also a number of areas where blue foods can advance and support action and transformation more effectively when considered as part of the whole food system, for example in conversations around nutrition and food security; traceability and transparency; shifting diets; subsidies and incentives; jobs and livelihoods; corporate and public procurement; smallholders, Indigenous peoples and local communities; and equity.
- We also hope to explore ways to address potential concerns we heard about blue foods and consider solutions, including animal welfare; labor and human rights; and the need for space for responsible fisheries and aquaculture production from a public resource.
- We are keen to continue collaborating and to work with others on a shared vision of a transformed food system. Some key actions we anticipate taking include:

- Blue foods highlighted at key events to ensure that panels, public policy dialogues, etc discussing food systems include blue foods, on panels and as part of conversations about food systems in the future, biodiversity protection
- Development of materials that elevate blue foods' profile and state the value of its inclusion
- Targeted outreach to specific funders and funder groups.
- We welcome your participation and interest! If you would like to stay informed and contribute, please contact [arife@merid.org](mailto:arife@merid.org) at Meridian Institute who is supporting the coordination of this effort.

## Background

- Blue foods are a critical part of the global food system. They have long been at the heart of ocean conservation and biodiversity efforts and are the foundation of food security in communities around the world.
  - Blue (or aquatic) foods are all fish, invertebrates, algae, and aquatic plants that are caught (fisheries) or cultivated (aquaculture) for food from marine and freshwater environments.
- Blue foods serve as a vital source of nutrition for 3 billion people and provide livelihoods for 800 million people.
- Blue foods have several characteristics that shape the potential of blue foods to contribute to food system priorities:
  - They are extraordinarily diverse, with more than 2,500 species and produced through a variety of methods, resulting in a vast array of possibilities.
  - They are rich in nutrients essential for healthy development and diets.
  - They are produced by large and small producers critical for livelihoods and revenue.
  - They have an overall lighter carbon footprint than protein produced on land.
- Fisheries are inherently regenerative; if we manage them well and prevent overfishing, we can restore biodiversity and increase production. Aquaculture, the fastest growing food sector, also has important roles to play, but investment is urgently needed to ensure that this growth is both socially responsible and environmentally sustainable.
- Protecting and expanding blue food systems and incorporating them deliberately into food and climate mitigation and resilience programs can help countries meet their food security goals, while also providing benefits to climate resilience and biodiversity.
  - Blue foods are a key part to meeting multiple [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) – in particular, healthy, sustainable food systems (Goals 1, 2, 3 & 12); climate change (Goal 13); and biodiversity (Goals 14 & 15).
  - Although blue foods vary widely in production impacts, the carbon footprint of blue foods is comparable to chicken and much lower than beef, lamb, or pork.
  - Ensuring that blue food is produced sustainably is also integral to meeting the Global Biodiversity Framework, especially 30x30 targets.

- Given their importance, blue foods should be an integral part of any discussion about the future of food systems – as a key priority for investments and action in food security and nutrition, adaptation and resilience, and reducing emissions.
- Blue foods tend to be consigned to the margins of the global agenda and are often not included in international and national discussions about current and future food production (and its impact on larger ecosystem changes).
- Despite acknowledgment by the FAO and numerous research and UN bodies that responsible blue foods have a crucial role to play in building a healthy, low carbon and climate-resilient sustainable food system to feed a hot and hungry planet, blue foods remain chronically underinvested in and underrecognized by investors and decision-makers.
- There is a need to incorporate blue foods into the mainstream of food systems priorities and policymaking – to ensure sustainable, equitable, resilient, and healthy food systems under climate change and to protect biodiversity.
- Philanthropy has a critical role to play in illuminating the importance of blue foods and supporting this integration.

## Key Intersections

### REDUCING EMISSIONS AND CARBON SEQUESTRATION

- Overall, the **carbon footprint** of blue foods is lower than nearly all animal source protein produced on land. However, blue foods vary widely in the impacts of production – with some blue food systems incurring higher emissions and ecological impacts than others.
- Blue foods will be profoundly affected by a changing climate, so should be integrated into climate negotiations and policymaking efforts. Many species will migrate poleward in search of cooler waters, leaving the jurisdiction of tropical countries that are often heavily reliant on fisheries for livelihoods and food security.
- Wild capture fisheries can contribute to a country's **National Determined Contributions** through improved motors, banning production systems with high emissions (e.g., bottom trawling), and improved management.
- Aquaculture emissions can be reduced through better feeds and improved citing that doesn't threaten coastal ecosystems and coastal sinks.
- There are also significant synergies between blue foods and **nature-based solutions** that address both biodiversity and climate goals. High-priority ecosystems, such as mangroves, tidal marshes and sea grass beds, are highly efficient **carbon sinks** and also important for sustaining healthy blue food populations.
- Inclusion of blue foods in efforts to enhance the **resilience of food systems** is of crucial importance – it can help diversify and strengthen food systems and communities that produce food.
- First, blue food systems will be affected differently from terrestrial systems, and thus can be a valuable part of a portfolio of measures in adaptation strategies.
- Second, the immense diversity of blue foods means that, as current systems are affected, there will often be other options that can be developed.

- There is also opportunity and research to be done to enhance resilience of food products, such as improving tolerance of certain species to drought or heat through genetic research.

## DIETS AND NUTRITION

- Blue foods are an accessible and affordable healthy, nutrient-dense food.
  - **Diet changes and protein transition** away from land-grown animal protein (especially beef and dairy) has implications for blue food production – and is likely to lead to higher demand for blue foods.
  - Blue foods are a good source of protein. But they offer much more. They are rich in an array of micronutrients – including Vitamin A and B12, omega-3s, iron, zinc, calcium, and others – that are essential for healthy development.
- In industrialized countries with high rates of obesity and heart disease and high greenhouse gas emissions, for example, blue foods offer a source of protein that is healthier than red meat, with a lower carbon footprint.
- In many developing countries, blue foods can play critical roles in meeting pressing challenges of **hunger and malnutrition** because they offer an affordable and accessible source of animal protein and are rich in essential micronutrients. For example, a single serving of many species of small pelagic fish, bivalves or shellfish, for example, provides more than the daily recommendations for omega-3 fatty acids (EPA+DHA), Vitamin B12 and calcium.
- A [2019 study](#) found that many tropical countries could solve nutrient deficiencies afflicting their coastal communities with better use of the fish harvested in their waters; 22 countries could meet the nutrient requirements of all their children under 5 with allocation of just 20% of the catch.
- Governments can capitalize on this potential if they build blue foods into food system policies and programs – helping consumers shift from meat to fish and, especially, to small pelagics and farmed bivalves that have low footprints and are particularly rich in micronutrients.

## BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION

- Production of blue foods, if not managed or sited well, can have impacts on the natural environment and threaten biodiversity.
- Thus, ensuring that harvest and production of blue foods does not threaten ocean biodiversity and ensures habitat protection and conservation has been a major focus for ocean and fisheries efforts.
- Much of blue foods production is already inherently “**regenerative**” – i.e., can recover and build back.
- If wild capture fisheries are managed well (within sustainable limits and with an ecosystem approach), we can restore biodiversity and increase production.
  - Overfishing and habitat degradation from fishing is a real threat when management not done right and threatens the regenerative nature of fisheries
- Aquaculture systems can have a regenerative lens applied much in the same way as agriculture – especially with seaweed aquaculture or that which combines seaweed with mollusks or multi-trophic aquaculture – and can be a climate-friendly way to produce food.

## PRODUCTION AND MARKETS

- Blue food production offers a significant economic and income development opportunity for producers and coastal communities.
  - In coastal cities, fisheries and food production are often the backbone of the **local “blue economy”** and a critical source of healthy food for community members.
- There is an opportunity to create incentives through policy, markets, and culture for producers and via institutional markets such as public schools and cities to **procure healthy foods**.
- Exports of blue foods by producers large and small provide \$38 billion in annual revenue for developing countries (FAO 2020), more than all agricultural commodities combined.
- **Small-scale actors** produce, process, and distribute most of the blue food destined for human consumption. They also provide 90% of the jobs, supporting 800 million livelihoods in the blue food sector.
- **Women** are 50% of the workforce in the blue food sector, making it a priority for gender equality