Feeding the future: the path towards nutrition-sensitive aquaculture

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Aquatic or blue foods, including a variety of fish, invertebrates, and algae, are pivotal for global food and nutritional security, contributing to 15% of animal and 7% of overall protein intake worldwide. Especially in lower-income nations, they form a significant portion of animal protein consumption. Despite their high nutritional value, including essential amino acids, fatty acids and micronutrients like iron, zinc, and vitamins, their importance is often overlooked in policy discussions and financial allocations, with less than 50% of national public health nutrition strategies and fisheries policies recognizing their significance. In many countries worldwide, the narrative has been primarily economy-centric, emphasizing high-value production for export over local food security and well-being.

Over the last three decades, aquaculture production has rapidly increased to fulfill the rising demand for aquatic foods, given the stagnation in capture fisheries. However, for it to effectively contribute to global food security and livelihoods, it must operate sustainably. Although there's a positive trend towards sustainability in aquaculture, challenges such as habitat degradation, disease management, and environmentally unfriendly feed production persist. The narrative is gradually shifting towards a nutrition-sensitive approach in aquaculture, focusing on producing a variety of affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods sustainably. This approach envisions aquaculture as a means to enhance well-being, taking into account socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors. It advocates for diversified and sustainable aquaculture production, evaluating the nutritional composition of aquatic organisms, and promoting sustainable feeding practices. Such a paradigm shift, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, positions aquatic foods as a promising avenue to address both nutritional needs and environmental sustainability, paving the way toward a more balanced food system.

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