

## **FAO : Seafood must welcome disruptive technology, but be mindful of potential abuses**

Disruptive technologies will increasingly offer the means to enhance the global seafood economy, with the scope to not only make improvements to current industry practices but to also generate new, far-reaching opportunities, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

With the capacity to rapidly change the way people live, work, do business, and engage with others rather than the incremental progress brought by existing tools and processes, more and more disruptive technologies are entering the fray with new market and value solutions and shaking up multiple industries.

In the latest edition of its [“The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture”](#) report, the FAO recognizes that in capture fisheries, new product or service innovations have the potential to change activities by providing fishers with more accurate weather forecasts and satellite positioning that can in turn make their operations safer, more precise, and more predictable. Such tools offer similar benefits to aquaculture producers, and that both sectors can benefit from those emerging technologies designed to gather and safely store information to help improve compliance with stricter regulatory and traceability requirements, according to the organization.

Concurrently, it identifies that the seafood landscape is being increasingly affected by mobile and advanced robotic technologies, with the former already providing such capabilities as real-time market prices for fish and the latter making the automatic filleting of fish possible. Beyond these, the Internet of Things (IoT) has made processing systems and supply chains much more interconnected.

In its report, the FAO said it encourages innovation and the adoption of new technologies, including disruptive ones, maintaining that they offer new ways for fisheries and aquaculture to do business – making them more sustainable, and more resource and energy-efficient, while creating new decent work opportunities, including opportunities for women and younger people.

There is also the recognition that along the seafood value chain, emerging disruptive technologies may change the organization of fisheries economies. With, for instance, consumers asking for more sustainably-caught fish from traceable and transparent sources, and fishers offering on-demand products from selective and safe fisheries.

Such technologies are becoming increasingly affordable and promise to change behavior and the economy, even for small-scale fishers, it said.

“The use of disruptive technologies in fisheries and aquaculture may not be



widespread now, but a look at three disruptive technologies that were not on the sector's horizon a few years ago – blockchains, sensors, and automatic identification systems (AIS) – demonstrates the potential of disruptive technology to change the processes, profitability, and sustainability of the sector," the report said.

While advocating disruptive technologies for their potential to provide new ways to meet objectives, the FAO also cautioned that such innovations have the potential to support unscrupulous activities.

If abused, they could be used to facilitate illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) or, if not taken into account in fisheries management, could increase fishing power in general and result in overexploitation of resources, it said, suggesting that the latter is a risk with blockchains as they make it possible to gather more information and to use it more efficiently and effectively, thus increasing predictive capacity.

At the same time, it acknowledges that some new technologies have created barriers for fisheries that lack the capacity or financial resources to adopt them.

These risks highlight the importance of ensuring that effective management is in place so that emerging technologies are used to improve rather than undermine the sustainability of fisheries, the FAO said, adding that it's essential to address barriers to fishers' and fish farmers' access to new technologies, and to build their capacity to take advantage of disruptive technologies.

"The machines will march on, and it is a great responsibility to keep the disruption of social and environmental networks in check. If well-managed, disruptive technologies offer immense opportunities to enhance the technical and financial efficiency of the sector, to create new work opportunities, to improve food security and livelihoods, and to contribute to the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 14," the report states.

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