



Event Title: Is governance the missing ingredient for sustainable aquaculture?

Date: Wednesday 12th May 2021

Time: 13:00-14:00 (BST)

The seminar explored the role of governance in realising the ambitions of the sector and introduced the **Aquaculture Governance Indicators (AGI)** as a framework¹ (the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study) for assessing the performance of aquaculture governance around the world. The AGI provides a handbook which offers a guide towards assessing aquaculture governance in a country which is available on their website (<https://www.aquaculturegovernance.org/news-and-resources>).

Audience Questions and Answers

The below questions were answered during the event by our Panel support Simon Bush, Furqan Asif and Hilde Toonen.

1. Could closed aquaculture systems² be the only solution to sustainable aquaculture?

To turn this back to a question of governance, the move to land-based closed systems may well be a response to failures or difficulties in addressing key issues around cage culture. So the governance capacity of both industry and states may be seen as relative poor in that case. That doesn't mean that land-based technologies are a silver bullet for the industry. Moving on land brings with it a range of new regulatory challenges, as well as new challenges of gaining what is broadly called a social licence to operate. So lots of governance challenges there too.

¹ 'Framework' the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study

² 'Closed aquaculture systems' are those that are entirely based on land in tanks.

If I may take your question to illustrate how the AGIs work: The AGIs would look into the ways in which specific solutions are formulated, by whom, and the extent to which they are openly discussed between industry, state and civil society organization.

2. Legitimacy is a nice principle. But who is to be consulted for a governance set up to be labelled 'legitimate'. Is it only 'the industry'? Or also the surrounding population and other actors?

Within the AGI framework we have defined multiple indicators to assess legitimacy. This includes the industry, and how they perceive challenges are addressed, but also others like environmental NGOs and community organizations.

Legitimacy here is cross-cutting through all of the dimensions, so for example, within legislation, legitimacy is focused on how the state is viewed in terms of authority and scope, i.e. it's ability to develop legislation. In collaborative arrangements, it deals with 'input legitimacy' which covers the various actors involved, not just industry.

3. Why only three principles? - where, for example, is social justice, or fairness? Then, in talking about governance, one would also want to discuss its range of objectives, or concerns, a few of which were elaborated in the 'Fish for Life' volume. Third, how does governance work in failed, failing or authoritarian states? Who is to take the lead there?

We see clear value in a problem-solving orientation to understanding governance. The framework we have set up is intentionally not prescriptive - in terms of setting goals for social justice or fairness. Having said that, the collaborative arrangements and capabilities do address issues of legitimacy and inclusiveness that underpin the ability of a sector (public and private) to solve issues like social justice. Our framework is also aimed at seeing the role of private actors (including industry and NGOs) beyond the state.

4. Could Simon or others expand on the issue of transparency? This was cited in his presentation as a factor for governance in Canadian aquaculture. What are the elements required for good or appropriate transparency? My view, working in government in British Columbia, is that transparency is much more complicated than just communicating out by both industry and government - which is done extensively in Canada.

Transparency is indeed more than communication. A key part of transparency we focus on in the AGIs is the availability of information, but also the capability of key actors in a given sector to respond to available information - both in terms of communication, but also in terms of reflecting on that information and responding to that information by changing practices, as well as prevailing norms and rules. So not just available information, but acting on that information.

5. How will fisheries continue with governance?

Fisheries governance is in one sense very different in terms of the extent to which fisheries resources are public resources. But our framework for aquaculture governance is also not only relevant to this sector. Understanding governance as the capability to interact with other actors to resolve problems in a given industry is of course also relevant to fisheries.

6. Aquaculture is often promoted with reference to food security; in other words, this might be labelled as one of the objectives or concerns. But whose food security? If food security is

connected to the populations who lack access to nutritious food, then a clear objective to this effect would be of use. Do you agree?

Aquaculture is indeed key for food and nutrition security. In general terms food and nutrition security are key governance concerns. In the context of the AGI framework this could be a part of the wider challenges the industry faced, if this is a key concern. However, we have to be clear that the scope of the AGI framework is primarily focused on environmental concerns within the industry. That doesn't mean it can't be extended to wider societal level concerns. The difficulty in that though, is that food and nutrition security goes beyond the responsibility of the aquaculture sector alone.

7. How can we develop effective global aquaculture governance from a nation state-based³ set of indicators?

While the assessment is on a country-level, it does include cross-border and global collaborations. So in our synthesis we can reflect on the way in which global standards can improve coordination⁴, how companies work in different countries. And I think there is much to learn from the cross-country comparisons.

8. What about Governance in African fisheries? I would like to be guided on how one can make his own contributions on Aquaculture governance in a situation where it is completely absent or have zero implementation like in my country?

Great to hear of your interest in contributing to understanding aquaculture governance. We have published the AGI Handbook which offers a guide towards assessing aquaculture governance in a country which is available on our website: <https://www.aquaculturegovernance.org/news-and-resources>.

Using the AGI framework, one would perhaps not first go for assessing legislation and standards, but to look into the capabilities of key organizations, what do they do? What is their ability to communicate, to build partnerships? And what collaborative initiatives can be identified? In industry, public-private, locally or internationally-driven?

9. Understanding that improving governance is a high cost and mid-to-long term works, what then the priority things to address? The other thing is, the legitimation we are talking about here, does this related more to a national government legislation, or also seeing the local legislation or even also considering the internal 'legislation' or policy set by a company or association?

We have addressed legitimacy as extending well beyond national governments. So yes, governments have to set legislation is deemed legitimate by those subject to them - otherwise compliance will likely be poor. But the same goes for industry and NGO activities - in terms of being seen as a legitimate production system, or voluntary rules set by NGOs (think here about [Seafood Watch](#), [ASC](#) or [GAA](#) certification). If they are not seen as legitimate, they won't have the effect they want to.

10. Effective governance in sub-Saharan Africa for aquaculture has been constrained considerably by lack of resources for most African countries i.e. simply budget. The evidence base shows commercial aquaculture production across sub-Saharan Africa has been grown by private sector in spite of governments. I would welcome the panels' views on this geographical differentiation.

³ 'Nation state-based' here refers to data collected at a national level.

⁴ 'Coordination' is between national level standards to apply beyond borders.

Indeed, the focus thus far within the AGI project has been on the more prominent producers within aquaculture, although we have also covered Myanmar which is in a much earlier developing stage for aquaculture. For sub-Saharan Africa, what your comment shows from the lens of the AGI framework is that there is low capacity⁵ (how this is manifested would be more clear if one were to do an AGI assessment, for example) and potentially limited legislation/regulation⁶. In this context, the private sector has taken the lead in developing the industry. We have seen this trend in some of the countries already assessed.

Thanks for bringing this forward. If I may take this observation to our assessment framework, this would be a point that could come out of our assessment, and by looking into lessons about capabilities or collaborations, we come up with actionable insights.

11. I've been involved in nutrition and environmental impact assessment in marine fish culture, and I am quite aware of the bad public image that aquaculture has, not to ignore the continuous attacks from ecologist groups. I got the idea that no matters what scientifically the sector does to tackle the issue, they are unable to communicate these efforts or to improve their image (little advances can be seen in the last decades).

This is indeed a persistent issue. It is also an issue that stresses the importance of governance - how inclusive, how transparent, how legitimate are then key questions.

Thanks for sharing this - and if I may take it to our assessment framework: we have developed indicators that take in public opinion, and what are the responses from state, industry and civil society organizations. So we take this as part of the overall aquaculture governance.

12. Private standards are continually being pushed to include more requirements. For example, of late, there have been campaigns to raise requirements for animal welfare. More complex standards are difficult and costly for producers in some countries to meet. Should standards become more complex or resist the pressure from campaigners?

Standard setting is potentially endless, with the danger that the degree of complexity ultimately risks undermining the impact of the standards in question. More attention to supporting compliance to a 'smaller' set of standards can have more impact than adding more and more criteria. This also says, in line with the AGIs, that standards will never be the answer. But they can absolutely play a role in the solution.

13. Governance is key but it needs to be guided by how we define sustainability. This is a multidimensional goal. The Sustainable Development Goal's effectively communicate this.

Governance also determines whose knowledge and interests go into defining sustainability.

14. Do the indicators evaluate inequalities in power that complicate trust and collaboration? What are the characteristics of a national aquaculture system that favour good governance as a dependent variable?

There is not a single indicator to capture power dynamics, but through interpretative analysis we can synthesize and come up with insights on trust and collaboration. About the second question: the three governance principles would be guiding good governance, but this is very much a broader research question that we aim to address

⁵ 'Capacity' as the perceived abilities, skills, and expertise of researchers.

⁶ Legislation sets out the principles of public policy, whereas regulation implements these principles.

15. The governance indicator reports all reference back to contents of Seafood Watch. Is this assessment only focused Seafood Watch and therefore constrained by the limits of what Seafood Watch assesses?

Yes and no. We've taken the issue areas covered by Seafood Watch as a starting point. But the AGIs don't refer explicitly to the Seafood Watch standard. In that sense they can be applied to a far wider set of issues if deemed necessary in a sector. The starting point is: is there a problem to solve? If yes, what is the collective capacity of the sector to solve those problems - and what needs to be improved. Said differently, it's not about setting goals, it's about assessing the capability of the sector (and institutions in that sector) to enable problem solving to sustainability.

16. After presenting the Chilean assessment synthesis report: What is the next step for this country and it's possible work with AGI?

We want to go beyond presenting a report, and engage with those involved. The AGIs can serve as a deliberative tool, for example in an engagement workshop. Please contact us if you want to engage with us in a next step.

The assessment is the first step. What happens next is most important. Seafood Watch, but our other partners plan to use these reports as a starting point for opening up discussion around what limits the capability of a sector (states and private actors) to interact, collaborate and resolve the outstanding issues in that sector. That is also the plan for Chile.

17. In comparison with Forest Stewardship Council ([FSC](#)), would AGI-governance also possibly result in three international chambers deciding about different dimensions of the strategy?

The FSC model is indeed very strong in this sense. Whether the AGIs take on such a model is a big question. Our current vision is seeing it as a compliment to existing standards and initiatives (public and/or private). In that sense, it's a means by which to understand and assess the conditions under which a sector/standard can enhance more inclusive and effective impact.

18. These assessments are at the national level, but often governance is much more local. Can these assessment be delivered at different scales?

Yes, indeed the scale at which an AGI assessment is done is set out at the initial 'scope' stage of an assessment so the assessment team would explicitly specify the scope so this could be at a more local level. If you would like to know more about this process, you can check out the AGI handbook: <https://www.aquaculturegovernance.org/news-and-resources>

We've actually designed the AGIs to be scale independent. Said differently a key question at the start of an assessment is to determine the scale at which problems emerge and the scale at which the actors who can resolve these issues operate. That can be local through to national (perhaps even global in some instances).

19. How many projects on aquaculture governance are running Globally?

Thanks, if the question is about the AGI assessments, we have carried out 10 assessments, and there will be more. If it is more generally, it is difficult to give a number. However, we found that there was attention for governance, yet this was not always very comprehensive (so most focus on laws, on compliance).

We have conducted 10 AGI assessments thus far and aim to do more in the future, you can see these on the AGI website here: <https://www.aquaculturegovernance.org/countries> and via the AGI dashboard.

20. In the Canadian situation, industry practices have evolved substantially. What happens when specific norms and rules are promoted by special interest groups in a way that doesn't reflect broader societal views?

Big issue indeed! Then I would say that collaboration is (perhaps weak) or interests of some actors seen as more important. That is an issue in British Columbia as I understand. Does that mean the problems are not being solved? Or that the reputation is at stake? They aren't necessarily the same thing. But far more to discuss here!

21. If governance for the sector operates within wider governance 'systems' - which are not always supporting the "good governance" of the aquaculture sector - How can this influence be managed? Things such as transaction costs, information asymmetries, conflicts (i.e. institutional economics issues) also?

I agree on all the points. A lot to digest. But who engages, what conflicts, speed of change are key elements.

22. What's next with the AGI? More case studies? Will you promote it to FAO?

There is a lot in stall for the AGIs. We will be extending the number of countries and/or sectors assessed. But we are also going to move to an engagement phase with the countries that we have already assessed. That will give us a chance to explore how governance affecting problem solving in a given sector? And we'll focus more on how governance challenges are behind poor environmental performance?