Nearly 50% of the global fish consumption currently originates from aquaculture, which is now recognised as the fastest growing food producing sector in the world and dominated by resource limited small-scale producers.

Traditionally, the threats to aquaculture posed by aquatic pathogens have been addressed through the use of antimicrobials, including chemotherapeutants, disinfectants, antibiotics and vaccines.

The injudicious use of antimicrobials, in addition to causing problems related to increased frequency of bacterial resistance, with negative impacts on the efficacy of these agents to control infectious diseases in aquaculture, has also resulted in the occurrence of their residues in aquaculture products, resulting in commodity rejections by importing countries and associated economic impacts.

FAO has been in the forefront in providing assistance to its member governments in making antimicrobial use prudent and responsible, carried out through engagement through both normative work and field programmes with a wide range of stakeholders and partners worldwide. The present paper describes some lessons learnt experiences gained during our efforts in addressing the injudicious use of antimicrobials in aquaculture.

In particular, the paper discusses the outcomes of a recent FAO Expert Workshop on Improving Biosecurity through Prudent and Responsible Use of Veterinary Medicines in Aquatic Food Production, which debated on the concerns and impacts of their irresponsible use on human health, the aquatic environment and trade.

The expert workshop concluded that safe and effective veterinary medicines need to be available for efficient aquaculture production, and their use should be in line with established principles on prudent use to safeguard public and animal health.

The use of such medicines should be part of national and on-farm biosecurity plans and in accordance with an overall national policy for sustainable aquaculture.