

**SPECIAL SESSION:
AN INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENT FOR SECURING SUSTAINABLE SMALL-
SCALE FISHERIES (SSF GUIDELINES): IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

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Abstract

In 2011 the FAO Committee on Fisheries tasked FAO with the development of an international instrument in the form of guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines will facilitate the empowerment and mobilization of stakeholders to promote change towards sustainable small-scale fisheries and hence facilitate the realisation of the sector's potential to contribute to poverty alleviation, food and nutrition security, and economic growth. This process needs strong catalysts and follow-up to stimulate lasting and efficient change and there is a need to build bridges between different stakeholder visions, within the fisheries sector as well as outside, to ensure coherence and build political will. The session discussed modalities of engagement of different stakeholders to facilitate the future implementation of the SSF Guidelines, in particular with regard to information and research, capacity development, institutional arrangements and incentive structures.

Introduction

According to the FAO's State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report 2012, more than 90% of all capture fishers are operating in the small-scale sector, with women playing a key role in post-harvest activities. The livelihoods of about 357 million people, primarily in developing countries, depend on the sector which often constitutes a fundamental way of life as well as an important economic activity. However, the full socio-economic contribution of small-scale fisheries is not yet fully understood.

During its Twenty-ninth Session the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) therefore welcomed the conclusions and recommendations stemming from an extensive process of consultations and approved the development of international guidelines on small-scale fisheries by FAO. Important milestones leading up to this decision include the session of COFI in 2003 in which small-scale fisheries became a regular stand-alone agenda item for the first time, the *Global Conference on Small-scale Fisheries. Securing sustainable small-scale fisheries: Bringing together responsible fisheries and social development* held in

Bangkok in 2008 and three regional consultations on securing small-scale fisheries held in 2010 in Mozambique, Thailand and Costa Rica¹.

These new SSF Guidelines should address both inland and marine fisheries, focus on the needs of developing countries, draw on relevant existing instruments and complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).

The SSF Guidelines are aiming to enhance the contribution of small-scale fisheries to poverty alleviation, food and nutrition security and economic growth. They shall empower small-scale fisheries communities to participate in decision-making, to receive and benefit from fishing rights and to assume responsibilities for sustainable resource utilisation and livelihoods development. They should also give advice and recommendations, establish principles and criteria, and provide information to assist all stakeholders involved in supporting improved governance and sustainable development of the small-scale fisheries sector.

The SSF Guidelines will be a comprehensive framework that enhances understanding of actions needed for small-scale fisheries governance and development and hence facilitate cooperation among those involved in and providing support to the sector. They will establish principles and criteria for the elaboration and implementation of policies and strategies for the enhancement of small-scale fisheries governance and development, and provide practical guidance for implementation of these policies and strategies. They will promote further research and the advancement of knowledge on small-scale fisheries governance and development and serve as a reference tool for the establishment or improvement of required institutional structures and processes, and capacity development.

The SSF Guidelines development process needs strong catalysts and follow-up to stimulate lasting and efficient change and there is a need to build bridges between different stakeholder visions, within the fisheries sector as well as outside, to ensure coherence and build political will. Since 2011, 14 national and regional consultations led by civil society organizations, 2 regional government-led and 2 national government-led consultations have taken place to consolidate the issues and principles compiled and published in a *Discussion Document. Towards voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries*². These workshops and the outcomes of a vast number of small-scale fisheries related events which have been used to promote the SSF Guidelines development process have provided suggestions for improvement of the Discussion Document and in July 2012 the FAO Secretariat has published a *Zero Draft of the International Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries*³ to provide a basis for further consultations leading up to the SSF Guidelines text.

¹ All reports available at <http://www.fao.org/fishery/ssf/guidelines/en>

² Available at

ftp://ftp.fao.org/Fi/DOCUMENT/ssf/SSF_guidelines/DiscussionDocumentSSFGuidelinesJune2011.pdf

³ Available at ftp://ftp.fao.org/Fi/DOCUMENT/ssf/SSF_guidelines/ZeroDraftSSFGuidelines_MAY2012.pdf

A regional consultation for the Caribbean Island Region is scheduled for December 2012 and the stakeholder consultation process will continue until January 2013. In May 2013 a technical consultation convened by FAO will negotiate the text of the SSF Guidelines which will be submitted to the Thirty-first session of the FAO COFI in June 2014 for adoption.

Implementation issues

The SSF Guidelines will cover a broad set of issues: it is likely to take some time for all stakeholders to understand and absorb them. Taking a forward looking approach, it therefore appears critical to start considering how these SSF Guidelines are going to be implemented. The discussions taking place during the preparation of the SSF Guidelines are expected to influence policies and actions and strong stakeholder buy-in will ensure that the instrument becomes a part of ongoing governance and development processes. However, also strategies and activities explicitly supporting the SSF Guidelines implementation will be needed. New thinking with regard to availability, access and use of information will be required together with capacity development, and enabling institutional arrangements and appropriate incentive structures.

Information and research

With the trend to decentralise and the increased focus on co-management regimes the respective roles of managers and decision-makers, researchers and communities or their organizations in information and research are changing and innovative approaches to information are needed.

Information contributes to power and accordingly academic research and basic information need to be widely accessible and should feed into policy-making to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Choices regarding the kinds of research undertaken, who does the research, and the connection of research to policy are crucial. The concept of knowledge mobilization as the effort to putting available knowledge into active service to benefit society needs to be explored in this context to ensure policy and on-the-ground impact. It is key to recognize the diversity of thinking as well as of potential sources of research and knowledge. The diversity of research and information inputs will allow for a broad spectrum of possible approaches on how to address a problem. Mechanisms are needed to ensure this diversity of knowledge and research is obtained.

In the past, there was a tendency for fishery research to focus on biological issues but there is an increasing trend for research to now also investigate socio-economic, cultural, legal and policy aspects, among others. Experiences from other sectors (besides fisheries and aquaculture) and from multi-sectoral processes (such as coastal and ocean management) which have implemented research in a more cross-cutting way could provide useful insights in this context. Participatory approaches to research and knowledge generation can be empowering to the small-scale fisheries sector, and are encouraged, but they will require at preliminary step of empowerment to enable all players to constructively engage in information generation and research.

The successful implementation of the SSF Guidelines requires special efforts and new avenues with regard to communication channels, language and publications to make the link between research and policy-making. Communication and information sharing will need to cover a wide range of issues: from promoting the SSF Guidelines themselves to awareness-raising on government programs or human rights, but also more specific information like weather or marketing information and communications on fisheries regulations and management decisions.

Communication will need to take place at different levels, from the household level to the community, national and regional level, and in different directions, horizontally or vertically, in one way or in two-ways. Various political, economic and social structures can heavily influence the flow of information at different levels by providing or withholding information. Transparency and availability of and access to information are priority considerations to ensure meaningful participation of stakeholders in governance and decision-making. Empowerment of small-scale fisheries actors is therefore of paramount importance and information should be accessible, useful, timely and presented in an appropriate manner. However, in small-scale fisheries, the dissemination of information can be constrained by illiteracy and limited capacity to absorb and use information.

The SSF Guidelines want to induce behavioral change and this objective needs to be clear. The concept of ‘messaging’ could guide information flows. It promotes a clear process that is logically and strategically organized to encourage action and behavioural change by staying focused and concentrating on critical pieces of information. Success under this concept is measured by how the target audience is acting after receiving the message.

Another important tool for implementation is a communication plan with four key elements: target audience analysis, delivery channel and style strategy, key messages and time line. The latter one allows estimating human and financial resources needed for implementation.

Capacity development

As noted above, the small-scale fisheries sector needs to be empowered to be able to access and use relevant information, and a key aspect of this lies in linking capacity development and information and knowledge. The target groups for capacity development include the state, civil society and communities and their needs have to be understood to enable them to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

With regard to governments and public authorities, there is a need for capacity development at all levels, in particular at the decentralized level, to improve their capabilities with regard to how to work with small-scale fishing communities in an effective manner. This includes how to communicate and how to apply bottom-up approaches more effectively.

On the other hand, extension methodologies and approaches established by fisheries administrations to reach out to small-scale fisheries communities need to be targeted or

revisited, for example taking into account the implications of geographic mobility of many fishers on capacity development methodologies and timing.

Capacity development provided by public administrations should encompass a broad range of issues, including human capital development, organizational capacity development (including co-management arrangements) but also technology transfer. Catalysts should be available to connect fisheries administrations and communities and most importantly, any capacity development should be demand driven and stakeholders should be enabled to make choices about priority issues.

In this context, public administrations should also target the private sector and non-governmental organizations or civil society through the extension service capacity building in order to reach out as much as possible. This is also important in view of the fact that public human and financial resources are always limited and hence other available actors, such as the private sector and NGOs, should be engaged to act as multipliers of extension services.

The consultations on the SSF Guidelines led by civil society organizations (CSOs) so far brought together more than 1000 people in 14 workshops in Africa, Asia, Central and South America. Among other, these workshops identified specific capacity development needs of civil society, including:

- Empowerment of women and men in fishers and fishing communities to improve their participation in management and governance at various levels;
- Enhanced awareness about economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and related legislation, strategies and policies;
- Education on sustainability and ecosystem issues to engage in sustainable fisheries management and resource use;
- Development of adaptive capacity to deal with climate change and
- Recognition and implementation of rights of indigenous peoples and of customary fishing community systems.

A key concern is the active participation of CSOs in the formal SSF Guidelines development process and it is recommended to adopt a similar approach to the one used for the development of the *Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* adopted in May 2012 in which CSOs played a major role.

Institutional arrangements

It is important to create opportunities for exchange of views among stakeholder groups to learn from each other, develop synergies and drop barriers. Accordingly, for both implementation and monitoring of the SSF Guidelines and along with the development of capacity at all levels, appropriate institutional arrangements are required, including partnerships for policy formulation and involvement of grassroots level organisations.

There is a co-existence of fisheries paradigms, approaches and guidelines and there is a risk that the SSF Guidelines are perceived to propose yet another new framework. Confusion and misunderstanding with regard to terminology also occur. For example, the term ‘rights based approach’ refers to fishing rights when used by some but means a human rights approach to others. With regard to the SSF Guidelines, they are intended as a complement to the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the EAF is complementary to the inclusive rights-based approach – referring both to fishing and human rights – promoted by the SSF Guidelines. Harmonization of the SSF Guidelines with existing instruments needs to be ensured in the implementation process. Still, the possible ‘paradigm and guidelines fatigue’ and confusion should be taken into consideration when planning implementation. Links between the SSF Guidelines and other instruments as well as language should be clear.

It is therefore paramount that the SSF Guidelines are not forced on stakeholders but discussed with them to allow understanding what the SSF Guidelines mean to each of them. Once informed and empowered, the different stakeholder groups need to engage with each other and institutions and instruments must speak to each other.

Partnership among all stakeholders are critical for this process, both at the horizontal level (e.g. fishers among themselves) and at the vertical level (e.g. fishers – boat owners), with the latter ones likely to be more difficult to be established. New levels of trust and respect between various stakeholders are crucial for these partnerships.

Many opportunities for establishing and strengthening these partnerships already exist and given financial and human resource constraints, existing platforms and institutional arrangements should be used for this purpose. Fisheries agencies for example could interact with peers in other countries and regional organizations (e.g. in Africa, NEPAD Sub-regional Fisheries Commission, in Asia, SEAFDEC, ASEAN, SPC etc.) could play a critical role in facilitating regional, subregional and national implementation strategies and plans focusing on the issues pertinent to the specific regions and countries. In the Philippines for example, the Fisheries Code endorses the establishment of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Councils, formed by fisheries organizations, cooperatives and NGOs at the national, municipal and village level, which are mandated to carry out a number of advisory functions in close collaboration with the local government units. Existing inter-sectoral processes and collaborative arrangements such as for climate change adaptation, coastal zone management or socio-economic development and planning at different level are other potential entry points.

Incentive structures

Due to poverty and vulnerability, small-scale fishing communities may lack the incentives to participate in resource management and these aspects of poverty need to be addressed first, or simultaneously. Appropriate incentive structures (institutional, legal, economic, social) are needed to enable small-scale fishing communities to sustainably manage the aquatic resources they and future generations depend on for their well-being without jeopardizing their social and economic development.

The inclusion of non-state actors in policy formulation is fundamental and necessary to develop ownership of the SSF Guidelines at the national level, in particular in a context of decentralization of fisheries management that should be supported by legally binding by-laws and similar tools. The SSF Guidelines in fact address not only states but also other stakeholders.

Political will is at the heart of the successful implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The recent shift in politics in Africa towards democracy provides a fertile ground for developing this political will. Politicians and policy makers in countries with coastal communities or inland fisheries are mindful to the needs of these communities as they represent important voting potential. Fisheries governance reforms with particular emphasis on decentralisation need to be encouraged and where already ongoing, these processes should be strengthened.

There are also ongoing policy processes that support the recognition of the importance of the small-scale fisheries sector. In Africa, NEPAD has embarked in a process known as 'currents of change' which conducts a political economy analysis to understand key drivers of change. In addition, the resolution of the Conference of African Ministers, Fisheries and Aquaculture (CAMFA) held in 2010 urges member states of the African Union to include small-scale fisheries in economic development strategies. The CAMFA resolutions provide the foundations for the development of national policies and generate peer pressure to comply with agreed commitments. Small-scale fisheries are among the key areas to be monitored in this context. FAO should ensure to provide technical inputs to the CAMFA process, in particular for the 2014 session and its small-scale fisheries targets.

The SSF Guidelines should not be a stand-alone reference but need to be interpreted in the context of existing international instruments and national measures and development strategies. The recognition of the interdependency of all rights is crucial and the fact that the SSF Guidelines are nested within human rights provides an opportunity for small-scale fisheries communities to challenge governments if opportunities identified by these communities are not used. Recent experiences from South Africa, where fishing communities obtained supportive court ruling on constitutionally protected customary rights show that this is already happening. Still, more efforts should be made to show the benefits of small-scale fisheries create to enhance politicians' interest in the sector.

Livelihoods in fishing communities are diverse and tend to encompass other activities in addition to fishing. Possibly because of this diversity, the *Zero Draft of the SSF Guidelines* contains a wide range of issues going beyond the fishery itself. There is a question of whether the SSF Guidelines should focus more on the core issue, since many areas seem to be beyond the realm of fisheries administrations. On the other hand, there is recognition that the small-scale fisheries sector and its associated fishing communities need to be empowered before engagement in sustainable resource management, based preferably on legally enshrined community rights, can be expected. This implies looking beyond the boundaries of the fisheries per se. The special needs of indigenous peoples and customary

systems need to be respected in this process and the principle of free, prior, informed consent as well as equal, full, meaningful and effective participation should apply to all relevant public policies.

Overall, CSOs are supportive of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines if major concerns are taken up by states and responsible agencies. This could make a difference on how small-scale fisheries communities engage and open a window of opportunity to improve sustainable resource management

In conclusion, the successful implementation of the future International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries will greatly depend on all parties working consistently towards ensuring the necessary conditions of transparency and accountability, equality before the law, democracy and the right to organize and participate in the management of fisheries in order to strengthen credibility and confidence in fisheries governance institutions.