

SSF Guidelines endorsed... What are the next steps?

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In June 2014, representatives of over 100 countries, representatives from various UN agencies and related organisations, and observers from 65 intergovernmental and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) gathered in Rome for the 31st Session of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) Committee on Fisheries (COFI). On that occasion, COFI endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).

The SSF Guidelines have a long history. COFI tasked FAO in 2011 with developing these guidelines in a participatory manner. Between 2011 and 2013, over 4,000 representatives of governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), academia and other stakeholder groups from over 120 countries directly contributed to developing the content and principles of the SSF Guidelines: civil society organisations organised over 20 national and regional consultations, and FAO organised three regional consultations, including the FAO/SPC Pacific Islands Regional Consultation on the Development of Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. The consultation was held in Noumea, New Caledonia on 12–14 June 2012, and the 38 participants representing governments, the fishing industry and CSOs from 17 countries and territories in the Pacific Islands region shared experiences of small-scale fisheries policies and practices, and provided inputs to the thematic areas of the SSF Guidelines.

In May 2013 and February 2014 the SSF Guidelines development process moved into its final phase: government representatives, together with representatives from CSOs and other stakeholders met for a technical consultation in Rome to negotiate the final text of the SSF Guidelines, going through the text word by word. The outcome of this process was then presented to the COFI meeting in June for finalisation and endorsement.

So, what are the SSF Guidelines?

The SSF Guidelines are the first international instrument dedicated entirely to the immensely important — but until now often neglected — small-scale fisheries sector.

The guidelines represent a global consensus on principles and guidance for small-scale fisheries governance and development. They were developed for small-scale fisheries in close collaboration with representatives of small-scale fisheries organisations in a process facilitated by FAO. The guidelines are directed at all those involved in the sector, and intend to guide and encourage governments, fishing communities and other stakeholders to

work together and ensure secure and sustainable small-scale fisheries for the benefit of small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities as well as for society at large.

The objectives of the SSF Guidelines are to:

- ✓ enhance the contribution of small-scale fisheries to global food security and nutrition, and support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food;
- ✓ contribute to the equitable development of small-scale fishing communities and poverty eradication, and improve the socioeconomic situation of fishers and fish workers within the context of sustainable fisheries management;
- ✓ achieve the sustainable utilisation, prudent and responsible management, and conservation of fisheries resources consistent with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments;
- ✓ promote the contribution of small-scale fisheries to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the planet and its people;
- ✓ provide guidance that could be considered by States and stakeholders for the development and implementation of ecosystem friendly and participatory policies, strategies and legal frameworks for the enhancement of responsible and sustainable small-scale fisheries; and
- ✓ enhance public awareness and promote the advancement of knowledge on the culture, role, contribution and potential of small-scale fisheries, considering ancestral and traditional knowledge, and their related constraints and opportunities.

Underpinned by a human rights approach, these objectives are critical to empower small-scale fishing communities — including vulnerable and marginalised groups — to participate in decision-making processes, and to assume responsibilities for the sustainable use of fishery resources.

The SSF Guidelines are divided into three main parts.

Part I: Introduction

This part specifies the objectives, nature and scope, and the guiding principles by which the SSF Guidelines are to be implemented as well as their relationship with other international instruments.

Part II: Responsible fisheries and sustainable development

This part provides guidance for fisheries-specific topics such as responsible governance of tenure and sustainable resource management, but also for crucial inter-sectoral issues such as social development, employment and decent work; value chain, post-harvest and trade; gender equality and disaster risks; and climate change.

Part III: Ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation

This part provides guidance on how to realise the principles and recommendations of the SSF Guidelines through policy coherence, and institutional and supporting implementation; information, research and communication; capacity development and implementation; and support and monitoring.

Making it happen: Achieving the objectives of the SSF Guidelines

The SSF Guidelines will only be effective if their provisions are put into practice. As a set of guiding principles, however, the SSF Guidelines go beyond direct fisheries activities, linking fishing and the larger aspects of life of SSF communities. A more integrated approach is needed to achieve these objectives.

The overall strategic approach for implementing the SSF Guidelines will build on the inclusive and consensus-seeking spirit and environment that characterised the development process. Accordingly, implementation must be based on participation and partnerships, with implementation anchored at the national and local levels within a framework of regional and international collaboration, awareness raising, policy support and capacity development. This strategic approach aims to have the principles of the SSF Guidelines mainstreamed into policies, strategies and actions at the international, regional, national and local level. This requires support and collaboration between a diverse group of stakeholders, including governments, CSOs, development partners, NGOs, academia, regional organisations, and the private sector.



Preparing the net – India (image: Nicole Franz).

In June 2014, COFI also welcomed FAO's proposal for a Global Assistance Programme (GAP) to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines without delay. During the COFI meeting, the role of governments in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, and regional and local fisheries organisations to ensure ownership of the SSF, was also emphasised. It was also recommended to build on existing experiences and institutional structures and processes. COFI members agreed to the structure of the GAP based on three main components, supported by an additional one component on programme management, collaboration and monitoring.

✓ *Raising awareness and providing policy support: Knowledge products and outreach*

The SSF Guidelines can only be implemented if the relevant parties with the abilities to make a difference are aware of their existence and contents. Partnerships play a crucial role to ensure that all stakeholders — particularly fishers, fish workers and their communities — are reached.

Potential stakeholders and partners include those in the fisheries sector and those in related fields (e.g. NGOs, regional economic communities, national cross-sectoral planning and/or coordination agencies). This should create a broad awareness and understanding of the SSF Guidelines across regions and countries, and among different stakeholder groups. High levels of awareness are fundamental for long-term commitment to the SSF Guidelines and provide a basis for other impact-oriented implementation support.

✓ *Strengthening the science-policy interface: Sharing of knowledge and supporting policy reform*

There is a need to strengthen the knowledge base surrounding small-scale fisheries and to promote policy reforms that use the latest available knowledge that combines sustainable management and socioeconomic development.

This component promotes an increased understanding of the issues, challenges, opportunities and approaches relevant to achieving the sustainable use of aquatic resources and securing livelihoods. It supports the mainstreaming of the SSF Guidelines and their principles in relevant governance, resource management and development strategies and plans.

✓ *Empowering stakeholders: Capacity development and institutional strengthening*

SSF stakeholders and their communities can and should be effective partners in implementation. This requires attention to organisational structures for fair and effective representation. Capacity development is the backbone of implementing the SSF Guidelines.

Developing capacity is closely linked to empowerment, which ensures that small-scale fishers and their communities are able to take an active role in shaping the future of the sector and of their own livelihoods. Capacity development is required at different levels, for different stakeholder groups and with respect to different skills and abilities. This creates some of the key building blocks for a long-term process of continuous improvement of the situation of small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities and increased contribution of the sector to food security and poverty eradication.

✓ *Supporting implementation: Programme management, collaboration and monitoring*

This component is expected to provide results in the form of transparent and efficient programme management and strengthened collaboration, leading to overall more effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

On 8–11 December 2014, FAO organised a Workshop on the Development of a Global Assistance Programme in Support of the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication in Rome to further discuss GAP with a large number of partners, including SPC. Based on these discussions and the outcome of other related meetings FAO will draft GAP as an umbrella programme to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Importantly, the final paragraph of the SSF Guidelines calls for regional plans of action to be developed under GAP, and SPC can play a major role in facilitating this for the Pacific Islands region.

Want to know more?

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines and GAP will depend highly on available resources and on partnerships. FAO, therefore, calls on resource partners, regional organisations, national governments, CSOs and other stakeholders to join forces to achieve the objectives set out in the SSF Guidelines.

The SSF Guidelines webpage has more information (www.fao.org/fishery/ssf/guidelines), and the final PDF version of the Guidelines are now available (www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e.pdf)

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