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TOWARDS SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN FISHERY VALUE CHAINS

Executive Summary

The sixteenth session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI:FT) in Busan, Republic of Korea, 2017, recommended that FAO should explore the possibility of developing, in close collaboration with interested partner organizations and stakeholders, a guidance document to assist fish value chain actors in the implementation of existing relevant instruments, criteria and measures covering responsible business conduct, human rights and international labour standards. This paper aims to inform participants of the thirty-third session of COFI of FAO's follow-up approach and initiative of reaching out to partners interested in contributing to the development of a discussion document on possible guidance on socially responsible fish value chains.



I. Background and scope

1. Over the last few years, human rights and labour issues in the fisheries sector have become part of the agendas of governments, industry, retailers, civil society organizations, unions, and progressively of consumers. As reported by the media, exploitative practices in the fish business include instances of modern-day slavery, physical, mental and sexual abuse, homicide, human trafficking, fraudulent and deceptive recruitment, debt bondage, poor occupational safety, child labour, refusal of fair and promised pay, denial of rights to association and collective bargaining negotiations and labour agreements. Violations have been found to take place at different stages of fish value chains - especially in fish harvesting, farming and processing - and across different geographical areas. Women, migrant labourers, youth and children are particularly vulnerable. Poor working and living conditions are frequently coupled with IUU fishing activities and other crimes.

2. FAO's Strategic Programme on Rural Poverty Reduction explicitly promotes decent work and social protection covering a significant range of related activities in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. COFI has extensively recognized the linkages between IUU fishing and issues of poor and unsafe working conditions, and labour abuses onboard fishing vessels¹. Decent work and social protection are key components of FAO's Guidelines for Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) that COFI endorsed in 2014. The COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture² in 2015 discussed decent work in aquaculture. The COFI:FT in 2016 highlighted the increasing concern about social and labour conditions in the industry and the need to raise these issues in international fora³. In close collaboration with partners, FAO has facilitated, and contributed to, a range of events and multi-stakeholder dialogues on decent work and human rights issues in fisheries and aquaculture (Box 1).

¹ FAO. 2015. Report of the 31st Session of the Committee on Fisheries, June, 2014. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, FIPI/1011. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4634e.pdf>

FAO/IMO. 2016. Report of the Third Session of the Joint FAO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and Related Matters, London, 16–18 November 2015. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. 1152, Rome. www.fao.org/3/a-i5736e.pdf.

² FAO. 2015. Improving livelihoods through decent employment in aquaculture. COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture. Eighth Session, Brasilia, 5-9 October 2015. COFI:AQ/VIII/2015/9 http://www.fao.org/fi/static-media/MeetingDocuments/COFI_AQ/2015/9e.pdf; Session Report : <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5191t.pdf>

³ FAO Committee on Fisheries. 2016. Report of the fifteenth session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade of the Committee on Fisheries. Agadir, Morocco, 22–26 February 2016. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. 1148. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5580t.pdf>

Box 1. Selected events and multi-stakeholder dialogues on decent work and human rights issues in fisheries and aquaculture supported by FAO

- Vigo Dialogues on Decent Work in Fisheries and Aquaculture^{4,5} (2014-2017);
- ILO Conference on Labour Exploitation in the Fishing Sector⁶ (2015);
- FAO/Holy See World Fisheries Day Event on human rights abuses and trafficking in fisheries⁷ (2016);
- OECD/FAO/UNODC Conference⁸ on improving cooperation in combatting tax crime and other crimes in the fisheries sector, which also covered human rights violations and labour abuses in fisheries (2016);
- FAO Workshop⁹ on Exploring the human rights-based approach in the context of the implementation and monitoring of the SSF Guidelines (2016);
- SEAFDEC-Sweden Experts Workshop¹⁰ on Regional Approach for the Implementation of FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Human Rights-Based Approach and Gender Equitability (2017);
- Regional Technical Seminar in Manila on Joining forces in the fisheries sector: Promoting safety, decent work and the fight against IUU fishing, organized by FAO and the Apostleship of the Sea, with contributions by IMO and ILO (2018);
- ILO Consultative Forum in Bali on Regional Cooperation Against Human Trafficking, Labour Exploitation, and Slavery at Sea (2018).

3. Overall, there is a general convergence towards the need of ensuring responsible sourcing solutions of fish products, and the need to ensure social development and human rights for fish workers along the whole value chain and the entire sector. Buyers are increasingly requesting business-to-business evidence that the seafood industry applies due diligence measures throughout fish supply chains, and the major seafood certification bodies are investigating how parameters addressing social and labour issues can be incorporated into their certification schemes.

⁴ Vigo Dialogue on benefits of decent employment in fisheries and aquaculture. Working for blue growth: Social responsibility in the fish business – a win-win situation for all. 9 October 2015, Vigo, Spain. <http://www.fao.org/3/I7091EN/i7091en.pdf>

⁵ Decent work for Blue Growth: Towards Social Responsibility in the Fish Business. Vigo Dialogue on Decent Work in Fisheries and Aquaculture. Vigo, Spain, 04 October 2016. <http://www.fao.org/fishery/nems/40862/en>

⁶ ILO 2015. Conference on Labour Exploitation in the Fishing Sector. <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/events/oslo-conference/lang--en/index.htm>

⁷ FAO & Holy See, 2016. World Fisheries Day: The violation of human rights within the fishing sector. <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/453811/icode/>

⁸ OECD-FAO-UNODC 2016 Conference on improving cooperation in the fight against fish crime. <http://www.fao.org/blogs/blue-growth-blog/when-iuu-fishing-is-only-the-tip-of-the-iceberg/en/>;

<http://www.oecd.org/tad/events/Fisheries-crimes-conference-summary-oct-17.pdf>

⁹ FAO. 2017a. Exploring the human rights-based approach in the context of the implementation and monitoring of the SSF Guidelines. Workshop proceedings, Rome, 24–26 October 2016. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Proceedings No. 53. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6933e.pdf>

¹⁰ SEAFDEC Sweden. 2017. Experts Workshop on Regional Approach for the Implementation of FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Human Rights-Based Approach and Gender Equitability. http://www.seafdec.org/documents/2018/02/50cm_wp05-2-5.pdf

II. Exploring opportunities for developing guidance on socially responsible fish value chains

4. The 2017 session of COFI:FT in Busan discussed social sustainability issues in fisheries value chains and the link to trade¹¹. The meeting noted the key significance of social and ethical issues for sectoral reputation and emphasized the sector's own responsibility towards people working in fish value chains and for sustainable livelihoods of the communities depending on fish production, processing, distribution and trade. The Sub-Committee recommended¹² that FAO should explore the possibility of developing, in close collaboration with interested partner organizations and stakeholders, a guidance document to assist fish value chain actors in the implementation of existing relevant instruments, criteria and measures covering responsible business conduct, human rights and international labour standards.

5. In 2016, OECD and FAO published¹³ a Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains to help enterprises observe existing standards for responsible business conduct along agricultural supply chains. These standards include the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, and other international instruments and standards. Observing these standards helps enterprises mitigate their adverse impacts and contribute to sustainable development. This OECD/FAO Guidance however focuses mostly on crops and livestock, and does not address issues and challenges specific to fisheries and aquaculture, including, in particular, fish value chains.

6. As already done for agricultural supply chains, FAO is now reaching out to interested partners (governments, ILO, UN-OHCHR, UNCTAD, UNODC, OECD, and other organizations, CSOs including ICFA, IFFO, GAA, ICSF, ITF, IUF, and others, as well as initiatives such as SeaBOS and others) for collaboration on the development of a guidance document on responsible business conduct (emphasizing risk-based due diligence approaches) in fish value chains, focusing however primarily on social aspects including human rights and labour issues. Risk areas¹⁴ to be explored for possible coverage by the envisaged guidance document would include human rights, labour rights, health and safety, food security, tenure rights and governance.

III. Suggested approach

7. As recommended by the 2017 session of COFI:FT, FAO aims to present a discussion paper to the 2019 session of COFI:FT that would elaborate on the opportunities for developing the said guidance document on socially responsible fish value chains. Therefore, FAO is pursuing the following actions, in close consultation with interested partner organizations and stakeholders:

- Develop a road map for the development of the discussion paper including a possible annotated outline and contents structure of a possible Guidance document, based on the 2016 OECD/FAO guidance for responsible agricultural supply chains;
- Invite interested key stakeholders to join and contribute to discussions on this initiative;

¹¹ FAO. 2017. Social sustainability in fisheries value chains and the link to trade. Sixteenth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade of the Committee on Fisheries. Busan, Republic of Korea, 4-8 September 2017.

COFI:FT/XVI/2017/5 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COFI/FishTrade/uploads/5e.pdf, and COFI:FT/XVI/2017/Inf.8 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COFI/FishTrade/uploads/inf8e.pdf

¹² FAO, 2017. Report of the Sixteenth session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, Busan, Republic of Korea, 4-8 September 2017. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. 1216. www.fao.org/3/a-i8157t.pdf

¹³ OECD-FAO. 2016. Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains. <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-FAO-Guidance.pdf>

¹⁴ http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/Brochure_OECD-FAO-Guidance.pdf

- Invite a small group of experts to compile relevant resources and to develop a first draft outline and content areas of the guidance;
- Present this initiative at relevant side events and stakeholder fora during 2018;
- Share and invite feedback on the first drafts from a wider range of interested experts and stakeholders;
- Organize an expert and stakeholder workshop to present, discuss and improve the discussion paper including inputs on possible components of the envisaged guidance document; such a workshop could be held in Rome, Vigo, or elsewhere;
- Based on workshop discussions and inputs, prepare an advanced version of the discussion paper for wider consultation and consolidation;
- Submit the draft guidance document for discussion and decision at the 2019 COFI:FT session.

8. FAO welcomes expressions of interest and contributions to this important process that could help mainstream and strengthen socially responsible business conduct along fish value chains.