



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



# Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries

in the Context of Food Security  
and Poverty Eradication

## At a glance



# What are the SSF Guidelines?

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) are the first international instrument dedicated entirely to the immensely important – but until now often neglected – small-scale fisheries sector.

The SSF 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 organizations in a process facilitated by FAO. They 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 to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food.

## Contribute

to the equitable development of small-scale fishing communities and poverty eradication and to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and fish workers within the context of sustainable fisheries management.

## Achieve

the sustainable utilization, 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.

## 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 marginalized groups – to participate in decision-making processes, and to assume responsibilities for sustainable use of fishery resources.

# Small-scale fisheries facts

Approximately

120

million

full-time and part-time workers are directly dependent on commercial capture fisheries value chains for their livelihoods

More than

90

%

work in the small-scale fisheries subsector

5.8

million

fishers currently earn less than USD1 per day

50

%

of the workforce is female

95

%

of small-scale landings are destined for local consumption

90

%

of small-scale fishers operate in developing countries

# Why are the SSF Guidelines needed?

Small-scale fisheries play a key role in ensuring food security and eradicating poverty. However, the overall development of the fisheries sector, as well as increased pressure from other sectors (e.g. tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, energy, mining, industry, infrastructure developments) with often stronger political or economic influence, has contributed to a decline in aquatic resources and threats to aquatic habitats, ecosystems and small-scale fisheries community livelihoods. Small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities also face a myriad of other challenges and constraints, including unequal power relations, lack of access to services and limited participation in decision-making processes, which may lead to unfavourable policies and practices within the fisheries sector and beyond.

The SSF Guidelines provide an important guidance tool to address the needs of the sector and empower stakeholders to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries.

## The SSF Guidelines:

**Emphasize the important role of small-scale fisheries** for food security and poverty eradication: a source of nutrition, income and economic growth

**Provide guidance** on the development and implementation of socially, economically and environmentally sustainable small-scale fisheries policies, legislation and legal frameworks

**Complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries** to achieve sustainable small-scale fisheries through a human rights based approach

**Are a product of extensive consultations** between governments, NGOs, CSOs, academia, regional organizations and fishing communities

## What is FAO?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is an intergovernmental organization with 194 Member Nations, two associate members and one member organization, the European Union. Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's efforts – to make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. FAO's three main goals are: the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; the elimination of poverty and the driving forward of economic and social progress for all; and the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources, including land, water, air, climate and genetic resources for the benefit of present and future generations. To achieve these, FAO supports improved governance; generates, develops and adapts existing tools and guidelines; and provides targeted governance support at country and regional levels. Headquartered in Rome, Italy, FAO is present in more than 130 countries.

## What is COFI?

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) is a subsidiary body of the FAO Council. It is the leading global intergovernmental forum where major international fisheries and aquaculture problems and issues are examined and recommendations addressed to governments, regional fishery bodies, NGOs, CSOs, fisher and fishworker organizations, FAO and the international communities are developed. COFI is also a forum in which global agreements and non-binding instruments are negotiated. COFI membership is open to all FAO Members, while non-members are eligible to participate as observers (e.g. other UN bodies and specialized agencies, regional fishery bodies, international and international non-governmental organizations). The two main functions of COFI are to review the FAO programmes of work in fisheries and aquaculture and to support their implementation, and to conduct periodic general reviews of fishery and aquaculture problems of an international character and appraise such problems and their possible solutions to promote concerted action by nations, FAO, intergovernmental bodies and civil society.

# Key milestones in the history of the SSF Guidelines



2008

**First Global Conference on Small-Scale Fisheries – Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Bringing together responsible fisheries and social development, Bangkok,** reaffirmed that human rights are critical to achieving sustainable development and called for an international instrument on small-scale fisheries.

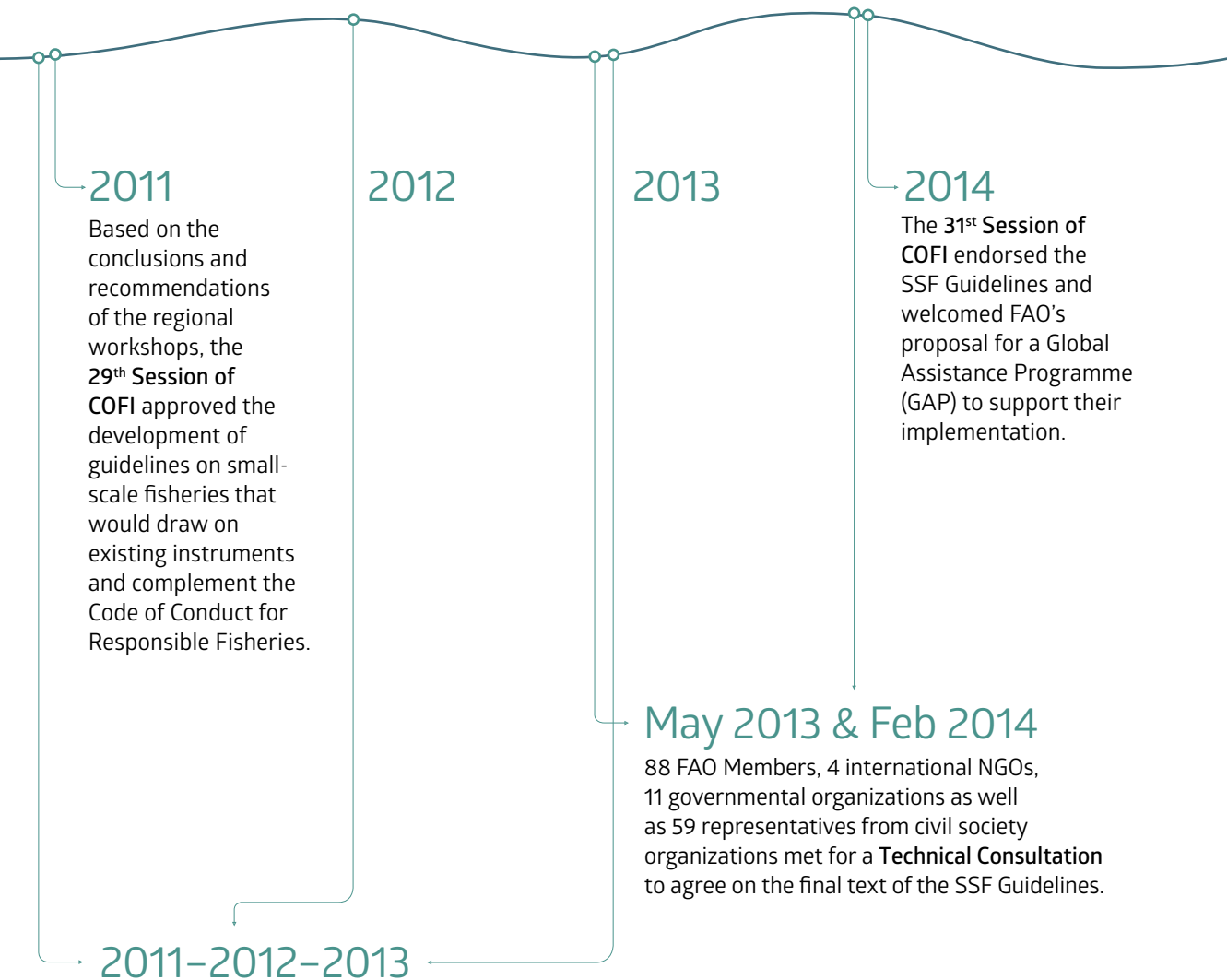
2009

**28<sup>th</sup> Session of COFI** expressed the need for an international instrument on small-scale fisheries that would guide national and international efforts to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries and create a monitoring framework.

2010

FAO convened three **regional workshops for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean** to consult with national and regional stakeholders, to identify good practices in the governance of small-scale fisheries, and to provide their views on how small-scale artisanal fisheries can be best supported and enabled to fulfil their potential.





The first draft of the SSF Guidelines was developed through a **participatory and consultative process**, that directly involved more than 4 000 representatives of small-scale fishing communities, civil society organizations (CSOs), governments, regional organizations and other stakeholders from more than 120 countries. To support this process, a CSO platform organized more than 20 national and regional stakeholder consultations. FAO held three more regional stakeholder consultations for the Near East and North Africa, for the Pacific Islands and for the Caribbean.

# Structure and content of the SSF Guidelines

## Part 1: Introduction

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

The SSF Guidelines are voluntary, global in scope, and focus on the needs of developing countries. They are relevant to small-scale fisheries both in marine and inland waters. This includes men and women working in the full range of activities along the value chain, and pre- and post-harvest activities.

The SSF Guidelines complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its

related instruments as well as other negotiated voluntary international instruments, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, and the Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security.

## Guiding principles

Chapter 3 outlines the basic guiding principles that are the foundation of the SSF Guidelines. These include:

- › human rights and dignity
- › respect of cultures
- › non-discrimination
- › gender equality and equity
- › equity and equality
- › consultation and participation
- › rule of law
- › transparency
- › accountability
- › economic, social and environmental sustainability
- › holistic and integrated approaches
- › social responsibility
- › feasibility and social and economic viability

## Part 2: Responsible fisheries and sustainable development

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

### Governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource development

#### Responsible governance of tenure

The SSF Guidelines stress that secure, equitable, socially and culturally appropriate tenure rights to fishery resources and to land in the coastal/waterfront area are critical for ensuring and facilitating access to the fishery, related activities (including processing and marketing), housing and other livelihood support activities of small-scale fishery dependent communities. Among other issues, the SSF Guidelines call upon States and all actors to ensure correct processes and procedures in the identification, recognition, protection, allocation and management of tenure issues in fisheries, with particular attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups.

#### Sustainable resource management

The SSF Guidelines call for the responsible management of aquatic ecosystems and associated biodiversity as a fundamental basis for livelihoods and for the sector's capacity to contribute to overall well-being. In particular, this section is devoted to the role of different actors in resource management, stressing that rights and responsibilities come together. It includes calls for participatory approaches, including co-management and a need to develop improved management systems and cooperation. Accordingly, the SSF Guidelines provide guidance on issues such as sustainable fishing practices and fisheries management, monitoring, control and surveillance, and capacity development for improved management.



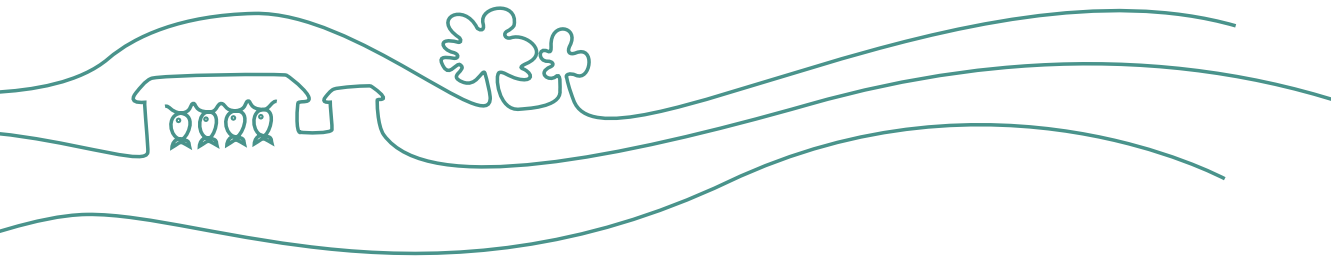
## Social development, employment and decent work

The SSF Guidelines recognize that fisheries do not exist in a vacuum. A variety of factors beyond the sector can contribute to sustainable long-term resource use and improve the contribution of fishing to improved livelihoods, food security and poverty eradication. Therefore, the SSF Guidelines go beyond strictly fisheries-related issues and also provide guidance to address the socio-economic conditions of small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities. The SSF Guidelines address issues such as education, health services, financial services, social protection, public infrastructure and other public services. In this chapter, the SSF Guidelines also call for increased attention and action on issues related to decent work by, for example, providing guidance on occupational health and safety and measures to improve safety at sea, and calling attention to the situation of migrant fishers and fish workers.

## Value chains, post-harvest and trade

The SSF Guidelines recognize post-harvest and other value chain activities as crucial components for sustainable small-scale fisheries. They therefore acknowledge the need to also involve post-harvest actors in relevant decision-making processes. In this context, the SSF Guidelines also call for support to associations of fishers and fish workers and stress the key role that women play in post-harvest activities. In addition, the SSF Guidelines call for improvements to the post-harvest sector through appropriate infrastructure and technology investments, value-addition activities, and post-harvest loss and waste reduction.

On matters of trade, the SSF Guidelines urge the facilitation of market access for small-scale fisheries at all levels. They also call for due consideration to the impact of international trade of small-scale fisheries, ensuring that benefits are fairly distributed and market-driven overexploitation is prevented. The SSF Guidelines also highlight the need to provide small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities with timely and accurate market and trade information that allows them to adjust to changing market conditions.



## Gender equality

As a cross-cutting issue, gender considerations are incorporated into the various sections of the SSF Guidelines. Nevertheless, this section specifically addresses the need to improve gender equality in the entire fisheries value chain. *Inter alia*, it calls for equal participation of women in decision-making processes and organizations, appropriate technologies, and supportive policies and legislation. It encourages the compliance with relevant international human rights law and the development of monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of legislation, policies and actions for effectively addressing and mainstreaming gender issues.

## Disaster risk and climate change

The SSF Guidelines recognize the vulnerability of small-scale fisheries (throughout the value chain) to the impacts of climate change and disasters. For this reason, the SSF Guidelines strongly urge States and other actors to support affected small-scale fisheries communities and to develop specific policies, strategies and plans for climate change adaptation and mitigation, and emergency response and disaster preparedness. These require holistic approaches to address matters such as coastal erosion, pollution, destruction of habitats and other issues that may negatively affect climate change adaptation and disaster risk management activities. The chapter also promotes energy efficiency and appropriate technologies for the entire sector.

## Part 3: Ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation

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

The small-scale fisheries sector cannot be looked at in isolation. It is embedded in a wider policy and institutional context. The SSF Guidelines therefore call for better integration of the sector into broader development processes, policies, strategies and plans. This requires improved institutional coordination and collaboration at various levels to ensure policy coherence. In this context, fisher and fish worker organizations are also encouraged to collaborate among themselves to facilitate their involvement in policy- and decision-making processes.

The SSF Guidelines also underline the fact that bioecological, social, cultural and economic information, and its related research and communication, is crucial to better understand the sector, to support decision-making, and action, and to ensure transparency and accountability. The SSF Guidelines stress the value of traditional knowledge available in fishing communities and encourage collaboration between researchers and communities.

The SSF Guidelines acknowledge the oft-encountered lack of capabilities and capacities, in both government administrations and communities. They therefore provide guidance for specific capacity-development measures, stressing the need to develop appropriate representative structures for small-scale fisheries actors and to develop the skills of government authorities and agencies, in particular at decentralized and local level.

Finally, the SSF Guidelines call for aid effectiveness and the responsible use of financial resources. They provide guidance on awareness-raising processes and promote the development of monitoring and assessment measures that allow feedback into policy-making processes. To support this, the SSF Guidelines promote the formation of national level platforms- with both cross-sectoral representation and strong CSO representation to oversee the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The SSF Guidelines also call upon FAO to promote and support the development of a Global Assistance Programme to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

# Making it happen: achieving the objectives of the SSF Guidelines

The overall strategic approach for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines builds on the inclusive and consensus-seeking spirit and environment that characterized their development process. Accordingly, implementation will 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 in policies, strategies and actions at the international, regional, national and local levels. This requires support and collaboration among a diverse group of actors, including governments, civil society organizations, development partners, NGOs, academia, regional organizations and the private sector.

The FAO SSF Umbrella Programme structured around three main thematic components and supported by a programme management, collaboration and monitoring component will support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines (see next page).

## Raising awareness: knowledge products and outreach

Increased awareness is crucial. The SSF Guidelines can only be implemented if parties with the possibility to make a difference are aware of their existence and of how they relate to their area of interest and responsibility. For this, there need to be the right communication materials, including implementation guides, translations into local languages, and promotion and awareness-raising activities.

## Strengthening the science- policy interface: sharing of knowledge and supporting policy reform

This component focuses on the need for a strengthened knowledge base that informs a policy reform leading to increased integration of sustainable resource management with social and economic development within a human rights context. Good practices need to be identified and shared. Improved collaboration and exchange of experiences between relevant research initiatives will be needed. Case studies, technical support and assistance for reviews and revisions of policy and legal frameworks creating enabling environment for SSF Guidelines implementation may also be required.

## Empowering stakeholders: capacity development and institutional strengthening

Organizational structures ensuring effective participation and fair representation in local, national and regional processes represent the key building blocks for continuous improvement towards secure and sustainable small-scale fisheries governance and development. Accordingly, capacity development should be the backbone of the implementation of the SSF and is required at different levels, for different stakeholders, and with respect to different abilities (e.g. technical skills, organizations skills, business development).

## Supporting implementation: programme management, collaboration and monitoring

This component is an overarching part of the FAO SSF Umbrella Programme that supports programme management, facilitates collaboration and experience sharing with partners, and seeks to monitor implementation progress of the SSF to ensure the establishment of a transparent and efficient monitoring system and strengthened partnerships and collaboration, leading to overall more effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines.







## Do you want to know more?

Partnerships are key to improving small-scale fisheries governance and to implementing the SSF Guidelines. The FAO SSF Guidelines Secretariat is committed to continuing the promotion of collaboration and engagement by all stakeholders at all levels.

### Please visit our website

[www.fao.org/fishery/ssf/guidelines](http://www.fao.org/fishery/ssf/guidelines)

### SSF Guidelines

[www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e.pdf)

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