Enhancing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and sustainable livelihoods

An overview of the FAO Umbrella Programme for the promotion and application of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication
What are ‘small-scale’ fisheries?

What small-scale fisheries look like varies from one place or culture to another. There is therefore no universal definition for what type of fisheries are ‘small-scale’, but as the name suggests, they are typically done on a smaller, non-industrial scale. Although small in scale, they are large by the numbers, as shown on the next page.

Generally, small-scale fisheries refer to both the act of catching fish, and to activities happening before and after the fishing itself. For instance, tasks like building boats, repairing nets, processing fish and selling seafood are also part of small-scale fisheries.

Small-scale fisheries are often done by families, communities or small organizations. The gear and technology used typically requires relatively low capital investment. The fish and fishery products are mostly sold in local markets, but can also reach national and international markets.

Note that fishing for sport or recreation are not considered small-scale fisheries.
Small-scale fisheries by the numbers

Approximately 120 million full-time and part-time workers are directly dependent on commercial capture fisheries value chains for their livelihoods. 97 percent of these people live in developing countries. Among them,

- more than 90 percent work in the small-scale fisheries subsector,
- 47 percent of the total workforce are women,
- over half of those employed in fisheries value chains in developing countries work in small-scale inland fisheries, and
- 73 percent of developing country fishers and fish workers live in Asia.

Over half of the catch in developing countries is produced by the small-scale subsector, and 90–95 percent of the small-scale landings are destined for local human consumption.

Why we engage

In a world where hunger is on the rise, and where more than 820 million people do not have enough to eat, it is imperative to invest in food and nutrition security and sustainable food systems. Millions of people, especially in developing countries, depend on small-scale fisheries to make a living. By supporting them to reach their full potential, we can significantly increase food security and nutrition, and help reverse this trend.

Small-scale fishers and fish workers face a myriad of challenges every day that hinders them from reaching their full potential. It is vital that small-scale fishers and fish workers gain stable access to the fish and other resources they depend on, that their human rights are met, and that they can have a strong voice in decision-making that affects their lives and future.

Empower fishers and fish workers and capacitate governments

We seek to empower small-scale fisher and fish worker organizations, and to raise broader awareness about the importance of small-scale fisheries. We also seek to strengthen governments’ capacity to better understand the specific characteristics of small-scale fisheries, and we encourage government to engage more with fishers and fish workers. Taken together, these efforts enhance the small-scale fisheries sector’s contribution to food and nutrition security as well as poverty eradication.

Together we can reach further

We invite you to support our work, and become a partner. Let us empower small-scale fishers and fish workers together! We have so far supported activities to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) in over 40 countries and in various global and regional forums. With your help, we can do even more. Please contact us.
The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

A tool by and for fishers and fish workers to address human needs and rights as a key part of making small-scale fisheries more sustainable.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) are the result of extensive consultations with more than 4 000 representatives of small-scale fishing communities, civil society organizations, governments, research organizations, regional organizations and other stakeholders from over 120 countries. These actors have identified how they would want to make livelihoods along the small-scale fisheries’ value chain sustainable for themselves and for the planet.

The recommendations put forward in the SSF Guidelines address policies, strategies and legal frameworks concerning small-scale fisheries, but also other matters affecting lives and livelihoods in fishing communities. They complement other global instruments and initiatives to achieve sustainable small-scale fisheries through a human rights-based approach. Implementing them can for instance act as a springboard towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030, in particular SDG 14.b: to “provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets”.

The SSF Guidelines are the first internationally agreed instrument dedicated entirely to the small-scale fisheries sector. They are also unique in that they approach sustainable fisheries from the point of human rights. Key issues in the SSF Guidelines include allocating tenure rights equitably; managing resources responsibly; supporting social development and decent work; empowering fish workers along the entire value chain; promoting gender equality; and addressing climate change and disaster risks.

The SSF Guidelines complement for instance

- the **Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries**;
- the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests**;
- the **Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food**;
- the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (the **RAI Principles**);
- the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas**;
- and the **Sustainable Development Goals**.
How we work

FAO encourages the uptake of the SSF Guidelines in many ways. We play an important catalytic role by supporting and equipping governments, fisher and fish worker organisations, academia, regional organisations, NGOs and others to take action.

Through the FAO Umbrella Programme for the promotion and application of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (FAO SSF Umbrella Programme) we raise awareness about challenges and opportunities in small-scale fisheries; we strengthen the science-policy interface by generating better information on small-scale fisheries; we empower small-scale fisher and fish worker organisations and increase governments’ knowledge, skills and capacity; and we support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines by creating an enabling environment.
1. Raising awareness

To make the recommendations in the SSF Guidelines become reality, governments as well as fishers, fish workers and other actors must know about, understand and apply them. Therefore, raising awareness is crucial. The SSF Guidelines are translated into 19 languages to make them more accessible, and more are under way. In addition, we offer a website, short videos and other information material to help explain and build an interest in the SSF Guidelines.

Awareness is also raised through a number of events around the world, initiated by us in FAO as well as by our partners. Many events have an element of discussing how the principles in the SSF Guidelines can help address common and pressing challenges facing small-scale fisheries in different contexts. These events help put small-scale fisheries on relevant global agendas, and help make the important role that small-scale fisheries play in food security and poverty eradication visible.

Example of how we raise awareness

Stressing the importance of livelihoods and food security in marine protected areas

7 December 2016, Cancún, Mexico

Small-scale fishers and their communities are part of the solution to healthy marine ecosystems. To establishing successful area-based measures such as marine protected areas, communities must be allowed to take part in designing the solution and to co-manage the waters and the fish in it.

This was the key message delivered by FAO and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) at a side-event arranged together with the IUCN Commission of Ecosystem Management Fisheries Expert Group and the European Bureau of Conservation and Development during the UN Biodiversity Conference in 2016.
Governments have both the opportunity and responsibility to make sure the recommendations in the SSF Guidelines get reflected in policies, strategies, and plans at a national and local level. To encourage governments to pay more attention to small-scale fisheries and take appropriate action, they need better information on the challenges and needs of the sector. We serve them with knowledge about small-scale fisheries, and encourage them to use such knowledge to supporting policy reforms. In short, we seek to strengthen the science-policy interface in small-scale fisheries.

We in FAO also highlight the challenges in small-scale fisheries and how the principles in the SSF Guidelines address them through handbooks and other guidance material that help explain what it means to apply the principles in practice. We further support studies on small-scale fisheries, and we compile and share good practices on how to strengthen the sector in line with the SSF Guidelines.

Example of how we strengthen the science-policy interface

Collecting small-scale fisheries facts and figures

Millions of metric tons of fish from the small-scale fisheries sector are hidden – in the sense of unreported. This was shown in the study *Hidden Harvest: The Global Contribution of Capture Fisheries* synthesized in 2012 by the FAO, the World Bank and WorldFish. The study looked at livelihood and economic contributions of capture fisheries globally and found that approximately 120 million full-time and part-time workers are directly dependent on commercial capture fisheries value chains for their livelihoods. More than 90 percent of them work in the small-scale fisheries subsector, and almost half of them are women.

Currently, a new study is again collecting small-scale fisheries facts and figures. It delves deeper into the social, environmental, economic and governance effects and roles of marine and inland small-scale fisheries at both a local and a global level. In fact, it will be one of the most comprehensive studies of small-scale fisheries globally to date. The ongoing study is called *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* and is done in partnership between FAO, WorldFish through the FISH research program, and Duke University.
3. Empowering stakeholders

For changes to happen at national and local levels, fishers and fish workers need to know their rights and have ways to realize them, while at the same time taking on the related responsibilities. Empowered and well-organized small-scale fisheries actors can more easily represent their interests in relevant decisions-making processes. We therefore seek to include, help and enable small-scale fisheries’ organizations to take an active part and have a direct voice in negotiations and decision-making processes that affect them.

Capacity development is also important for governments to better understand small-scale fisheries livelihoods and the links between responsible fishing and social and economic development. We work in close collaboration with national, regional and international partners to strengthen the capacities of governments and public institutions to support sustainable small-scale fisheries governance. We also assist and encourage governments and institutions to continuously engage with fisher and fish worker organizations as a natural part of their policy- and decision-making.

Examples of activities to empower stakeholders

Implementation of the SSF Guidelines under way in Tanzania

FAO has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development to provide capacity support towards the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Tanzania. An inception workshop was held in 2018, and a National Task Team is currently taking steps to implement the SSF Guidelines in Tanzania. One such step was the launch of the Tanzanian Women Fish Workers Association (TAWFA) in April 2019.

Draft law in Costa Rica reflects the needs and interest of small-scale fishers and fish workers

Costa Rica has developed a draft law on small-scale fisheries with clear references to the SSF Guidelines. The draft law particularly highlights human rights, livelihoods, the role of women in fisheries, and the importance of preserving local and traditional knowledge.

When developing the draft law, the Costa Rican Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture (INCOPESCA), gained support from FAO to engage in a series of consultations with main actors in the small-scale fisheries sector, in academia, in NGOs and with legislators. These consultations ensured that the draft law reflects the main needs and requirements of all actors in the small-scale fisheries sector.
Implementing the SSF Guidelines takes combined efforts from many actors. These actors need a supporting structure that makes it easy for them to exchange ideas and concerns, and to collaborate to make a difference. We help establish and strengthen global and regional level platforms for national fisher and fish worker organizations to link up, address and advocate for action on shared issues of priority to the members.

In 2016, the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) recommended the development of a Global Strategic Framework in support of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines (SSF-GSF). The SSF-GSF is a global partnership mechanism that helps ensure the implementation of the SSF Guidelines is carried out in a coherent way. It allows for participation of small-scale fisheries actors and other stakeholders in finding and sharing good practices, and in combining efforts to advocate for change and mobilize resources.

Actors also need to agree on meaningful ways to measure and keep track of progress. We are therefore developing a monitoring system to track progress towards the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

The Global Strategic Framework in support of implementing the SSF Guidelines is made up of three main components, facilitated by a Secretariat in FAO:

**THE FRIENDS OF THE SSF GUIDELINES**

are FAO Members participating on a voluntary basis. They provide programmatic advice and guidance, including on future priorities, of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines to FAO and other interested actors. In turn, the Friends of the SSF Guidelines receive advice from the Advisory Group.

**THE ADVISORY GROUP**

consists of representatives from each global small-scale fisheries organization and other relevant organizations in support of small-scale fisheries, indigenous peoples (working directly in the small-scale fisheries sector) and rural workers, and follows criteria of gender and regional balance.

**THE KNOWLEDGE SHARING PLATFORM**

is composed of actors from academia, research institutes, regional organizations, and NGOs. As the name suggests, they contribute knowledge, and they support the Friends of the SSF Guidelines and the Advisory Group with research, communication, capacity development, resource mobilization and other relevant activities.
The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2022 the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022). The Year is an important recognition of the millions of small-scale fishers, fish farmers and fish workers who provide healthy and nutritious food to billions of people.

The celebration is an opportunity to empower small-scale producers, to review achievements regarding the objectives of the SSF Guidelines, and to encourage States to incorporate the SSF Guidelines into public policies and programmes.

Learn more at

Join us!

You can support the FAO Umbrella Programme for the promotion and application of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (FAO SSF Umbrella Programme) by becoming a donor or a partner.

Please get in touch by emailing SSF-Guidelines@fao.org

Learn more about small-scale fisheries and the implementation of the SSF Guidelines

on the web: fao.org/2/ssf-guidelines
on Twitter: #SmallScaleFisheries, #SSFGuidelines, @FAOfish
or through subscribing to our monthly newsletter at: newsletters.fao.org/k/Fao/ssf_guidelines_implementation_subscription_form

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