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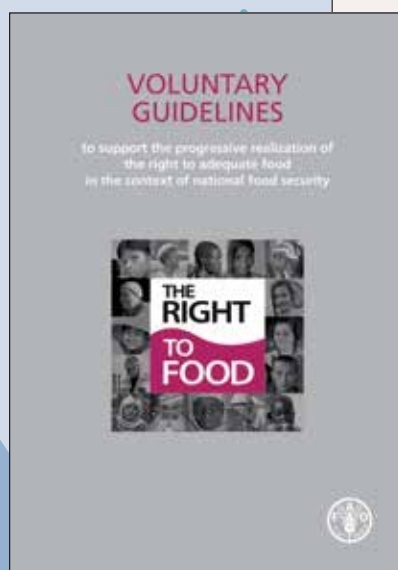
Linkages between the  
**Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries**  
in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication  
and the  
**Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of  
the Right to Adequate Food**  
in the Context of National Food Security

## Making a difference in food security and nutrition, together

Small-scale fisheries provide nutritious food for their own consumption and for local, national, and international markets. They also generate income to support local and national economies. They contribute to over half of global catches in developing countries, and 90 to 95 percent of their landings are destined for direct human consumption (World Bank, 2012).

- Small-scale fisheries are fundamental and instrumental for the progressive realization of the human right to adequate food (right to food) for millions of people.
- There are two international instruments that can support the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and nutrition.

The Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (Right to Food Guidelines)



- The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)

Both built on existing human rights obligations under international law

Non-binding documents

Global in scope

Focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups

Both hold the realization of the right to food as their main objective

Both are to be implemented following a human-rights-based approach (HRBA)

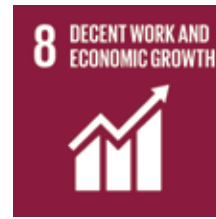
Tools to guide dialogue, policy processes, and action at all levels, from local communities to global fora

### Right to Food Guidelines

- Adopted by consensus at the 127<sup>th</sup> Session of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) council, in November 2004.
- Result of a biennium of highly participatory multi-stakeholder negotiations.
- Endorsed in 2009, by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).
- First attempt by governments to interpret an economic, social and cultural right and to recommend actions to be undertaken for its progressive realization.
- Provide guidance to states in their implementation of the right to food over nineteen different policy areas, including access and sustainable management of natural resources.
- Open the path for other guidelines targeting specific sectors, issues and topics.

### SSF Guidelines

- Endorsed at the 31<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2014.
- Result of a bottom up participatory process that directly involved more than 4 000 participants from more than 120 countries.
- First international instrument entirely dedicated to small-scale fisheries.
- Intended to support the visibility, recognition and enhancement of the role of small-scale fisheries to food security and nutrition.
- Contribute towards the eradication of hunger and poverty, and ultimately towards the realization of the right to food, and other human rights.
- Further expand the Right to Food Guideline 8 on “access to resources and assets”, while building on the premises of Right to Food Guidelines 2, 3, 10, 11 and 13.



## Small-scale fisheries and the right to food: a path towards achieving food security and nutrition

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, stability of supply, access and utilization.

Both the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines, hold the realization of the right to adequate food as their main objective. The Right to Food Guidelines emphasize the role of small-scale producers in several sections and the SSF Guidelines as their first objective call “to enhance the contribution to fisheries to food security and nutrition and support the realization to the right to adequate food” (paragraph 1.1 a).

Small-scale fisheries directly contribute to the availability and access to highly nutritious food for people in fishing communities, but also for society more broadly. Markets and trade, and related access issues, therefore, are of primary importance for allowing the small-scale fisheries sector to make its contribution to the realization of the right to food. This importance is acknowledged in Guideline 4 of the Right to Food Guidelines and in chapter 7 of the SSF Guidelines. Importantly, access to markets for small-scale fishers is also enshrined in Target 14.b of the Sustainable Development Goals “provide access for small-scale artisanal fisheries to marine resources and markets”.

Small-scale fisheries also generate income for those operating in the sector, including in pre-harvest

- and post-harvest activities where many women are involved (fish processing, selling, net making and boat building), which allows them to buy other food items, and to sustain local economies (UN General Assembly, 2016).

- In terms of utilization, small-scale fisheries products offer a valuable source of micronutrients and protein, which is essential to our diets, especially where other alternatives of high-quality food are scarce or unaffordable. Small-scale fisheries products provide a large amount of people with vitamins such as D and B, calcium, phosphorus and minerals, such as iron, zinc, iodine, magnesium, and potassium. This is particularly important in the first 1 000 days in the life of a child.

- Still, as many small-scale fishing communities are located in remote rural areas with often weak transport infrastructure and limited access to health systems, community members are easily exposed to nutritional health hazards due to a lack of dietary diversification and related medical services.

- Likewise, fishing communities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. As sea levels rise and ecosystems change, the right to food of the communities is threatened due to lack of fish available for human consumption (HLPE, 2014). Both guidelines acknowledge this particular vulnerability in dedicated sections.



# Promoting the complementary implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines

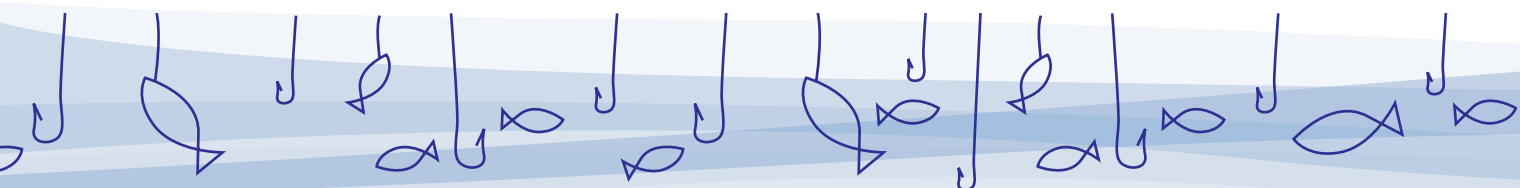
The following areas provide major opportunities for synergistic implementation of the two instruments

## Access to resources

One of the most salient points of intersection between the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines, is that they both have provisions for fishers and fish workers to access the resources on which they depend. Chapter 5 of the SSF Guidelines on the “governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management” expands on the Right to Food Guideline 8 on “access to resources and assets”, emphasising the intrinsic link between access rights for small-scale producers to ensure the availability of food for all as a fundamental element of the right to food.

States have an obligation to protect, respect, and fulfil all human rights, including the right to food. In this regard, states should respect and facilitate sustainable,

- non-discriminatory and secure access to the resources
- that are important for people’s livelihoods including fisheries (Right to Food Guideline 8.1). Similarly, states should abstain from taking measures that reduce such access for small-scale fishers and fishing communities, guaranteeing that “small-scale fishing communities are not arbitrarily evicted” (SSF Guidelines paragraph 5.9), for example, when their rights conflict with others rights in coastal development projects where fishing communities are in a vulnerable position, which would negatively affect the realization of the right to food and other human rights.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, states should take steps to improve access to natural resources, including by creating and enforcing exclusive zones for small-scale fishers (SSF Guidelines paragraph 5.7).



## EXAMPLE

### Access to fishing rights for small-scale fisheries in South Africa

In South Africa a group of 5 000 small-scale fishers won a class action lawsuit in the High Court and in the Equality Court. The group argued that the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries had failed to provide them with just access to fishing rights, and that the implementation of the Marine Living Resources Act (MLRA) of 1998 violated their right to food, a right protected by the South African Constitution. In 2007, the Minister issued a decision granting traditional fishers the rights to catch and sell West Coast Rock Lobster for commercial purposes. This decision followed an order by the Equality Court stating that small-scale fishers were entitled to some form of interim relief through fishing, and obliged the minister of fisheries to restore access to marine resources (Skonhofs and Gobena, 2009). In 2012, a new policy aiming to provide recognition of the rights of small-scale fisher communities in South Africa was adopted (Government of South Africa, 2012). This example reflects on Guideline 8 “access to resources and assets” and Guideline 13 “support for vulnerable groups” of the Right to Food Guidelines and on the objectives of the SSF Guidelines, and the provisions of chapter 5 “governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management”.



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<sup>1</sup> See also briefs on the linkages between the SSF Guidelines and the VGGT for a complementary implementation with other CFS instruments.



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## Focus on vulnerable groups, including women and indigenous peoples

The Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines focus on vulnerable groups. Specifically, Guideline 17 of the Right to Food Guidelines calls on states to “monitor the food security of vulnerable groups” and their nutritional status. The small-scale fisheries sector is often considered prone to becoming food insecure due to higher exposure to various risk factors such as climate change and insecure access to natural resources and markets.

Within the small-scale fisheries sector, women and indigenous peoples groups deserve special attention. Women play a significant role in small-scale fisheries, particularly in post-harvest activities. Despite their great contribution to the sector, there is frequently a lack of recognition and related support measures, such as targeted social protection benefits or adequate participation in producer organizations, which can exacerbate a situation of vulnerability.

The Right to Food Guideline 8.6 prescribes that states should promote women’s full and equal participation in

- the economy, introducing gender sensitive legislation
- and providing women with an equal right to land and
- equal access to and control over productive resources
- and their benefits. Gender considerations also have
- significant importance in the SSF Guidelines; chapter
- 8 in particular recognizes the significant role women
- have in small-scale fisheries, including in processing
- and marketing.
- In relation to indigenous peoples, both, the Right to
- Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines have the human
- rights principle of non-discrimination as one of the
- overarching principles for implementation. In addition,
- the respect of cultures is an overarching principle of the
- SSF Guidelines. The Right to Food Guidelines provide
- that states should give special attention to indigenous
- peoples and should take steps to ensure that vulnerable
- groups have access to opportunities and economic
- resources (Guidelines 8.1 and 8.2). Furthermore, the SSF
- Guidelines recognize the role of indigenous peoples to
- restore, conserve, protect and co-manage local aquatic
- and coastal ecosystems (paragraph 5.5).

### EXAMPLE

#### The importance of fish consumption in the Brazilian Amazon

Brazil is a country with abundant access to water resources, of which the inland dominant aquatic system is the Amazon River. The Commission for Small-Scale and Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPESCAALC - previously Commission of Inland Fisheries in Latin America), carried out a study that analysed fish consumption in the Brazilian Amazon. The study reviewed 39 publications related to fish consumption in the region, where an estimated 420 indigenous communities live (FAO, no date).

The study demonstrated the importance of fish consumption in the Amazon region, revealing a higher percentage of fish consumption compared to the official statistics, which do not consider catches for domestic consumption. It also revealed that fish is the main source of protein among the indigenous communities living in the river basin. However, in other indigenous communities located in the highlands or in areas far from the river basins, low rates of fish consumption were found with clear consequences for levels of malnutrition and other health issues.

The study also showed that a factor that has lowered fish consumption is the incorporation of industrialized products into the diets of the Amazon communities, which leads to the loss of cultural values of indigenous peoples and to a diet low in nutritional quality. Another worrying factor was the high concentration of mercury found in fish, with clear consequences for the health of the communities of the river basin of the Amazon River. Therefore, a joint effort by the Government, nutritionists and environmentalist is needed to establish sustainable and safe measures for exploiting mines, from where the mercury has come (FAO and COPESCAALC, 2011). The provisions of both the SSF Guidelines and the Right to Food Guidelines promote the protection of traditional knowledge and customs of indigenous peoples and the consumption of nutritious food, including fish, among vulnerable and marginalized communities.



## Importance of small-scale fisheries for global food security and nutrition

The global importance of small-scale fisheries has been stated in the introduction. For vulnerable populations fish constitutes, in many cases, their only source of animal protein. In small-scale fishing communities, for example, fish proteins are essential. For these populations fish represents an affordable source of animal protein that is cheaper than other protein sources. It is part of their traditional culture and a common ingredient in their recipes.

Fish also has the potential to reduce malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency, particularly for those at risk of malnutrition like children and pregnant women. Malnutrition not only results from a lack of food, but from the lack of nutritious food and the lack of diverse foods in the diets and from uneven distribution of the food that is available. Therefore, it is important to include fish, particularly from small-scale fishers and sustainable sources, in international and national programmes of food security and nutrition (HLPE, 2014).

- Guideline 10 of the Right to Food Guidelines on nutrition, encourages states to involve all stakeholders in “the design, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation programmes to increase the production and consumption of healthy and nutritious foods, especially those that are rich in micronutrients”.
- In Guideline 17, it adds that states should monitor the “food security situation of vulnerable groups, especially women, children and the elderly, and their nutritional status, including the prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies”. The SSF Guidelines call on states and other actors to establish coherent policies where food security and nutrition are favoured. It also promotes the consumption of fish and fishery products within consumer education programmes in order to increase awareness of the nutritional benefits of eating fish (paragraph 11.11).

### EXAMPLE

#### Fish from small-scale fisheries as part of school meals

School meals are increasingly seen as a unique opportunity to improve food and nutrition in children in many countries suffering from malnutrition. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) together with Infopesca supports three countries (Angola, Honduras and Peru) in incorporating fish into national school feeding programmes, through national policies and strategies and proposals for the public procurement scheme to include small-scale fisheries products, thus offering small-scale fishers a market and contributing to the community's socioeconomic development. The project carried out pilot activities to evaluate the fish products that were incorporated into the programmes following the species and the food habits of the specific country, and the results report high acceptability of the meals containing fish among school children. However, there are many barriers to overcome before fish becomes a natural part of school meals in many countries, including the high cost of fish products, their high perishability, beliefs that kids do not like fish and a lack of political will. The project is testing ways to overcome these barriers (Infopesca, no date).



# ACTION POINTS

## For governments

- Approve budgets for public education and programmes leading to awareness raising on the importance of the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines and their synergistic implementation.
- Conduct a legal assessment of the national legal framework in terms of the recognition of the right to adequate food to identify gaps and opportunities to better include small-scale fisheries.
- Integrate the provisions of the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines in the design and implementation of fisheries policies and programmes.
- Promote inter-sectoral data collection and analysis and related capacity development to better understand and support the linkages between small-scale fisheries and food security and nutrition.
- Include fish and fishery products from small-scale fisheries in nutritional programmes aiming at tackling nutrition deficiencies, especially among children and women.

## For civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and others

- Inform and generate consensus and public support on the importance of small-scale fisheries in the realization of the right to food.
- Carry out independent studies to highlight the contribution of small-scale fishing communities to food security and nutrition in your country or region.
- Raise awareness of the hazards and risks of violations of the right to food in fishing communities in your country or region, engaging also with human rights institutions.
- Conduct capacity development on the provisions of the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines with government officials, and small-scale fishing communities.

## For small-scale fishing communities

- Commit to participate in consultations and dialogues with multiple stakeholders on projects and programmes relevant to the provisions of the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines. Take special care to include women, youth and indigenous peoples.
- Create networks and associations of small-scale fishers, fish-workers and fishing communities in order to gather information, gain knowledge and promote accountability in relation to the progressive realization of the right to food.
- Create women's cooperatives to build capacity and leadership among women in their fishing communities, in particular, on issues related to the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines (FAO, 2017).

## For all

- Spread the word, inform, share experiences and generate consensus and public support on the importance of the Right to Food Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines.
- Try to consume fish products that come from responsible fisheries.
- Raise awareness at relevant events such as:
  - 2021 Global Summit on Food Systems
  - 2022 International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture
  - UN Decade on Family Farming 2019-2028
  - Annual sessions of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

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## LEARN MORE

The SSF Guidelines: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/I4356EN>

The Right to Food Guidelines: [www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf)

Fifteen years implementing the Right to Food Guidelines: [www.fao.org/3/ca6140en/ca6140en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca6140en/ca6140en.pdf)

The relationship between the governance of small scale fisheries in the realization of the right to adequate food in the context of sustainable development goals: [www.fao.org/3/a-i7922e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7922e.pdf)

Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE): [www.fao.org/3/a-i3844e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3844e.pdf)

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food on fisheries (A/67/268) <https://undocs.org/A/67/268>

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food on fishery workers (A/HRC/40/56) <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/56>

Food security and nutrition and the SSF Guidelines: [www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/guidelines/nutrition](http://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/guidelines/nutrition)

The Committee of World Food Security: [www.fao.org/cfs](http://www.fao.org/cfs)

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