



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## Evaluation of FAO's contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 2

*"End hunger, achieve food security and improved  
nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"*



# Support to secure tenure of natural resources through VGGTs and other guidelines

## About this document

This report looks at two sets of guidelines focusing on vulnerable and marginalized people: the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The evaluation of FAO's work on Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) found the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on the guidelines to be relevant and a major step forward in addressing discrimination against women and other marginalized groups and in ensuring their equal rights to economic and natural resources.

FAO has had more success with the VGGTs, as they preceded the SSF Guidelines and such initiatives take time. A more holistic, less

siloeed approach could be beneficial. Also, there is still much to do on the social inclusion of youth and people with disabilities if we are to "leave no one behind". There has been progress on the inclusion of indigenous peoples, but a systematic approach is needed. The multi-stakeholder approach to implementing the VGGTs at national level brings together different sectors, promotes participation and sets the stage for sustainability.

There needs to be more engagement with the private sector, particularly industry, to support post-harvest and marketing opportunities and strengthen SSF Guidelines implementation. Care is warranted, however, as a shift in focus to the private sector, public-private partnerships and innovation may negatively affect fishers and indigenous communities. The COVID-19 pandemic may also reverse past gains.

### SDGs



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## Abbreviations and acronyms

FAO	<i>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</i>
GIZ	<i>German Agency for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)</i>
LAT	<i>Legal assessment tool</i>
SDG	<i>Sustainable Development Goal</i>
SOLA	<i>Solutions for Open Land Administration</i>
SSF Guidelines	<i>Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication</i>
VGGTs	<i>Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security</i>

# 1. Introduction

This report looks at two sets of voluntary guidelines that focus on vulnerable and marginalized people: the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs) (FAO, 2012) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) (FAO, 2015a). The evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) work on Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) found its work on the voluntary guidelines to be a major step forward in addressing discrimination against women and other marginalized groups, their achievement of equal rights to economic and natural resources and services, and other equity issues. Though the guidelines were adopted during the Millennium Development Goals era, they are

still relevant. They address fundamental issues pertaining to SDG targets 1.4, 2.3 and 5.1. The common thread in the two sets of guidelines is their human rights-based approach and the need to protect vulnerable and marginalized groups. Here, we focus on the extent to which the two sets of guidelines have supported FAO Members in achieving SDG 2.

This report was compiled using two key data collection methods: i) a review of documents, including the voluntary guidelines, project documents, evaluations, country case studies on the implementation of the guidelines, newsletters and videos; and ii) interviews with FAO personnel at headquarters and in regional and country offices and with implementing and other key partners (please see Appendix 1 for the list of people interviewed).

## 2. Background

### 2.1 History of the VGGTs and SSF Guidelines

The VGGTs seek to improve the governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests. They provide countries with a flexible framework for best practices in tenure-related policy, law, regulation, organization and strategy to promote secure tenure rights and equitable access to land, fisheries and forests as a means of eradicating hunger and poverty, supporting sustainable development and reducing environmental degradation (FAO, 2012).

The VGGTs stemmed from the global food crisis of 2008 and the urgent need to deal with the growing challenges related to land tenure. In 2009, FAO saw that donors and civil society wanted to address these land-tenure issues with a global instrument. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) had adopted the Right to Food Guidelines in 2004 and these served as an example for the VGGTs (FAO, 2005). Consultations were held in 2009–2010, then a first draft was presented to the CFS.<sup>1</sup> The Guidelines were finalized in 2011–2012 through intergovernmental negotiations, with the input of civil society organizations, the private sector and research institutions. The Guidelines were officially endorsed by the CFS on 11 May 2012. Since then, multilateral organizations have been promoting their implementation, including FAO, the Group of 20 (G20) nations, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the United Nations General Assembly and Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie, to name but a few.

The SSF Guidelines were developed to complement the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (FAO, 1995). The objectives of the SSF Guidelines are to support the visibility, recognition and enhancement of the role of small-scale fisheries in contributing to global and national efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty. The SSF Guidelines take a human rights-based approach to supporting responsible fisheries and sustainable social and economic development for the benefit of current and future generations, with an emphasis on small-scale fishers, fishworkers and related activities, including vulnerable and marginalized people (FAO, 2015a).

The SSF Guidelines are the result of a bottom-up participatory development process, based on the recommendations of the Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Sessions of the FAO Committee on Fisheries. Between 2010 and 2013, FAO facilitated a global process involving more than 4 000 representatives of governments, small-scale fishers, fishworkers and their organizations, researchers, development partners and other stakeholders from more than 120 countries in six regions, as well as more than 20 civil society organizations-led national consultative meetings. The outcomes of these consultations acted as the basis for the work of an FAO Technical Consultation, which met in May 2013 and February 2014 to agree on the final text. The SSF Guidelines were endorsed by the Thirty-first Session of the Committee on Fisheries in June 2014.

The two sets of guidelines address the principle of “leaving no one behind”, in addition to other SDG tenets, and take a human rights-based approach to those issues that can arise when poverty, food and nutrition security, governance of tenure and small-scale fisheries intersect. Both are based on the core principles of human dignity, non-discrimination, consultation and participation, gender equality, transparency, accountability and rule of law. The SSF Guidelines and VGGTs emphasize tenure rights, which are important in order to realize human rights (FAO, 2020a). 2030 Agenda is anchored in human rights and aims to realize the right to adequate food by protecting and promoting access to productive resources and promoting social protection (FAO, 2017b). The two sets of guidelines share the goal of achieving food security for all and support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food, while the SSF Guidelines also underline nutrition. They further address the problems of weak governance of tenure and growing pressure on natural resources, with a particular emphasis on the vulnerable and marginalized (FAO, 2020a).

The SSF Guidelines and the VGGTs are closely related to 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) (FAO, 2005). However, we address the Right to Food Guidelines in an accompanying report on legal and parliamentary work on food and nutrition security.

<sup>1</sup> By then, the CFS was undergoing reform, and civil society and private sector representatives were included in its debates. A multi-disciplinary scientific advisory body to the CFS, the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), was also created. See: FAO (2009).



## 2.2 Evolution of the guidelines over time

The texts of both the SSF Guidelines and VGGTs have remained unchanged since their adoption. What has evolved, however, are the tools that FAO and others use to support the implementation of the guidelines, which are highly technical and aimed primarily at governments. FAO has developed technical guides and learning programmes to help different stakeholder groups, from governments to the private sector, from civil society organizations to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities. Both sets of guidelines are used not only by FAO, but by many actors around the globe. It is not FAO's sole responsibility to implement them. In some countries, they have been simplified and translated into local languages to ensure that communities can easily understand them.

## 2.3 Implementation

The implementation of the guidelines has varied according to country preferences and needs, as well as the prevailing sociopolitical environment, as illustrated by the country examples we discuss later in this report. It is recommended that both sets of guidelines be used flexibly, as they are voluntary. Application of the VGGTs has been quite broad. They have been used, for example, in formulating policy and other legal frameworks and to address climate change issues, corruption, conflict, investment, gender issues and indigenous land rights, among other things. Countries are encouraged to embrace the guidelines as a whole, but at the same time, certain elements can be used to bring focus to a specific topic and can be used independently.

There are five streams of work in implementing the VGGTs. The first is to work with government ministries or land agencies and institutions that implement land policy work to include the principles of the VGGTs in their policies. The second is to identify key stakeholders working on land issues, including civil society organizations and rural women's organizations that undertake advocacy, and small-scale farmers to engage them in the policy review process. This is to ensure that policy formulation is done in a consultative and participatory way. The third stream is capacity development and the facilitation of multi-stakeholder processes to review policies. The fourth is to support the monitoring of SDG land indicators, including for SDG 5. Fifth, there is a team working with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to produce a technical guide on how the VGGTs can be used to address global environmental issues.

Twelve technical guides have been developed to accompany the implementation of the VGGTs. They range from addressing pastoral tenure, tenure for women and men, and developing gender-equitable legal frameworks to safeguard tenure in the context of investment. There has also been capacity development to ensure that stakeholders have a good understanding of the guidelines and are able to use the associated normative tools to support implementation. An e-learning curriculum has also been developed on responsible governance of tenure.

Moreover, there is a gender and land database with more than 90 country profiles on factors relating to gender inequalities embedded in land rights. The database also has gender and land-related statistics for many countries globally. Twenty-five country assessments have been conducted using the legal assessment tool (LAT), which analyses national legal frameworks to provide prompt,

targeted and effective policy advice to FAO Members. Based on the legal information derived from country profiles, the LAT assigns scores based on 30 legal indicators to identify areas where action is needed to advance gender equity in land tenure. The LAT has been amended to comply with the VGGTs and SDG indicator 5.a.2 methodology (of which FAO is a custodian).

Some 75 to 80 percent of the VGGT land-tenure programme is funded by extrabudgetary (donor) contributions. The remaining 20 to 25 percent is funded through the regular programme budget. The VGGT land-tenure programme is currently operating with funds provided for the second phase of the umbrella programme, which started in 2016 and was expected to end in 2020. The COVID-19 crisis has caused delays in programme implementation, so some activities have had to be rescheduled; the programme will now end in June 2021. No new funding has been made available; once the current funding ends, the programme will run solely on regular programme budget funds. This means that as of July 2021, the VGGT land-tenure programme may have to be downsized to a quarter of its current scale.

Implementing the SSF Guidelines involves a different approach to implementing the VGGTs. The initial focus was primarily on small-scale fishery organizations around the world, with country-specific support for governments at a later stage. It is important to be sensitive to the power plays between small-scale fishers and government and it is necessary to strengthen small-scale fishers' ability to engage with government. The SSF Guidelines take an equitable partnership approach, and cross-sectoral collaboration is fundamental. There are different roles for different partners. Governments have a key responsibility to make implementation happen at the national and local level and to incorporate the principles of the SSF Guidelines into relevant policies and strategies, not only for fisheries, but for socioeconomic development overall.

High-level political engagement, capacity investment and participatory decision-making processes are required to realize the vision for small-scale fisheries. Fishers and fishworkers, through their organizations, are seen as the main drivers of change and play a major role in "bottom-up" processes to empower collective action, to ensure that small-scale fisheries are mainstreamed into relevant policies, strategies and actions at the local, national and regional level and to ensure that these policies, strategies and actions are implemented.

Initially, the implementation of the SSF Guidelines focused on the global and regional levels, to raise awareness of as many stakeholders as possible working with global and regional fisher and fishworker organizations. The focus shifted to a country approach once additional funds were made available. The array of guidance materials available includes a gender handbook, a safety-at-sea guide, guidance on microcredit and credit services, guidance on access to social protection, FAO technical papers with examples of good implementation practices and informational videos. The SSF Guidelines themselves are available in 19 languages.

The SSF Guidelines are implemented through consultations with government, fisher organizations and other stakeholders, coupled with broader awareness-raising, regional consultations and the development of priority implementation plans. At national level, the SSF Guidelines should ideally be implemented through national plans of action. This started in Tanzania and Senegal and is now also underway in Madagascar and Namibia. The awareness-raising

sessions focus on the contribution of small-scale fisheries to nutrition and gender equity, with an emphasis on human rights and how small-scale fishers can engage and bring the guidelines into the policy agenda.

An FAO SSF Umbrella Programme, “Enhancing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and sustainable livelihoods”, is used to implement the SSF Guidelines. The programme has four focus areas: i) raising awareness of the SSF Guidelines, as well as challenges and opportunities in small-scale fisheries; ii) strengthening the science–policy interface by generating better information on small-scale fisheries; iii) empowering small-scale fishers and fish-worker organizations; and iv) increasing governmental knowledge, skills, capacity and support for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines by creating an enabling environment (FAO, n.d.a, 2019a).

There are two main projects under the umbrella programme. One creates an enabling environment for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries and is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (USD 6.9 million from 2015 to 2020). The other empowers women in small-scale fisheries for sustainable food systems and is funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (USD 8.9 million from 2018 to 2022). Funding from FAO’s regular programme has been minimal. In the first years after the SSF Guidelines were endorsed, it only covered one staff member and some consultancy time. Personnel-time contributions have increased more recently. Specific activities include consultations with government, regional organizations, fisher organizations and other stakeholders to raise awareness and develop implementation plans by prioritizing activities.

## 2.4 Partners in implementation

Governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the guidelines are implemented, as most of the guidelines are aimed at them. Governments are key partners in implementing the VGGTs, be it through ministries of agriculture or justice, land commissions or investment agencies. Civil society organizations also play a key role, having embraced the guidelines as advocacy and monitoring tools. FAO’s partnership with the private sector has not been as expansive, but there is a significant effort underway to involve and motivate private-sector partners, especially investors and operators

of land-based investments, including some financial institutions that use the guidelines as a reference. More specifically, partners include academic institutions, research organizations, the International Land Coalition, the Global Land Tool Network, NGOs and the Global Donor Working Group on Land – a group of donors and governments that provide funding for land, such as the European Union, World Bank and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID).

FAO encourages the uptake of the SSF Guidelines in a number of ways and plays a catalytic role by supporting and equipping governments, fishers and fish-worker organizations, academia, regional organizations, NGOs and others to take action. At global level, FAO has set up a structure, the Global Strategic Framework (SSF-GSF), to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The SSF-GSF is a partnership mechanism with an advisory and facilitative role. One of its key objectives is to give small-scale fishery actors an opportunity to say how they would like to see the SSF Guidelines put into action. Its members can share experiences, jointly mobilize resources, develop synergies and coordinate efforts to advocate for policies and approaches that foster the implementation of the SSF Guidelines (FAO, 2020b). The SSF-GSF has three components: an Advisory Group, the Friends of the SSF Guidelines, and a Knowledge Sharing Platform. The Advisory Group meets two to three times a year. Three regional Advisory Groups have been established in 2020, in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The Friends of the SSF Guidelines are Norway, the United Republic of Tanzania, Peru, Canada and Indonesia and they meet once a year. The Knowledge Sharing Platform is currently being developed.

The core SSF team at FAO headquarters leads the implementation and works closely with the Fisheries Working Group of the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), a global platform of small-scale food producers and rural workers’ organizations. Members of the IPC include the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF) and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), all of which were involved in developing the SSF Guidelines. Partners include civil society organizations, research institutions and academia, as well as regional organizations, such as the African Union. FAO supports multi-actor platforms at the regional level, such as the African Union non-state actor platforms (FAO, 2020c).

# 3. Effectiveness and relevance to SDG 2

## 3.1 Indications of achievements and potential achievements related to SDG 2

Both the SSF Guidelines and the VGGTs have been implemented extensively in different regions, with varying success. In this section, we cite regional and country examples to illustrate successes to date and potential achievements associated with SDG 2. The information in this section is compiled based on interviews with FAO personnel in various countries, implementing partners and stakeholders, as well as FAO case studies and a literature review.

### The VGGTs

The FAO/World Bank Cooperative Programme has provided support worth USD 1 billion to projects in the Philippines, Viet Nam, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and other countries.

### The Philippines

A new project that started in 2020, supported by the World Bank, has the potential to reap rewards in terms of SDG 2. With a budget of USD 470 million, comprising a USD 370 million loan and USD 100 million of government cofinancing, it aims to speed up the process of splitting up about 1.4 million hectares of land under the country’s Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program into titled parcels for around 750 000 beneficiary farmers (Republic of the Philippines, 2020). FAO helped to design an automated system

to process the parcelling of collective titles, replacing manual processes. This will speed up project implementation, linking the flow of documentation between different institutions. In addition, FAO provided technical support from an economist, who prepared the economic benefit analyses.

### **Western Balkans and Serbia**

The Western Balkans regional initiative, supported by FAO, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the World Bank, addresses the land-ownership challenges faced by women in the Western Balkans (SDG target 5.a). National multi-stakeholder gender teams have been assembled, comprising land administration specialists, government policymakers, gender officers, local NGOs and notaries, to support the process of improving gender equality and social inclusion in property rights. Each country produced sex-disaggregated data that indicated low levels of female ownership, from as little as 3 percent to no more than 30 percent in most cases.

Notaries in the region identified cases where women had lost ownership of land, either due to a lack of legislation or standardized procedures by legislative bodies or due to discriminatory customs. In many cases, women had renounced their property rights as a result of social pressure and, on occasion, in the belief that they did not have the right to own land (FAO, 2018a). FAO has also developed regional guidelines aimed at strengthening gender equality in notarial practices in Southeast Europe (FAO, 2019c).

Teams were trained on the VGGTs using the Governing Land for Women and Men technical guide (FAO, 2013), the 2030 Agenda, the land-related SDG indicators and the LAT. In June and July 2017, SDG indicator 5.a.2 monitoring methodology was piloted in two states in the Western Balkans, Serbia and Albania. Examples of good practice can be seen in several countries. For example, in Serbia, spousal consent is mandatory for any transaction involving matrimonial property, while property acquired during a consensual/non-marital union is considered to be co-owned or jointly owned.

In 2018, Serbia implemented a simplified procedure for registering joint ownership, based on a marriage certificate, which also allowed the listing of a previously unregistered spouse on properties obtained during the marriage. It also put in place incentives to reduce property registration fees by introducing a token fee of EUR 3. The aim was to increase women's ownership and control over land, also where spouses or partners were co-owners of a property and in the case of people with disabilities. A government mobile service has been operating since mid-2017 for ease of access. The primary beneficiaries of the service are people with disabilities, people who face multiple forms of discrimination (women with disabilities, for example) and the parents of children with disabilities. The mobile service contributes to the inclusion of people with disabilities in society by informing them of the benefits of ownership registration and encouraging them to become registered property owners, be they inherited or purchased (Draskovic et al., 2019). This addresses the 2030 Agenda principle of "leaving no one behind", while also addressing SDG targets 5.1 and 5.a.

### **Mongolia**

Mongolia drafted a law on pastureland after the end of socialism, but parliament never passed it, due to conflicts of interest and a lack of consultation with herders. The VGGTs were presented to the Mongolian government at a multi-stakeholder workshop in October

2014. A national multi-stakeholder platform and a working group of government ministries, civil society organizations, academia, associations and private-sector entities working on tenure issues were subsequently established to develop policy and dialogue on tenure rights.

The Mongolian Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry spearheaded an initiative to accelerate the implementation of the guidelines through various activities. A national NGO, People Centered Conservation, facilitated community engagement with people living in remote areas, resulting in broader policy dialogue and capacity-development activities.

Inequalities can be seen at every level in Mongolia, from the number of women in government to gender-based wage disparities. In the provinces, where customary law largely still applies and women have few, if any, ownership or inheritance rights, it has been a challenge to change mindsets and create a more equitable system. FAO has conducted training on "Governing land for Women and Men" (FAO, 2013).

Mongolian tenure laws are being upgraded. Its regulation on "Securing the legitimate tenure rights of land and its resources" was published on 21 January 2016. Meetings have been organized at local level, leading to official agreements that have helped to secure the rights of herders (SDG target 2.3 and SDG target 1.4). The Government of Mongolia is committed to improving pastureland legislation. Pastureland is state-owned, but managed by local herders who, despite growing responsibilities, have ever-fewer rights to land use and resources (FAO, 2019d). Despite delays due to a parliamentary changeover, in early 2018, the new government reaffirmed its commitment to improving legislation, creating a specific working group and preparing a second legislative draft.

### **Sierra Leone**

In the aftermath of the country's 11-year civil war, the Government of Sierra Leone began to modernize its land-tenure system, putting policies in place so that each parcel of land would be productive and economically valuable. Sierra Leone has a dual land-tenure system that dates back to the colonial era (FAO, 2019d). Trees and bodies of water are used as rough estimates for boundary markers. However, due to environmental activity, this method can be unreliable. In the past, agribusiness and mining companies wishing to acquire large areas of land negotiated land deals directly with communities, who had no proper legal representation. At times, firms merely made non-legally binding verbal commitments to communities.

Under customary law, paramount chiefs are custodians of these lands, but have often been accused of confusing that mandate with ownership. The powers of the paramount chiefs have been challenged after numerous instances in which they had signed agreements with companies without the consent or knowledge of families that owned the land.

Another issue is that laws allow individuals to register their land without spousal consent. This usually means that men register lands without involving their wives. This is particularly worrying, as women account for 70 percent of the agricultural labour force and this practice exacerbates the gender gap. Women's land rights have been a challenge, especially in the provinces, where patriarchal customary law prevails. The new land policy addresses this by proposing spousal consent.

In 2009, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders from civil society, academia and various development partners, among others, started to draft the country's new National Land Policy. On 1 February 2014, the VGGTs were launched in Sierra Leone, thanks to funding from the Government of Germany and technical support from FAO. In November 2015, the cabinet approved a fifth draft of the National Land Policy. A prime example of good practice, it includes the full set of VGGT principles and refers to them in more than 90 paragraphs.

A multi-stakeholder platform was established in April 2014, comprising more than 100 participants, including women and youth from civil society organizations, NGOs, the private sector, the media, development partners, landowners and traditional leaders. Meetings are held annually and end with the signing of an official document or communiqué tracking progress over the previous 12 months. Anchoring the voluntary guidelines within government structures through technical working groups was cited as a key achievement in the implementation process. Civil society organizations have popularized the principles and documents of the voluntary guidelines and translated key clauses of the National Land Policy into local languages.

Sierra Leone has a new investment process that is aligned with the guidelines. Awareness-raising has enabled companies to realize that community participation is very important. Investors are aware that they cannot operate on a piece of land without the knowledge of the landowners and stakeholders. Paramount chiefs and family landowners are consulted so that they can decide whether they want to sell a piece of land.

In January 2018, in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone, FAO launched the "Protecting women's customary land rights in Sierra Leone" project. Its main components are: i) a context analysis of the critical aspects influencing and hindering women's land rights in three ethnically different customary tenure communities (Temne, Limba and Mende) and ii) training and capacity development, so people can participate in decisions on the allocation of land rights. The context analysis has looked at traditional practices that disadvantage women and has built awareness-raising into the capacity development of gatekeepers, so that they can become advocates for women's rights. Change is happening (albeit very slowly) as regards women taking up positions as chief; at present, just two have been appointed. Families, too, are gradually releasing land to their female offspring (SDG targets 2.3, 5.a and 5.5). The use of Solutions for Open Land Administration (SOLA) technology, whereby communities participate in the development of maps within their community, has encouraged youth participation and empowered communities to be part of solving their tenure challenges.

A task force was founded to sustain the implementation of the voluntary guidelines, drawing high-level political support for VGGT implementation. Its members include the Ministers of Lands, Housing and the Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, Justice (and the Attorney General), Local Government and Rural Development, and Fisheries and Marine Resources. There is also a steering committee that brings together the directors of the relevant ministries.

Numerous stakeholders have expressed interest in replicating the success of the National Land Policy in other agricultural sectors

(forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) using the principles set out in the Guidelines. The first phase (2017–2020) focuses on the clarification and protection of land rights. The second phase (2021–2027) will involve the systematic implementation of phase one: enacting land laws and planning laws, strengthening the capacity of land-related institutions and then scaling-up the compulsory and systemic first-time registration of legitimate land rights.

Key achievements to date include the completion of the customary land-rights mapping. Work on cadastral mapping is underway, so that regulations can be put in place. The National Land Policy has now moved to legislation and there are two bills currently awaiting approval by parliament, namely, the customary land-rights bill and the land administration bill.

Importantly, work on implementing the SSF Guidelines in Sierra Leone began in 2019 following the successful implementation of the VGGTs. The process is being implemented in close cooperation with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. Funding from Japan has enabled the capacity development of small-scale fisheries in relation to storage, hygiene and fisheries management.

### Guatemala

In the rural areas of Guatemala, the poverty rate is high (at 59.3 percent in 2014) (World Bank, 2018), as is the incidence of chronic malnutrition, particularly in indigenous communities (37.6 percent according to the country's fourth agricultural census of 2015) (Republic of Guatemala, 2015). Around two-thirds of arable land is used by less than 2 percent of the country's landowners, while the majority of holdings, 82 percent, are farmed by smallholders who use only one-sixth of all arable land. Guatemala's civil war, from 1960 to 1996, arose from long-standing issues of unfair land distribution – issues that remain to be resolved.

In 2013, the Government of Guatemala approached the FAO Regional Office with a request for VGGT training. In 2016, it adopted a new National Policy for Comprehensive Rural Development, which includes the main concepts and principles of the VGGTs. It seeks to facilitate access to productive assets for small-scale farmers and indigenous communities, recognize and strengthen indigenous communal systems of land tenure and management, and promote customary rights and women's rights to land (SDG targets 2.3 and 5.a) (FAO, 2015b). So far, the work has focused on advocacy, laying the ground for inclusive policy dialogue. Improving the capacity of people and organizations has been a theme throughout the process.

Gender equality and access to land were identified as key issues. Skills development activities were implemented to improve the institutional environment for women, particularly indigenous women. A gender equality guide was created for civil society organizations and NGOs. Recently, there have been calls to recognize the rights of women who have been victims of violence, to give them back their land and integrate the land-tenure guidelines in the process. FAO supports the restitution of land and reinforces the empowerment of rural women in Guatemala (SDG target 5.a).

Emphasis has now turned to the implementation of the National Land Policy. Representatives from government, civil society and academia have participated in a series of workshops to address the advancement of rural development in Guatemala within the framework of the guidelines.



### In summary

These country examples show the different ways in which the VGGTs have been implemented. Sierra Leone has made significant strides in reviewing and changing the law and is now getting communities to make their own maps using SOLA technology. Crucially, this process has shown how access to national resources can be changed for the better to meet SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5 and SDG 15. Sierra Leone has demonstrated that the VGGTs can help to change the way land is used and allocated. In all these cases, the process has highlighted the inequalities that exist within countries and how women's rights to land are affected by tradition and customary law. The way of doing business can also be changed for the better to help achieve the SDGs. In the Western Balkans, for example, the facilitation of tenure rights for women has contributed to the achievement of SDG target 5.a, while in Serbia and North Macedonia,<sup>2</sup> civil society organizations have worked with notaries to build women's rights into the management of land tenure (FAO, 2020e). In 2016, only 16 percent of landowners were women in North Macedonia; by 2018, the percentage had risen to 27 percent, a clear indicator of how tenure rights can be secured for women (FAO, 2020f).

### The SSF Guidelines

FAO has worked with various partners to implement the SSF Guidelines in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Near East, and Asia and the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> Here are three examples.

#### Costa Rica

Costa Rica was among the first countries to request implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The country has introduced a bill entitled the "General Law for the sustainability of small-scale, artisanal fisheries in the context of food security, poverty eradication and shared governance". It is currently being considered by representatives of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica (ICSF, 2018).

The Marine Area for Responsible Fisheries (Área Marina de Pesca Responsable) (AMPR) is a spatial management model to implement effective measures for the management and conservation of fishery resources based on the suggestions and vision of local fishers. Barra del Colorado, a remote community that depends on local fisheries, is the latest community to create an AMPR in Costa Rica (there are now 12). The community lacked management, and its access to fishing grounds was threatened by the expansion of a nearby nature reserve. Supported by the government, FAO and NGOs, it developed a management plan and set up its own conservation area. The Barra del Colorado AMPR is a member of the Marine Area for Responsible Fishing and Marine Territories of Life Network, an open and heterogeneous group with a broad representation of actors from the small-scale fisheries sector in Costa Rica. Its members range from AMPR representatives to diverse fishing organizations, communities in marine management areas, indigenous groups, afro-descendant groups, mollusc-gathering communities and other community and fisheries organizations (FAO, 2020d).

Monitoring and building co-management capacities in the community and in local institutions fuelled the project's success. These activities also resulted in good governance processes, which apply the principles of the ecosystem approach to the joint management of fisheries in which various actors and interests intertwine, in order to seek the benefit of fishers and the sustainable use of resources. To create the AMPR, the project and its partners in the fishing authority facilitated the establishment of the Barra del Colorado Peeling and Processing Association and the United Small-Scale Artisanal Fishermen's Association of Barra del Colorado, two fisher and fish-worker organizations.

The country's Natural Reserve Management Committee, civil society organizations and FAO worked together to draft and approve the first AMPR management plan in Costa Rica to incorporate the principles of the SSF Guidelines in a participatory process. The management plan and monitoring strategy was based on fisher needs, supported by the government and local NGOs, and increased the local fishers' capacity to manage their fisheries. Ensuring fisher access to resources increased local resilience and reduced vulnerability by securing long-term access to fish products (SDG target 2.4).

#### United Republic of Tanzania

The United Republic of Tanzania is rich in marine and inland fishery resources. Consequently, its fisheries sector is significant, employing almost four million people and accounting for 2 percent of gross domestic product (United Republic of Tanzania, 2019). The Tanzanian fisheries sector has faced many challenges, however, including a lack of social protection, limited access to financial institutions, a dearth of technology, illegal fishing and trade practices and a lack of awareness of the need to encourage a new generation into fisheries. Fishers across Tanzania also face dangers posed by disasters and climate change, while landing sites lack crucial social services, such as schools, dispensaries, electricity and all-weather roads. There is also inadequate interaction and communication between fishers and other stakeholders on decision-making, the implementation of fisheries issues and the dissemination of research findings. To address these challenges, the United Republic of Tanzania, supported by FAO, undertook a review of regulatory measures in the fisheries sector.

The review found that women were discriminated against and exposed to sexual harassment from male fishers. There were conflicts between farmers, livestock keepers and fishers over the use of land close to the shoreline, as well as conflicts between migrant and indigenous fishers over access to and rights to fish. A lack of access to financial institutions and poor remunerations, as well as poor fish handling and processing infrastructure at most landing sites were among the key issues raised by fishers as major impediments to realizing social justice and development.

In November 2017, the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, supported by FAO, embarked on a project (still ongoing) to implement the SSF Guidelines in the marine and inland waters under the jurisdiction of mainland United Republic of Tanzania.

<sup>2</sup> Serbia is one of the top-ranked countries (that have reported) in terms of SDG indicator 5.a.2.

<sup>3</sup> FAO is also working with World Fish and Duke University on a global study entitled "Illuminating Hidden Harvests", which builds on 2012 research and covers the pre-harvesting, harvesting and post-harvesting sectors of inland and marine fisheries. The report provides information on food security in developing countries and shows how the importance of the SSF Guidelines is often overlooked in this regard. Early results suggest that when households engage in small-scale fishing, they have a low probability of malnutrition. The study addresses the social, environmental, economic and governance contributions of small-scale fisheries at global and local level, as well as the key drivers of change in these sectors, including both threats and opportunities (World Fish, FAO and Duke University, 2018b).

Policies, laws, and institutional and regulatory frameworks governing the fisheries sector have been reviewed to identify gaps in relation to the SSF Guidelines. A national task team is leading guideline implementation. While a National Plan of Action for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines is still being developed, which will encompass both coastal and inland fisheries, useful studies and workshops have been held in this regard.

A study mapping women fish processors and traders and non-state actors actively involved in fisheries was carried out in 2018. The study sought to identify the organizational status of women's groups and non-state actors, as well as weaknesses, gaps, strengths and needs, to inform interventions and strategies, collect opinions on the creation of a platform for women and raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines and other issues. In addition, it was noted that in the linkages between gender and nutrition and food security, women make more decisions on food provision and nutrition (SDG targets 2.1 and 2.2). Furthermore, support was given to the formation of the Tanzanian Women Fish Workers Association (TAWFA). An inception workshop was held in 2019, at which point, TAWFA had more than 200 member groups reaching up to 6 000 women just six months after its launch.

### **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has made progress on fisheries policymaking, with assistance from the Government of Norway and the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka. In 2018, the Cabinet of Sri Lanka approved a White Paper on National Fisheries Policy, which is expected to be presented to parliament at some point. The white paper has incorporated some SSF Guidelines, although the policy still appears to fall short in addressing some of the compelling needs of the small-scale fisheries sector.

The Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF) embarked on a process to implement the SSF Guidelines from July 2018 to May 2019, with assistance from the ICSF. It held an awareness-raising workshop for state actors, to present and discuss the SSF Guidelines and identify major areas of concern. It developed communication tools for community stakeholders. It also prepared a number of documents that presented the SSF Guidelines and key messages in local languages (Sinhalese and Tamil) and distributed them to fishing communities. The SLFSSF also held stakeholder meetings that included fisheries community members and state actors from 12 coastal districts (FAO, 2019b).

Focus-group discussions in stakeholder consultative workshops revealed a number of incidences in which the rights of fishers were violated, such as the acquisition of beach areas for tourism, leading to the loss of anchorage sites, beach seining sites and space for craft and gear repair and fish processing. Stakeholders also said large-scale mechanized craft and equipment had taken away resources that were traditionally available to small-scale and artisanal fishers. There were also concerns about rights that fishers wanted to have and enjoy, including access to and use of mangrove forests and land-adjointing beaches. The need for coastal-area zoning was suggested as a solution to these issues (Amarasinghe, 2020).

Participants also highlighted the absence of a proper monitoring, control and surveillance mechanism to oversee coastal resource management. They underlined the need to decentralize management decisions to district level, with local government involvement. They also emphasized that the coastal zone should be treated as one ecosystem and that all relevant stakeholders should

be involved in management and decision-making processes at all levels, including youth, women, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. It was agreed that management approaches should be holistic, integrated, inclusive and participatory.

Stakeholders also cited post-harvest losses of as much as 40 percent, as local planning had not allocated sufficient space for various fisheries-related activities on the coast, such as craft anchorage, equipment storage and fish drying, or shore facilities to engage in such activities. The need to build awareness among fishers of the importance of adopting sea-safety measures was noted. Participants expressed displeasure at the functioning of the Fishermen's Pension Scheme.

Discussions revealed that in predominantly Buddhist coastal communities, a woman's employment was still considered a reflection of a man's inability to feed his family. It was proposed that awareness be raised in these communities of women's right to work and the importance of their employment in improving family wellbeing.

It was agreed that measures to promote sustainable resource management would not succeed if they were not accompanied by measures to improve social development. A number of actions were proposed with a view to guaranteeing basic social services: i) access to basic education, health, housing and household amenities; ii) giving children of fisher communities priority access to higher education; iii) financial assistance for children of fisher families to continue education during the off season; iv) the development of credit and microcredit schemes to encourage investment in fisheries; and v) enabling the poor and vulnerable to access credit.

Stakeholders proposed training and capacity-building for members of the fishing communities in new fishing techniques, deep-sea fishing technology, post-harvest processing, alternative livelihoods, resource conservation and co-management. They also recognized the need to provide training to women and school dropouts in post-harvest processing and other ancillary activities.

After a group of policy experts revisited the current National Fisheries Policy and identified missing links, a new policy paper was prepared, inspired by the SSF Guidelines. It is now awaiting government approval. As was clear from the countrywide consultations, the full benefits of the policy process can only be reaped through a participatory management process, the capacity-building of state actors and communities, the empowerment of community organizations and investment in social development (Amarasinghe, 2020).

### **In summary**

Good practices are evident in the United Republic of Tanzania and Sri Lanka, which have established task teams of small-scale fishers, government representatives and academics to develop workplans. In Costa Rica and in Sri Lanka, the draft bills are good examples that now need to be turned into law. The Costa Rican bill has taken on the provisions of the SSF Guidelines at a high level. However, small-scale fishers in Sri Lanka feel that the policy is one sided and that all their contributions and needs have not been taken into account. It should be noted that the SSF Guidelines have not yielded transformative results yet, but have the potential to contribute to SDG 2. The work reviewed for this report also seems to include some value-chain development and the promotion of fisheries as an undervalued sector (and of fisherfolk as an important element of society). This is specific to the SSF Guidelines (not the VGGTs).

## 3.2 SDG 2 (and other) targets addressed by the voluntary guidelines

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains land-related targets and indicators under SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 11 and SDG 15. Land is a significant resource, both cross-cutting and critical to achieving the SDGs (Land Portal Foundation, n.d.). The SDG targets addressed by implementing the land-tenure guidelines include: 1.4, 2.3, 2.4, 5.a, 11.1, 11.3, 11.7, 15.1, 15.2 and 15.3.

Discussions with the FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL) suggested a belief that there was no direct link to SDG 2 indicators. However, discussions at country level suggested that there was a correlation between the implementation of VGGTs and SDG 2. When land security is increased, farmers and families are more likely to have enough food (SDG target 2.1) and farmers increase land use to enable dietary diversity, food security and sufficiency, thereby decreasing all forms of malnutrition (SDG target 2.2). In addition, when the VGGTs are implemented, farmers are more likely to engage in sustainable food production and in climate-smart agriculture (SDG target 2.4), as the guidelines provide for the responsible use of land. Farmers with secure land tenure are able to grow permanent trees, such as cocoa and coconut trees, thereby increasing productivity and income (SDG targets 2.3 and 1.1). Improving tenure rights for women has led to greater household food security (SDG targets 5.1 and 2.1). The use of a rights-based approach in implementing both the VGGTs and SSF Guidelines is in line with principle of “leaving no one behind”, as well as SDG 5 and SDG 15.

Addressing tenure is fundamental, as insecurity of tenure prevents people from using the land more broadly. It is important to improve land governance, looking at which rights are recognized, secured and marked in law, but also at people’s capacity to enforce their rights to tenure and to resist being forcibly evicted by investors or governments. Both the VGGTs and SSF address SDG target 2.3, as they work with food producers to access land – an essential component in improving food production – and to achieve better conditions for and recognition of fishworkers and fishers – also essential to food production capacity.

Improved governance of small-scale fisheries contributes to the eradication of hunger and poverty, to sustainable development and to the sustainable use of the environment (FAO, n.d.b). The SSF Guidelines address all 17 SDGs, specifically SDG targets 2.3 and 14.b, which refer specifically to access to production, access to resources and access to markets for small-scale fishers, so as to make food accessible to consumers.

The other targets, such as targets 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, are addressed more generally in terms of access to food through direct consumption or selling to buy food that is needed. There is work being done to end all forms of malnutrition (SDG target 2.2) by integrating fish and fish products into school feeding programmes. This new work is currently underway.

## 3.3 Links to the key principles of the 2030 Agenda

### 3.3.1 Acting at scale

The VGGTs are implemented by numerous stakeholders, including governments, academia, NGOs, civil society organizations and the private sector at national level and regional bodies at regional level. Working with the private sector is a new way of working for FAO and there is now a realization that it is important to the sustainability of results. Interviewees observed that the implementation of the VGGTs was more effective when civil society organizations were involved, took ownership of training and replicated it, thereby increasing the numbers trained.

The VGGTs have influenced the national and subnational policy environment, as shown in the country examples. Sierra Leone’s new land policy incorporating the VGGTs, for instance, is set to become law through the customary land-rights bill and the land administration bill. FAO is now undertaking new land-tenure work on responsible investments in agriculture. It has focused its efforts on working with investment centres to review investment policies to ensure that they are VGGT compliant. This has been done in Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone and the United Republic of Tanzania. FAO is also working with investment centres to introduce safeguards to ensure the legitimate rights of communities are upheld and it has developed a legal guide to responsible investments.

The VGGTs and SSF Guidelines have influenced natural resource management, a key area covered by both. The implementation of the VGGTs and the SSF Guidelines has had a positive influence on food production. The VGGT implementation programme, supported by the World Bank, is now being implemented at scale and includes components for sustainability. A socioeconomic and environmental analysis were conducted before the project started and the World Bank has included VGGT safeguards to protect vulnerable groups.

The World Bank provides soft loans to countries with interest rates of zero to 10 percent. The assumption is that when all property is registered, buying and selling is easy, and the government can collect property tax and service charges. FAO’s land tenure-related support in the Russian Federation, for example, fell under the FAO/World Bank Cooperative Programme, which led the Government of the Russian Federation to adopt a new policy and develop a programme to improve land tenure. The World Bank, as part of its Doing Business project, supported the Russian Federation in setting up an e-property registration system accessible to all communities in the country’s nine time zones; properties can now be registered in mere minutes. The introduction of e-services goes hand in hand with changes in policy, legislation, capacity development and awareness-raising. The FAO has been providing technical assistance and know-how on the design and implementation of the project.

The SSF Guidelines are implemented through a partnership approach with government, small-scale fishers and fishworkers and their organizations at national and sub-national level, regional organizations, some NGOs, research organizations and academia. There is not much focus on the private sector, which tends to use coastal resources and compete with the fishing communities, though this is largely localized. The private sector is also more involved in the post-harvest value chain. Women’s groups that produce fish-powder products for export to other countries in

the region work with the private sector, but this needs further development. In general, private-sector engagement is still in its infancy as most of the interaction has been with small-scale value chains.

### 3.3.2 Holistic views and interconnectedness

Ministries that oversee land administration are the entry point for VGGT implementation. For SSF Guideline implementation, it is the ministry responsible for fisheries administration, which can be agriculture, fisheries or environment, depending on the country. The focal sectors then bring in other ministries they feel are important to the processes, such as finance, education, health, nutrition, tourism, youth, gender and women's economic empowerment.

The multi-stakeholder process used in VGGT implementation at national level allows for the participation of diverse actors, not just government agencies from different sectors, but NGOs, academia and the private sector, among others. This facilitates participatory processes, the interconnectedness of multiple sectors and holistic solutions, as stated in the guidelines. Sierra Leone is a good example of a country where the multi-stakeholder approach has continued to function, with frequent meetings to consult on land policy implementation. The Final Evaluation of the Global Programme to Support the Implementation of the VGGTs (2012–2016) also noted the value of this approach (FAO, 2017a).

### 3.3.3 Social inclusion to “leave no one behind”

Tenure rights link people and resources (land or water) and address multiple interests in the same resource over time. To address tenure issues is to address human relations and the balance of power. Implementing the VGGTs has helped to change the way tenure is viewed, enabling stakeholders to talk, negotiate, plan and decide over natural resources in a more transparent, participatory and equal way. Note that neither VGGT nor SSF Guideline implementation activities emphasize human rights, but focus on social inclusion and “leaving no one behind”. This is because some members view an emphasis on human rights as a direct attack on their human rights record. It is also important not to look at tenure in silos, such as land, forests, fisheries and water, but as a multisectoral dialogue. The land-tenure guidelines have been used to spark dialogue within communities on issues such as gender equity, have allowed pastoralists and indigenous communities to voice their rights and have enabled the less powerful to take part in discussions on laws relevant to them, such as in Mongolia and Sierra Leone.

Social inclusion has been at the heart of SSF Guideline implementation. Their purpose was to enable small-scale fishers, fishworkers and civil society organizations to bring concrete proposals to government that could improve their livelihoods. However, FAO's technical positioning still dominates some of its SSF work and may limit the social aspects.

The voluntary guidelines depend on political will and government priorities. Their implementation has to be respectful of national governments' prerogative to reform or not. The voluntary guidelines can be used to promote the rights of smallholders where there is political will to do so. This limitation may explain why progress has been confined to a few countries in Africa and the Western Balkans and has been rather slow in Latin America and Asia.

**Gender:** The key factors contributing to gender inequality are education, tradition and religion. In the rural areas of Africa and

the Western Balkans, the tradition is that the first son inherits everything, but in big cities, things are changing. The VGGTs have a section that speaks to law and tradition. There are widespread customs preventing women from having their names on property registers. In the Mekong region, which spans China, Myanmar, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam, where customary tenure is recognized and protected, work has been done to raise awareness of the rights of women and the importance of recognizing these rights. Women are now beginning to gain user rights on state-owned land – a role traditionally filled by the male head of household. In Cambodia and Myanmar, discussions are underway to include both husband and wife on tenure documents. This has not happened to date, according to the authorities, as the space on the standard form is too small for two names. This is a somewhat flimsy excuse, however, as forms can be changed in relatively short order.

It has been very difficult to reach the most vulnerable, however, who are most often the least informed when it comes to women's rights. It is important to build trust and avail of any snowball effect to gain access to other vulnerable communities to raise awareness. VGGT implementation addresses target SDG 5a, which calls for countries to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

In the Western Balkans, an assessment was conducted using the LAT. These results were used to report on SDG indicator 5.a.2, for which FAO is a custodian agency. There are numerous good practices in the Western Balkans that provide evidence of the progress made since VGGT endorsement. These include gender-disaggregated data from the property registration and cadastre IT systems, which show an increase in the share of properties with registered women owners or co-owners, from 9 percent in 2013 to 38 percent in 2019 (FAO, 2020i). The FAO multidisciplinary team from the Land Tenure, Gender and Legal Units, in tandem with the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and the GIZ regional teams from the Western Balkans and Caucasus, continue to support the nine gender teams in the Western Balkans with a view to achieving SDG indicator 5.a.2.

Gender is mainstreamed in and a major component of SSF Guideline implementation. Both men and women are included in the process, but women make up the majority of labour in post-harvest operations, while men dominate harvesting and fishing. FAO has been supporting fishers and fishworkers in exploring gender norms and access to fisheries for women. It recently conducted a training of trainers on gender-transformative approaches in Accra, led by the gender expert from the Regional Office in Ghana. The training was attended by government and FAO gender focal points from those countries where the SSF Guidelines are being implemented. The plan is to cascade the training nationally.

**Youth:** There is a crucial need to involve youth to secure their access to land and resources. In implementing the VGGTs, it is important to design processes and methodologies with a strategic focus on young people. They are familiar with technology and have been instrumental in participating in the demarcation of land using mobile phones. Training in the use of technology creates a link between young people and their knowledge of their community. Youth are not specifically mentioned in the SSF Guidelines, but are noted as an important group in the OED evaluation (FAO, 2017a). While there have been attempts to include youth in implementing



the VGGTs, more needs to be done. The same goes for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines where these have been recently introduced.

**People with disabilities:** People living with disabilities have been included in a project tied to school feeding programmes, which aims to boost the school attendance of children with disabilities. In terms of social inclusion, based on discussions with various FAO offices, this would appear to be one of FAO's weakest areas. More needs to be done in this regard, as every community has people with disabilities who must not be left behind.

**Indigenous peoples:** Indigenous peoples are cited specifically in the SSF Guidelines. Some donors, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), require the engagement of indigenous groups in order to address the challenges of their communities. The Climate Change Adaptation in the Eastern Caribbean Fisheries Sector (CC4FISH) project targets indigenous peoples (FAO, n.d.c).

One of the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines is consultation and participation for indigenous peoples. This means active, free, effective, meaningful and informed participation in the decision-making process to manage the fishery resources on which they depend. Their preferential access to fishery resources should be recognized, respected and protected in ways that are consistent with international human rights frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), and related standards, such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FAO, 2016).

The SSF Guidelines also recognize the traditional and local knowledge of small-scale fishers and fishworkers, including indigenous peoples. They call on countries and other actors to acknowledge and build on indigenous knowledge to restore, conserve, protect and co-manage local aquatic and coastal ecosystems. They also have a responsibility to make sure that indigenous peoples' knowledge, culture, traditions and practices inform local governance and development processes. For example, the SSF Guidelines call on states and other actors to provide small-scale fishing communities with technical and financial assistance to organize, maintain, exchange and improve traditional knowledge on fish and fishing techniques and to upgrade knowledge on water ecosystems (FAO, n.d.d).

In the context of implementing the SSF Guidelines, FAO has supported the capacity development of indigenous peoples, as well as the Costa Rican indigenous peoples' initiative to establish the regional Alliance of Central American Indigenous Fishers in 2018. In the same year, in Panama City, the Alliance hosted a workshop on territorial governance in fishing, focusing on the revitalization of various forms of Central American indigenous fishing for the affirmation of territorial management. The workshop was supported by FAO and the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples for Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC) (FAO, 2019f).

SDG 2 is the only SDG that makes specific reference to indigenous peoples. The SDGs have largely left indigenous peoples behind and targets do not include them. Indigenous peoples see first-hand the interaction between environment and culture, and they have vast knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next. While indigenous peoples have received some training on tenure issues, the tenure of indigenous peoples is not respected around the world and they are frequently excluded from discussions. Countries that have included indigenous peoples' rights include India, Indonesia and Guatemala.

Interviewees noted that FAO as an institution was not ready to fully integrate indigenous peoples into its programming and that FAO management had not taken the FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit (PSUI) seriously. An example was given of an FAO Country Office where indigenous people had requested to meet with the FAO Representative to discuss issues pertaining to indigenous people in agriculture, but their request was denied. More broadly, there are few personnel in the unit dealing with indigenous peoples and their issues are not mainstreamed throughout FAO's work.

There are more than 370 million self-identified indigenous peoples in more than 90 countries globally. Many of them rely heavily on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods, as well as for their food security and nutrition. For example, it is estimated that more than 30 million coastal indigenous peoples live in the Arctic and South Pacific regions, alone. Small-scale fisheries are also important to indigenous peoples' culture, heritage and way of life.

The traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples helps manage and maintain the planet's vital ecosystems and related food systems. Indigenous peoples, therefore, can play a major role in the efforts required to foster responsible management of resources and sustainable development. They can also be innovators and a driving force in ensuring food security and ending poverty. In spite of their strong stewardship, many indigenous peoples around the world face barriers to accessing, using and managing their fisheries resources effectively. Climate change also has a significant impact on the livelihoods and traditional fishing practices of indigenous peoples. It is important to support and recognize indigenous peoples as rights holders, particularly their right to small-scale fisheries, both for the people themselves and the sustenance of the ecosystems in which they live.

**Migrants:** SSF Guideline and VGGT implementation has involved limited work with migrants. In Sierra Leone, for example, the focus on migrants has been on migration that happened during the war, when people migrated to other areas and were given a parcel of land to farm. Over many years, those migrants have started to grab land, as they have no legal right to it. Some of these migrants were given land access and user rights, but not ownership. In implementing the VGGTs, gatekeepers have been tasked with making the migrants understand the importance of living in harmony and trying to resolve the land disputes through peaceful means.

Social inclusion and rights-based approaches should crosscut all FAO work, but are a challenge in practice, as they do not permeate throughout FAO. This could be partly down to the resistance of some members to the approach, arising from some contentious wording on slave labour. In the fisheries space, countries are more amenable to boosting human rights. This has opened discussions on social sustainability, including a call for FAO to champion socially responsible fisheries value chains. When it comes to implementing the VGGTs, land remains a very sensitive issue. However, efforts to make governments aware of their obligations continue in different countries. In recent years, FAO has increased its focus and emphasis on the participation of the private sector, through public-private partnerships, innovation and digital technology. If not done properly, commercial approaches can clash with the rights-based approach.

### 3.4 Factors contributing to a successful guideline experience

Stakeholders cited the following factors as contributing to successful guideline implementation:

- i. the creation of an enabling environment by governments and political parties, including the political will to make progress;
- ii. the presence of champions, or individuals that take up implementation and run with it;
- iii. the engagement of small-scale fishers and workers, by strengthening their organizations to have their voices heard;
- iv. capacity development as a key element in implementing both the VGGTs and SSF Guidelines, starting with the first rule of developing capacity at local level, to guarantee that when a project has ended, local people will be left with the capacity to sustain the results, as observed in the VGGT evaluation of 2017 (FAO, 2017a);
- v. the demand-driven nature of the process of implementing both sets of guidelines;
- vi. starting the project with a participatory review and mapping out positive examples, looking at what has been successful in the past, so as to follow suit and ensure sustainable outcomes;
- vii. the application of digital tools to create a different dynamic, making the processes far easier, especially when it comes to land tenure;
- viii. exchange visits between fisher folk and their peers to share experiences; and
- ix. donor support to be able to carry out the work and champion reform.

### 3.5 Capacity and ability to adapt and respond to crises, shocks and stresses

The COVID-19 pandemic showed how ill-prepared the world was for such a crisis. COVID-19 has affected all of FAO's work.

It has significantly impacted implementation activities at country level, while all regional and global conferences and seminars have been cancelled or held online on a smaller scale. This has created challenges, as not all countries have the same level of internet connectivity, especially in rural communities. Technology has played a key role in dealing with the pandemic but, in some countries, where communities have not been affected by lockdowns, local people have had to continue to work. This has helped to keep information flowing.

Contingency plans have had to be created to adapt workplans and budgets in some countries where there are concerns that public health-related restrictions, such as lockdowns, might affect production. The SSF Guidelines on the implementation process now include issues surrounding hygiene in markets, which has meant increasing and adjusting budgets. Some project funds have had to be adjusted for activities related to COVID-19, for example, hygiene awareness, hand-washing stations and pamphlets to promote measures to prevent infection. In the Eastern Caribbean, a webpage has been set up to collect information on COVID-19 and SSF for use in learning how different activities can support SSF.

Indigenous people have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis. In some countries, miners and loggers are reportedly moving on lands usually occupied by indigenous communities, but who have been unable to do so because of travel restrictions. The FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL) is in the process of addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with a series of new guides.

The CC4FISH project and many other projects in the Western Caribbean have conducted assessments and predictions of extreme events. There is also a focus on "building back better" to ensure resilience. The region experiences frequent shocks. Indeed, in hurricane Maria, FAO Fisheries Division (NFI) facilities were destroyed to the extent that they could no longer provide support to fishers. Here, the project helped the division to get back to work and assist the fishers in "building back better".

It became apparent that in most countries that participated in interviews, as well as at the global level, FAO has limited capacity to deal with shocks and crises. However, in countries that frequently experience shocks and crises, there were built-in mechanisms to deal with such events.

## 4. Contribution to FAO's positioning

FAO has been facilitating and taking a leadership role in the implementation of both the VGGTs and SSF Guidelines with other partners. This has given the Organization an opportunity to show leadership in the sustainable management of resources and food production. FAO is perceived as the leading organization on the implementation of the VGGTs and is visible in those countries that are implementing them. This gives FAO a competitive advantage when it comes to broadening its sectoral reach. As an intergovernmental agency, it has a direct working relationship with governments and is able to facilitate multilevel policy dialogue, including with non-state actors and farmers. FAO has the mandate and institutional structure to steer government attention to sectors such as forestry, fisheries and land administration.

However, interviewees noted that FAO's mechanisms were too bureaucratic at headquarters level, slowing implementation. Once a link with government, other stakeholders and communities has been established at country level, however, it is possible to conduct field activities outside that bureaucracy.

The SSF Guidelines are being included in policies at global and regional level and this shows that FAO's position is recognized. A number of global documents are taking on board the SSF Guidelines and including them in investment strategies and activities. As more partners refer to the SSF Guidelines, development investments and activities should increase synergies, giving them greater impact. Related key developments include:

- i. The annual European Fisheries Development Advisors Network meeting held in Sweden in June 2018 discussed the importance of small-scale fisheries actors participating in global and regional processes, highlighting examples of FAO's support for strengthening organizations.
- ii. The German Ministry for Development Cooperation has a 10-point action plan on marine conservation and sustainable fisheries that includes the SSF Guidelines.
- iii. In September 2019, FAO was invited to brief a regional conference of GIZ staff members, consultants and implementing partners from small-scale fishery and aquaculture projects in Uganda, Mauritania, Malawi, Madagascar and Zambia on the SSF Guidelines and what it means to implement them.
- iv. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have published a guide on advancing gender in the environment: *Gender in Fisheries*, which also refers to the SSF Guidelines (Siles et al., 2019).
- v. Oak Foundation has developed a funding stream for small-scale fisheries that supports the implementation of the SSF Guidelines (Oak Foundation, 2017).
- vi. GEF 6 and 7 Programming Directions refer to the SSF Guidelines under the International Waters Portfolio.

## 5. Lessons, challenges and opportunities

### 5.1 Lessons learned

Stakeholders and FAO personnel identified the following lessons:

- i. Government support, commitment and engagement are important.
- ii. The multi-stakeholder approach used in implementing the VGGTs has worked well. The involvement and support of other organizations and NGOs has been important. All stakeholders should be engaged from the start, as they must have ownership of the process.
- iii. It is important to create an enabling environment where dialogue can happen.
- iv. The approach to implementing the VGGTs needs to be holistic and it is important to create synergies.
- v. National task teams should be established at the start of the VGGT implementation process, along with a full implementation plan.
- vi. There needs to be a good initial country assessment, which should be carried out together with all stakeholders, including local communities, in a participatory process.
- vii. VGGT and SSF Guideline implementation requires time and the processes cannot be rushed.
- viii. Simplified versions of both sets of guidelines are useful and make them easier for stakeholders to understand.
- ix. Working in partnerships is effective and makes it possible to operate at scale.
- x. The capacity development of stakeholders is key to successful implementation. It should be comprehensive and conducted at the beginning of the process.
- xi. Technology is relevant and fundamental to the implementation of land-tenure processes.
- xii. From a land-tenure perspective, it is important to have functioning customary institutions to support tenure rights.

- xiii. The decentralization of land services to local authorities is important.
- xiv. South–South exchange helps countries to learn from each other.

### 5.2 Challenges

Stakeholders and FAO personnel cited the following challenges:

- i. Changes in government and political parties have been a major challenge in implementing policy-related interventions. When a government changes, this may mean starting anew, which delays and affects progress. For example, in Myanmar, the new government made no progress on passing its land policy for two years, until it realized that it was formulated through a multi-stakeholder approach.
- ii. Changes at ministerial level also affect implementation. Countries gave examples of how they had experienced a lot of change and had to re-establish a lot of processes.
- iii. A lack of coordination between different government institutions, due to unclear mandates and overlaps, can delay and disrupt processes.
- iv. The lack of adequate financing is a barrier. Funding is required to implement good practices and for upscaling. In addition, when it came to implementing the SSF Guidelines, the funding horizon and related timelines did not allow for a more strategic view and affected team size. The VGGTs have been implemented by the FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL) and funded through a trust fund, but changes in donor funding streams have had an impact. There are limited resources to allow the team to measure impact against the SDG targets.
- v. The text of the VGGTs is too abstract for many countries, so it takes them a long time to understand them, identify a window of opportunity and link VGGT activities to an ongoing national process.
- vi. Competition between sectors at national level is a hindrance to upscaling good practices.

- vii. It is a struggle to ensure that fisheries do not fall off FAO's radar, as there is a tendency to focus on land-based agriculture.
- viii. The existence of multiple languages in a country – such as Guatemala, where there are 22 languages – poses a documentation and communications challenge.
- ix. Political instability and civil war are a major challenge, as they prevent the implementation of the guidelines. Again, for example, in Guatemala, there are two territories where implementation has not been possible due to civil war. In Sudan, security and mobility restrictions have hampered work.
- x. Small-scale fisher networks at national and regional level are inefficiently organized and donors are unwilling to support them.
- xi. Countries often have little capacity to implement the guidelines.
- xii. There is institutional uncertainty within FAO amid many structural changes.
- xiii. COVID-19 has caused members and FAO to lose focus on implementing the guidelines. FAO's corporate response has focused on food prices and supply.

### 5.3 Opportunities and ideas for scaling up

There is growing recognition of both the SSF Guidelines and the VGGTs. In addition to consolidating partnerships, global processes are now including the guidelines in donor funding strategies. Academia has taken on board the SSF Guidelines and started writing and developing scholarships around the guidelines in peer reviewed journal articles. The International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2022 is an opportunity to create a platform for scaling-up the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The International Decade of Family Farming also provides an opportunity to mobilize efforts and financial resources to continue work on the VGGTs and land tenure.

There is also ever greater realization that land and natural resources not only have a social value, but a sustainability value: both the VGGTs and the SSF Guidelines are central to food systems and the climate change agenda. To ensure the sustainability of food production systems, it is important to address land administration and tenure rights, which are achievable in the framework of the VGGTs. There is now the technical capacity to implement the VGGTs and this has been tested successfully. There are partners

ready, willing and able to implement both the VGGTs and the SSF Guidelines. There are vibrant partnerships on land, notably with USAID, DFID, Irish Aid and many others. FAO land tenure-related support in the Russian Federation (and in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and others) under the FAO/World Bank Cooperative Programme is an opportunity to increase the Organization's work on land tenure.

Some ideas for scaling-up implementation include learning from national experiences and developing more tools and training for governments in countries that have not yet been reached. The FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL) is creating an online community of practice with the Land Portal on the impact of COVID-19 in order to address issues arising from the crisis. In addition, work is underway on a global report on land governance with a view to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

### 5.4 Use of innovation and digital technologies

SOLA is used to support the implementation of the VGGTs. This software allows the demarcation of community land in a simple and inexpensive way, unlike land surveying. It shows that with new technology, geospatial data can be developed in a participatory way. FAO provides tablets, software and technical guidelines to the communities in question and the communities do the mapping work. SOLA is currently being used in Sierra Leone. The software is updated as the system evolves and has worked well to date.

In other regions, such as the Western Balkans, high-resolution satellite imaging has been used to map illegal buildings. Government authorities can click on the map and see buildings that are unregistered. A process is now in place to verify ownership of these buildings and check whether they are secure before registering them. It has been noted that the price of such houses rises immediately after being registered. It is important that technology usage is at a level a country can handle and support; in other words, the technology must be fit for purpose. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been greater use of virtual platforms to maintain engagement with countries and stakeholders.

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines has not incorporated technology other than the online guides. The assumption is that small-scale fishers largely have low levels of education and may not have access to technology. There is, however, room for innovation in this area.



## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

We have drawn the following conclusions from the evaluation:

**Conclusion 1.** There has been some progress on implementing both the VGGTs and the SSF Guidelines, with more success observed in the former. This is understandable, as the VGGTs (2012) preceded the SSF Guidelines (2015). Implementation of both takes time due to the nature of the processes involved. However, FAO seems to compartmentalize the implementation of the two sets of guidelines and not address them as a whole.

**Conclusion 2.** The initial approach to implementing the SSF Guidelines, at a regional rather than a national level due to limited funding, may have affected the achievement of results.

**Conclusion 3.** The VGGTs and the SSF Guidelines have speeded progress in terms of contributions to SDG 2 and other SDGs, but to varying degrees in different countries, possibly due to national idiosyncrasies. Policy processes are country-led, so each state has its own priorities and timelines. It was noted that FAO personnel in Rome did not necessarily link results to the SDGs and their targets. Personnel at country level were better able to relate their results to the SDGs, including the targets, though they did not necessarily report against SDGs at project level.

**Conclusion 4.** There is still much to do on the social inclusion of youth and people with disabilities if we are to “leave no one behind”. Progress has been made on the inclusion of indigenous peoples, but more needs to be done through a systematic, Organization-driven approach.

**Conclusion 5.** The multi-stakeholder approach taken at national level to implement the VGGTs is an effective way of bringing together different sectors, NGOs and communities, promoting participation and setting the stage for sustainability.

**Conclusion 6.** The shift in FAO’s focus to the private sector, public-private partnerships and innovation may negatively affect both fishers and indigenous communities. Similarly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fisher communities may reverse past gains.

### 6.2 Recommendations

We would make the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1.** SDG 2 is at the core of FAO’s mandate. It is, therefore, imperative that all units are cognisant of how their work contributes to SDG 2 and its specific targets.

**Recommendation 2.** Each country is unique, with a different context. Patience and a long-term view are required. It is important to incorporate the implementation of the VGGTs and SSF Guidelines into FAO’s ongoing programmes at country level, rather than as a stand-alone process.

**Recommendation 3.** There needs to be more engagement with the private sector, particularly the industrial sector, which can be leveraged to support post-harvest and marketing opportunities, so as to strengthen SSF Guideline implementation.

**Recommendation 4.** It is important to scale-up first in countries where the two sets of guidelines have been implemented and consolidate those gains. This should be followed by a scale-up in neighbouring countries, encouraging regional approaches where possible.

**Recommendation 5.** FAO should adopt a holistic approach and avoid working in silos in order to foster collaboration.

**Recommendation 6.** FAO should consolidate new ideas into existing guidelines, instead of developing completely new guidelines, leading to inadequate focus and funding to implement existing guidelines. For example, the VGGTs already had a fisheries component. It would have made sense to add a component of small-scale fisheries to the VGGTs, rather than create separate guidelines.

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## Annex 1. People interviewed

Surname	Name	Organization/Division	Position
<b>VGT</b>			
Gamboa	Klemen	FAO Guatemala	Project Associate
Jansen	Louisa	FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL)	Land Officer
Mabikke	Samuel	FAO Sierra Leone	Natural Resource Management Officer
Molina Cruz	Javier	FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL)	Land Tenure Unit Coordinator
Risso	Maria Paola	FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL)	Land Tenure Officer
Romano	Francesca	FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL)	Land Tenure Officer
Tonchovska	Rumyana	FAO Land Tenure Unit (PSUL)	Senior Land Administration Officer- Information Technology
Yansanjav	Narangerel	People Centered Conservation (PCC), Mongolia	
<b>SSF</b>			
Ahern	Molly	FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department	Food Security and Nutrition Specialist
Amarasinghe	Oscar	Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries	President
Brunel	Anne	FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit (PSUI)	Indigenous Food Systems
Calza Bini	Edoardo	FAO Family Farming and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations Unit (PSUF)	Family Farming and Partnership Consultant
Diei-Ouadi	Yvette	FAO Subregional Office for the Caribbean	Fishery and Aquaculture Officer for Sub-regional Office, Secretary for Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAF)
Fernández de Larrinoa	Yon	FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit (PSUI)	Indigenous Peoples Team Leader
Franz	Nicole	FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department	Fishery Planning Analyst
Kumara	Herman	National Fisheries Solidarity Movement	National Convener, Sri Lanka
Lucci	Emanuele	Crotevia	Assistant Project Manager for SSF Working Group
Lucidi	Velia	Crotevia	Assistant Project Manager for SSF Working Group
Mgawe	Yahya	SSF National Task Team	Chair, Tanzania
Mills	Dave	World Fish	Fisheries Specialist
Simmanse	Fiona	World Fish	Fish in Food System Scientist
Westlund	Lena	SSF	Consultant, SSF

## Evaluation of FAO's contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 2

*"End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"*

Signature Product 1: Legal and parliamentary work on food and nutrition security

Signature Product 2: Nutrition education

Signature Product 3: Support to value chain development

### **Signature Product 4: Support to secure tenure of natural resources through VGGTs and other guidelines**

Signature Product 5: Farmer field schools and their derivatives

Signature Product 6: Control of transboundary plant diseases and pests

Signature Product 7: Agroecology

Signature Product 8: Protection and fair share of genetic resources for food and agriculture

Signature Product 9: South-South and triangular cooperation

Signature Product 10: Support to agricultural investment

Signature Product 11: Support to fair and informed commodity markets and international trade in agriculture

Signature Product 12: Rural women's empowerment

Signature Product 13: Food for the cities and urban agriculture

Signature Product 14: Aquaculture promotion and Blue Growth

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