

SSF GUIDELINES UPTAKE AND INFLUENCE A pathway to impact

In 2014, the **Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication** (SSF Guidelines) were endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI). Since then, many steps have been taken to implement the SSF Guidelines. This has led to policy environments that enable the values that small-scale fisheries provide to food and nutrition security, livelihoods and employment, and environmental stewardship to continue and increase. For instance, several governments have adopted or are developing national plans of action for SSF Guidelines implementation, funders increasingly reference adherence to the SSF Guidelines in their grants, and small-scale fishers and fishworkers are driving uptake of the SSF Guidelines through bottom-up processes. This brief highlights the milestones on the journey to implement the SSF Guidelines, and meet the principles therein, at national, regional and global levels. This brief also identifies priority areas for further action to ensure small-scale fisheries continue to reflect and generate nutrition, livelihood and stewardship values.

A SOCIAL ENGINE: About small-scale fisheries

Small-scale fisheries encompass all activities along the value chain – pre-harvest, harvest and post harvest – in both marine and inland waters. Small-scale fisheries play an important role in food security and nutrition, and provide an opportunity for poverty eradication, equitable development and sustainable resource utilization. Over half of the fisheries catch in developing countries is harvested by small-scale fisheries, and 90 to 95 percent (World Bank, 2012) of the small-scale catch is destined for consumption by relatively nearby populations. Small-scale fisheries employ more than 90 percent¹ (World Bank, 2012) of the world's capture fishers and fishworkers, about half of whom are women¹.

1. New research is under way that will provide additional data on small-scale fisheries - see Box 1.

In spite of their importance, small-scale fisheries are often marginalized from physical, economic and governance spaces, and fishers and fishworkers are frequently left out of decision-making processes. Formal statistics on food production and employment tend to overlook the contributions made by small-scale fisheries. As a result, small-scale fisheries' concerns tend to be inadequately addressed, both with regard to resource management and from a broader social and economic development perspective. The marginalization also means the food and security and livelihoods values of small-scale fisheries may be undermined or suboptimal, and may accentuate power and economic inequalities. The SSF Guidelines, based on a human-rights approach, were developed to draw attention and build commitment to the sector, in accordance with the vision of success, sustainability and equity generated by small-scale fisheries stakeholders themselves.



SUCCESS FACTORS: Driving uptake of the SSF Guidelines

Since 2014, there have been policy changes at global, regional and national scales (see page 4), providing an important framework for supporting positive developments at local levels. Both bottom-up and top-down approaches are used to drive uptake of and commitment to the SSF Guidelines (Figure 1). Where these approaches have been successful, they have built buy-in from and engagement with all different actors involved in the subsector – social movements and civil society representing small-scale fishers and fishworkers, governments, development partners, international and regional organizations, academia, and environmental and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

FIGURE 1: Pathway to impact for SSF Guidelines

SSF GUIDELINES

GLOBAL

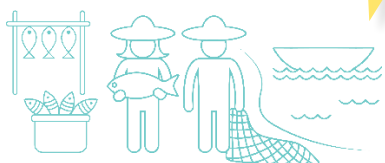
Policy processes: SDG 14b, 2030
UN Decade of Family Farming
UN Declaration on the Rights to Peasants
Committee on Food Security

REGIONAL

Fisheries policies
Economic policies
SSF working groups

NATIONAL

National plans of action
Fisheries policy & legislation
Food policies
Social policies



LOCAL ACTION AND IMPACT



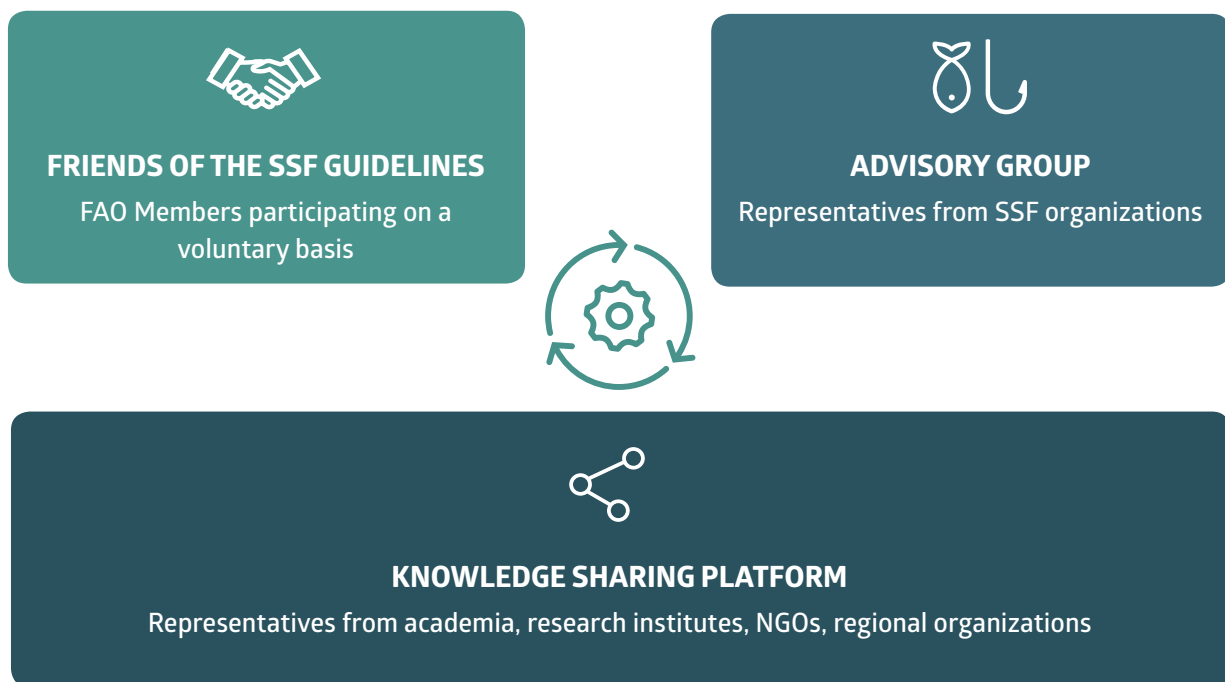
To create a space for collaboration, in 2016, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) facilitated the development of the [Global Strategic Framework](#) – SSF-GSF (FAO, 2020a), which is a partnership mechanism to support all actors in implementing the SSF Guidelines (Figure 2). Members of the SSF-GSF include groups that are directly involved in the subsector or represent the interests of small-scale fisheries – such as small-scale fisheries social movements and civil society organizations – and those working to support implementation of the SSF Guidelines, such as government representatives and other stakeholders. The members of the SSF-GSF can share experiences, mobilize resources, develop synergies and coordinate efforts to advocate for policies and approaches that support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. One key objective of the SSF-GSF is to give social movements and civil society, represented in the SSF-GSF Advisory Group (FAO, 2020b), an opportunity to advise others on how they would like to see the SSF Guidelines put into action.



**THE SSF
GUIDELINES ARE
AVAILABLE IN
20 LANGUAGES:**

Arabic • Bengali
Burmese • Chinese
English • French • Hindi
Indonesian • Japanese
Kannada • Malayalam
Oriya • Portuguese
Russian • Sinhalese
Spanish • Swahili
Tamil • Telugu • Thai

FIGURE 2: Global Strategic Framework in support of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines



Who actively commits support to implement the SSF Guidelines?

SMALL-SCALE FISHERS AND FISHWORKERS

through their social movements and civil society organizations, continue to drive SSF Guidelines implementation by engaging in partnership mechanisms and policy processes. Globally, for instance, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers (WFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) are represented in the SSF-GSF Advisory Group. Regionally, in Africa for example, there are the African Confederation of Artisanal Fisheries Organizations (CAOPA), the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET), and the Federation of the Fishers of the Indian Ocean (FPAOI).

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS include the SSF Guidelines in policy discussions and strategies. Examples of such organizations are the African Union, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM), the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC).

GLOBAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

reflect and call for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in global policy processes, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; in particular, SDG 14.b), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy.

GOVERNMENTS support national implementation by referencing the SSF Guidelines in policies and strategies, and national plans of action, or other actions dedicated to small-scale fisheries. Countries currently supported by FAO projects include Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, India, Madagascar, Malawi, Myanmar, Namibia, Oman, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda.

DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE PARTNERS

fund SSF Guidelines implementation activities and programmes. Examples of such partners are the development agencies of Germany, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America, and donors like Oak Foundation and GEF.

NGOs WORKING IN FISHERIES, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, including Bread for the World, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), SwedBio, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA work in support of the SSF Guidelines and/or include them in their curriculums, for example, WorldFish, Too Big To Ignore (TBTI), Duke University, the Centre for Resource Management & Environmental Studies/University of West Indies, United Nations University in Iceland, and Wageningen University in the Netherlands. The Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) collaborative initiative (see Box 1) highlights the social, environmental and economic contributions of small-scale fisheries globally.



Big numbers



About

1 100

articles and reports

published between 2014 and 2020 refer to the SSF Guidelines with an increasing trend – 279 items were found in 2020, compared to 61 in 2015 and 41 in 2014²

More than

10

global, regional and subregional small-scale



fisheries social movements and civil society organizations,

including women and indigenous peoples' organizations, and representing many thousands of small-scale fishers and fishworkers, have been supported by FAO³



Government representatives and other stakeholders from

80

countries participated in seven regional awareness

raising and consultation events on the SSF Guidelines organized by FAO (in collaboration with regional partners) in 2015–2018³

50

countries implement the SSF Guidelines



in various ways, with FAO support or through engagement with other projects, initiatives and organizations³

Over

35 000

page views



of the SSF Guidelines webpage on the FAO website in 2019 and 2020³



2. Based on a search of the SSF Guidelines in Google Scholar from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020.

3. Information compiled from various FAO reports and webpage analyses conducted in early 2021.

FROM THE SSF GUIDELINES TO RESEARCH: Emerging top themes

“Governance”, “gender”, “management”, “marine” and “sustainable” are some of the most common terms used in publication titles that reference the SSF Guidelines (Figure 3).

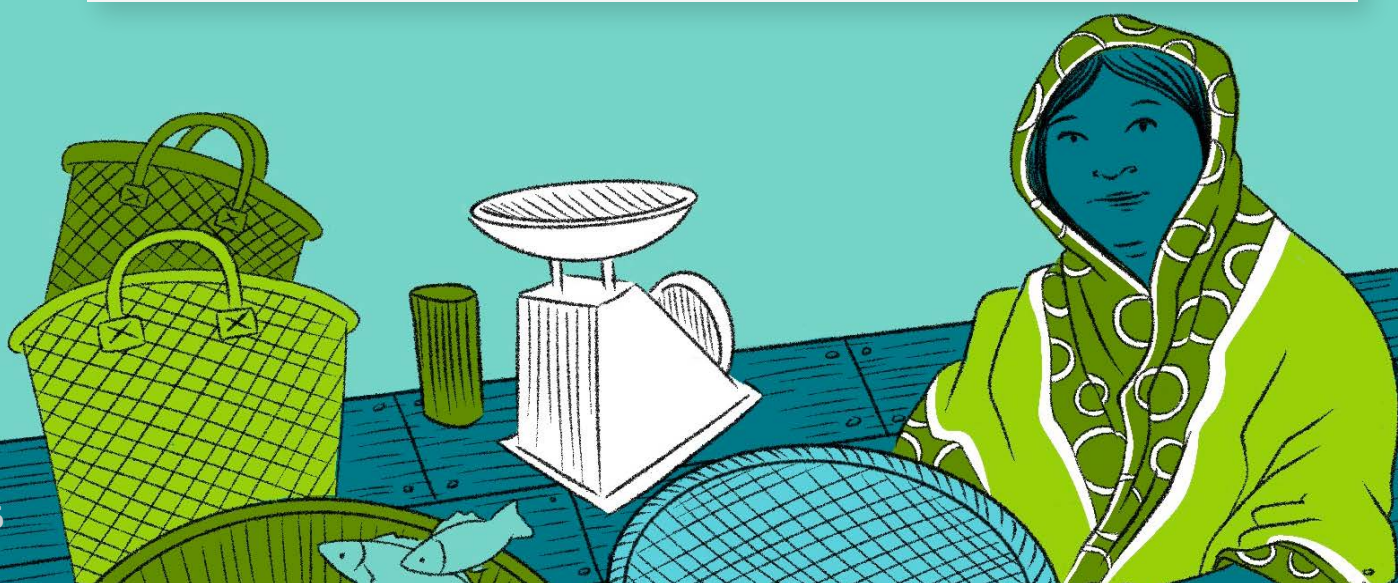
FIGURE 3: A word cloud of the top 95 title terms in publications released in 2014–2020 that cited or referenced the SSF Guidelines



BOX 1: RESEARCH TO HIGHLIGHT THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

The **Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH)** is a collaborative global initiative by FAO, Duke University and the WorldFish to generate and disseminate new evidence on the current contributions of small-scale fisheries globally. The initiative will help to inform global policymaking processes and empower fishing communities, their organizations and advocates to make a strong case for productive, sustainable and equitable small-scale fisheries. The knowledge generated supports implementation of the SSF Guidelines and progress toward the SDGs.

A main output of the IHH initiative will be a research report released in 2022. Building on the 2012 **Hidden Harvest study**, the IHH report delves deeper into the social, environmental, and economic contributions and governance arrangements of marine and inland small-scale fisheries at global and local scales. The report is based on 58 country and territory case studies and 104 survey responses from national fisheries administrations, which feed into a global synthesis and thematic studies.



Global and regional milestones: the journey to SSF Guidelines uptake

Since the SSF Guidelines were endorsed by COFI in 2014, a number of significant global and regional commitments and activities have taken place to support implementation.

2014

The **SSF Guidelines** are endorsed by COFI.
The **GEF** includes, for the first time, implementation of the SSF Guidelines as a priority in its **International Waters programming framework**.

2015

The **SDGs** are agreed, including SDG 14.b to provide access of small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.
The **Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)** starts to support the FAO SSF Umbrella Programme (FAO, 2019)⁶, which supports implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

2016

The Thirteenth Conference of the Parties (COP-13) of the **CBD** recognizes the importance of the SSF Guidelines in mainstreaming biodiversity in fisheries and aquaculture (Decision XIII/3).

2017

The **Oak Foundation** launches their 2017–2022 strategy for SSF, with the vision to build a field that effectively improves small-scale fisheries governance based on the SSF Guidelines.

2018

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas is adopted and refers to the SSF Guidelines.

2019

The **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)** starts to support the FAO SSF Umbrella Programme.

2021

The **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)** Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition refer to the SSF Guidelines.

2014

The **African Union** publishes the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS), which includes a small-scale fisheries section and reference to the SSF Guidelines.

2015

SEAFDEC supports the first regional workshop on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, organized by FAO and Indonesia.

2016

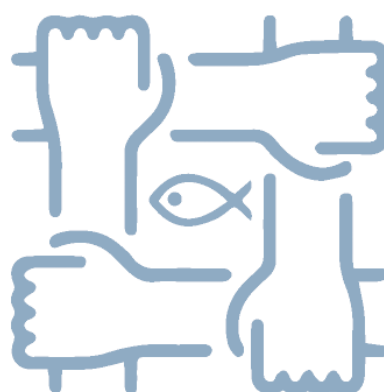
OSPESCA, the Confederation of Artisanal Fisherfolk of Central America and FAO establish an inter-sectoral working group on small-scale fisheries for SSF Guidelines implementation in member countries.

2018

CRFM adopts the Protocol on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, a separate provision under the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy, integrating the SSF Guidelines into the fisheries policies of 17 Caribbean countries.
The members of the **GFCM** sign a ten-year Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF) based on the SSF Guidelines.

2020

SEAFDEC, Indonesia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat and FAO organize a Regional Workshop on Assessing the Needs of ASEAN Member States in Implementing the SSF Guidelines to Support Access to Markets.



REGIONAL

GLOBAL

Reaffirming their commitments

At the Thirty-fourth Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries, held on 1–5 February 2021, members and observers reconfirmed their commitment to the SSF Guidelines.



MEMBER STATEMENTS



“The [European Union] **EU and its Member States** are fully committed to implementing the FAO voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries. The EU Common Fisheries Policy contains a number of provisions designed to take on board the specificities of small-scale coastal fisheries, including through dedicated financing.”



“**Indonesia** underlines the role of the SSF Guidelines as a tool to achieve the SDGs and supports the FAO activities in encouraging the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.”



“We [**Mexico**] recognize the high value of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (VGSSF) as an instrument to support the achievement of the SDGs.”



“We [**the Philippines**] join in reiterating the importance of enhancing the contribution of small-scale and artisanal fisheries to global, regional and national efforts to eradicate hunger and eliminate poverty, including in the context of the **International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA)** in 2022 [see Box 2], and in noting progress by FAO and partners in the effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines.”



“The **United States [of America]** looks forward to celebrating IYAFA next year and plans to actively engage in promoting the importance of the small-scale sector as part of this important event.”



OBSERVER STATEMENTS



CAOPA: “The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis offer us the opportunity to radically rethink coastal development in Africa and globally, creating an enabling environment for sustainable artisanal fisheries through the implementation of FAO Guidelines.”



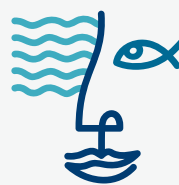
ICSF: “[There is] continued relevance of the SSF Guidelines in providing direction to the formulation of small-scale fisheries policies, strategies and legislation at the regional and national levels in many developing countries.”



SSF-GSF Advisory Group: “... the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and their holistic, human-rights based approach, is more relevant and urgent than ever.”

BOX 2: SHINING A LIGHT ON SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN 2022

The International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) represents a key moment to increase global understanding of the SSF Guidelines and encourage action to implement them at local to global levels. 2022 will be an inflection point for enabling small-scale fisheries values.



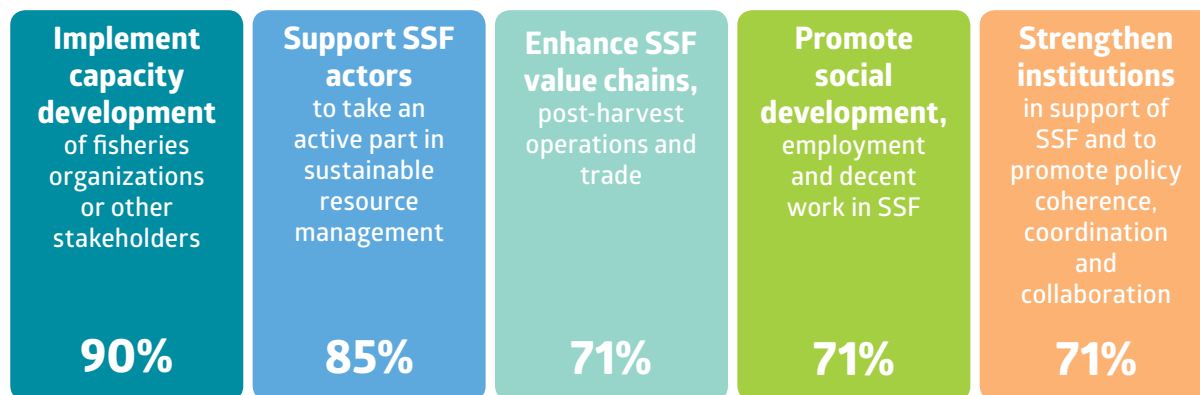
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
**ARTISANAL FISHERIES
AND AQUACULTURE**
2022

In 2022, IYAFA aims to focus world attention on the role that small-scale fishers, fish farmers and fishworkers play in food security and nutrition, poverty eradication and sustainable natural resource use, and enhance dialogue between different actors.

TAKING ACTION: How governments are implementing the SSF Guidelines

In the 2020 FAO biennial [Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries questionnaire](#), FAO Members were asked if they had introduced specific initiatives to implement the SSF Guidelines. Forty-one (45 percent) of the 92 respondents answered positively, with all others reporting that they intended to do so in the future. Examples of these initiatives were related to capacity development, supporting SSF actors, enhancing value chains, promoting social development and strengthening institutions (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: How do FAO Members implement the SSF Guidelines?



Based on 41 responses to the 2020 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries questionnaire.



Case studies from across the world

Several countries are taking proactive steps to implement the SSF Guidelines at the national level, providing a positive example to other countries.

COSTA RICA

In 2014, the government signed a [national decree](#) calling for support to small-scale fisheries organizations. Accordingly, the Costa Rican Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture has engaged with small-scale fishers and fishworkers as well as academia, NGOs and legislators to develop a [draft law on small-scale fisheries](#) that is currently (2021) with the Costa Rican Parliament for approval. Small-scale fishers in Costa Rica have successfully collaborated with the government to establish a shared governance model, known as “[Marine Areas for Responsible Fisheries](#)”. This model is being scaled up across the country and integrates efforts toward sustainable fishing; it also helps small-scale fishing communities maintain their cultural identity and way of life.

CABO VERDE

The Government of Cabo Verde enacted a new Decree in 2020 (Legislative Decree No. 2 of 2020 defining the general management regime of fishing activities in national maritime waters and on the high seas). The Decree considers the important social and economic contributions of small-scale fisheries, especially to the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities and to the national economy, and explicitly calls for fisheries management to foster and support measures for sustainable small-scale fisheries, in line with the SSF Guidelines.



Source: UN map No. 4170 Rev. 19, October 2020.

UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

In March 2021, a national plan of action for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines (NPOA-SSF) was launched. The NPOA-SSF was developed through a consultative process led by an SSF Guidelines National Task Team under the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries. Along the way, in 2019, the Tanzanian Women Fish Workers Association was established, facilitating the engagement of women in discussions and consultations. The next step is the implementation of the NPOA-SSF; the Ministry has called for broad support from all stakeholders to contribute and align activities and workplans with the action plan.

OMAN

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth and Water acknowledges the importance of the SSF Guidelines in Oman, where small-scale fisheries are important and, in particular, contribute to domestic fish supplies. In 2015, the Sultanate of Oman hosted a regional consultative workshop on the SSF Guidelines. The Ministry continues to implement various programmes and projects to support small-scale fisheries and develop the capacities of small-scale fishers and fishworkers to ensure a future for the traditional profession in Oman. This includes supporting women who are involved in fishing and related activities, such as seafood processing and marketing, in creating coastal women fisheries associations with a view to improve their access to resources, assets, services, technologies and economic opportunities.

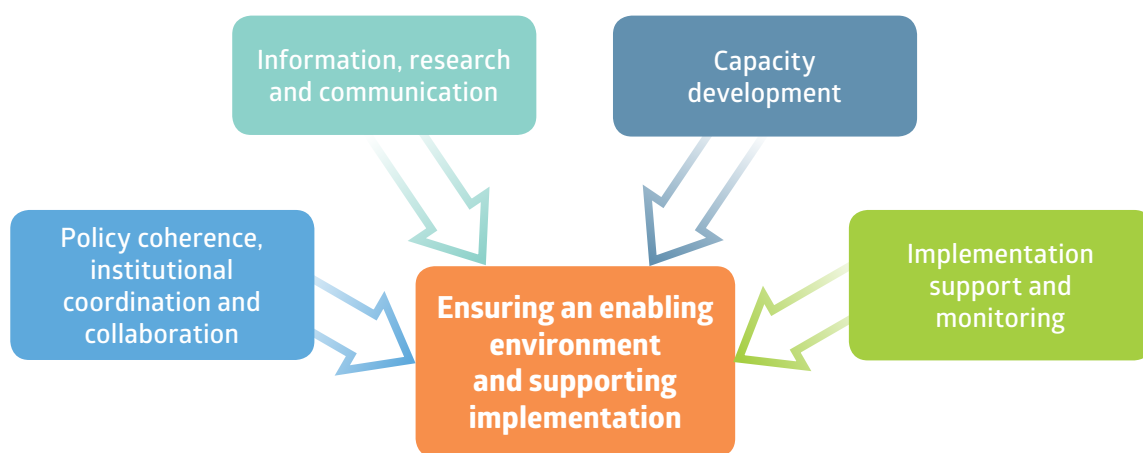
INDONESIA

Indonesia supports the SSF Guidelines and has enacted legislation to empower and protect small-scale fishers and fishworkers in support of their implementation. Indonesia has also taken an active role regionally and hosted, together with FAO, the first [regional consultation workshop](#) for SSF Guidelines implementation in 2015, and in 2020, a workshop on assessing the needs of the ASEAN Member States in implementing the SSF Guidelines to support access to markets.

ON THE HORIZON: Towards more widespread and impactful implementation of the SSF Guidelines

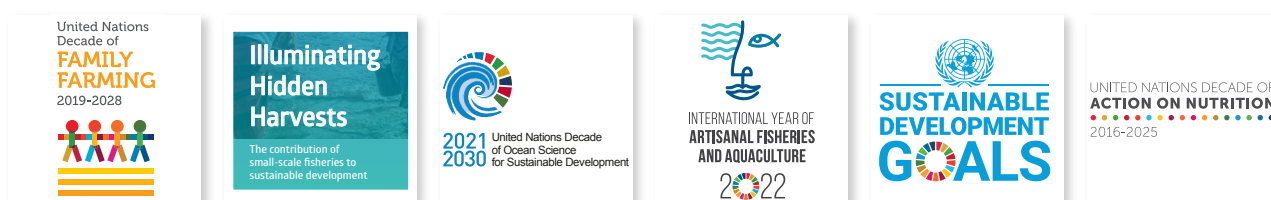
As competition in physical, economic and governance spaces intensifies in relation to food systems and the use of aquatic resources, ensuring commitments to fishers and fishworkers is necessary to avoid impacts such as marginalization, widening inequalities and food insecurity. Decisions and policy directions at high levels can impact upon the lives and livelihoods of actors working at local levels. Continued collaboration, alignment, awareness of, and commitment to the SSF Guidelines are necessary to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries and create fair livelihoods for all the women and men working in the sector and their communities. Critically, an environment that enables small-scale fisheries to persist and thrive includes improved policy and legal frameworks and the development of the capacity of SSF organizations and government institutions to work together more effectively for a sustainable future for small-scale fisheries, benefitting their communities and society at large (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: Enabling environment to support implementation of the SSF Guidelines



To further accelerate uptake of the SSF Guidelines, small-scale fisheries need to continue to build knowledge of their values and contributions to food security and nutrition. A key set of upcoming events provide important moments for small-scale fisheries to rally, to further raise awareness and encourage action around the SSF Guidelines, and share this knowledge beyond the fisheries sector to influence policies and actions (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: Global agendas and events to raise awareness of and enable small-scale fisheries contributions



With the SSF Guidelines and their constructive recommendations for how to deal with small-scale fisheries governance and development, the situation and policy arena are starting to change. By putting the guidelines into practice, the way is being paved for positive impacts on the lives and livelihoods of rural and coastal communities. Now let us all capitalize on this enabling environment and take action for real impact on the ground.



Acknowledgments:

This brief was developed by FAO and as part of the CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems (FISH) led by WorldFish. The FISH program is supported by contributors to the CGIAR Trust Fund. Funding support for this work was provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) as part of their support to the FAO SSF Umbrella Programme and the Oak Foundation in the framework of the Building capacity, coordination and communication for collective action on small-scale fisheries project.

References:

- FAO. 2019. *Enhancing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and sustainable livelihoods*. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6958en/CA6958EN.pdf>).
- FAO. 2020a. *Global Strategic Framework*. FAO, Rome. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7737en/CA7737EN.pdf>).
- FAO. 2020b. *Introducing the Advisory Group* (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8803en/CA8803EN.pdf>).
- World Bank. 2012. *Hidden Harvest: The Global Contribution of Capture Fisheries*. Washington, D.C. (also available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/11873>).

Drawings by Manuela Marazzi – Graphic design by José Luis Castilla Civit

Learn more and get in touch



SSF-Guidelines@fao.org



www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en/



#SmallScaleFisheries, #SSFGuidelines, @FAOfish



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence