



## International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty Working Group on Fisheries

### IPC statement in response to Agenda Item 13.1 - Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture

Esteemed members of the Governmental Delegations,  
Dear COFI observers,

We, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), La Via Campesina (LVC), members of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), stand for policies and innovations that support small-scale fisheries rather than promoting high technological business models that condemns them to precarious and overexploited seasonal work or to migration, reaffirming the legitimacy of small-scale food fisheries and their communities to be at the centre of effective development for a sustainable and richer future.

When it comes to food security, FAO recognises the primary role of small-scale fishers in feeding the world, as for example through the UN International Year of Family Farming and the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDF). Nevertheless, although small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples and their communities, but also peasants, rural workers, are those who mainly feed the world, they remain the most exposed groups to social and economic marginalization up to starvation. This is a clear failure of national and international support to small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples, while the support given to industrial fisheries highlights its failure of guaranteeing food security (see COVID-19).

Consequently, to tackle today's global challenges and reach the 2030 Agenda, it is essential to bring back autonomy and decision-making power to those same actors that provide food. To enable the survival of human societies on Earth, all the constraints that hinder small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples' freedom to organise, share knowledge and innovations to reach effective food sovereignty must be resolved through agendas led by rural communities and their social organisations.

The ongoing digitalization processes that promise to promote environmental sustainability and access to information in agriculture are actually going in the direction of taking away the means of productions from the fisheries communities, concentrating the power of large transnational corporations over agricultural and food chains, and legitimating their biopiracy.

Innovations and new technologies can be sustainable only if digital information and innovations recognise small-scale fishers' centrality and needs, and their autonomy of decision making and knowledge protection.



Those institutions supposed to regulate access, use and reproduction of digital innovations applied to the food system must therefore act in accordance of the Free, Prior and Informed Consent with small-scale fisheries' communities and organizations. It is in fact small-scale fisheries and Indigenous Peoples – and not scientists, nor politician or lobbyists, that have first-hand experience on the impact that dematerialisation – and related consequences (patents on native traits, transformation of fishers into basic executors of the numerical orders of upstream and downstream industries, piracy of territorial data and private marketing of predictive products related to food production, biopiracy, etc.), may have on their ability to continue to contribute to conservation and dynamic management of plant genetic resources, exchange of best practices of resilience, innovations, market participation and global food security.

In the development of new infrastructure and the establishment of new forms of management, public policies must therefore follow bottom-up processes to include the needs and to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and small-scale fisheries communities in the access to land, water, and local markets and the protection of their knowledge and know-how. Grassroots organizations must be supported through public spending, ensuring an adequate infrastructure that enables knowledge sharing and inclusive access to public life.

IPC recognises the potential that, under certain circumstances determined by small-scale fishers themselves, innovative digital models, analysis and infrastructure can represent for small-scale fishers, their communities and the environment. Digitalization and innovations can really have an impact for Peoples only when small-scale fishers are the true in-situ innovators, able to contribute to the creation of digital models and their governance to the achievement of food sovereignty, the recognition of collective rights, self-organization and of sustainable local food systems through agroecology.

However, the vested interests at stake and the international powerplay is overwhelming. Today we have to be extremely prudent, since public policies have not produced effective legal obligations, while the expansion of digital communication and its products is concentrated in a very small number of multinational companies that have built up rules in their own interests and destroyed those that could oppose their economic model. IPC is aware that technology and technical innovations are not neutral, but they portray the industrial production system in which and for which they have been created: without a radical change towards rural-led food system policies centred on the autonomy and networking of local food chains in coevolution with natural resources and local communities, digitalization will hinder a stable sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

IPC stands therefore against any digitalization process that through data expansion and data mining defends and strengthens insane accumulation of wealth, resources and power; cementing inequalities, public good grabbing and neo-colonial ambitions. If misled, any digitalization processes can be a powerful tool to reinforce inequalities, the control of the economy and social life by large transnational companies, and, therefore, food insecurity.

Worryingly, while the climate and environmental crisis are increasingly threatening peoples' access to sufficient, nutritious and culturally appropriate food around the globe, a "technologistic" misconception of development sold us by big-business' interests are gaining momentum in various spaces of global governance, including FAO.

The discourse on technological innovation as a *natural* and easy way out of a capitalistic, environmental and social crises is therefore used to avoid the necessary political and institutional changes to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. This becomes then the pretext to bypass food sovereignty and international obligations to protect small fishers' rights, traditional knowledge, prior consent, and the benefit-sharing provisions.



Moreover, these smart solutions proposed by the industry do not take into account their total ecological, social and health impact related to the manufacture and use of ICT/AI hardware (e.g. micro-chips, semiconductors, liquid crystal displays, mobile phones, computers, batteries, etc.).

To pin our hopes for a food secure and environmentally resilient world relying on high energy and resources consuming industrial processes (resulting in higher contamination and consumption, waste generation/disposal and greenhouse gas emissions, etc) does not sound like a pragmatic approach.

Sadly, despite FAO supposedly strives for food security and favour farmer-to-farmer exchanges to enhance knowledge and innovation, support small-scale fishers organizations' access to local markets; FAO is also promoting public policies and initiatives increasingly tailored to cover the conversion costs of an increasingly more capital-intensive and invasive system based on new technologies that do not respond to the small-scale fishers' needs who provide the bulk of the food available on the planet.

IPC will denounce any attempt to "gig-economy" reorganization of labour in the food system that freely extracts public good's data in favour of big business to catalyse private investments' and raise the return on investment. What mandatory regulations are needed to stop the transformation of fishers into another group of information producers resulting from surveillance capitalism?

Yet, IPC believes that return on investment is no innovation: IPC will severely oppose any digitalization development that further attempt to grab Peoples' land, resources, work, culture, knowledge, self-determination and data for private interests.

If governments and international institutions lose their role and their governance in favour of big business' interests, they won't be able to reaffirm their commitment to human rights, nor to support any SDG or any sustainable development.

Therefore on behalf of all the food-producers gathered in the IPC :

- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process aiming to increase the production of raw materials at a cheaper price, just as the ill-fated Green Revolution did, serving the interests of big corporations of increasing productivity by reducing the number of peasants and small food producers;
- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process that underpin new waves and frontiers of resource grabbing: this relates to ICT re-writing property/use rules in fisheries, but also in regards of seeds/genetic resources (DSI, etc), land, and forests (digitized cadasters, registries, spatial/environmental planning);
- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process confining small-scale food producers' role to precarious and over-exploited executor of the numerical orders of the transnational corporations that control the global food trade, instead of key political actors and agents of bottom-up innovation, change and development;
- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process that threat to bypass Peoples' forms of self-organization, isolating the small-scale food producer and its community face to the wicked system of the neoliberal global market;
- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process that threat to bypass the obligations to protect small food producers' rights, knowledge and data derived from such knowledge, to give prior consent and and benefit sharing, strengthening instead capital and resource accumulation against a sustainable and inclusive systems of wealth and resources redistribution in cocreation with nature;
- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process that treats to subvert ancestral, traditional and grassroots generational knowledge into a dematerialized set of information for the telecommunications industry, the agricultural services industry and, more generally, reinforcing bio-piracy, the patenting of life and population control;



- IPC rejects and organises against any digitalization process that aims to co-opt our practices like agroecology for the agroindustry, eradicating the cultural process and cultural diversity of our community-based practices for green-washing purposes;

We urge therefore that local authorities and international institutions comply with the necessary principles for an effective and sustainable development:

- Peoples' self-determination;
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent on the access to traditional knowledge, genetic resources and their derived data;
- Effective participation in decision-making processes regarding digitalization;
- The protection of traditional knowledge and small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples' collective rights over natural resources;
- Gender equality.

The FAO and its member states should also ensure that existing mechanisms are implemented effectively supporting the work of small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples, including inter alia:

- The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines);
- Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT);
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP);
- The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues;
- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- The Convention on Biological Diversity and its Protocols (Nagoya and Cartagena)

IPC calls for a real democratic control of the development of the digital models and infrastructures with the effective involvement of those most concerned by digitalization: Indigenous Peoples and small-scale fishers communities. We strive for a digital innovation in fisheries that do not dematerialize the work, traditional knowledge, resources, culture and organization. IPC invites, therefore, global and local partners to support small-scale fishers and their communities in the access to land and local markets with adequate digital infrastructure and policies to facilitate grassroots organization and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and knowledge building.

IPC calls for a bottom-up rural-led agenda for digitalization able to promote small-scale investments for climate change mitigation, inclusivity and community resilience, assuring collective and community rights, gender equality and the strengthening of small-scale fisheries and agroecological practices.

IPC will always be an active partner of those policy-makers and institutions looking for guidance to support the transformative power of bottom-up digitalization.

