

# Taking the Next Steps

The ICSF-BOBLME India (East Coast) Workshop discussed ways in which the FAO SSF Guidelines can be taken forward in a participatory and inclusive manner

**A** workshop on 'Implementing the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)' was held in Chennai, India, during 6-7 March 2015.

Organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) with support from the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project, the workshop was the third in a series to be held in 2015 as part of attempts worldwide to promote ownership of the SSF Guidelines among different

in small-scale fishing communities; and

- explore the need for a multi-stakeholder mechanism to facilitate
- a co-ordinated, inter-sectoral approach to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

Participants at the workshop came from various backgrounds, and included central and state government officials, fishworker organization leaders and representatives, community leaders (men and women), researchers from various disciplines, and representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs).

In his opening address, John Kurien, Member, ICSF, recalled Chandrika Sharma's invaluable contributions to the drafting of the SSF Guidelines, and urged for the continuation of the same principles of "commitment, correctness and consciousness of the great cycle of life" that she espoused.

Introducing the workshop and its objectives, Sebastian Mathew, Executive Secretary, ICSF, urged participants to consider the potential challenges ahead, particularly with respect to governance reforms to deliver a human-rights-based approach to development in fisheries through multi-stakeholder co-ordination and an inter-sectoral approach.

## Opening address

While acknowledging the importance of the SSF Guidelines, Santha Sheela Nair, Vice-Chairperson of the Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission, in her opening address, sought more active participation from

stakeholders. The ICSF-BOBLME India (East Coast) Workshop coincided with the first anniversary of the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 with Chandrika Sharma, then Executive Secretary, ICSF, on board.

The workshop aimed to:

- disseminate information about the SSF Guidelines and examine their relevance in varying local contexts;
- assess serious issues facing marine and inland small-scale fishing communities along the eastern seaboard of India;
- examine how implementing the SSF Guidelines can contribute to improving life and livelihoods, especially of the vulnerable and marginalized groups and women

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*This report has been written by **Seema Shenoy** (seemashenoy83@gmail.com), an independent researcher and consultant based in Bengaluru, India*

the government, particularly from elected representatives at various levels. She offered the platform of the State Planning Commission to bring together various actors for dialogue and debate, an initiative that was appreciated and acknowledged by the stakeholders present at the workshop. She suggested exploring opportunities under the Backward Regions Grant Fund and the India Inclusive Innovation Fund that would be applicable to coastal communities.

The FAO India Representative, Kevin Gallagher, cited the SSF Guidelines (and the highly consultative process by which they were drafted) as a model for other small-scale sectors, particularly in their inclusion of a human-rights-based approach.

Nicole Franz, FAO's Fishery Planning Analyst, elaborated upon the potential roles of state and non-state actors, highlighting the vast range of players that needed to arrive at a common understanding of the small-scale fisheries sector. While discussing the role of the state, she said that policy coherence to address small-scale fisheries issues at all levels is imperative, as is the strong and committed political will of government agencies. She called for a review and revision of the existing legal framework and institutional arrangements to identify gaps and scope for improvement. As equal partners in the process, fishworker organizations (FWOs) and CSOs had an important role in ensuring that

the process remained participatory, that active lobbying with the state actors would continue and the importance of the small-scale fisheries sector be brought to focus. Drawing from lessons learned in the implementation of other voluntary instruments, she recommended the setting up of an implementation and monitoring platform at the national level. At all levels of institutional arrangements, she reiterated, the representation of small-scale fishers and fishworkers was indispensable.

Representing BOBLME, C M Muralidharan introduced the project's Strategic Action Programme (SAP), noting that the objectives and targets of the SAP in addressing transboundary issues incorporated many components as outlined by the SSF Guidelines themselves, particularly the Ecosystem Quality Objectives, which promoted an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management (EAFM). Under the theme "Socio economic considerations" in SAP he stressed on point supporting the dissemination and implementation of the SSF Guidelines among other people centred targets for regional and national actions.

Nalini Nayak, Member, ICSF, focused on the social dimensions of the SSF Guidelines. They could "be a turning point in social development history if implemented in the right spirit with conviction and imagination," given how their development was necessitated by the

ICSF



Participants at a workshop on the FAO SSF Guidelines held in Chennai, India, during 6-7 March 2015. The workshop attempted to help catalyze further debate, engagement and collaboration on issues related to the SSF Guidelines

vulnerability and marginalization faced by these communities, and recognizing that small-scale fisheries had the ability to eradicate poverty and provide food security, while ensuring long-term sustainable use of resources. The implementation of the SSF Guidelines necessitates an inter- or even trans-disciplinary outlook and process, she added.

The opening session was followed by the presentation of reports from the various preparatory consultative meetings that were held in West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu during January to February 2015 as part of the ICSF BOBLME collaboration.

Venkatesh Salagrama, Member, ICSF who moderated the session, and had led the consultative meetings, said that the pertinent issues had common elements across the states. These included the lack of recognition of tenure and use rights, the erosion of traditional practices, displacement of communities by large-scale development projects, problems faced by migrant workers, disaster preparedness and social development.

Most of the state government representatives reiterated the schemes that addressed these issues,

**...effective implementation can only occur if the relationship between communities and the government is amicable.**

highlighting the various ways in which the functioning of their respective departments would focus on the small-scale fisheries subsector, and increase co-ordination and collaboration with other departments.

The post-lunch panel discussion addressed the need for governance reforms, while examining how an enabling socioeconomic, legal and policy environment for small-scale fisheries could be created.

Yugraj Singh Yadava, Director, Bay of Bengal Programme-Inter-Governmental Organization (BOBP-IGO), said the SSF Guidelines should

be read in conjunction with other international agreements and covenants (such as the FAO Tenure Guidelines and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries) to strengthen application. He called for reforms across sectors that would promote policies that were community-driven and community-centred.

Ganesh Chandra from the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI) said the inland sector was dominated by small-scale fisheries, characterized by highly diverse operations, seasonally and geographically. The issues confronting the sector included tenure rights to resource access, weak organization, threats to the resource (and thereby livelihoods) from outside the sector (pollution, development projects) and the lack of alternative livelihood options.

Speaking on behalf of T Raja, a traditional *panchayat* representative, V Vivekanandan, Member, ICSF, presented a cogent case for the consideration and understanding of traditional governance systems. Such systems, he said, in which a community is entrusted with decisionmaking that directly impacts it, play a valuable role in enforcing what the SSF Guidelines endorse, and mostly operate in the spirit of participation and consensus. While it is true that there are factors that require considerations for change (such as the absence of women in positions of leadership), it would be wrong, he added, to dismiss these systems entirely.

Manash Choudhury of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), commended governmental efforts, citing the exponential growth in the export of fisheries products as evidence of the central government's commitment to the sector. However, he said, effective implementation can only occur if the relationship between communities and the government is amicable.

### **Empowerment**

He called for a paradigm shift in fisheries management, with an increased focus on empowerment

of stakeholders. He also advocated for public-private partnerships (PPPs) which could help enhance production, and suggested that aquaculture be considered on par with agriculture and given the same importance in policy.

The final panelist of the session, Albertina Almeida, a legal expert, elaborated upon how international and national legal instruments can be tapped to support and strengthen the provisions of the SSF Guidelines, with a specific focus on securing women's rights in small-scale fisheries. While gender mainstreaming was an important component, the monitoring of the process and its impact by 'line departments', she stressed, was just as important.

The SSF Guidelines specifically call for the voices of both men and women to be heard in the process. In this spirit, she said, the women in fisheries needed to be consulted on what they considered small-scale. She called for a greater emphasis on the role of women in fisheries, to consciously dispel 'gender blinkers'.

The questions and comments that followed the panel session broadly questioned the current development model and exclusionary practices that further marginalized the small-scale fisheries sector. It was also suggested that work in different capacities in small-scale fisheries and fisheries management should gain conceptual clarity on the various ecological, socioeconomic and political aspects.

The concluding session of the first day included group discussions on the themes of securing coastal tenure rights, the government actors involved, especially with respect to promoting social development within the sector, and what assistance and institutional arrangements the achievement of these objectives would require. Ujjaini Halim, Treasurer, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), moderated the session.

The participants observed that there was a need to:

- contextualize the SSF Guidelines for relevant application in local areas;



Nicole Franz, Fishery Planning Analyst, FAO, speaking about the role of state and non-state actors in implementing the SSF Guidelines

- make gender equity and empowerment of the marginalized a priority;
- increase visibility of the small-scale fisheries sector and emphasize its ability for poverty eradication and its contribution to food and nutritional security;
- disseminate information about the SSF Guidelines and other instruments to empower communities to assert their rights, in turn making them less dependent on welfare schemes of the state;
- call into question the current model of capital- and investment-driven development at the cost of social development, and address indirect threats to livelihood and resources (for example, pollution from shore-based industries, development and tourism projects, competition from the large-scale and other sectors);
- ensure that implementation of the SSF Guidelines is bottom-up and participatory;
- draw from existing positive examples and good practices already instituted in community management for the realization of equitable and sustainable practices;
- formalize and secure tenure rights for ownership, use and transfer;
- call upon state governments to address their responsibility in safeguarding human rights, particularly of members of

- vulnerable and marginalized groups;
- explore opportunities for skill building and alternative livelihoods to enhance income generation;
- emphasize the role of the post-harvest sector;
- provide due recognition of inland fisheries and address tenurial, livelihood and social-security issues; and
- establish a more prominent position for small-scale fisheries in the market and trade components of the value chain.

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*panidhari* system, which is premised on stringent property rights on the river itself and works on an exclusionary basis—a system abolished by law, but still practised in some areas. She also spoke about the emerging threats to livelihoods of fishing communities. These threats include tourism and resorts along the river banks that not only prohibit access to local fishermen but also hamper the livelihood opportunities of other marginalized and vulnerable sectors that directly depend on these resources.

E Vivekanandan, Emeritus Scientist of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), talked about the ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM) in the context of small-scale fisheries. By stressing the importance of sustainable fisheries development and protection of the environment, he explained how SSF could play a major role in promoting EAFM. He also illustrated a five-step process to achieve this, which could be particularly relevant to Indian fisheries. The benefits of EAFM include the accordance of responsibility, availability of resources, better compliance and reduced conflicts.

Probir Banerjee of Pondy Citizen's Action Network (PondyCAN), Puducherry, called for an 'inside-out' approach to addressing environmental problems and designing interventions. Speaking on the topic 'Customary rights to land and sea: Negotiating tenure rights', he highlighted the immense changes on land and at sea caused by infrastructure and coastal development projects. He introduced an ongoing pilot Coastal Stewardship Programme, which conducts capacity building in fishing villages, and trains the youth in mapping their villages with global positioning system (GPS) units and geographic information system (GIS) software, implemented in Puducherry and nearby coastal villages of Tamil Nadu, under BOBLME support.

#### **Post-tsunami**

Annie George from Building and Enabling Disaster Resilient Coastal Communities (BEDROC),

The second day of the workshop began with a panel discussion about contextualizing the SSF Guidelines in the case of Indian fisheries. The panelists included representatives who had worked on inland fisheries, marine fisheries, food security, disaster management, legal affairs and the coastal environment.

The first panelist was V V Sugunan, Assistant Director General (Retd), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, who spoke about the 'SSF Guidelines and Inland Small-scale Fisheries'. While acknowledging the role of inland fisheries in promoting sustainable livelihoods, he pointed to the conceptual difficulties in defining small-scale fisheries. Sugunan distinguished between culture-based fisheries and capture fisheries in the inland sector, especially with relevance to the process of stock enhancement.

Sumana Narayanan, Programme Associate, ICSF, spoke about tenure rights in inland fisheries. Having visited and interacted with stakeholders around the river Ganga, Sumana highlighted the problems of tenure rights associated with the people, fisheries, river and the land. She cited the example of the traditional

Nagapattinam, and Sajith Sukumaran from FishMARC, Thiruvananthapuram, shared their experiences working with fishing communities in the post-2004 tsunami context in Tamil Nadu. While Annie focused on the housing policy and the outcomes of shelter and housing exercises undertaken by the Tamil Nadu state government in the aftermath of the tsunami, Sajith spoke of the impacts on fisheries livelihoods post-disaster.

Annie talked about the governance challenges, community aspirations and administrative and technical aspects that compounded some of the problems that arose in the course of rehabilitation. She pointed out that although the intentions were well-placed, the lack of technical capacity, low investments in repair and maintenance, and the short shrift given to safety, proved counterproductive.

While addressing changes in fisheries livelihoods, Sajith mentioned that a lack of data regarding certain aspects, especially the impacts to the livelihoods of women, left gaps in understanding the trends over the last ten years, but a marked increase in fishing pressure, and a decrease in traditional non-motorized craft, was observed.

In the face of changing climatic conditions and their possible direct impacts on fishing and fisheries-based livelihoods, Vincent Jain, of the Association of Deep Sea Going Artisanal Fishermen (ADSGAF), spoke on 'Climate-smart fishing: Development of solar-powered fishing vessels in Thoothoor'. The ongoing work not only involves innovation of climate-smart technologies for fishing vessels, but interventions in all sub-sectors (for example, the introduction of solar lamps in evening markets for women fish vendors), including the post-harvest sector.

Jesu Rethinam of Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA), Nagapattinam, talked about 'Post-harvest and trade: Social development and women fish vendors'. She indicated how the changing nature of the coast and

markets are making women fish workers vulnerable day by day. With the loss of beach space due to coastal erosion and market space due to the entry of big players, she said the post-harvest sector should be supported to face the changing nature of fisheries and its implications for fisheries-dependent women.

Addressing the lack of legal provisions to secure the rights of small-scale fishing communities, Gayathri Singh, an advocate from Mumbai and Member, Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), listed the possibilities of asserting rights through the provisions of supporting laws and regulations. She discussed the ongoing and rapid erosion of traditional systems, and the failure of the state and courts to recognize customary rights over land and water.

This makes communities vulnerable to external forces that utilize the coast for purposes other than fishing, she added. The tendency to view customary tenure in the light of resource use, and not as basic rights, has vested the power to decide how rights should be exercised with the government.

**...the ongoing and rapid erosion of traditional systems, and the failure of the state and courts to recognize customary rights...**

She also lamented the loss of the doctrine of public trust, according to which the state is a trustee of the commons. She pointed to specific sections of the Forest Rights Act which gave the right to traditional dwellers to exploit resources within a protected area.

Kavitha Srivatsava of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) introduced the Right to Food Campaign, acknowledging Chandrika's efforts to bring fishworkers to the platform.

### **Basic entitlement**

She brought to focus the National Food Security Act, which accorded a basic entitlement to food and nutrition

to people across the country. She informed the workshop that the provisions of the Act would extend to the small-scale fisheries community as well, especially fisherwomen (for example, the provision of free meals to pregnant and lactating women).

The concluding panel of the workshop, moderated by C M Muralidharan, BOBLME and the discussions that followed suggested ways in which the many recommendations could be meaningfully employed and the commitments to collaboration addressed in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

M Ilango, Chairperson, National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), recapitulated the arguments that questioned the present mode of development, and demanded that practices detrimental to the well-being of the small-scale fisher and the marine and coastal ecology be reconsidered. In particular, he called upon authorities to address the threats posed by destructive fishing practices. He also introduced the 'People's Draft Bill of Rights of Fisheries and Other Traditional Coastal Communities', pointing out that the stake these communities claim in coastal and marine resources necessitates their participation in decisionmaking at every level.

**Livelihoods can be secure, she said, only if the security of the marine ecology was assured.**

Sonali Huria, Research Consultant at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), New Delhi, outlined the potential role that the Commission could play in the protection and promotion of rights of SSF communities. The complaints disposal and enquiry process of the Commission allows for a direct appeal regarding human-rights violations. She mentioned cases that were filed by the members of fishing communities with the NHRC against their human-rights violations.

Sunil Mohamed, Principal Scientist and Head of Molluscan Fisheries, Central Marine Fisheries Institute (CMFRI), Kochi, elucidated the role of scientific and research institutions in the sustainable use and management planning of fishery resources.

CMFRI has a large database that enumerated fishers, craft, gear and socioeconomic factors, an invaluable resource for any country-wide assessment. A large number of CMFRI research projects focus on the small-scale sector, examining their socioeconomic status, sustainable marine policy issues, capacity development for EAFM, supply-chain management, 'global learning for local solutions', and disaster resilience.

He also introduced the National Marine Fisheries Management Code—based on the provisions of the CCRF—and indicated that the draft would be circulated in mid-2015 among civil society and fishing communities for extensive consultations.

Laying down the roadmap for the Department of Fisheries of the Union Territory of Puducherry, Mary Chinna Rani, Director, Department of Fisheries and Fishermen Welfare, listed the schemes and initiatives of the Government of Puducherry. While the Pondicherry Marine Fisheries Regulation Act encompassed many of the issues confronting fisheries, she said, it was not implemented fully. The ban on purse-seine nets, for example, is ineffective and they continue to be used in many areas. She listed the various committees, housing and welfare schemes and fishermen's co-operatives as initiatives of the state government to include fair representation for women and marginalized sections.

### **Decision-making process**

D Nagasaila, an advocate of the Madras High Court, shared her experiences as a labour and environmental law practitioner, and referred to cases that highlighted the need for communities to be integral to the decision-making process. Livelihoods can be secure, she said, only if the security of the marine ecology was assured.

This requires the combined commitment of a variety of actors, and the ethical enforcement of legislation. She cautioned that unless institutions practiced 'constitutional morality' and instilled an honesty of purpose in executing their functions, all efforts would be futile, irrespective of whether there were reforms in legislation or new bodies instituted, or even instruments such as the SSF Guidelines drafted.

In the discussion that followed the panel presentations, some community representatives sought clarity on how decisions regarding fishing bans and regulations were justified by scientists. They also questioned the legitimacy of uniform regulations, given the varying contexts to which they were applied. The principle of 'scale subsidiarity' in relation to fishing vessels was proposed for further examination and application.

The question of the mandated and obligatory roles of scientists in the development of management strategies was also discussed, and, in turn, the responsibilities of those working in a particular sector or discipline to engage with the larger objectives as outlined in the SSF Guidelines.

The juxtaposition of differing perspectives from different actors was another aspect that came up for discussion. The example of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and state Departments of Environment and Forests, operating under the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), was shared to highlight a protection approach to resource conservation, whereas the Fisheries Departments promote the development of fishery resources. It was suggested that the reconciliation of these differing approaches—and not necessarily of purpose—might go a long way in achieving commonly set objectives.

The valedictory remarks at the workshop were made by Raja Sekhar Vundru, Joint Secretary of the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India. He commended the inclusion of a



Raja Sekhar Vundru, Joint Secretary, DAHDF, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, delivering the valedictory remarks at the ICSF-BOBLME India workshop

human-rights-based approach in the SSF Guidelines and highlighted the various ways in which the government had already put in place a number of programmes and interventions that addressed the issues brought up by the SSF Guidelines. He invited the workshop participants to deliberate upon the existing gaps in policy and action, and bring them to the notice of the Ministry.

John Kurien brought the workshop to a close, urging that the deliberations be continued. It was the objective of the workshop, he said, to help catalyze further debate, engagement and collaboration, and the discussions over the two days were successful on that count.

The new opportunities and avenues that had been opened up were a revelation to those who had worked all these years with an inward-looking approach, he added. He cautioned against hasty and short-sighted action, and said that the process of implementation must duly reflect the participatory and inclusive process by which the SSF Guidelines were drafted.

Mariette Correa, Programme Co-ordinator, ICSF, wound up the ICSF-BOBLME India (East Coast) Workshop with a Vote of Thanks. ♣

#### For more

[igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1061-India.html](http://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1061-India.html)

#### ICSF – India SSF Guidelines Website

[www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/Year-After-MH370-VanishesChandrika-Floats-in-Memories/2015/03/07/article2701824.ece](http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/Year-After-MH370-VanishesChandrika-Floats-in-Memories/2015/03/07/article2701824.ece)

#### Year after MH370 Vanishes, Chandrika Floats in Memories