

Moving On

Promoting a rights-based approach to sustainable small-scale fisheries development through participatory and consultative processes was discussed at a workshop in Colombo

The South Asia FAO–BOBLME Regional Consultation on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, during 23–26 November 2015. The event was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project. It was co-hosted by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Sri Lanka, and additional financial support was provided by the Government of Norway. About 42 participants from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka attended the workshop, including representatives of governments, regional and international organizations, fisherfolk organizations, CSOs/NGOs, academia and other relevant actors.

The overall objective of the workshop was to raise awareness and support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the region. The workshop started with an introductory presentation by FAO, explaining how the process of preparing the Guidelines took place since 2008, with the enrolment of about 4,000 stakeholders who interacted with one another in a series of conferences, workshops and consultations held in a number of countries. The role of BOBLME in this initiative by contributing to institutional coordination, information, research, communication and capacity building was also explained.

The status of SSF in South Asia

An array of presentations by public, private and civil society actors

explained the status of fisheries in their own countries. The country representatives stressed the importance of SSF in the region due to the large numbers of rural populations engaged in fishing, both marine and inland, and the greater share of SSF in the total fish landings. The major issues highlighted by all included the need to promote the sustainable use of fisheries resources, promote participatory decisionmaking and management, empower small-scale fishers, provide them with market access, strictly enforce laws, and protect the aquatic resources. Moreover, emphasis was

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laid on gender concerns, especially the need to empower women. Everybody stressed the need to identify and recognize the rights of fishers. Some of the important considerations that emerged during discussions included the importance of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, engagement of fishing communities in decisionmaking, integration of research outputs into policy, and capacity development of all parties concerned in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Several voids in fisheries research were also identified, which included, among others, the need to find out the most appropriate interactive platforms, mechanisms of empowering fishing communities, guiding technological change and institutional change along a socially

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optimal direction, and addressing issues of legal pluralism.

The country representatives also discussed issues specific to their countries. Both India and Bangladesh expressed serious concern about the process of marginalization of fishers, including women in the processing sector. Maldives pointed out that sea level rise (due to climate change) is a serious risk to SSF, while for Bangladesh, vulnerability was strongly related to 'ownership of fishing assets slipping out of the hands of the small-scale fishers'. Sri Lanka expressed increased concern on safety of fishers and the lack of alternative employment opportunities for fishing populations.

Participants also discussed the good practices adopted by their countries in dealing with some of the above issues. Sri Lanka boasted of a very strong legal framework and the functioning of a number of co-management platforms (especially in lagoon fisheries), rights of access to resources established through the construction/declaration of beach access roads, and recognition of beach seine *padu* and stake-net fisheries. Participants from India explained how self-help groups and cooperatives deal effectively with social and economic issues, while fishworker unions deal with the 'rights' of small-scale fishers. Representatives from Maldives and Bangladesh explained how small-scale fishers are granted access to land for fish processing. Maldives have also been able to set a floor price for tuna. With respect to transboundary issues, the shared management plan for the *Hilsa* fishery between Bangladesh and India was highlighted.

Concerns and suggestions

Through group discussions, the participants identified the key areas of concern and the actions proposed to deal with them.

i. Governance of tenure in SSF and resources management

The participants recognized the need to legalise customary tenure rights, both in fisheries resources and land,

and proposed that efforts should be made by CSOs and academia/researchers to identify and document such rights and advocate their recognition by governments. The need to identify and document incidences of human rights violations and address them in collaboration with fisher community organizations and national human rights institutions was also highlighted. The absence of a 'fisher voice' in the process of decisionmaking was also a major concern.

Participants stressed the importance of effective and meaningful consultation of fishing communities. Co-management was recognized as an effective mechanism for incorporating fisher interests, including those of women and marginalized groups, into fisheries management. This needs capacity building and empowerment of fishing communities, who will engage in effective resources management both at the local and national levels. Establishment of multi-tier platforms to address regional management issues and transboundary fishing issues was also proposed. The participants added that governments should ensure that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and international human rights conventions, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, are applied to all fisheries activities.

ii. Social development, employment, decent work and gender equality

Development of human capacities in SSF was identified as one of the most urgent needs and a prerequisite to adopt holistic approaches to fisheries development. Training of fishers and fisherwomen to earn decent incomes and financial support to start up productive activities and improvement in the provision of information (for example, through information and communications technology ICT) were also recognized as important. The participants stressed the need to provide basic needs, such as housing, secure tenure rights, sanitation and drinking water. The need to develop/

strengthen and operationalize public health schemes, fisheries insurance schemes and subsidized loan schemes (in particular for women) was also brought to light. The participants expressed concern on the issue of empowerment of fishing communities. Not only the establishment of community organizations, but also the provision of capacity development and strengthening of the link between community organizations and the government, was emphasized. It was also observed that the small-scale fisheries sector often fails to provide equal opportunities and a safe and fair source of income, in particular for women and in inland fisheries. The poor bargaining power of fishing communities vis-à-vis the middlemen, had pushed down fishing incomes, which could be addressed by developing alternative means of support generally rendered by merchants. It was suggested that minimum wage schemes for small-scale fishworkers be examined, as also the development and/or implementation of policies in support of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Strengthening and expansion of regional collaboration among CSOs to share experiences on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and resolving transboundary and other common issues were also strongly recommended.

iii. Value chains, post-harvest and trade

The role of women in post-harvest activities received great attention. Organizing women into cooperatives, training on entrepreneurship, promoting micro-finance assistance, provision of low-interest credit, promotion of community saving and credit schemes, were all recognized as important steps in facilitating women's involvement in the fish value chain. Distribution of benefits from trade and returns from fish and fishery products were noted to be 'unfair'. The need for fisher organizations to involve in bargaining vis-à-vis buyers, collective purchasing by cooperatives, reducing cost of

fishing inputs, effective dissemination of market information and the need to support post-harvest infrastructures were suggested as remedial measures. Another important concern of the participants was the issue of 'safety at sea'. It was suggested that safety of small-scale fishers be improved through the provision of safety equipment, training on safety at sea, designing effective insurance schemes, and improved communication and early warning systems.

The way forward

The following were identified as the steps to be taken by diverse stakeholder groups to actively promote the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at the national and regional levels:

Role of government actors and other participants

The government participants agreed to establish the SSF focal points in their fisheries administrations and other authorities, as appropriate. All participants agreed to organize formal and informal debriefing meetings to provide information about the outcomes of the workshop within their respective administrations and organizations and to disseminate the SSF Guidelines and the outcomes and recommendations of the workshop to relevant meetings. It was also suggested to advocate for the establishment of a regional oversight committee with at least one government and one CSO member per country (with due attention to gender balance) to follow up and monitor (for example, through email groups) the process, building potentially on existing initiatives (like the Asia Alliance on Small-scale Fisheries).

Role of CSOs, CBOs and NGOs

The CSOs agreed that they should develop additional language versions of the SSF Guidelines, with the help of the respective governments and the FAO. The NGOs and CBOs/CSOs are to prepare posters, simplified versions, short movies, and radio features, again with the support of their

governments, in order to raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines. CSOs also agreed to appoint national focal points for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

Role of international organizations, FAO and BOBLME

The participants thought that it is best for the FAO to provide guidance for the preparation of National Plans of Action to support the implementation of the SSF Guideline and support the monitoring of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It was also suggested that the BOBLME project should include support to follow up activities after the workshop and the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at regional and national levels during its proposed second phase.

Role of research institutes and universities

It was recommended that academia and researchers should contribute a chapter on the SSF Guidelines implementation to a planned publication of the research network Too Big To Ignore (TBTI). It was also proposed that the research institutes and universities need to look into new research areas relevant to the application of the SSF Guidelines, which might include socioeconomic data collection, design and implementation (including gender-disaggregated data), provision of information on the socioeconomic status of fishing communities and the aquatic habitats through participatory research, and making initiatives to integrate the SSF Guidelines in fisheries course curricula.

Finally, the participants noted the need to secure funding, which, among other things, include engagement with international and regional development partners through bilateral donors and embassies at the country level, and with new projects (including BOBLME phase 2). The need to explore opportunities of joining hands with NGOs operating outside fisheries and working with human rights and social development institutions was also brought to attention. Provisions to be made for

the implementation of SSF guidelines and promoting interaction with relevant non-fisheries ministries and departments at all levels, and mainstreaming of SSF Guidelines in relevant policies, strategies, plans as well as public-private partnerships in support of the SSF Guidelines were also recognized.

A concluding remark

In summary, there was general agreement among the participants at the workshop that sustainable development of small-scale fisheries shall be based on proper governance and management of the natural resource base and the people who depend on it, through the establishment of effective interactive platforms, such as fisher community organizations and appropriate co-management platforms, which will adopt holistic and integrated approaches, while ensuring that the rights and responsibilities of the participating actors, including women and marginalized groups, are clearly laid down and respected, and that decisions are made through a process of consultation, collaboration and coordination of all actors concerned. Such a process shall encompass capacity building and empowerment of small-scale fishers, providing them with the required social protection, and meeting their well-being aspirations through proper social development interventions and adoption of appropriate legal instruments. 3

For more

igsf.icsf.net/en/page/1066-Interesting%20articles%20on%20SSF%20Guidelines.html

Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines

www.fao.org/srilanka/news/detail-events/en/c/356820/

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