

Sailing from a Good Port

A Central American regional workshop on the SSF Guidelines, held in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, in December 2015 sought commitment to take forward the Guidelines in a binding manner

The adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication has been of great importance for small-scale fishers worldwide. Fishers in Central America as a region, with the support of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the Cooperative for Social Solidarity (CoopeSoliDar R.L.) started a discussion on how to move towards the implementation of this important instrument at a regional workshop in Puntarenas, the central port on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, on 1–3 December 2015.

The Workshop was attended by about 30 participants from the Central American region. Fishers and fishers' organizations from Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panamá were present. There was also participation from the FAO, represented by John Jorgensen, Fisheries and Aquaculture Officer, FAO Sub-regional Office for Mesoamerica, Panama and Octavio Ramirez, FAO Representative in Costa Rica.

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines at the regional level would require creative and innovative action where dialogue, strategic alliances, negotiation, consensus and commitment would be needed to make it a reality. So the Workshop was an important milestone in this context.

Gustavo Meneses, Executive President, Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture (INCOPESCA), Costa Rica, mentioned at the regional workshop's opening: "If you are here now, it is due to the fact that you had great struggles in the past—struggles for

assuring a better life, struggles for wanting to see a healthier sea and struggles for wanting to improve the livelihood of your fishing communities. To be here today means to recognize that there are still a lot of people along our coasts who are struggling for food, medicines and other needs". He highlighted how small-scale fishers together with the indigenous peoples have succeeded in placing the SSF Guidelines within the framework of the Costa Rican government policy for implementation.

The general objective of the Central American workshop was to

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move towards a plan of action for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the Central American region. The following specific objectives formed the basis for the discussions during the workshop:

- Integrate the efforts of civil society organizations of small-scale fisheries, indigenous peoples and fishers, and the Confederation of Artisanal Fishers of Central America (CONFEPESCA) for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.
- Define priorities at the regional level for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.
- Define a roadmap to ensure progress toward the main strategies defined for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

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- Support organizations of civil society and artisanal fishers in capacity building and policy making geared to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

The workshop began by recalling that prior to the adoption of the SSF Guidelines, meetings were held in the Central American region, namely, in Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua and El Salvador with the support of the ICSF. A regional meeting was also held in Tárcoles, Costa Rica.

There was general agreement among the participants that the SSF Guidelines marked a path for the development of a process that would help eradicate poverty and reduce marginalization of the most vulnerable sectors in the small-scale fisheries of Central America.

The proposals prepared by the artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen and other representatives at the regional workshop were important inputs for negotiations at the meeting of the Organization of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector of Central America (OSPESCA) that took place in El Salvador during 15–16 December 2015, where agreements for regional implementation of the SSF Guidelines were developed.

The priorities for the regions were: governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management, social development and employment, gender equity, addressing risks from natural disasters and climate change, capacity development, and monitoring and control.

For each priority, fishers suggested clearly-defined actions and discussed the possible limitations in implementation efforts. The priority actions defined for each subject are discussed below:

Governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management

Priority actions:

- i. Create the ideal mechanism to implement the SSF Guidelines and develop a strategic plan led by OSPESCA and supervised by CONFEPESCA.

- ii. Seek information on resources that form the basis of the SSF Guidelines.
- iii. Respect the views and knowledge of local communities and organizations of fishers, and take them into account, prior to the adoption or establishment of marine protected areas and continental reserves.
- iv. Encourage the authorities to adopt in principle the concept of the ecosystem approach to fisheries, within the legal framework.

Social development and employment

Priority actions:

- i. Recognize the importance of the small-scale fisheries sector for the region's economy and food security.
- ii. Create a mechanism for social and financial support to fishing communities.
- iii. Bring fishers within the ambit of medical insurance, pension, old-age benefit and financial credit.
- iv. Create a legal framework for the social and economic development of fishing communities in their territories through replicable pilot models. This legal framework should factor in the implementation of all aspects of the SSF Guidelines.

Gender equality

Priority actions:

- i. Identify communities where the role of women in the fishing sector is relevant for the fishing culture and value chain (for example, New Armenia and La Ceiba, Honduras).
- ii. Conduct a regional meeting to define strategies for action.
- iii. Review and follow up the meeting on women in fisheries conducted in El Salvador.

Addressing risks from natural disasters and climate change

Priority actions:

- i. Demonstrate that the small-scale fisheries sector is the most vulnerable to climate change.
- ii. Prepare a regional project on small-scale fisheries and climate

change, prioritizing coastal areas and islands and continental water bodies.

- iii. Disseminate to the communities the reasons for, and the effects of, climate change.
- iv. Prepare a programme for the adaptation to climate change.
- v. Identify communities that have been, or will be, directly affected by climate change to generate grants to support them.

Capacity development for fishers and their organizations

Priority actions:

- i. Impart training for young fishermen in education, politics, biology and technology.
- ii. Establish a training centre for artisanal fishing.
- iii. Help fishermen strengthen their identity.
- iv. Encourage fisherwomen to fight for gender equality.
- v. Train fishermen in leadership skills, in acquiring knowledge of national and international legal frameworks, including the SSF Guidelines, and also prepare literacy programmes adjusted to the schedules of the fishermen, and impart knowledge of computing, administration and accounting.
- vi. Produce radio programmes to train fishermen in the above mentioned issues.

Monitoring and control

Priority actions:


- i. Create programmes that discuss the legal framework in each fishing country, perhaps via the radio.
- ii. Publicize the SSF Guidelines at all levels (in communities and with all the relevant authorities and institutions).
- iii. Teach federations of fishermen to manage economic resources.
- iv. In the context of implementation of these priority actions, the fishers discussed several important limitations: lack of vision towards sustainable use of marine resources, mega development projects that affect fishermen and their communities, lack of will

on the part of governments, lack of economic resources, lack of organization at the community level, and finally, the lack of qualified personnel (fishermen who are prepared to discuss and create the necessary legal framework). The fishers also said that change in authority makes it difficult to implement the proposed actions, and there are also difficulties in training on the ecosystem approach to fisheries.

In the context of social development and employment, they rued the lack of political and moral will on the part of the authorities, which makes it difficult to implement actions at a regional level.

They also considered gender-oriented actions difficult in the follow-up and dissemination of the priority actions. For instance, OSPESCA held a meeting on gender and small-scale fisheries, which did not have any follow-up and very little has been done to date.

The fishers were also concerned about the absence of resources for programmes of adaptation to climate change, specifically for fishing communities, and the unwillingness of the governments to prioritize the sector. In this sense, they felt, the SSF Guidelines provide a good effort to turn the focus of attention of the authorities to the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Perhaps the most important agreement of the regional workshop was to request the Central American States to make a commitment to take the SSF Guidelines forward in a binding manner by adopting a regional plan of implementation. OSPESCA representatives and the governmental authorities who participated in the regional workshop left with a clear mandate of informing the El Salvador OSPESCA meeting of the discussions and recommendations from this important fishers' regional workshop. 

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