

Looking beyond Fisheries

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) will help small-scale fishing communities

This issue of *SAMUDRA Report* carries seven articles—including two extracts—that report on modest- to well-attended workshops for raising awareness and for supporting implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). They were held in different places—ranging from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific—within a time span of eight months during 2015-16 at the regional, national and local levels, and were organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), regional bodies, fisheries projects, national governments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Nearly 600 participants representing various stakeholders from over 50 countries, mostly developing countries, attended these workshops.

The workshops saw the SSF Guidelines as a tool to eliminate the marginalization of small-scale fisheries actors at various levels. They highlighted the significance of a holistic and human-rights-based approach, a dimension not upheld in any fisheries instrument so far. Several examples of good practices were provided in relation to legal systems and institutional structures that can potentially support the implementation process.

While some of these workshops focused on the conservation and sustainable-use elements of the SSF Guidelines, others focused also on protecting individual and collective human rights, including the right to decent work of fishers and fishworkers, and migrant workers in fisheries. They also consciously brought in, for the first time, several social-development actors to interact with fisheries actors. Not only regional plans of action, but actions at the national and local levels were also proposed for the effective implementation of the Guidelines. These included decentralized management of coastal and inland fisheries at the local level, especially through

strengthening community-based systems, and developing plans of action for implementing the Guidelines at the regional and national levels with the active participation of organizations of small-scale artisanal fishing communities and indigenous peoples.

A significant departure from the past was the recognition of the importance of collaborating with non-fisheries institutions, including national human-rights institutions, towards implementing the recommendations of the Guidelines related to labour, social development, migration, rights and tenure aspects, and climate change—areas often outside the competence of fisheries authorities.

The Guidelines should, in the first place, act as a reference framework to guarantee preferential access rights to small-scale fisheries and to enable the participation of small-scale fisheries actors, including migrants, in institutional arrangements for sustainable fisheries. Secondly, the Guidelines should seek a balanced outcome and help reform fisheries and social legislation and policies at various levels to protect the right to life and livelihood of marginalized small-scale fishing communities and women in small-scale fisheries, within an ecosystem approach, a gender-sensitive approach and a human-rights-based approach. Thirdly, the Guidelines should assist in winning support from non-fisheries actors to help the social development of fishing communities, both within and outside the fisheries sector.

Towards reaching these goals, we strongly urge governments to take the lead in establishing regional and national plans of action to implement the SSF Guidelines by making space for both State and non-State actors in a consultative and participative manner, upholding the principles of accountability, rule of law and transparency. Such a move—which goes beyond the immediate bounds of ‘fisheries’—can trigger an irreversible process of undoing the marginalization of small-scale fishing communities in different parts of the world. 

