

# Women Rising

**A critical look at *Towards Gender-equitable Small-scale fisheries Governance and Development: A Handbook* by Nilanjana Biswas, published by the FAO, in 2017**

It was a pleasure to read through Nilanjana Biswas' *Towards Gender-equitable Small-scale Fisheries Governance and Development: A Handbook*, part of a larger series of initiatives designed to support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines were several years in the making and involved extensive consultations with diverse groups from more than 120 countries. They were endorsed by the Thirty-first Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2014.

As indicated in the Foreword, they are “the first internationally agreed instrument dedicated entirely to the immensely important—but until now, often neglected—small-scale fisheries sector.” They are global in scope but there is a specific focus on developing countries which are home to most of the world's small-scale fisheries (SSF). While constituting a very significant accomplishment, the Guidelines are technically voluntary, although, as argued by Svein Jentoft (see For more box below), their linkage to international human-rights laws, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, makes them less voluntary than they appear. That said, using them to help achieve meaningful change on the ground requires ongoing effort.

Since 2014, the FAO has been spearheading extensive consultations with diverse stakeholders as a way to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. These consultations resulted in a request for more information on how to address gender

issues. One reason for this is that the SSF Guidelines include, among their core objectives and guiding principles, the principles of gender equity and equality. Biswas' handbook is designed to help address this request.

As noted by Kleiber et al. (see For more on page 63), “[t]he presence of gender equity and equality in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries... is unprecedented in global fisheries policy.” The last time I worked intensively on gender and fisheries issues was a decade ago when I was one of the leads on a gender, globalization and fisheries initiative

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that brought together researchers and representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) from multiple developed and developing countries, including the Women in Fisheries programme of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

## Changing tides

We hosted a workshop in Newfoundland and produced a video called *Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization* and an edited collection of articles and stories with the same title (<http://toobigtoignore.net/curra/>). At that time, despite more than a decade of research and activism on gender/women in fisheries (particularly through ICSF), women

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and gender issues were largely invisible in fisheries research and particularly in policy throughout the world. Something like the SSF Guidelines, with its attention to women and to gender, was, for me at least, unimaginable.



FAO. 2017. Towards gender-equitable small-scale fisheries governance and development - A handbook, by Nilanjana Biswas. Rome, Italy. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7419e.pdf>

The handbook under review extends the long tradition of community-engaged consultations and regional and international initiatives that informed the ICSF Women in Fisheries programme and the development of the SSF Guidelines to the

each section linking explicitly to relevant chapters in those guidelines. The focus is on developing countries and discussions of broad concepts like gender equality (“when women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities and entitlements in civil and political life”) and equity—the achievement of “fairness and impartiality in the treatment of women and men in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities”, are thought through in relation to the relevant Guidelines chapter.

Each chapter includes one or more case studies, as well as useful analyses of the case studies and suggested action points for policymakers and CSOs related to the kinds of scenarios outlined in the case studies. It emphasizes the need to take a value-chain approach to fisheries, encompassing the full supply chain as essential to capture the full range and extent of women’s involvement in fisheries, and to identify both points of vulnerability and options for improving their lives and livelihoods. It also reminds us again of the ongoing and longstanding invisibility of much of women’s work in many statistical and other resources on fisheries.

implementation phase. It does this both in terms of the process that informed its development, and its contents. Contributions to an online survey, two regional workshops and an Expert Workshop on Gender-equitable Small-scale Fisheries, linked to the SSF Guidelines, helped inform the development of the handbook. Its target audiences include governments, as well as fisher/fishworker and CSOs and other actors, including researchers.

The handbook is organized into three parts: Part 1, on understanding gender and the role of women in SSF; Part 2, on responsible fisheries and sustainable development through a gender lens; and Part 3, on ensuring an enabling environment for gender equality and supporting implementation. It follows the structure of the SSF Guidelines, with

Consistent with the approach in the SSF Guidelines, Part 2 of the handbook uses a gender lens to examine responsible governance of tenure and the impact of loss of use rights, ownership rights and the transferability of tenure on women in different contexts. The section on sustainable resource management explores issues related to the need to strive for the equitable participation of women and marginalized groups in fisheries management and the design of protected areas. Chapter 4 of Part 2 brings a gender lens to social development, employment and decent work within SSF, calling for recognition of women’s paid, unpaid and subsistence work, and the need to promote decent work opportunities for women in SSF. A case study of migrant Chinese women workers in oyster shucking in Japan draws attention to the part of the SSF Guidelines that

require States and employers to offer similar protections to international migrant workers as to local workers.

This section also draws attention to occupational health and safety issues experienced by women in different contexts, including the threat of violence. Chapter 5 focuses on value chains, post-harvest and trade, including women's roles in markets, processing and other forms of trade. It offers examples of policy and other initiatives that threaten women's livelihoods in these areas, and examples of initiatives—often led by women—that have benefitted them. The case study of the organization of women vendors and their success in reclaiming the Marol fish market in Mumbai, India, inspires and the linked analysis of the case points to many parts of the SSF Guidelines that enjoin States to fulfill multiple duties essential to supporting women's post-harvest work.

The discussion of the role of trade liberalization and globalization and related increase in non-tariff barriers to trade related to food, sanitary and other standards that constrain women's ability to produce for export, and often undermine their access to local fish, is reminiscent of the earlier work we did on the gendered impact of these changes. The handbook also has a chapter on gender equality and gender-equitable policy implementation, with case studies showing what can happen when women are neglected in policy implementation, as well as one on disaster risks and climate change, including indicators for developing gender-sensitive disaster-reduction strategies.

Part 3 explores initiatives that can help to ensure an enabling environment for gender equality and to support the implementation of the SSFs Guidelines in ways that will help to achieve the promise they hold for women fishworkers and their families. Attention to women's relationship to natural and man-made disasters is essential in the context of climate-change hazards and ongoing problems with

overfishing, pollution and other challenges. It was the silence around impacts on women of the collapse of Newfoundland and Labrador's cod stocks that motivated my last intensive foray into the field of gender equality and fisheries, and that led to my opportunity to join, for a time, the international network of women activists and researchers working on gender and fisheries.

In 2010, the ICSF Women in Fisheries programme celebrated its 20th anniversary with the publication of a retrospective report entitled *ICSF's Journey with Women in Fisheries*, co-authored by Nalini Nayak, Cornelia Quist and others (see the Women in Fisheries webpage for a list of the many publications from this programme). In that report, they noted, “[i]t has taken FAO a quarter of a century to seriously focus on a standard for small-scale fisheries... It has taken as long for us in ICSF to collectively agree on the importance of a gendered perspective in fisheries—despite the fact that the crucial role of women in fisheries has been recognized from the very beginning.”

In recent years, new researchers, including particularly those involved with the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Group within the Asian Fisheries Society, have supported ongoing research in the area, and are now in the process of organizing their first standalone Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries to take place this coming October. While I have not seen an analysis of the processes that led to the inclusion of gender equality and equity in the SSF Guidelines, I am convinced that all of this intensive and sustained background legwork played a crucial role. One indication of this is the dedication of the Guidelines to the memory of ICSF's Chandrika Sharma who worked tirelessly on both the SSF and women in fisheries fronts. Ongoing support like that which made this handbook possible is essential if the Guidelines are to achieve their objectives for women and men in SSF globally. ♣

#### For more



<https://maritimestudiesjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40152-014-0016-3>

**Walking the Talk: Implementing the International Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries by Svein Jentoft**

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317644549\\_Promoting\\_Gender\\_Equity\\_and\\_Equality\\_Through\\_the\\_Small-Scale\\_Fisheries\\_Guidelines\\_Experiences\\_from\\_Multiple\\_Case\\_Studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317644549_Promoting_Gender_Equity_and_Equality_Through_the_Small-Scale_Fisheries_Guidelines_Experiences_from_Multiple_Case_Studies)

**Promoting Gender Equity and Equality Through the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines: Experiences from Multiple Case Studies by Kleiber, D., K. Frangoudes, H. T. Snyder, A. Choudhury, S. M. Cole, K. Soejima, C. Pita, A. Santos, C. McGougall, H. Petrics and M. Porter. 2017.**