

Seize the Day

The International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022) is a rare opportunity to promote much-needed transdisciplinary research into small-scale fisheries

This is a special year for small-scale fisheries. The International Year for Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022) brings more attention to the sector as also to the people who draw their livelihood both from life below and above water. Their well-being depends on healthy ecosystems, sensible government policies and well-functioning communities.

IYAFA 2022 is an opportunity for States to reconfirm the commitment they made in 2014, when they endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). There are thus reasons to be hopeful that positive change will come to small-scale fisheries around the world and that they will no longer be ignored or marginalized as in the past. IYAFA 2022 is a window of opportunity for real action in several arenas, not the least of which is research and knowledge production.

Too Big To Ignore

Too Big To Ignore (TBTI) is a global network to conduct research on small-scale fisheries. Like other contributors included as ‘stakeholders’ in the SSF Guidelines, IYAFA 2022 is expected to lead positive change for researchers who devote their time and effort to learning more about small-scale fisheries, and to support their viability and sustainability. Just as small-scale fisheries have been overlooked in the past, research in this field has been similarly disregarded—and for many of the same reasons. If governments see little potential in small-scale fisheries, concluding that the future is in large-scale industrialization, they have few reasons to incentivize research into small-scale fisheries.

That is not how the SSF Guidelines define specific roles for the academic community in Article 11 (Information, research and communication). The SSF Guidelines serve as a marching order for researchers around the world to engage more directly with small-scale fisheries. Without generating knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses, it is not possible to answer questions such as: Why are they so often in a state of poverty and marginalization? What is their contribution to the local economy and food security?

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local levels. What are the opportunities and hindrances for bringing about much-needed progress in small-scale fisheries? Is the Blue Economy what small-scale fisheries have been waiting for, or is it a threat to their survival? To answer these important and intriguing research questions would need funding, something the SSF Guidelines also emphasize.

Knowledge is power... and support

The research community is hopeful that States and civil society organizations will deliver on article 11.9 of the SSF Guidelines that says: “States and other

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A beach seine in operation in Ilocos Norte, the Philippines. The implementation of the SSF Guidelines may not be as straightforward as one might have hoped; it is likely to meet obstacles on the way to realization at domestic and local levels

parties should, to the extent possible, ensure that funds are available for small-scale fisheries research, and collaborative and participatory data collection, analyses and research should be encouraged. States and other parties should endeavour to integrate this research knowledge into their decision-making processes.”

development to allow small-scale fishing communities to participate in research and in the utilization of research findings. Research priorities should be agreed upon through a consultative process focusing on the role of small-scale fisheries in sustainable resource utilization, food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, and equitable development.”

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Article 11.10 specifies areas requiring more research, such as conditions of work, health, education and decisionmaking. In the context of gender relations, it urges research to capture how interventions have contributed towards social change. Many of these topics and questions speak to the need for comprehensive understanding of small-scale fisheries, in their own contexts and in their relations to the broader society.

It would also be necessary for the research community to fulfil its own role, as further stated in the same article. “Research organizations and institutions should support capacity

Transdisciplinarity

TBTI has stressed the importance of transdisciplinary perspectives; the 2018 book *Transdisciplinarity for Small-Scale Fisheries Governance: Analysis and Practice* gets into the fine grain of the matter. In sum, small-scale fisheries are too rich to fit within a single discipline. We need insights from diverse academic disciplines within the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. They all offer relevant insights and methodologies. The guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines require philosophical reflection about the meaning of human rights, dignity and social justice. What constitutes a good life for small-scale fisheries people is not merely a philosophical question, however. It is our overarching goal.

Transdisciplinarity implies the integration of the experience-based knowledge that people in the industry have built over generations from being on the water and working in the value chain. They have their own understanding of their problems and their causes. They also have their own ideas of what a good life entails for them. Researchers of small-scale fisheries are there to learn, understand and support the sector, not to override and impose their own perspectives and concepts.

The SSF Guidelines talk about “holistic approaches” to small-scale fisheries development. This requires a process of co-production where researchers and fishing communities make the building of knowledge a joint and interactive effort. Let us make that an ambition for IYAF 2022 and beyond.

World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress (WSFC)

As has been done since 2010, researchers, practitioners, and governments gather with small-scale fishers and supporting organizations every four years to share knowledge and discuss current and emerging issues affecting small-scale fisheries. The 4th World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress (4WSFC) coincides with IYAF 2022. It is being organized

as five regional congresses instead of one, to enable better participation and engagement; this also takes into consideration travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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All small-scale fisheries stakeholders are invited to participate at these regional congresses, either in person or virtually, and be part of the global movement to help make small-scale fisheries vibrant and strong. 📌

For more



Too Big to Ignore
<http://toobigtoignore.net/>

Transdisciplinarity for Small-Scale Fisheries Governance: Analysis and Practice

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-94938-3>

The 4th World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress (4WSFC)

<https://www.4wsfcongress.com/>