

Rich Rewards of Doing it Right

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines should be based on human-rights principles and standards, factoring in local conditions

In June 2014, the 31st session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines are rooted in decades of pioneering work in small-scale fisheries by intrepid human-rights campaigners such as John Kurien and Chandrika Sharma, among other advocates.

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has spearheaded campaigns since 2014 that show how the SSF Guidelines provide an unprecedented framework for addressing the needs of small-scale fishers through the human-rights-based approach. The initial phase of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Ghana was thus not unique to the country but part of ICSF's broader global campaign in 2018-2019 in Brazil, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

While its guiding principles are based on international human-rights standards, standards of responsible fisheries and on sustainable development, a number of contextual factors must be considered before local implementation. In Ghana, these considerations included socio-cultural, economic and educational factors, in addition to SSF value chains, bottlenecks and interventions. These broad conditions determined the local content of Ghana's programme, its focus and outcomes vis-a-vis the SSF Guidelines.

Small-scale fisheries play a critical role in providing food security and

supporting livelihoods in Ghana. It is estimated that the sector contributes 60 per cent of the total animal protein intake of Ghanaians while providing a source of livelihood for three million fishworkers dependent on the SSF value chains. For nutritional and socio-cultural factors, fish is highly valued. Ghanaians are among the highest consumers of fish in the world: 20-25 kg per capita per annum.

The country draws about 450,000 tonnes of fish annually from marine and inland waters, as well as from

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aquaculture. An additional 450,000 tonnes is imported. In terms of volume, SSF contribute 70-80 per cent of the total catch from marine and inland waters. The high number of fishers and communities dependent on SSF makes the sector pivotal to employment, livelihood and also to the food security mix.

Since the mid-1990s, Ghana's SSF economy was once thriving but has been declining since the mid-1990s. The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development (MoFAD) points out that overfishing, overexploitation and overcapacity of fishing vessels are the main obstacles to recovery of stocks. Small-scale fishers, on the other hand, point to weak regulation and enforcement of bye-laws as the fundamental problem. Despite state

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The two-day national workshop was held on August 14-15, 2019, at the University of Ghana. Participants and delegates were drawn from the NAFPTA, the Prampram Cooperative Fishmongers Society, NICFC, GNCFC, CEWEFIA and the University of Ghana, among others

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policy interventions and multilateral donor support, Ghanaian fisheries are hurtling towards unprecedented crises. To reverse this trend, fishworkers must be empowered to participate in decision making and management of the fishery resource to make the sector more productive and sustainable. Central to this is a shift from the macro level, top-bottom policy approach to a clear-cut human-rights-based approach.

Accordingly, in 2013, representatives from the NGO, Technical Services for Community Development (TESCOD) contributed to discussions on a 'zero draft' of the SSF Guidelines in Grand Bassam, Cote d'Ivoire. The initial phase of the implementation of the guidelines in Ghana, therefore, provided a unique opportunity to engage with long-time SSF advocates to shape the discourse for local implementation.

The first phase of the SSF Guidelines implementation in Ghana focused on improving awareness of the guidelines at the community, national and institutional levels; identifying common SSF challenges that could be addressed within a national SSF Guidelines framework;

and deepening the understanding of the implementation challenges. To this end, the year-long programme was structured around four key activities:

- Translating the SSF Guidelines into four indigenous languages
- Conducting three local workshops
- Organizing a two-day national implementation workshop
- Creating a national SSF Guidelines platform

Considering that most small-scale fishers have limited formal education, the abridged SSF Guidelines in English, by John Kurien, had to be translated into the indigenous languages. For this reason, a team of seasoned translators and linguists were commissioned in the Ga, Ewe, Fanti and Nzema languages. The initial copies of the translated drafts were circulated in James Town, Keta, Elmina and Sekondi-Takoradi between October 3 and October 10, 2018. However, the feedback was that the texts were technical and difficult for the average reader to comprehend. This observation led to several reviews that modified the texts to make them easier to read and understand.

The second activity comprised conducting three subnational workshops in 2018 for fishworkers, community-based organizations (CBOs), national fishworker organizations (FWOs) and their local branches. These workshops were held in Accra on November 27, in Takoradi on December 11, and in Keta on December 16. In order to create a high level of awareness and foster a deeper appreciation of the SSF Guidelines, the workshops were conducted in the Ga, Mfantse/Nzema and Ewe languages. Over 90 participants participated in the local workshops.

The three workshops highlighted the guiding principles, themes and roles; they also reflected the unique specific challenges of each location. In Accra, participants prioritized illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, lack of direct involvement in policy making and weak enforcement of fishery laws as major worrying concerns. In Takoradi, fishworkers were more concerned about 'saiko' (illegal trans-shipment of fish at sea), security of tenure regarding management and access to the fishery resources, and worsening livelihoods as a result of commercial oil and gas production. The Keta participants identified poor social infrastructure, lack of enforcement of bye-laws, frequent tidal waves, lack of proper beachfront development and exclusion of fishworkers in decision making as key constraints affecting their livelihoods.

The third activity was the national workshop. Its objective was to identify common SSF challenges from the local workshops and how they can be addressed within a national SSF Guidelines framework. The two-day event was held on August 14-15, 2019, at the University of Ghana. Participants and delegates were drawn from the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA), the Prampram Cooperative Fishmongers Society, the National Inland Canoe Fisherman Council (NICFC), the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC), the Central & Western Fishmongers Association (CEWEFIA) and the University of Ghana, among others.

The first day followed a discussion of the themes of the SSF Guidelines.

The second day's three-part session programme commenced with a formal welcome address and solidarity statements. This was followed by a presentation by Prof FKE Nunoo on the topic 'The FAO VG-SSF: Nature, Scope and Relevance'. The second session dealt with a presentation of local workshop reports by Peter Adjei of TESCO/ICSF, which formed the basis of focus-group discussions along three strands: one, key national SSF challenges and opportunities for change; two, identifying roles and responsibilities of primary actors in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines; and three, ways forward—actions for addressing key identified and/or prioritized issues.

The group discussion led to the third session that focused on group reports and conclusions. Although there were varying perspectives from the three groups, the key prioritized issues and recommendations at the end of the plenary session were deeply rooted in the local workshops but were broader in scope. The main recommendations of the national workshop include:

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- Work with the MoFAD and other stakeholders to adopt the SSF Guidelines into enforceable laws and regulations;
- Develop a document for MoFAD to advocate a long-term vision on the SSF Guidelines, with clearly outlined annual plans;
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis of the SSF Guidelines value chain, including a definition of SSF and the relationship with other organized businesses in the fishery sector;
- Increase advocacy efforts regarding inequalities in the SSF sector; and
- Emphasize the need for training and capacity building of FWOs and other interest groups to sustain the dissemination the SSF Guidelines at both national and subnational levels.

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Mfantse - Nzema (Takoradi) local workshop, 11 December 2018, SSNIT House Takoradi, Ghana. The workshops were conducted in the Ga, Mfantse/Nzema and Ewe languages. Over 90 participants participated in the local workshops

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The fourth activity was the creation of a national SSF Guidelines platform. To this end, a seven-member national platform was launched on August 15, 2019, at the sidelines of the national workshop. The platform seeks to raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines among various stakeholders and promote human-rights-based SSF through appropriate policy responses.

The initial phase of implementing the SSF Guidelines in Ghana has led to several meaningful outcomes. Besides the development of local language contents, over 120 participants from FWOs, CBOs, academia and MoFAD benefited from local and national workshops. In addition to the establishment of the national platform, the implementation activities by TESCOD/ICSF have been the most visible and comprehensive in Ghana since the adoption of the SSF Guidelines in 2014.

Nonetheless, the year-long implementation was fraught with a number of notable organizational and logistical challenges. Close to three million Ghanaians are dependent on the SSF, spread across hundreds

of communities. It was impractical to directly disseminate the SSF Guidelines in these communities. To achieve greater impact, the TESCOD team did not only engage with FWOs, municipal chief executives (MCEs) and MoFAD officials but also introduced the guidelines directly to chiefs and fishworkers. This approach led to high interest and a diverse blend of workshop participants.

Time constraint

The time constraint was another challenge. While all the activities were executed as per the timeline, the national workshop date was rescheduled from the original date of February 2019 to August 2019. This was necessary for deeper consultations, back-and-forth communications and in getting the major FWOs, including GNCFC, NAFPTA and NICFC, to harmonize their views and commit to working together to implement the SSF Guidelines.

The committed bottom-up approach came at considerable expense, far above the implementation budget. Many small-scale fishworkers

who expressed interest in attending the events could not do so because of the limited number of invitations allotted to each event.

The initial implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Ghana has, on the whole, met the goals outlined at the beginning of the programme. The participatory process motivated the fishworkers to express themselves eloquently as active participants, not just passive observers. Small-scale fishers from varying backgrounds, for the first time, discussed their roles in responsible fisheries and sustainable development in their mother tongues. Despite these successes, however, many invaluable lessons were learned; the areas where improvements can be made. It's worthwhile to consider them in detail for other such democratic efforts.

Addressing misperceptions: A common view among fishworker participants was that because of the voluntary nature of the SSF Guidelines, it would not be worthwhile to address their grievances. This view stems from the belief that stringent enforcement of fisheries bye-laws will rid the sector of the numerous illegal practices, particularly 'saiko'. Continuous effort is, therefore, needed to help fishworkers recognize that while legislative and economic approaches do have certain advantages, for sustainable management of fisheries, the SSF Guidelines address their needs in a more organized, all-inclusive and dignified manner on the basis of guiding principles such as human rights and dignity, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability.

Training and capacity building: In order to prepare national and community-based FWOs to be proactive in promoting the SSF Guidelines, they must be assisted to appreciate the human rights-based approach in SSF. Training and capacity building should equip FWOs and community leaders with participatory techniques to educate their members on the SSF Guidelines; align their organizations with human-rights standards; improve collaborations with other actors in the SSF value chain; and take a bigger role in SSF Guidelines advocacy and community monitoring.

Stakeholder consultation: Broad consultation can be a factor for change when it is properly facilitated and allows for direct participation of stakeholders or indirectly through their assigned representatives. Attention needs to be given not only to identifying and understanding the influence of each stakeholder but also the perspectives of the disadvantaged and vulnerable early on in the process. Future implementation of the SSF Guidelines should broaden the initial scope of consultations, with more attention to

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stakeholders involved in inland SSF, gender justice, tenure rights, saiko, and child labour and trafficking (CLaT).

Policy integration: Existing policies for developing and managing SSF are generic, with no specific objectives, measurable outcomes and time-frames. A holistic policy on SSF must be based on human rights and must recognize that small-scale fishworkers have legally mandated rights to use and manage fisheries resources. The next phase of the SSF Guidelines implementation should influence or drive policy alignment of national fisheries laws with the human rights principles and standards enshrined in the SSF Guidelines. ↴

For more

Ghana: Improved awareness about the SSF Guidelines at the community, national and institutional level and better understanding of the challenges facing the implementation of the SSF Guidelines

<https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1083-Ghana.html>

Ghana: Small Fish, Big Solution

<https://www.icsf.net/en/samudra/article/EN/83-4426-Small-Fish,-Big.html>

The SSF Guidelines Summary translated in Ghanaian languages (Ewe, GA, FANTE and NZEWA)

<https://igssf.icsf.net/en/page/1083-Ghana.html>