

# Cracking the Code for Small-scale Fisheries

**There is need for both an international instrument and a global programme to address the specific needs of the world's small-scale and artisanal fisheries**

Should the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) be “opened up” to include a special Chapter on small-scale artisanal fisheries? This was called for by the civil society organizations at the FAO’s Global Conference on Small-scale Fisheries (4SSF) in October 2008. The call was reiterated by civil society at the 28th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI 28).

The CCRF, while making several references to small-scale fisheries and fishworkers, does not provide specific guidance on how the small-scale artisanal subsector, which employs about 90 per cent of those engaged in fishing and fisheries-related activities, should be supported and promoted. The CCRF also lacks a gender perspective—especially to address the specific forms of discrimination faced by millions of women who are part of the fisheries worldwide, or to acknowledge the vital role they play at all levels. For civil society, these are areas that need urgent attention.

However, several delegations to COFI 28 opposed opening up the CCRF, which, it was argued, could prove to be a “Pandora’s Box”. If opened up for small-scale artisanal fisheries, then why not for other interests? While there was consensus on the need to support small-scale artisanal fisheries, there was no consensus on the best way to do so. Many Members expressed the need for an international instrument on small-scale fisheries, which could comprise a new article in the Code, an international plan of action (IPOA) and/or the development of guidelines that would guide national and international efforts to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries and create a framework for monitoring and reporting. In addition, many Members called for the establishment of a new COFI Sub-Committee on small-scale fisheries. In the end, COFI 28 directed the FAO Secretariat to examine various options to carry these suggestions forward.

To follow up on the mandate given by COFI, the FAO organized three regional workshops in Asia, Africa and Latin America, in October 2010. This enabled a large number of both governmental and civil society participants to provide their views

on how small-scale artisanal fisheries can be best supported and enabled to fulfil their potential. All the three workshops recommended developing a new instrument, complementing the CCRF, to address small-scale and artisanal fisheries issues.

ICSF feels that there is a need for both an international instrument and a global programme. With the world gripped by concerns about overfishing, excess capacity, declining biodiversity and climate change, as well as the challenges of food insecurity and poverty, it is increasingly evident that sustainable small-scale artisanal fisheries within a human-rights framework offers the most viable solution. There is recognition today that the small-scale artisanal fisheries subsector is relatively more sustainable, energy-efficient and less destructive, even as it

supports millions of livelihoods across the world, and supplies diverse populations, and particularly rural and remote populations in food-insecure regions, with a rich source of nutrition.

It is also recognized that small-scale artisanal fishing communities in many regions live and work under extremely precarious and

vulnerable conditions, due to a range of factors that include insecure rights to land and fishery resources; indebtedness; unfair and unsafe working conditions; inadequate health and educational services and social-safety nets; natural disasters and climate change; and exclusion from decision-making processes. Women fishworkers experience particular discrimination.

The potential of a new instrument to strengthen the social pillar of sustainable development and to effectively complement the CCRF within the framework of a human-rights approach was well recognized by the regional workshops. The onus is now on the 29th Session of COFI, to be held from 31 January to 4 February 2011, to respond in a manner in keeping with these recommendations. If it is not possible to open up the Code, COFI should agree to develop an instrument, along the lines of FAO’s Right to Food Guidelines. This would go a long way in meeting the aspirations expressed in the 2008 civil society Bangkok Statement. We hope that COFI obliges and decides upon the most appropriate instrument for further recognizing small-scale artisanal fisheries. 3

