

A New Era of Hope

The 10th Anniversary of the SSF Guidelines in 2024 will offer an opportunity to renew individual and collective commitments

The end of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022) has led to a new era of support for artisanal fisheries and small-scale aquaculture. Several closing events were held around the world, not only to recognize the importance of small-scale fisheries (SSF) and their contribution to food security and poverty alleviation, but also to pledge support. Too Big To Ignore (TBTI) Global had the privilege of co-organizing the Closing Ceremony for Asia with the Thailand Department of Fisheries, in Bangkok on 28 February 2023, in partnership with INFOFISH and with technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

gaining visibility around the world, concerted and sustained efforts are imperative to enhance information and knowledge about the sector, to protect their rights and access to resources and markets, to promote decent work and safety for people involved in the SSF and aquaculture sector, and to develop fishery management and governance systems sensitive to the needs and the characteristics of SSF and aquaculture in each region. National commitments are key to achieving these goals, and mechanisms to enhance regional collaboration are a must for capacity building. The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) is a key instrument.

Being a global research and capacity building network on SSF, TBTI Global is launching its new era of support with a range of activities. One, it is releasing the second edited volume on the SSF Guidelines, this time focusing on the roles of existing national policy and legal frameworks that can help support and advance the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The first volume had described how the SSF Guidelines were received and perceived, exploring the challenges and opportunities that could be anticipated through case studies of SSF in about 30 countries. Collectively, authors talked about how implementation would not happen on its own, but would require continued persuasion and negotiation, especially as power and inequity continue to be an issue. Partnership and collaboration would need to be strengthened—or built anew. Various transformations and reforms in SSF management and governance are required.

The second volume picks up on these points and moves forward.

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About 300 people from more than 40 countries joined this two-hour hybrid event including presentations from fishers' groups and civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government and inter-governmental organizations, and research institutions and academics. The speakers reiterated the significant contributions of SSF and fish farmers, in terms of livelihoods and food security, local economy, jobs and employment throughout the value chain. Their contribution to cultural and heritage value, conservation efforts and stewardship ethics were also emphasized.

IYAFA 2022 was an opportunity to reflect on several issues. While SSF are

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Fishing village in Malawi. Several closing events were held around the world, not only to recognize the importance of small-scale fisheries (SSF) and their contribution to food security and poverty alleviation, but also to pledge support

It emphasizes the need to look at the implementation of the SSF Guidelines from institutional and legal perspectives. Specifically, it examines the existing conditions in countries that can support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It does so in terms of laws and policies and whether these are directly or remotely related to SSF. The book illustrates this through reviews and appraisal of national-level policy and legal frameworks in 15 countries.

Two, the network is supporting the Thailand Department of Fisheries in a new initiative. Funded by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Secretariat, it seeks to improve data and data collection system for SSF in the APEC economies. The best practices are getting documented through a collaborative process, based on the knowledge and experience shared by the participating economies, and further discussion. In line with the SSF Guidelines, this project contributes to enhancing knowledge and understanding of SSF, helping address challenges like overfishing and the

lack of recognition of SSF customary and tenure rights in law and policies. One focus of the work is on developing context appropriate strategies for sustainable resource management among APEC member economies. Once the best practices document is ready, it can be incorporated in the Information System on Small-Scale Fisheries (ISSF) that TBTI Global maintains, to broaden application in other areas.

Three, following the success of the World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress in five regions in 2022, the network is launching a new SSF Regional Symposium Series in 2024. The first one for the Asia-Pacific region will take place in April 2024 in Shizuoka, Japan. Its theme is 'Bright Spots ~ Hot Spots' to recognize the decades of hard work by fishers, fishworkers and their organizations, CSOs, communities, government organizations and NGOs, practitioners and researchers. It illustrates why SSF matter and looks to gather greater support for them.

The SSF Guidelines and IYAFA 2022, along with the work of the International

THAILAND DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES



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Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and numerous other partners, are clear evidence of this effort. SSF has no shortage of bright spots with numerous studies, projects, networks and fisher-driven and community-based programmes. They contribute towards enhancing the knowledge and understanding about SSF, illustrating their values and contributions, and highlighting the critical role they play in supporting multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Great work has been done to strengthen SSF organizations and build their capacity for better governance. Major advances have been made in theories, policies and practices that promote viable and sustainable SSF around the world. Therefore, the 2024 SSF Regional Symposium is an opportunity to share these bright spots to energize and inspire others. At least two more regional symposiums will be held later in the year.

To not get carried away

We must acknowledge that SSF still face many problems and challenges, making them vulnerable; climate change and disaster are two prominent ones. SSF continue to be economically marginalized and unable to engage in making decisions and policies. The lack of secure access to resources and markets is compounded by poverty, poor working conditions and inadequate infrastructure. Some fishers have been displaced from places where they live and work by major development projects. Numerous cases of injustice have been noted—they more are likely to happen with the continued presence of agendas for economic growth and development in ocean and coastal areas around the world.

The global interest in biodiversity conservation has not paid sufficient attention to SSF's traditional and customary rights. Yet, none of these should lead to hopelessness or fear.

Quite the contrary: SSF communities are part of the 'hope spots' for the ocean, given how critical they are to the protection of the health of the ocean. More attention and support need to be provided to strengthen SSF and enable them to contribute to poverty alleviation, food security, cultural identity, conservation and sustainability, among other concerns. Describing SSF as hope spots recognizes the challenges that require varied interventions.

TBTI Global continues to dig deeper into the factors and conditions affecting SSF's viability and sustainability. It is strengthening its Blue Justice programme, with more stories and evidences, and with the application of a rapid appraisal tool, I-ADAPT, to the case studies, in order to enable the development of a Blue Justice typology based on a comprehensive set of guiding questions. These enable us to improve our knowledge regarding the community's resilience and its capacities to cope with stressors of injustices, as well as to adapt to change in ways that correspond well with their particular contexts.

Capacity is often mentioned in its absence in all efforts across multiple groups. Strengthening of SSF organizations is a key area for building capacity; to enhance their participation, including the representation of women, in policy and decision making processes, among others. Co-ordination among government departments involved in fisheries, environment, social development and legislation, is imperative to break the silos, and to facilitate concerted effort to protect fishers' rights and support their livelihoods.


Better integration of knowledge and building of common understanding and terminology across disciplines is also highlighted as an area needing greater effort. TBTI Global has developed a transdisciplinary training programme to deal with the current and emerging challenges, emphasizing how to structure the governance system to make it correspond with the diversity, complexity and dynamics of the sector. We offer free online training

on a regular basis, and on-site training whenever opportunities arise.

Just as co-management and decentralized systems can help improve SSF management and governance, TBTI Global has been creating 'country hubs' to strengthen the network and capacity to engage locally, as also to influence national policies. TBTI Japan was the first hub, co-ordinated by Yinji Li of Tokai University. It was followed by TBTI Bangladesh (Mahmud Islam, Sylhet Agricultural University), TBTI Philippines (Alice Ferrer, University of Philippines, Visayas) and TBTI Ecuador (María Jose Barragan Paladines, Charles Darwin Foundation).

Each hub has full autonomy in creating its focus, in how it is organized and operated. TBTI Global supports the country hubs through communication strategies that help enhance their visibility, by making connections that strengthen their networks, and through the production and promotion of e-books that illustrate the importance of SSF in their respective countries. The experience with the four country hubs, especially with the e-books programme, suggests this is a move in the right direction. We are excited to welcome more hubs in 2024, including TBTI Canada, launched on World Fisheries Day this year.

The new era of support for small-scale fisheries had a good start with the IYAFA closing events. SSF10 is an opportune time in 2024 for all stakeholders to renew their commitments, individually and collectively. For this, we need to first look back and see what has been done; we must review our efforts and then look at what has yet to be done.

When the World Fisheries Day comes around again in November 2024, we should be in a good position to put in place a comprehensive and holistic research programme and related activities that help enhance quality and capacity for SSF governance, support of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, achieve the multiple SDGs relevant to SSF, and secure Blue Justice and development opportunities for SSF around the world. 

For more

International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022: Final Report

<https://www.fao.org/3/cc5034en/cc5034en.pdf>

The new era of support for small-scale fisheries in Asia was pledged in Bangkok at the IYAFA Closing Event for Asia

<http://toobigtoignore.net/the-new-era-of-support-for-small-scale-fisheries-in-asia-was-pledged-in-bangkok-at-the-iyafa-closing-event-for-asia/>

The Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines: Global Implementation

<http://toobigtoignore.net/the-small-scale-fisheries-guidelines-global-implementation/>

The SSF Regional Symposium in 2024

<https://www.ssf-symposium.com/>