

Better Recognition Now

At the 36th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) several participants felt that issues relating to small-scale fisheries would have been better served if discussed under a stand-alone agenda item

The 36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was held at its headquarter in Rome, from 8 to 12 July 2024. Small-scale fisheries (SSF) issues were included under all major agenda items, unlike in previous COFI meetings where SSF issues were discussed under a stand-alone agenda item.

Speaking first, the Tanzanian delegation drew attention to the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). The delegation spoke with appreciation of the development of national plans of action for SSF (NPOAs-SSF) in African countries like Namibia, Uganda, Malawi and Madagascar. Further, initiatives of the African Union-Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP), in support of SSF, were mentioned. In future, the delegation was keen to see SSF retained as a stand-alone agenda item in the regular sessions of COFI. The Philippines delegation also supported the 10th Anniversary of the SSF Guidelines and informed COFI about its NPOA under development.

At a high-level special event on the 10th anniversary of the SSF Guidelines, held during the lunch break of the opening day of COFI, FAO brought to light the SSF legislation already in place in 20 member countries, the development of NPOAs-SSF in seven member States, and a decennial action plan in pipeline for the Mediterranean region.

Minister Abdullah Hamis Ulega, for Livestock and Fisheries, Tanzania, spoke on the occasion in support of what his government has done for SSF. Sergio González Guerrero, Minister of Production, Peru, encouraged all FAO members to implement the SSF Guidelines. Formalizing 12,000

artisanal fishing vessels and designating the high-value giant squid fishery to the subsector were shared as key Peruvian government decisions to benefit artisanal fisheries. Additional support included a dedicated low-interest credit scheme, the development of an extension system, and protection of the ancestral and traditional knowledge of artisanal fishing communities.

Drusilia Bayate, Undersecretary for Fisheries of the Philippines, spoke about the NPOA-SSF under development in her country. Preferential access for small-scale fishers to municipal waters (inland, coastal and marine waters up to eight nautical miles from the low-tide line, excluding the marine

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protected areas or MPAs) was being operationalized. Schemes were being introduced to replace lost fishing gear and to support parametric insurance. A management initiative for sardine fisheries was being developed. Seaweed farming was proposed as an alternative source of income for municipal fishers.

Charlina Vitcheva, Director of the Directorate General, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission, commended FAO for making the Summit a genuine platform for dialogue. While scoping of SSF into the WTO instrument on fisheries subsidies was seen as essential, she cautioned against any undue expansion of its scope. She agreed that the SSF subsector was more vulnerable than other sectors in coastal areas. While men fished and caught different species in different geographic areas, women were active in fish processing.

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FAO / GIUSEPPE



Committee on Fisheries 36th Session (COFI), Rome Italy, 8-12 July 2024. It is a matter of great concern that many non-State actors who had prepared knowledge-based statements on COFI agenda papers, were forced to resort to spreading their message only online

The women's role, however, was overlooked. The Director expressed concern about the existential threat to small-scale fishing from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and competing activities such as offshore windfarms and MPAs. Safeguarding secure access to resources for small-scale fishers was necessary, she observed. Fishers, both men and women, were to participate in decisionmaking, especially in relation to marine spatial planning (MSP) and management of MPAs. She sought a regional approach to data collection. In addition, promoting consumer awareness and engaging with local value chains were needed, she added.

Mahlet Mesfin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Ocean, Fisheries and Polar Affairs of the United States (US) Department of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, was keen to see a better understanding of SSF, and was appreciative of the information and analyses provided by the 2023 Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) study. She was supportive of participatory and inclusive management of SSF, and sought to empower the role of women in SSF, considering that they formed a significant share of the workforce. She emphasized the importance of decent work and poverty alleviation and the urgency to criminalize forced labour.

Lorena Ortiz of Confederacion Mexicana De Cooperativas (CONMECOOP) was keen to see greater recognition extended to the SSF Guidelines and better recognition of SSF at COFI. Despite legal protection, the blue economy approach marginalized SSF, she feared.

She was keen to see greater protection of coastal and marine territories. Rather than a private-property approach, a human-rights-based approach was to be promoted. She identified climate change and environmental destruction, including from pollution, large construction projects, changing migratory patterns of fish and the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) target such as '30x30' acting as major threats marginalizing SSF. Greater investments were to be made in reparation and protection of nature, and better access had to be provided to small-scale fishers and fishing communities to climate-change adaptation and mitigation funds. Gender-based discrimination was to be addressed. She would like COFI to remain a strategic forum, and SSF to be a stand-alone agenda item at COFI.

Concluding the side event, Manuel Barange, Assistant Director-General and Director of FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Policies and Resources Division (NFD), applauded the SSF Guidelines and hoped to see the instrument acting as a catalyst to empower small-scale fishing communities to help them become full actors in the sector.

Under the agenda item 6, Decisions and Recommendations of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, Indonesia expressed concern about poor market access for SSF, in general, and certification of fish and fish products not benefitting the SSF subsector, in particular. Several other delegations concurred with this view.

Under the agenda item 7, Decisions and Recommendations of the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, China sought clarification of the definition of SSF. The Philippines drew attention to SSF being practised across different habitats and expressed concern about how SSF was the most vulnerable subsector to climate-change impacts.

Canada recognized malnutrition as an issue and saw a role for aquatic foods in providing both nutrition and livelihoods. While doing so, Canada sought integrating biodiversity protection into food security and nutrition. Aquatic foods were a vital source of micronutrients for small-scale fishing communities, observed the US. New Zealand saw aquatic foods as a pathway for food security and nutrition. Australia drew attention to

indigenous peoples and their need to access aquatic foods.

Food security and heritage go hand in hand, observed Brazil, and drew attention to the role of small-scale artisanal fisheries in valorizing ancestral work, upholding a way of life, life style and culinary skills, and contributing to gastronomic heritage.

Under agenda item 10, Fisheries and Aquaculture in Food Security and Nutrition, Norway, considering the importance of SSF for food security and nutrition and socioeconomic development, wanted to ensure representation of small-scale fishers in decision-making processes.

Ecuador spoke in support of protecting sustainable sources of livelihood of marginalized people. Chile upheld the right to adequate food in the context of blue transformation, and was keen to bring SSF back to COFI as a stand-alone agenda item.

Indonesia shared information about its school feeding programme, based on aquatic foods. Marshall Islands also wanted to provide healthy diets in local schools.

Under agenda item 11, Impact of Climate Change on Fisheries and Aquaculture, New Zealand and Chile drew attention to fishery resources as a low-carbon source of protein. The US said the coastal fishing communities were greatly affected by climate change and pointed out changes in fish distribution and abundance as a result of climate-change impacts, requiring a longer-term, and a more flexible and holistic approach to fisheries management.

Chile said climate change exacerbates the El Niño phenomenon and highlighted the need for adaptation plans for fisheries, aquaculture and biodiversity. The Republic of Korea shared plans to move its national fisheries to carbon neutrality by 2030. Saudi Arabia was keen that the social, cultural and economic aspects of climate change be looked into.

Several delegations spoke in support of integrating climate change into regional fisheries management bodies (RFMBs). Vietnam said it was the country most vulnerable to climate change. Maldives was aware of climate change affecting fisheries and migration of fish to cooler waters of the ocean. The Philippines drew attention to bleaching of coral reefs. India observed that small-scale fishers and marginalized

communities dependent on aquatic food systems in the South Asian context were particularly impacted.

The SSF in small island developing States (SIDS) were particularly vulnerable to risks, slow-onset events and disasters from recurring climate-change impacts, observed Fiji. The implications for lives, livelihoods, food security and resource management were to be better understood and there was an urgent need to mobilize resources and to act. The nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were to be made available to the aquatic food sector. Fiji was also worried about the intrusion of salt water into freshwater aquifers.

Although of significant concern and interest to SSF, the agenda item 12, on the Implications of Fisheries and Aquaculture of Global Biodiversity Frameworks, did not elicit any discussion on the SSF implications of biodiversity, and biodiversity conservation. Similarly, agenda item 13, on Marine Plastic Pollution and Fisheries and Aquaculture, also did not have a focus on the implications of plastic pollution for SSF.

Although SSF issues were dealt with under most of the agenda papers, the discussions during COFI, especially on topics such as climate change, biodiversity conservation and plastic pollution, did not deal sufficiently with SSF, begging the question if SSF, in relation to all major agenda items, would fare better if discussed under a stand-alone agenda item. The need for a stand-alone agenda item was supported by Tanzania, Chile and civil society organizations.

Although enhanced transparency was the aim, it is a matter of concern that a significant amount of time of all the delegations was committed to vetting the COFI report in the plenary on screen, at the expense of discussion time on each of the agenda item. It is a matter of great concern that many non-State actors who had prepared knowledge-based statements on COFI agenda papers, or wanted to air some of their concerns or positions, were forced to resort to spreading their message only online, denying them an opportunity to reach COFI members through all the UN languages. They were unable to thus benefit from the excellent FAO interpretation facilities. ♻️

For more



Report of the Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, Rome, 8–12 July 2024 by FAO, 2024

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/report-of-the-thirty-sixth-session-of-the-committee-on-fisheries-rome-8-12-july-2024-by-fao-2024/>

Statement at COFI36 on Agenda Item 10: The Role of Fisheries and Aquaculture in Food Security and Nutrition

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/statement-at-cofi36-on-agenda-item-10-the-role-of-fisheries-and-aquaculture-in-food-security-and-nutrition/>

Statement at COFI36 on Agenda Item 11: Impact of Climate Change on Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Aquatic Foods as a Climate Solution by ICSF

<https://icsf.net/resources/statement-at-cofi36-on-agenda-item-11-by-icsf/>

Statement at COFI36 on Agenda Item 12: The implications for fisheries and aquaculture of global biodiversity frameworks and agreements by ICSF

<https://icsf.net/resources/statement-at-cofi36-on-agenda-item-12/>

Statement at COFI36 on Agenda Item 13: Marine Plastic Pollution and Fisheries and Aquaculture by ICSF, 2024

<https://icsf.net/resources/statement-at-cofi36-on-agenda-item-13-marine-plastic-pollution-and-fisheries-and-aquaculture/>