

Contributions to the HLPF 2016 from the Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

The 32nd Session of COFI will be held from 11 to 15 July 2016, where the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be one of the most essential matters to be discussed. While several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are highly relevant to fisheries and aquaculture, SDG 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development is the most relevant for the work of COFI. Several targets of SDG 14 call for specific actions in fisheries, *inter alia*, effectively regulate harvesting, end over fishing and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, address fisheries subsidies, increase economic benefits from sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture, provide access for small-scale fishers to resources and markets, implement the UN Convention of Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

In considering the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind”, this input is mainly focusing on small-scale fisheries (SSF), by following the template. Small-scale fishers and fish workers account for over 90% of all people involved in capture fisheries and are considered to be among the most vulnerable people engaged in fisheries and could be potentially “left behind”, unless appropriate consideration and action are taken.

I. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:

The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code), adopted in 1995, in its Article 6.18 of the General Principles, prescribes that “recognizing the important contribution of artisanal and small-scale fisheries to employment, income and food security, States should appropriately protect the rights of fishers and fishworkers, particularly those engaged in subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fisheries, to a secure and just livelihood, as well as preferential access, where appropriate, to traditional fishing grounds and resources in the waters under their national jurisdiction”¹.

SSF is one of the most important Agenda items for COFI and has been one of its stand-alone Agenda item since its 25th Session, in 2003. In 2008, FAO co-organized, with the Royal Government of Thailand, the First Global Conference on Small-Scale Fisheries- Securing sustainable small-scale fisheries: bringing together responsible fisheries and social development, in response to a request by the 27th Session of COFI, held in 2007. Following the recommendation of the 29th Session of COFI, in 2011, FAO facilitated the development of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), which were adopted in the last Session of COFI (COFI 31), held in June 2014, as a complement of the Code. SSF and the implementation of the SSF Guidelines will, therefore, be thoroughly discussed in the incoming session of COFI in July 2016.

II. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

As describe in the foreword of the SSF Guidelines², the small-scale fisheries sector tends to be firmly rooted in local communities, traditions and values. Many small-scale fishers are self-employed and usually provide fish for direct consumption within their households or communities. Women are

¹ FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, FAO, 1995.

² Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, FAO, 2015

significant participants in the sector, particularly in post-harvest and processing activities. Despite their importance, however, many small-scale fishing communities continue to be marginalized, in particular in the case of indigenous and ethnical minority communities, and, therefore, their contribution to food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, equitable development and sustainable resource utilization is not fully realized. The development of the fisheries sector over the past three to four decades has in many cases around the world led to overexploitation of resources and threats to habitats and ecosystems. Small-scale fishing communities also commonly suffer from unequal power relations. In many places, conflicts and competition with large-scale fisheries and other sectors are an issue. Small-scale fishing communities are commonly located in remote areas and tend to have limited or disadvantageous access to markets, and may have poor access to health, education and other social services. Within the small-scale fisheries sector, small island developing states (SIDS) are particularly reliant on the fisheries sector. For many SIDS the fisheries sector is the primary or secondary source of income. SIDS will be left behind if their fisheries are not managed effectively and if their rights to participate in those fisheries are not recognized. Pollution, environmental degradation, climate change impacts and natural and human-induced disasters add to the threats facing small-scale fishing communities. All those factors make it difficult for small-scale fishers and fish workers to make their voices heard, defend their human rights and tenure rights, and secure the sustainable use of the fishery resources on which they depend.

III. Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

The SSF Guidelines are the result of a long and participatory development process. They present an agreed international consensus and guidance in relation to small-scale fisheries development and governance, promoting human rights based approach. Building on the outcomes of relevant previous conferences and consultations³ and on the practical experience of the over 4,000 stakeholders from over 120 countries directly involved in the SSF Guidelines development process, they place emphasis on the needs of developing countries and are for the benefit of vulnerable and marginalized groups. The SSF Guidelines promote, among other, the following principles and good practices:

- Formal integration of small-scale fisheries into rural development policies.
- Embracement of transparency and accountability as well as holistic, integrated and adaptive management and development approaches that promote and balance social economic and environmental sustainability.
- Adoption of inclusive and participatory approaches, promotion of cross-sectoral linkages and fostering of an environment that promotes collaboration and conflict resolution mechanisms among stakeholders.
- Promotion of gender equality, integration of gender concerns and perspectives and empowerment of women.
- Equal consideration of environmental, resource and community rights and sustainability, and promotion of co-management and community-based management arrangements, including for marine reserves and protection areas that are informed by the precautionary approach.
- Use of a wide range of information for decision-making, including bio-ecological, social and economic data, from scientific and local and traditional sources.

³ E.g., Good Practices in the Governance of Small-scale Fisheries: Sharing of Experiences and Lessons Learned in Responsible Fisheries for Social and Economic Development (COFI/2011/8), consultations reports available at <http://www.fao.org/fishery/ssf/guidelines/en>

- Respect of cultures, existing forms of organization, traditions, local norms and practices, as well as customary or otherwise preferential access to fishery resources, land and territories, by small-scale fishing communities, including indigenous peoples.
- Recognition of the need for capacity development in all areas and at all levels, and support to awareness-raising, empowerment and cohesion.
- Assurance that disaster risk reduction/management and climate change adaptation policies and interventions respond to the specific needs of small-scale fisheries, recognizing that special considerations must be given to fishing communities living on small islands which are particularly vulnerable to disasters and climate change.

IV. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

The factors affecting SSF, listed above in item 2, are still emerging issues, which need to be tackled. The empowerment of small-scale fishers/fisherfolks and their representatives in the context of a human rights based approach is a major emerging issues. The topics addressed in the SSF Guidelines go beyond traditional fisheries issues, like fisheries management only. They consider for example gender, social development and policy coherence. They also put an emphasis on vulnerable and marginalized people, including indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities who are often particularly affected by the lack of access to aquatic resources and markets, as called for under SDG target 14.b. These people are often not aware of their rights, not properly organized and not sufficiently connected to relevant decision-making processes at national, regional and international levels, to ensure that they are not left behind.

V. Area where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required.

HLPF may wish to provide guidance in particular with regard to SDG 14 and especially SDG 14.b, and to take into consideration recommendations by COFI to SSF, in the context of the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind”. In that context, discussion on how to better integrate small-scale fisheries into broader policy agendas, namely in relation to food security, poverty eradication, social protection, decent work, etc., to ensure that all small-scale fishers are enabled to know and realize their rights and to benefit from and make a full contribution to development, would be particularly appreciated. The deliberations may include the identification of major relevant policy processes, partnerships to be developed, capacity needs and good practices to be learned from in the context of other relevant policy processes.

It also important that SDG 17 is taken into consideration, in particular on the consolidation of the Global Partnership and the effective mobilization of urgently needed resources for the implementation of the Agenda 2030. The world fisheries and aquaculture community would welcome strong commitments to effective intergovernmental collaboration and strengthening of means of implementation to support capacity development efforts promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development processes and associated institutions. We are looking forward to the outcome of the discussion on concrete steps for fisheries stakeholders worldwide to join processes following the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) for Financing of Development. FAO’s Blue Growth Initiative provides a strategic framework to facilitate follow-up to Agenda 2030, including the AAAA, in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Further, HLPF may wish to review commitments and processes that effectively expedite the successful implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10, and, at the same time, facilitate the consideration and integration of needs and opportunities relevant to local communities depending on fishing, fish farming and fish processing. Many fish producers and fish workers will benefit from their effective inclusion and participation, as well as the integration of their interests and concerns, in processes aiming at the implementation of the above-mentioned SDGs.

VI. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:

An important way to accelerate progress for those at risk to be left behind in small-scale fisheries is therefore the actual use of the SSF Guidelines as a powerful tool at country and regional level to revise/strengthen small-scale fisheries governance and development models in a transparent and participatory manner. The exploration and promotion of the human rights based approach in this context is particularly important as it allows for a comprehensive approach that does not look at the sector in isolation but recognizes and values its embeddedness in a wider social-economic-environmental context.

It is noted that COFI has always paid particular attention to Article 5 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which recalls the Special Requirements of Developing Countries:

5.1 The capacity of developing countries to implement the recommendations of this Code should be duly taken into account.

5.2 In order to achieve the objectives of this Code and to support its effective implementation, countries, relevant international organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, and financial institutions should give full recognition to the special circumstances and requirements of developing countries, including in particular the least-developed among them, and small island developing countries. States, relevant inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and financial institutions should work for the adoption of measures to address the needs of developing countries, especially in the areas of financial and technical assistance, technology transfer, training and scientific cooperation and in enhancing their ability to develop their own fisheries, as well as to participate in high seas fisheries, including access to such fisheries.

We feel this fundamental consideration should continue to guide COFI in its work and hope that HLPF would recognize and support this approach for implementation of Agenda 2030 in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.