

## SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

of the

### Near East and North Africa Regional Consultation Workshop: Towards the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

Muscat, Oman,  
7-10 December 2015

#### INTRODUCTION

The *Near East and North Africa Regional Consultation Workshop: Towards the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* was held in Muscat, Oman, on 7-10 December 2015 and was jointly organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). The workshop was attended by 40 participants from countries in the Near East and North Africa region – Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Tunisia – including representatives of governments, fisher-folk organizations, civil society organization (CSOs), academia as well as representatives of regional and international organisations, NGOs and other relevant actors.

The overall objective of the workshop was to raise awareness and support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) in the region. During 3.5 days, participants reviewed the situation and current status of small-scale fisheries in the region, shared experiences through regional and topical presentations and discussions, and made suggestions with regard to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the region, including identification of priorities and recommendations for actions.

The workshop noted the socio-economic and cultural importance of small-scale fisheries in the region. Small-scale fisheries contribute to livelihoods, food security, and local and national economies. Fish is very important for nutrition, especially for population groups with limited purchasing power, and small-scale fisheries are a main contributor to local fish supplies.

It is of great importance that the implementation of the SSF Guidelines be carried within the framework of food security and poverty eradication and take local needs into consideration. It was noted that small-scale fisheries dependent livelihoods go beyond fishing, and encompass social, economic and cultural values as well. The comprehensiveness of the SSF Guidelines was acknowledged and the need to take a holistic approach to small-scale fisheries governance and development was recognised.

Women make significant contributions to small-scale fisheries, mainly in postharvest processing and trading but also in other down- and upstream activities, although the rate of women's participation varies from one country to another. Women also play an important role at the community and household level. However, women's work is often invisible and hence not sufficiently recognised.

There are encouraging developments in the region with regard to reviews of policies and strategies, recognition of the socioeconomic dimensions of small-scale fisheries, and increasing emphasis on participation of small-scale fisheries actors in decision-making on resource management and development. However, challenges persist, including – with some differences between different countries – insufficient or weak organisational structures of small-scale fisheries actors, poor infrastructure facilities and services, heavily exploited fishery resources and a strong influence of demand on production, especially in the context of exports, and increasing risks from climate change and disaster impacts.

The workshop recognised that the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and of the outcomes of this workshop need to be linked and integrated with other on-going initiatives in the region and at national level, for example the FAO Blue Growth Initiative and the ecosystem approach to fisheries. There is also an important potential for countries in the region to share experiences with each other.

## **OUTCOMES OF WORKING GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

Key priority areas of actions to be considered further in national and regional implementation planning processes proposed by the workshop included:

### **Governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resources management (Chapter 5 of the SSF Guidelines)**

- *The small-scale fisheries sector is constrained by the lack of specific small-scale fisheries areas and the regulatory framework does not grant preferential access rights.* Countries should develop or improve legislation, policies, strategies, plans and institutional structures to grant fair access and user rights for sustainable small-scale fisheries, both to men and women. At the regional level, experiences with small-scale fisheries support infrastructure (e.g. processing/landing sites, fishing villages) should be shared.
- *Existing institutional frameworks do not always enable the participation of all relevant small-scale fisheries actors to achieve sustainable management.* At the regional level, producer organization platforms and other appropriate mechanisms/organizations are needed to contribute to participatory decision-making. These organizations need training and capacity development in relation to sustainable use and management of resources. At the national level, these organizations can play an important role in supporting the development and strengthening of fishers and fish workers, including women, and their associations. National regulatory frameworks should be reviewed as necessary to ensure the participation of organizations in sustainable management of small-scale fisheries.
- *Data and information necessary to support sustainable management of small-scale fisheries are often lacking or insufficient.* The awareness of all stakeholders about the importance of data and information needs to be raised and the capacities to process and use data should be developed, including at local levels, so that small-scale fisheries actors can participate in data collection. Modern technologies should be used in the collection, processing and analysis of data and results need to be documented and disseminated to all relevant stakeholders. One institution at national level should be in charge of providing official information on small-scale fisheries.

### **Social development, employment and decent work and gender equality (Chapters 6+8 of the SSF Guidelines)**

- *Small-scale fisheries actors in the region, particularly deprived categories, women and migrants, are not always sufficiently organized to actively participate in fisheries management and policies.* It is expected that increased participation could also contribute to create additional employment possibilities. Valuable existing national experiences of organizational development should be shared in the region to inform organizational strengthening. In addition, regulatory frameworks and their implementation need to be assessed in relation to their supportive functions for organizations.
- *Small-scale fishers and fish workers, in particular women and deprived groups, often lack access to social security protection.* Better organization of small-scale fisheries actors and the provision of awareness raising and training on the benefits of social protection and on how to access these schemes should be provided. In addition, various funding mechanisms for social protection need to be explored across the region and beyond, taking into account the specificities of the sector.

- *Safety at sea and other decent working conditions, including for women, are currently insufficient in small-scale fisheries.* A regional workshop on decent working conditions (including safety at sea and occupational safety and health) should be organized with relevant partners. In this context, the impact of climate change on working conditions in fisheries should also be considered. Appropriate legislation should be developed and enacted at national level and small-scale fishers and fish workers should benefit from training on safe technologies for better working conditions. The use of information and communication technology to improve working conditions should be promoted and cost-efficient safety equipment solutions should be developed with the involvement of fishers.
- *In order to enable small-scale fisheries to be a driver for development, integrated approaches that reconcile environmental, social and economic development are needed.* All countries in the region should use the SSF Guidelines as a reference framework when developing policies and strategies. Research, in particular on socio-economic aspects, should contribute to improved conditions for small-scale fisheries. Importantly, monitoring capacities of all stakeholders to assess progress need to be developed. At the regional level, coordinated management and research agendas in relation to shared stocks should be encouraged and regulations should be harmonized.
- *In general, the small-scale fisheries sector is often characterized by limited access to education and professional development opportunities, in particular for children/women.* The implementation of International Labour Organization (ILO) guidance on decent work should be promoted to support better professional development in the sector. Moreover, functional basic literacy needs to be ensured.

#### **Value chains, post-harvest and trade (Chapter 7 of the SSF Guidelines)**

- *Small-scale fishers actors need to be empowered to reap more of the benefits of and income from the sales of their produce.* Their marginalisation should be eliminated and their self-esteem improved. At the national level, fisheries departments need to provide support, e.g. through establishing better marketing facilities following successful experiences of 'model fishing villages'. The negotiating power of small-scale fisheries actors vis-à-vis middlemen needs to be strengthened, in particular in the context of exports. At the regional level, better coordination among governments is needed to negotiate trade agreements with importing countries taking small-scale fisheries into consideration. Member countries should be more proactive and promote changes in mandates/functionality of regional organisations, as required, to become more effective.
- *The links between trade (demand) and production need to be better understood and considered.* Adverse impacts of international trade on resource utilisation and local food security should be avoided by creating awareness among middlemen and consumers on resource implications of demand. Diversification of small-scale fisheries products should be promoted and the access of small-scale fisheries actors to knowledge on new markets and products should be facilitated. The current dependence of small-scale fishers and fish workers on middlemen for financing and provision of inputs need to be reduced by providing them with the necessary support and services to become more independent, e.g. through cooperatives, improved regulations, fair competition and transparency with regard to the role of middlemen.
- *The organisational structures of small-scale fisheries actors need to be strengthened along the value chain to enhance their negotiating power with other segments of the market and allow them to get better returns from their production activities.* Strong organisations are also needed to enable effective participation of small-scale fisheries stakeholders in policy and decision making processes. Governments should ensure that small-scale fisheries effectively participate at all levels of decision-making, and small-scale fisheries actors need to ensure that their organisations have clear statutes, promote compliance and are representative.

- *The availability of trade related information facilitating the access to domestic, regional and international markets needs to be improved.* Appropriate links and networks for sharing and exchanging information should be strengthened making use of relevant regional organisations and structures. Trade related information systems should be developed that can provide real time information on prices in different markets to small-scale fisheries actors. These need to be based on a suitable platform and make use of appropriate technologies.
- *There is a lack of adequate conditions and controls to ensure the quality and prices of fishery products.* Small-scale fisheries actors need capacity development to improve their handling and marketing opportunities based on international good practices to increase the value of their products. Requirements and specifications of the products to ensure quality should be determined at national level, based on international norms.
- *Investments are needed* for small-scale fisheries in appropriate infrastructures and equipment, marketing facilities, financial support, as well as in the development of technical and human capacities for value addition and reduction of postharvest losses. Small-scale fisheries actors should be supported with regard to the improvement of product quality and value addition. There is also a need to increase their awareness of product quality and safety requirements.
- *The context of food security and poverty eradication is essential* and priority should be given to improved value added to the benefit of small-scale fishing communities and the improvement of their well-being, but also remembering the needs of consumers. Macroeconomic objectives, including exports, need to be accompanied with mechanisms to ensure that small-scale fishing community development needs are satisfied.

### **Climate change and disaster risks**

- *Climate change and disasters negatively affect small-scale fisheries in the region* (e.g. through sea level rise, changes in water temperature and salinity, damages to infrastructure by storms, red tides and human-induced pollution, such as chemical). Studies to better understand the impact of climate change and disasters at the regional level are needed and the small-scale fisheries sector needs to be included in national climate change adaptation strategies. In addition, forecasting, prevention and preparedness capacities of all stakeholders to deal with disasters needs to be enhanced.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The workshop identified the following next steps to actively promote the SSF Guidelines implementation at the national and regional level:

- *All participants* should encourage the use of the outcomes of the workshop to provide a road map for national action planning in relation to small-scale fisheries, using the SSF Guidelines as a general reference framework.
- *All participants* should raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines and the workshop outcomes, including through:
  - Distribution of the SSF Guidelines to all relevant stakeholders;
  - Preparation and dissemination of simplified and other national and local language versions and multi-media communication products;
  - Organization of information meetings with different stakeholder groups, including ministries/government agencies, CSOs, fishing cooperatives, federations, unions etc., to agree on actions and distribute tasks; and
  - Dissemination through electronic networks and websites as well as local and national media (e.g., newspapers)
- *Regional bodies and organizations* should be more involved in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, e.g. through:

- The regional network for fisheries research institutes in the Maghreb countries;
  - Including SSF Guidelines implementation in the work programme of, for example, the Regional Commission on Fisheries (RECOFI); and
  - The use and strengthening of the Maghreb Platform for SSF and MEDARTNET and other similar organizations.
- *The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of Oman* should include information on the SSF Guidelines and the outcomes of the workshop in the Senate Al Bahar forum.

The need to identify and secure funding and synergies by all stakeholders was acknowledged. This should include reviewing possibilities to include SSF Guidelines implementation in on-going and planned projects and programmes. Proposals for new projects focusing on SSF Guidelines implementation could be prepared for consideration by development partners, bilateral donors and embassies at country level, and NGOs. Fisheries administrations should also strive to include SSF Guidelines implementation in their regular budgets. The establishment and access to national funds, like the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund in Oman, should be encouraged. Also, taxes and levies generated by the sector itself should be reinvested in its development.

Interactions with relevant non-fisheries ministries and departments at all levels and clarification of responsibilities for the mainstreaming of the SSF Guidelines in relevant policies, strategies and plans as well as public-private partnerships in support of the SSF Guidelines should be encouraged. Possibilities to receive support from large private sector companies, e.g. through corporate social responsibility schemes or polluter pay principle application, should be explored. Similarly, access to climate change adaptation funds and the establishment of disaster risk funds should be promoted.

*The workshop called on:*

- *Countries from the region* to participate in the GFCM Regional Conference on Small-Scale Fisheries to be held in Algeria in 2016.
- *FAO* to improve awareness of national FAO Representations on SSF Guidelines implementation needs

Participants thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman, FAO and GFCM for hosting and organising the workshop.

Muscat, 10 December 2015