



## JOINT COMMUNIQUE

### SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

of the

#### South Asia FAO-BOBLME Regional Consultation on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security

Colombo, Sri Lanka  
23-26 November 2015

#### INTRODUCTION

The *South Asia FAO-BOBLME Regional Consultation on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security* was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 23 – 26 November 2015 was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project for Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. It was co-hosted by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of Sri Lanka, and additional financial support was provided by the Government of Norway. The workshop was attended by 42 participants, including representatives of governments, regional and international organisations, fisher-folk organizations, civil society organization (CSOs), NGOs, academia 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 examined the current status of small-scale fisheries in the region, shared experiences through country and topical presentations and discussions, and proposed action to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at regional and national level.

Across the region, small-scale fisheries, contribute to livelihoods, food security, and local and regional economies. In Bangladesh, inland fisheries play a key role while marine capture fisheries are dominant in the Maldives. In all four countries, the majority of fishers and fish workers are employed in the small-scale fishery sector.

There are encouraging developments in the region in relation to legal reforms, strengthening participation of small-scale fisheries actors and co-management approaches. On the other hand, many challenges persist, including heavily exploited fishery resources in coastal area, poor infrastructure facilities and services, increased risks from disasters and climate change, competition from other sectors, insufficient operationalization of fisheries management plans and institutionalization of the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) in national fisheries governance frameworks. There is therefore a strong need to move from theory to practice and to link policy and actions in the spirit of the SSF Guidelines.

The comprehensiveness of the SSF Guidelines was acknowledged and the need to take a holistic and human rights-based approach to small-scale fisheries governance and development was stressed. Efforts are required to ensure that there is a common understanding on how to apply a human rights-based approach in the context of small-scale fisheries.

The workshop recognised that the implementation of the SSF Guidelines should be anchored at the local and national levels but that regional attention and support would also be required to address transboundary fisheries related issues. There are also opportunities for regional collaboration, in particular with regard to information exchange and capacity development. The contribution of the BOBLME project's first phase to support small-scale fisheries was appreciated. The inclusion of activities in relation to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at regional and national level in the draft BOBLME Strategic Action Programme, which is the basis of the proposed second phase, was welcomed.

The workshop also learned about the recent *Southeast Asia Regional Consultation Workshop on the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*, hosted by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of Indonesia in collaboration with FAO and supported by BOBLME and SEAFDEC, including steps undertaken by Indonesia to develop a National Plan of Action for SSF and the initiative towards a Regional Plan of Action.

## **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 SSF and resources management (Chapter 5 of the SSF Guidelines)**

- *Representation of small-scale fisheries actors, including women and marginalized groups, in decision-making needs to be strengthened.* Small-scale fisheries communities should be empowered to participate in aquatic resources management and benefit from socio-economic development. National and local level multi-stakeholder platforms, management committees and community based organisations should be given responsibility through co-management arrangements. Capacity development for participatory management (ecosystem approach to fisheries – EAF), including legal aspects, is needed – both for government officials and community representatives.
- *Multi-tier platforms for joint management are also needed at the regional level for management of shared resources, e.g., by Sri Lanka and India, and by India and Bangladesh.* Regional and bilateral arrangements should be supported and facilitated by regional organisations and projects, e.g. the Bay of Bengal Programme – Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO) and the BOBLME project proposed second phase. Governments should also request these and other relevant regional bodies, through the respective governing structures, to assist in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, e.g., the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC), the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the IUCN Mangroves for the Future (MFF).
- *Mechanisms for effective and meaningful consultations with communities, including consultative committees at district, state and national level (as appropriate) and regular visits to fishing communities by policy makers, should be set up by fisheries administrations and other relevant government authorities.*
- *There is a need to legalise legitimate customary tenure rights, both to fishery resources and land.* Efforts should be made (by CSOs and academia/researchers) to identify and document such rights and to advocate for their recognition by governments. Likewise, cases where small-scale fisheries communities are threatened or affected by loss of land to other sectors need to be documented and legal protection and support provided.
- *Human rights violations should be identified, documented and addressed through collaboration including fisheries sector stakeholders and national human rights commissions.* Governments should ensure that international human rights conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, are applied in cases of transboundary and migrant small-scale fisheries activities. CSOs, academia/researchers and media have a role to play to draw attention to and raise awareness on human rights violations.

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

- *Human capacities of small-scale fisheries stakeholders at all levels should be developed, as a precondition to implement holistic approaches (e.g. EAF).* This needs to be strengthened by long-term

financial support for small-scale fisheries. An important action, already partly initiated in the region, is the provision of ID cards for small-scale fisherfolk to facilitate access to services. Women require special attention in terms of skill development and start-up support. Overall, the sector requires the identification and development of permanent/temporary diversification of income generating activities. Improved socio-economic information, provided also by fishing communities (e.g. through use of ICT) is key to inform human capacity development measures.

- *The high level of vulnerability of fishing communities is often aggravated by the lack of (sector-specific) or the insufficient reach of existing welfare schemes.* Ensuring the coverage of basic needs in fishing communities (e.g. housing with secure tenure rights, sanitation, drinking water) should be based on needs assessments to inform the provision of inclusive services. Good examples from the region, including opening of bank accounts with minimum deposits, should be further developed and applied to small-scale fisheries. Similarly, existing and proposed public health, fishing craft, life and property insurance scheme models (including group life insurance), integrated insurance and credit programmes and subsidized loans, in particular for women, need to be further developed, strengthened, tested and/or operationalized. Overall, information about the existence and access to welfare schemes has to be disseminated to fishing communities and decentralized government institutions interacting with communities.
- *Strong and effective community and/or fisherfolk organizations empowered for responsible fisheries management* are called for in all countries of the region. Where they exist, further technical support and capacity development is needed. Often the relationship between governments and these organizations has to be strengthened. Regional collaboration between CSOs to share experiences on the SSF Guidelines implementation and solve common issues, including transboundary issues, exist but could be expanded. Regional information sharing on the SSF Guidelines implementation, in particular on co-management and in relation to monitoring, with other stakeholders, including governments, could support collective regional learning (e.g. through BOBLME, BOBP-IGO or other international institutions).
- *The small-scale fisheries sector often fails to provide equal opportunities and a safe and fair source of income, in particular for women and in inland fisheries.* To address this, communities and their organizations need to be empowered to increase their bargaining power. Other means to better distribute benefits along the value chain should be investigated, e.g. community-hired middlemen or open auctions. Marketing infrastructure improvements (e.g. sanitary facilities) to improve working conditions and diversified means of transport to reduce dependency on middlemen (e.g. transport through CBOs, women's organizations) would particularly benefit women in the sector. The promotion of social standards can also contribute to improve living and working conditions in small-scale fisheries. Minimum wage schemes for small-scale fishworkers should be explored. Overall, the development and/or implementation of policies in support of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in line with international standards and agreements is imperative.

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

- *Awareness raising and technical support programmes* should be provided to assist women in setting up women's cooperatives/societies and enable their enhanced participation in fisheries value chains. Microfinance assistance targeting women, community savings and access to social protection programmes should be promoted to increase women's access to fish and to other income generating activities. Women should also have access to training in entrepreneurship and marketing. A regional women network should be promoted for exchange of good practices.
- *Fair distribution of benefits from fish trade should be ensured* through appropriate policies and measures. Information on market price through mobile applications/technology should be enabled for SSF. Fishers' organizations should represent fishers in negotiation with buyers to have a stronger voice.

Access to low interest credit should be supported to reduce dependency and shorten the value chain. States should work towards coherent trade policy at regional level.

- *Better return from fish and fishery products should be sought through support to post harvest infrastructures, processing technology and capacity development* in close consultation with SSF and in line with their needs. The costs of fishing input should be reduced through collective purchasing by fisheries cooperatives. Exposure/exchange of experiences should be promoted between the countries of the region.
- *Safety at sea should be promoted* to ensure the safety of small-scale fishers, the efficiency of their operations and that fish reach the market. Awareness raising, provision of safety equipment, training in safety at sea, insurance schemes, and improved communication/credibility of early warning systems should be developed. Security at sea should be improved through patrolling and the safety of coastal population enhanced, e.g. through cyclone shelters.

As a principle, the SSF Guidelines should be implemented through integrated and holistic approaches, supported by participatory monitoring mechanisms at different levels (district, state, national) to achieve the vision of:

Sustainable development of small-scale fisheries based on:

- Good governance and management of the natural resource base and the people who depend on it, through the establishment of effective interactive platforms (e.g. fisher community organisations, co-management platforms);
- Clearly laid down and respected rights and responsibilities of participating actors, including women and marginalized groups, and
- Consultation, collaboration and coordination of all concerned actors in relation to decision-making.

Such a process shall encompass capacity development and empowerment of small-scale fisherfolk, providing them with the required social protection and meeting their wellbeing aspirations through proper social development interventions and adoption of appropriate legal instruments and policies.

Accordingly, governments should consider developing and implementing National Plans of Action (NPOAs) for SSF Guidelines implementation.

## NEXT STEPS

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

- *FAO* should
  - distribute the outcomes of workshop (draft) and final document to all workshop participants and governments and to relevant international and regional organisations;
  - provide guidance for the preparation of National Plans of Action to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines
  - support the monitoring of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, e.g. during the Committee on Fisheries.
- The *BOBLME project* should include support to follow-up activities after the workshop and the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at regional and national level during its proposed second phase.
- *Workshop participants* should:
  - organise formal and informal debriefing meetings to inform about the workshop outcomes within their respective administrations and organisations.
  - disseminate the SSF Guidelines and the outcomes and recommendations of the workshop to relevant meetings, e.g., National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) Women in Fisheries meeting in Kerala, India, in December 2015, and the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in April 2016.
  - enhance their own knowledge on the SSF Guidelines and regional SSF issues by consulting relevant reports and websites, e.g., FAO [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) [www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net) and the BOBLME project [www.boblme.org](http://www.boblme.org).
  - advocate for the establishment of a regional oversight committee with at least 1 government and 1 CSO member per country (with due attention to gender balance) to follow-up and monitor (e.g. through email group), building potentially on existing initiatives (e.g. Asia Alliance on Small-Scale Fisheries)
- *Government workshop participants* should report back to relevant ministries/departments on workshop outcomes and promote incorporation of recommendations into existing national action plans and on-going national planning processes (e.g. building on the NPOA experience from Indonesia), and advocate for relevant actions, including post-harvest related capacity development, improvement of infrastructure facilities, development of fisher women societies, and secure budget allocations.
- *Governments* should establish SSF focal point in their fisheries administrations and other authorities, as appropriate, and organise national awareness raising and planning workshops in collaboration with other stakeholders.
- *CSOs with the support of governments and FAO* should develop additional language versions of the SSF Guidelines, e.g., in Bangla (Bangladesh) and Dhivehi (Maldives). The different existing and future local language versions should be disseminated widely.
- *NGOs and CBOs/CSOs, with support from governments*, should prepare posters, simplified versions, short movies, radio features to raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines
- *CSOs* should appoint national focal points for SSF Guidelines implementation.
- *Transparency International Sri Lanka* should disseminate information on the SSF Guidelines in monthly meeting and support the drafting of a National Plan of Action.
- *The WorldFish Center* should check their on-going intervention priorities against the issues identified in the workshop to support SSF Guidelines implementation, including support to the Bangladeshi government's initiatives on SSF Guidelines implementation and relevant research.
- The *Sustainable Fisheries Partnership* will seek to incorporate SSF Guidelines issues identified by the workshop in their Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs) in the region and seek partners to assist in addressing these.
- *Research institutes and universities* should:
  - contribute a chapter on the SSF Guidelines implementation to a planned publication of the research network Too Big To Ignore (TBTI) (case study on Bangladesh).
  - need to look into new research areas relevant to the application of the SSF Guidelines, including socio-economic data collection design and implementation (including gender disaggregated data).

- provide information in collaboration with fishing communities (participatory research) on socio-economic conditions and aquatic habitat to inform policy and management decisions.
- integrate the SSF Guidelines in fisheries course curricula (e.g. *Sylhet Agriculture University of Bangladesh* in its fisheries course on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries).

The need to identify and secure funding and synergies by all stakeholders was acknowledged. This should include engagement with international and regional development partners, including through bilateral donors and embassies at country level, and with new projects (including BOBLME phase 2). Opportunities with NGOs operating outside fisheries and working with human rights and social development should be explored.

At national level, 2016 budget allocations should be used to the extent possible and proposals for following budget years should be submitted. Interaction with relevant non-fisheries Ministries and departments at all levels and 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.

Participants thanked the FAO, BOBLME and the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka for hosting the workshop.

Colombo, 26 November 2015