

Report by:

The Regional Advisory Group of Asia and the Pacific of the
**INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY**

**PEOPLE-CENTRED ASSESSMENT OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VOLUNTARY
GUIDELINES FOR SECURING SUSTAINABLE
SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE CONTEXT OF
FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION**
BANGLADESH, INDIA, INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, AND SRI LANKA

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The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)

is an autonomous and self-organised global platform of small-scale food producers and rural workers organisations and grassroots/community-based social movements whose goal is to advance the Food Sovereignty agenda at the global and regional level.



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ABBREVIATIONS

AG SSF-GSF - Advisory Group of the SSF-GSF

COFI - Committee on Fisheries

CSF - Community-Supported Fisheries

FAO - Food and Agricultural Organization

ICSF - International Collective in Support of Fishworkers

IPCC - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

IPC - International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty

MPA - Marine Protected Area

MSP - Marine Spatial Planning

RAG - Regional Advisory Group

SSF-GSF - Small Scale Fisheries - Global Strategic Framework

SSF - Small Scale Fisheries | Small Scale Fishers

UN - United Nations

WFFP - World Forum of Fisher Peoples

WFF - World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UN Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (henceforth, SSF Guidelines) play a crucial role in promoting sustainable fisheries practices and protecting the rights of small-scale fishers worldwide. The following assessment highlights broad regional trends in the SSF Guidelines' implementation, shedding light on the diverse ways of life within the small-scale fisher communities. Country-specific cases are included where possible, recognizing the rich heterogeneity within and between countries. It is acknowledged that no single country can fully represent the entirety of the small-scale fisher communities, necessitating a comprehensive examination of multiple cases.

While the report acknowledges various cases of non-compliance with the SSF Guidelines, it also highlights examples of positive practices being implemented. These success stories are emphasised to identify best practices and serve as inspiration for related stakeholders. The objective is to highlight the challenges small-scale fishers face and the positive examples that have proven effective in meeting SSF Guidelines requirements.

The Regional Advisory Group (RAG) of Asia and the Pacific plays a crucial role in this report, as its primary objective is to design solutions and provide concrete recommendations to address challenges faced by the small-scale fisher communities. By identifying areas of non-compliance and showcasing best practices, the report supports the RAG's efforts to foster positive change and promote sustainable small-scale fisheries. The people-centered methodology employed in this report ensures that the voices and experiences of small-scale fishers are central to the assessment process, empowering them as active participants in shaping the recommendations directed towards policymakers, state agencies, and civil society.

This report focuses more on marine capture fisheries than inland fisheries (as all countries have more extensive marine fisheries). It underscores the importance of the SSF Guidelines in promoting sustainable practices and protecting the rights of small-scale fishers. The report contributes to the collective efforts to enhance the sustainability and well-being of small-scale fisheries globally by providing regional trends, diverse case studies, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

THE SSF GUIDELINES

The endorsement of the UN Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)¹ by the thirty-first Session of COFI in June 2014 was a significant triumph for natural resource-based people's movements worldwide. This achievement resulted from the tireless efforts of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers (WFF), the two global fisher movements that spearheaded a participatory development process along with the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (hereinafter ICSF) and the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (hereinafter IPC) and other small-scale fishers organizations facilitated by the FAO. The SSF Guidelines were developed through the input of 4000 fishers, civil society organizations, and state agencies from 120 countries. The SSF Guidelines are noteworthy for their focus on a Human-Rights-Based approach, marking the first internationally agreed instrument dedicated to the small-scale fisheries sector. This initiative was necessary to address the historical marginalization of small-scale fishers communities, despite providing 90% employment and ensuring food security and nutrition for millions of people.

The SSF Guidelines have significantly contributed to the global recognition

of small-scale fisheries as more than just a sub-sector of the more significant fisheries industry. This achievement lies in recognizing small-scale fisheries as a way of life rather than a mere economic activity. The small-scale fishers communities are unique in their relationship with the land-seascapes they are linked to, and the SSF Guidelines acknowledge this intrinsic bond by highlighting the profound interconnections between their identities, culture, language, sense of place, and belonging. For these communities, fishing is not just a means of livelihood but also a way of life that shapes their very existence. The SSF Guidelines have effectively challenged the dominant narrative that has traditionally viewed the small-scale fishers' communities solely through the lens of their economic contribution. Instead, they have put forth a more comprehensive and holistic perspective that recognizes the small-scale fishers as custodians of the seas, oceans and inland waters who possess a wealth of traditional knowledge and practices critical to sustainable marine resource management.

Despite their critical role in the global fisheries sector, the small-scale fishers community's individuals remain underrepresented and receive inadequate acknowledgment in fisheries-related public policy-making, governance, and fiscal planning.

1. SSF Guidelines - <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en/>

As we approach 2024, it will mark the 10th anniversary since the SSF Guidelines were established. However, despite this milestone, practical implementation has yet to be realized. In light of this, it was deemed crucial for small-scale fisheries organizations to conduct thorough assessments of the situation on the ground and actively inform governments about the challenges and opportunities faced by small-scale fishing communities. These assessments and informed dialogues with policymakers are vital to catalyze meaningful action and ensure that the vision of the SSF Guidelines translates into tangible benefits for the small-scale fishing sector.

This assessment adopts the same approach as the SSF Guidelines, which seeks to narrow the divide by emphasizing the significance of various principles. It places great importance on aspects that foster a just and inclusive society in the small-scale fisheries sector. It highlights the significance of upholding human rights, treating all individuals with dignity, and respecting diverse cultures. It advocates for promoting gender equality and equity, engaging in meaningful consultation and participation, and adhering to transparent and accountable practices based on the rule of law.

Finally, the report underscores the need for economic, social, and environmental sustainability, encouraging integrated approaches that consider the interconnectedness of various factors, emphasizing the importance of social

responsibility, and ensuring the feasibility and long-term viability of social and economic initiatives.

The final aim of this assessment is to inform how best governments can move towards implementation. Simultaneously, it assists global movements in strengthening their understanding of the gaps and challenges along the way and provides best practices that can be adapted to other places.

The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)

The IPC is a global platform comprising autonomous and self-organized organizations representing small-scale producers, rural workers, and grassroots/community-based social movements. Its purpose is to advocate for and promote the Food Sovereignty Agenda on a global and regional scale.

The Working Group on Fisheries is an alliance and coordination space within the IPC. The primary global civil society network unites small-scale fisheries and amplifies their voices in international political decision-making processes. By joining together, the working group enables small-scale fishers to effectively communicate the concerns and perspectives of their communities to global forums. The working group plays a crucial role in advocating for the rights and needs of small-scale fisheries within the broader context of food sovereignty and sustainable development.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Its goal is to achieve food security for all and ensure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. With 195 members - 194 countries and the European Union, FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide².

COFI (Committee on Fisheries)

The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) is an intergovernmental body established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). COFI is a global platform for member countries to discuss and address fisheries and aquaculture-related issues, policies, and initiatives. The Committee has fostered the development and adoption of several binding agreements and non-binding instruments that have reshaped how the sector works in the interests of resource sustainability³.

SSF GUIDELINES' SUPPORTING MECHANISMS.

The Small Scale Fisheries - Global Strategic Framework (SSF-GSF)

The SSF-GSF was established based on recommendations from the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2016⁴. It serves as a partnership mechanism with an advisory and facilitative role, providing small-scale fishery actors (Advisory Group), FAO (Secretariat), government representatives (Friends of the Guidelines), and other

stakeholders (Knowledge Sharing Platform) with a global platform for collaboration. It allows its members to exchange experiences, pool resources, establish synergies, and coordinate efforts in advocating for policies and approaches that support the effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

The work is facilitated by the FAO Secretariat, which summarizes the SSF-GSF activities and reports back to the FAO Committee on Fisheries for consideration.

In this framework, global small-scale fisheries organizations sit in the Advisory Group (AG). Currently, the AG includes representatives from the Working Group on Fisheries of the IPC, selected based on criteria for geographical representation and gender balance, making their input particularly relevant in advising on implementing the SSF Guidelines worldwide.

The members of the Advisory Group recognized the need to offer tangible guidance and established the Regional Advisory Groups (RAGs) as regional entities within the SSF-GSF. The RAGs are entrusted with advancing the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at the regional level, actively involving social movements and regional FAO bodies. Their role is to provide practical advice and foster effective regional cooperation towards achieving the objectives of the SSF Guidelines.

In this framework, small-scale fishers and

2. FAO - <https://www.fao.org/about/en/>

3. COFI - <https://www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofi/en/>

4. SSF-GSF <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/CA8803EN>

Indigenous Peoples' organizations play a crucial role in supporting their respective small-scale fishers communities by facilitating community-led processes to assess the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at the country level. These assessments mirror all dimensions of their everyday experiences, emphasizing the link between local realities and global guidelines. The outcomes of these assessments are then brought to the attention of the regional FAO bodies and then to COFI and other relevant stakeholders at the global level. This process reinforces the connection between local actions and broader international efforts to promote sustainable small-scale fisheries and uphold the principles outlined in the SSF Guidelines.

In this way, the SSF-GSF acts as a vital conduit, bridging the gap between small-scale fishers and the global fisheries policy arena represented by COFI and other SSF-GSF members. It helps amplify the voices and concerns of small-scale fishers, ensuring that their perspectives are considered in developing and implementing fisheries policies and initiatives at all levels.

METHODOLOGY

This report embodies the outcome of the assessment conducted by the RAG Asia and the Pacific using the "SSF People-Centered Methodology to Assess the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication." Developed by the AG SSF-GSF with the support

of the Working Group on Fisheries of the IPC, this methodology is a valuable tool to support and promote the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It is designed to gather empirical evidence and qualitative information on the gaps and positive practices related to the uptake of SSF Guidelines.

By actively involving small-scale fishers' communities, this approach ensures that their perspectives, concerns, and experiences are heard and incorporated into decision-making processes. The methodology strives to create a comprehensive and context-specific framework that reflects the unique needs and aspirations of small-scale fishers' communities, thereby fostering sustainable and equitable outcomes for their livelihoods and the marine and inland ecosystems they depend upon.

At its core, the methodology provides a robust framework for local communities to collect relevant qualitative data, aligning with the human rights standards endorsed by the SSF Guidelines. It prioritizes the voices and experiences of small-scale fishers throughout the assessment process.

Aligned with the SSF Guidelines' approach, the methodology is founded on principles of non-discrimination, recognizing the equal treatment of individuals involved in small-scale fisheries. It respects cultural and religious diversity, acknowledging the influence of customs and traditions on fisheries engagement. The methodology emphasizes the active participation of all actors, including SSF, community

members, and local leaders, recognizing their essential roles in a successful evaluation. Transparency is fostered throughout the evaluation process, promoting open communication and stakeholder accountability. Moreover, gender equality is prioritized, ensuring equal opportunities and representation for both men and women.

The assessment was conducted by the RAG's members in Asia, who enlisted the help of an external research team to collect data in three distinct methodologies. The initial method involved a detailed questionnaire to assess various indicators related to sections 5 to 13 of the SSF Guidelines. Subsequently, the members conducted 'Focused Group Discussions (FGDs)' within their respective communities to complete the questionnaire and elicit empirical insights from the community members and their diverse viewpoints. Case studies were also incorporated to provide detailed, site-specific stories (see section 5). Finally, the RAG members' responses were analyzed and cross-referenced with secondary sources, such as reports from the International Peoples' Tribunal on the Impacts of Blue Economy and the Conference⁵ of the Ocean Peoples 2022 (C-OP)⁶. This meticulous approach allowed for a comprehensive examination drawing from primary data, community perspectives, and secondary sources to yield a nuanced and informed assessment.

A pivotal phase of the study

encompassed the organization of workshops, serving as essential components in reviewing the primary findings, establishing a shared comprehension of regional challenges, and collaboratively formulating recommendations among the RAG members.

This report focuses on Asia and South East Asia—specifically, the status concerning India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Between 2013-2017, Asia was the region with the most significant contribution of small-scale fisheries catch, accounting for 64 percent (23.4 million tons). At the same time, it is a region where ocean-based development is gaining the highest momentum through the Blue Economy paradigm. At this crucial juncture during the UN Ocean Decade, it is timely to evaluate the SSF Guidelines to uncover gaps and inform opportunities for an equitable and just future for communities that live closest and with the lightest footprint is timely. FGDs have been conducted in small-scale fisheries coastal and inland communities in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Malaysia.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The report follows the organization of the original SSF Guidelines, with Chapter 2 focusing on the assessment itself. This chapter is divided into seven sub-chapters, one for each section of the SSF Guidelines

5. Blue Economy Tribunal - blueeconomytribunal.org

6. C-OP <http://blueeconomytribunal.org/c-op-home/>

The assessment for each section does not adhere to a single or consistent format. For instance, Section 5 presents the main findings as 'Positive Practices' and "Challenges" for each country followed by recommendations. On the other hand, in some sections, the report consolidates the main findings from all nations together, offering a broader perspective.

The reason for the difference in assessment formats between Section 5 and Sections 6 to 12 is due to the nature of the content covered in these sections. Section 5 primarily focuses on tenure rights, which entails distinct models and challenges that vary from country to country. To effectively capture these variations, Section 5 presents its main findings as "Positive Practice" and "Challenges" for each Country, along with specific recommendations tailored to their unique circumstances, which are best conveyed through brief case studies.

On the other hand, Sections 6 to 12 aim to consolidate and compare the experiences of different countries in the region. Since many of these countries share common positive practices and issues in the context of small-scale fisheries, it makes more sense to present these main findings in a more general, broader perspective by consolidating the data across all countries. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of common regional trends and challenges.

Even with the differences in presentation, it is essential to note that all sections in the report offer a set of recommendations. These recommendations address the

identified challenges and capitalize on the positive practices in the region's small-scale fisheries, fostering improvements and promoting sustainable and inclusive approaches to fisheries management and development.

The recommendations presented in this report have been developed through an extensive and collaborative process involving multiple rounds of participatory workshops with members of the RAG. The primary objective of these workshops was to formulate solutions-oriented recommendations that go beyond generalizations and provide detailed and specific guidance. Through discussions and knowledge exchange, RAG members shared their perspectives, identified similarities and differences in their respective contexts, and worked towards a nuanced understanding of how each guideline manifests in different countries.

The participatory workshops served as a platform for consensus building among RAG members, fostering an environment of active engagement and mutual appreciation of diverse perspectives. The workshops encouraged open dialogue, enabling participants to delve into the intricacies and complexities of implementing the guidelines. By collectively examining challenges and opportunities, RAG members were able to draw upon their varied experiences and expertise, leading to the development of comprehensive and contextually relevant recommendations.

The depth of these recommendations stems from the rigorous and inclusive

nature of the workshop process. RAG members brought unique insights from their on-the-ground experiences and understanding of local realities. The recommendations are, therefore grounded in practical considerations and consider the specific contexts in which small-scale fisheries operate. This approach ensures that the offers are relevant and address the nuances and complexities of implementing the guidelines in different countries. The recommendations developed target governments, intergovernmental

institutions, and other actors such as large environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) or philanthropic organizations increasingly emphasizing multistakeholderism. These recommendations aim to guide these entities in their actions and decisions to promote the SSF Guidelines implementation.

CHAPTER 2 THE ASSESSMENT



OVERVIEW OF THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SSF GUIDELINES

This chapter delves into the SSF Guidelines, focusing on sections 5 to 13, which cover critical aspects of sustainable practices, human rights, and governance in small-scale fisheries. By examining these sections in detail, the chapter aims to comprehensively understand the SSF Guidelines and their implications for the small-scale fishers community. Drawing upon insights from the Asian region, the chapter presents broad trends and observations regarding implementing the guidelines in this diverse and significant area.

One of the primary objectives of this chapter is to offer recommendations that can enhance the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. By analyzing the trends and challenges identified in the Asian context, specific recommendations are formulated to address the gaps and shortcomings. These recommendations consider the unique socio-economic and environmental conditions prevalent in the region, ensuring their practicality and effectiveness in real-world scenarios.

The chapter highlights the importance of collaborative efforts among various stakeholders, including governments, local communities, civil society organizations, and international institutions, to successfully implement the SSF Guidelines. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy frameworks, capacity-building initiatives, and participatory decision-making processes that involve small-scale fisherfolk as critical stakeholders. Furthermore, the recommendations in this chapter underscore the significance of integrating traditional knowledge and practices into fisheries management strategies, recognizing their valuable contributions to sustainable resource use and community resilience.

SECTION 5: GOVERNANCE OF TENURE IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



Tenure systems in small-scale fisheries determine who can access, use and control land and water resources related to their livelihood. It can allocate areas and prescribe how long and under what conditions these resources are accessed. It's important to note that tenure systems are based on written policies, laws, and unwritten customs and practices. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (FAO) assigns States the responsibility to "provide legal recognition for legitimate tenure rights not currently protected by law" and further goes on to say that people should be given adequate legal protection against forced evictions

Broadly, governance related to Tenure Rights in small-scale fishers can be seen in two distinct ways. The first is formal tenure rights over land and water resources through legal provisions. The second is customary tenure rights exercised by small-scale fishers through locally adapted normative frameworks. In many cases, these two types of tenure rights can exist separately and overlap. However, in cases where there has been a formalization of customary governance systems, it undergoes a process of making the rules entirely fixed, reducing the capacity of communities to adapt to change.

The SSF Guidelines ensure the legal tenure and customary rights of the small-scale fishers, fish workers, and their communities over the land, fisheries, and forests, with particular attention paid to women. In addition, the guidelines push the States to take appropriate measures to identify, record and respect legitimate tenure right holders and their rights, local norms and practices, as well as customary or otherwise preferential access to fishery resources and land by small-scale fishing communities, including indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, should be recognised, respected and protected under International Human Rights Law.

MAIN FINDINGS

The RAG members and their connected small-scale-fisher communities that participated in this assessment were asked to evaluate the status of tenure rights. They reported that all countries have some form of legal recognition of tenure rights, often established through co-management plans. This is with the exception of Sri Lanka, which reports only customary rights and not legally recognized tenure rights. However, across South Asia and Southeast Asia, the new modalities of ocean development channelled through the Blue Economy approach have eroded tenure rights for small-scale fishers despite legal guarantees. Despite legal safeguards in place, the surge in projects related to port-led development, intensive industrial aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy, oil and gas exploration, and marine protected areas has generated substantial conflicts over coastal and marine territories. This contentious environment has prompted forceful displacements of small-scale fisher communities from coastal areas, often occurring without proper community engagement or consent.

In addition, the ecological destruction that typically accompanies industrial development has meant ecological degradation, leaving the small-scale farmers dispossessed of the natural resources that support their livelihoods. Except for Malaysia, this study indicates that impact assessment studies conducted before project initiation rarely involve consultation with SSF,

despite the potential stipulation of the Environmental Impact Assessment procedures. Furthermore, the mechanisms available for addressing disputes arising from violations of property rights are inadequately equipped to address these issues.

Another dimension of complexity is the new governance tool of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), which is seen as a threat to the governance systems of property rights for SSF. The assessment reveals that MSP is frequently characterized by a top-down technocratic approach favoring formal scientific frameworks over traditional knowledge and social sciences. As a result, governance tools and instruments like MSP often overlook the intricate socio-ecological impacts, gender dynamics, and power structures inherent to specific localities. This lack of consideration impairs the ability of MSP to accommodate the self-organisation and adaptive strategies of small-scale fisher communities in response to threats and changing circumstances.

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

SRI LANKA

Positive Practices

There is a customary tenure system based on stake nets in two main areas of the country, Negombo and Chilaw lagoons. Locally known as the Padu system, it is managed by meetings organised monthly; during these meetings, members decide the rotation

offishing sites among the members of the society in villages of Sea Street, Pitipana, Duwa, and Grand Street. The families with the surname Warnakulasuriya, Kurukulasuriya, Mihindukulasuriya, Liyanage, Panamburuge, Colombage, and Naithappuge are eligible to become members of this governance system, which allocates rights to only one member per family to fish. The system of shared ownership and rotating access via a lottery mechanism is an effective tool for fostering equitability in fisheries management. Distributing ownership and access rights among various stakeholders ensures a fair distribution of benefits and acts as a powerful deterrent against overfishing and the depletion of precious marine resources. Moreover, this approach guarantees secure and impartial access to fishing grounds, significantly diminishing conflicts among diverse groups of fishers and thereby promoting a more harmonious and sustainable coexistence in our oceans.

Challenges

The Kalpitiya Integrated Tourism Resort Project is a large-scale tourism development project in Sri Lanka that aims to transform the coastal region of Kalpitiya into a significant tourist destination. The project covers an area of 1,700 hectares and includes the construction of luxury hotels, marinas, golf courses, and other tourist facilities. It is reported that 400 small-scale fishers families will be displaced if the project is implemented.

BANGLADESH

Positive Practices

Hakaluki Haor is one of the largest

wetland ecosystems in Bangladesh, located in the country's northeastern region. The Haor supports a diverse range of fisheries managed through traditional community-based systems. The conventional community management of Hakaluki Haor fisheries involves the establishment of "beel committees" or "pukur committees". These committees are made up of local community members who are responsible for managing and regulating fishing activities in the Haor. They work closely with government authorities to develop and implement sustainable fishing practices. Under the traditional system, fishing rights are allocated to specific households or families based on traditional knowledge and practices. These rights are often passed down through generations and regulated through informal social control systems, such as peer pressure and community norms. The beel or pukur committees are responsible for developing and enforcing rules and regulations for fishing practices. These rules may include restrictions on using specific fishing gear or establishing closed fishing seasons to allow fish stocks to replenish. The committees also oversee the distribution of fishing permits and collect fees from fishers, which are used to fund local development projects.

Challenges

Sand filling and land grabbing in Munshiganj on the Meghna River have severely impacted fishers' tenure rights. The practice of sand filling has resulted in the loss of fish habitats and spawning grounds, affecting the small-scale fisher communities that depend on the resource. As a result, local fishers cannot

catch enough fish to make a living, and their tenure rights to fish in the river are being undermined. The land grabbing that often accompanies sand-filling practices also leads to the displacement of fishers, further jeopardising their tenure rights. The lack of regulation in sand-filling practices and the collusion between the authorities and the land grabbers make it difficult for fishers to assert their rights and access the river resources. These issues threaten fishers' livelihoods and the fisheries' sustainability.

MALAYSIA

Positive Practices

In the Sabah region of Malaysia, there is a community co-management tenure system called Tagal. "Tagal means prohibition in the Dusun language and has been practised by the indigenous peoples of Sabah for many generations. It involves shared responsibilities and management, not only for rivers but also for other natural resources. The Sabah Fisheries Department has adopted this traditional concept, and about 400 river co-management systems have now implemented the tagal concept." Through the tagal system, fishing activities in the rivers are regulated according to three zones, namely, a red zone, where no fishing is allowed; yellow zone (fishing activities can only be conducted during community celebrations or festivals such as harvest season), and the green zone, which is an open fishing zone. Locally known as bombon, which means 'don't' in the Kadazandusun language, it is monitored jointly by the community and the Sabah

Fisheries Department.

Challenges

Small-scale fisheries in the Malacca Straits face various challenges that affect their tenure rights. Overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing practices have led to the depletion of fish stocks in the region, making it increasingly difficult for small-scale fishers to make a living. One of the main drivers of this loss has been the growth of industrial fisheries and large-scale fishing operations, which have often been granted exclusive rights to fish in certain areas, displacing small-scale fishers who have traditionally fished in those waters.

INDONESIA

Positive Practices

Sasi Laut is practised in several regions in Indonesia, particularly in the Maluku and Papua provinces. It is typically enforced by the local customary leaders or elders, who have the authority to declare the start and end of the closed seasons. The closed seasons are usually determined based on a combination of ecological and cultural factors, including the lunar cycle, the tides, and the availability of target species. The length and timing of the closed seasons are determined based on various factors, such as the life cycle and reproductive patterns of the target species, as well as the ecological dynamics of the marine environment. Some communities also use astrological or other cultural factors to determine the start and end of the closed seasons. During the closed

seasons, fishing and other activities that may harm the marine ecosystem, such as coral reef destruction and sea grass trampling, are prohibited or restricted. Violations of the Sasi Laut rules are typically met with fines or other forms of social punishment, such as public shaming or exclusion from community activities. In some regions of Indonesia, Sasi Laut is also supported by local regulations and government policies. For example, in the Kei Islands of Maluku, the provincial government has enacted laws that formally recognise and support the Sasi Laut system to promote sustainable fisheries and marine conservation.

Challenges

One illustration of the erosion of tenure rights of small-scale fisheries communities in Indonesia is the case of the Seko people in Maluku province, specifically in the district of West Seram. The Seko people are a traditional fishing community living in the area for generations and depend heavily on marine resources for their livelihoods. The threat to their tenure rights comes from a large-scale shrimp farming project granted a concession in the area, overlapping with the Seko people's traditional fishing grounds. The project, owned by a private company, has been accused of land grabbing and violating the Seko people's customary land rights. The project has been resisted by the Seko people and their allies, who argue that it threatens the community's livelihoods and way of life. They have organised protests and legal challenges against the project, with support from civil society organisations and human

rights groups. As of 2021, the conflict is ongoing, with the Seko people and their allies continuing to resist the shrimp farming project and demanding recognition of their tenure rights.

INDIA

Positive Practices

The Koli community in Maharashtra on the west coast of India practices a form of communal marine tenure known as "samudayik hakka", or community rights. Under this system, the Koli community has exclusive access to fishing grounds within a certain radius of their villages, and fishing activities are regulated through customary rules and practices. For example, specific fishing methods, such as trawl nets, are prohibited in certain areas to protect spawning grounds and nursery habitats. The Koli community also practices a form of co-management in which they work with the local government and other stakeholders to regulate fishing activities and promote sustainable use of marine resources. This includes participatory monitoring programs to assess the health of fish stocks and identify areas needing conservation measures.

Challenges

The ongoing coastal road project and related infrastructure development in Mumbai pose a significant and immediate threat to the tenure rights of the Koli fishing community. As construction progresses, the project necessitates the acquisition of land along the coastline, including areas traditionally used by the

Koli people for fishing, boat storage, and other livelihood-related activities. Consequently, many Koli families face the distressing prospect of losing their ancestral homes and fishing villages, resulting in forced displacement and resettlement. This displacement disrupts their way of life, causing them to lose their cultural heritage and disconnect from their traditional fishing grounds and community ties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure coherence between the SSF Guidelines and the Tenure Guidelines

It is recommended that there be improved coherence between the SSF Guidelines and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VG Tenure) developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

To achieve this, policymakers could benefit from training in a framework that cross-pollinates the two guidelines. Such training would enable policymakers to understand better the principles of tenure governance and how they relate to the management of small-scale fisheries. This would facilitate the development of effective policies and management systems that recognise and respect small-scale fishers' customary tenure rights while promoting sustainable fishing practices that contribute to food security and poverty eradication.

Prioritise recognising and including

small-scale fishers customary and legal tenure rights models in the 30x30 agenda. It is recommended that the 30x30 agenda should prioritise the recognition and inclusion of customary and legal tenure rights models in the establishment of MPAs instead of utilising exclusionary tactics to achieve conservation goals.

Small-scale fishers have expressed concern about the 30x30 agenda and the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as they fear that these measures may lead to the exclusion of small-scale fishing communities from their customary fishing grounds and jeopardise their livelihoods. Instead, the rights and needs of small-scale fishers must be respected and considered in the development of conservation policies, and their traditional fishing practices must not be disrupted. It is crucial to acknowledge the vital role of small-scale fishing communities in sustainable fisheries management and engage them as partners in the conservation process. This would foster more collaborative and equitable decision-making processes that align with social and environmental justice principles.

Conduct a comprehensive mapping of tenure rights in the region. This process is crucial as it enables a deeper understanding of the existing customary tenure rights and traditional governance mechanisms system, ensures its protection, provides essential information to policymakers, and identifies gaps or potential conflicts with the current

formal legal system.

Firstly, it would provide a clearer understanding of the diverse customary tenure systems and traditional governance structures that exist within the region. This would enable policymakers to make more informed decisions when developing policies and regulations that impact small-scale fishing communities. Secondly, it would help identify gaps or inconsistencies in the current legal framework and highlight areas where there may be conflicts between customary and formal legal systems. This could inform the development of legal frameworks more aligned with customary tenure rights and traditional governance mechanisms. Thirdly, the documentation of customary tenure rights and conventional governance mechanisms can serve as evidence for the recognition and protection of these systems. To implement this recommendation, there should be a collaboration between government agencies, civil society organisations, and small-scale fishing communities to conduct the mapping and documentation process. This would ensure that the process is participatory and inclusive and that the voices and perspectives of small-scale fishing communities are considered.

Additionally, the process should be conducted with sensitivity and respect for local customs and traditions and in consultation with community leaders and elders. The information gathered should be widely disseminated to relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organisations,

and small-scale fishing communities, to ensure it is used to inform policy and decision-making processes. This would facilitate recognising and protecting customary tenure rights and traditional governance mechanisms and promote more equitable and sustainable fisheries management practices in the region.

Redesign Marine Spatial Planning to be more inclusive and participatory
Fishers should be involved in MSP's planning and decision-making processes and be provided with the necessary resources and capacity-building opportunities to participate effectively.

Typically, MSP involves various technical processes, including mapping resources, identifying areas for different uses, and developing management plans. However, the technical nature of MSP often leads to its exclusion of small-scale fishers, who may need more resources and capacity to engage with the process. One of the primary challenges with MSP is its limited consideration of small-scale fishers' traditional or customary practices. Often, these practices need to be more active, and fishers may need more capacity or resources to provide the information required for the technical MSP processes. Consequently, the allocation of space for various uses may need to adequately reflect the needs and rights of small-scale fishers, resulting in their exclusion from areas they have historically relied upon. To rectify this, MSP requires a more inclusive and participatory re-design. This would entail actively engaging small-scale fishers to document their

traditional practices and rights. States must conduct studies to comprehend fishers' traditional and customary rights over resources and strive to safeguard them within formal small-scale fishers governance systems. Allocating space for different uses should consider conventional and standard practices equally to ensure fair and sustainable marine planning.

Formalize small-scale fishers' customary rights at the national level. Recognising customary rights flexibly and adaptable empowers communities to respond to changing conditions and emerging challenges.

Formalising customary rights is critical in recognising and safeguarding the longstanding rights shaped by generations of local knowledge and experience. These rights are deeply rooted in cultural and traditional practices that have evolved to address each community's needs and challenges. As such, any efforts to formalise these rights must prioritise flexibility and adaptability, allowing them to respond to new threats and challenges that may emerge. This approach ensures that the rights remain relevant and effective in supporting the sustainable management of resources and fostering community resilience.

It is essential to approach the formalisation process with a keen understanding of each community's historical context and unique circumstances. Customary rights have been developed organically over generations, reflecting the deep connection between communities

and their environments. Thus, the formalisation process should respect and integrate this history, ensuring the rights are legally recognised and, effectively implemented and protected.

In conclusion, the formalisation of customary rights should embrace their inherent flexibility, recognising their dynamic nature and capacity to adapt to new realities. It is a crucial step in ensuring small-scale fishing communities' long-term sustainability and well-being and continued stewardship of marine resources.

Protect small-scale fishers against forced displacements. Forced evictions threaten small-scale fishing communities, causing displacement and loss of livelihoods. States must protect tenure rights through consultation and measures to prevent such actions.

Forced evictions can occur when governments or private interests seek to claim land or resources for development projects, often with little or no consultation with the affected communities. These evictions can result in the displacement of communities and the loss of their livelihoods and cultural traditions. To safeguard against forced evictions, States must take a range of measures to ensure that the tenure rights of small-scale fishing communities are protected.

One critical step is to conduct stronger Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) to identify the

potential impacts of development projects on communities and to consult with these communities to ensure their concerns are considered. They must be conducted in a participatory and transparent manner, ensuring that the affected districts have meaningful input.

Additionally, States must guarantee to small-scale fishing communities that their tenure rights will be respected and protected. These guarantees can take many forms, including legal recognition of customary rights, formal agreements with communities, and compensation for eviction losses.

Forced evictions are a significant threat to the tenure rights of small-scale fishing communities, particularly those who lack formal legal recognition of their customary rights.

It is essential to include the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) before the sanctioning or approval of any project. This means that affected communities, including SSF, must be provided with all the information they need to make an informed decision about the project and be allowed to give or withhold their consent.

Note on MPA

We have reiterated our co-existence with nature and that we are the custodians safeguarding what others call conservation. WFFP has repeatedly resisted the formation of MPAs – e.g. in our general assembly resolutions and WFFP and joint statements. Here, we have stated that “we condemn the application of false mitigation solutions, such as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and blue carbon initiatives” and that “the climate crisis is being used as an opportunity for vested interests to propagate false solutions like blue carbon, MPAs and so on.”. The new CBD agreement of 2022 – the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework - with its 23 targets is an open door for corporations to blue-wash their carbon emissions through carbon trading schemes (e.g. blue carbon) and by investing in the 30by30 agenda. It builds on ocean conservation through MPAs (admittedly also based on other measures), financing mechanisms (e.g. debt-for-nature swaps and global finance mechanisms as made explicit in article 19 of the new CBD agreement), and carbon trading schemes (including blue carbon). On these grounds, while it can be argued that we have some opportunities within the CBD framework, we resist the 30by30 agenda.

SECTION 6: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYMENT, AND DECENT WORK



Addressing the socio-economic welfare of small-scale fishers in the SSF Guidelines is important because most small-scale fishers in the region live in socio-economically precarious conditions. These fishers face multiple challenges that threaten their livelihoods and well-being, including a diminishing natural resource base, competition from industrial-scale fishing operations, rising living costs and related debt traps, poor working conditions, poor access to health, food insecurity and malnutrition, and inequitable socio-political dynamics.

Section 6 of the SSF guidelines addresses the responsibility of State Governments to ensure social development, employment, and decent work for SSF. This section emphasizes the importance of access to civic amenities such as healthcare, education, housing, water, nutrition, sanitation, electricity, and banking.

Ensuring access to these basic amenities can help to improve the socio-economic conditions of small-scale fishers, reducing their vulnerability to socio-economic challenges and enhancing their resilience.

Furthermore, addressing the socio-economic welfare of small-scale fishers can positively impact the overall development of coastal communities and the region as a whole. When small-scale fishers have access to basic amenities, they are better equipped to engage in productive and sustainable fishing practices, contributing to the long-term health of coastal ecosystems and the sustainability of the fishing industry. Additionally, improved socio-economic conditions can increase social mobility and opportunities for small-scale fishers and their families, promoting overall economic growth and development in the region.

MAIN FINDINGS

This section of the SSF Guidelines has several sub-themes related to the topic. The assessment explores different aspects of the sub-themes, providing relevant details and examples. Furthermore, many countries reported similar results or findings, indicating a common trend or pattern across other regions.

Healthcare and Education: Access to healthcare and education are critical components of socio-economic welfare for small-scale fishers. While Malaysia has made strides towards ensuring universal healthcare and education access for its small-scale fishing communities, neighboring countries in the region, including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, are grappling with challenges in these domains. The pressing issues stem from inadequate infrastructure and escalating costs. One of the main reasons for these countries' poor healthcare and education indicators is the distance to facilities compounded by a shortage of efficient public transport. This makes it challenging for small-scale fishers living in remote areas to access medical care and education for their children. To address this issue, certain countries within the region have introduced decentralized community clinics at the village level and public schools offering mid-day meals. These localized initiatives have seen success rates in small pockets within the countries in the region, indicating the potential for scaling up and replicating these models in broader areas. The consequences of restricted education and healthcare access extend

far from individuals, affecting families and entire communities. Insufficient education impedes skill development, limiting access to higher-paying jobs and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Simultaneously, inadequate healthcare accessibility increases the likelihood of chronic illnesses and injuries, eroding productivity and overall quality of life.

Food Insecurity: The shift towards export-oriented fisheries driven by increasing global demand for seafood and the potential for higher profits has created significant challenges for the small-scale fishers. As a result, this shift has diverted the focus of many fisheries away from providing food for local communities and serving local markets favouring export demands. This trend necessitates additional resources and infrastructures for these communities to compete globally, often leading to their marginalisation and displacement from their traditional fishing grounds. Further, export-oriented fisheries have created food insecurity for small-scale fishers.. Firstly, the emphasis on exporting seafood for profit has led to overfishing and the depletion of fish stocks, reducing fish availability for local consumption. Secondly, focusing on high-value species for export undermines the importance of lower-value fish species crucial for regional food security. Finally, the competition for fish resources between export-oriented fisheries and small-scale fishers led to the marginalisation of small-scale fishers and their exclusion from fishing grounds, reducing their access to fish as a vital food source.

Excerpt from academic paper - "Blind spots in visions of a "blue economy" could undermine the ocean's contribution to eliminating hunger and malnutrition".

The authors argue that the "blue economy" vision, which emphasizes the economic potential of the ocean, tends to overlook the social, ecological, and cultural dimensions of ocean resources, and it may undermine the ocean's potential to contribute to food security, nutrition, and poverty alleviation.

They say that:

- Growth in the blue economy will lead to growth in blue food production and consumption, when emerging evidence suggests that industrialization of the ocean economy may compromise its potential to provide more food.
- Increasing food production will directly lead to reduced hunger, when there may already be enough food produced to address hunger, but it is not sufficiently accessible to those who need it.
- Mariculture production will replace declining capture fisheries, when the latter still supply half the world's fish catch for direct human consumption and provide many people with a diverse and nutritious food supply. At the same time, capture fisheries support the livelihoods of tens of millions of people.

Job Precarity: Small-scale fishers in the region often face economic distress concerning employment and decent work. An illustrative example is Bangladesh, where the requirement for proper registration or formal contracts has led to job insecurity and fragility. The lack of adequate registration or contracts results in unfair remuneration, lack of access to social security benefits, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation among small-scale fisheries..

Debt: According to the insights shared by RAG members, the primary reasons for financial insecurity are often related

to the declining availability of natural resources, rising inflation, and a lack of access to formal financial services. The fact that many small-scale fishers compound the challenges associated with economic insecurity. communities are also impacted by informal debt traps, often associated with borrowing from informal lenders at high interest rates. Across the region, rising inflation and the debt cycles among fishers and their families exacerbate issues such as hunger and mental well-being. The prevailing credit systems across the countries represented in this report are predominantly informal and intricately woven into the dynamic of small-scale

fisher social relations and the value chain. These systems are closely tied to mediators and intermediaries who purchase catches and frequently act as lenders for input costs related to bait, ice, fuel, repairs, and gear. These informal credit systems have high interest rates resulting in deductions from fishers' catches upon landing, covering interest and sometimes even portions of the principal sum borrowed.

Consequently, the cycle of debt is perpetuated. The absence of measures to combat this cycle by governments directly reflects the concerns outlined in Section 6.13 of the SSF Guidelines, underlining the need for remedies to prevent the exploitation of small-scale fishers. communities. Informal moneylending, indiscriminate issuance of loans, and unregulated high-interest rates emerge as substantial issues necessitating attention to safeguard small-scale fishers. communities from exploitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ensure policies and programs prioritise accessible healthcare and education services for small-scale fishers. States should invest in infrastructure and facilities to ensure that healthcare and education are accessible and of high quality, particularly in remote and underserved areas and allocate sufficient resources to support them.

States must recognise the vital role of small-scale fishers in their communities and economies and invest in policies and programs that prioritise their well-

being. Governments can empower these communities by allocating sufficient resources to support healthcare and education for small-scale fishers and enhance their overall quality of life.

Investments in healthcare should focus on establishing accessible and high-quality medical facilities, ensuring that small-scale fishers receive timely and adequate healthcare services. This is especially crucial in remote and underserved areas, where access to healthcare may be limited. By providing equitable healthcare opportunities, governments can improve the health outcomes of small-scale fishers and their families, thus contributing to a healthier and more productive workforce.

Similarly, investing in education is essential for the long-term prosperity of small-scale fishing communities. Governments can promote skill development and knowledge sharing among small-scale fishers by enhancing educational opportunities and infrastructure. Access to quality education equips community members with valuable tools to adapt to changing circumstances, adopt sustainable fishing practices, and engage in alternative livelihood options. Education also helps preserve cultural traditions and empowers future generations to carry on the legacy of small-scale fishing. Moreover, investments in infrastructure, such as roads and transportation networks, can enhance connectivity and facilitate the delivery of healthcare and education services to remote coastal areas. By improving accessibility, governments can bridge the gap

between underserved communities and essential services, fostering inclusivity and equal opportunities for small-scale fishers.

Design livelihood insurance schemes for small-scale fishers. and extend their coverage beyond death and disaster-related events. Livelihood insurance schemes must be designed with a broader scope beyond merely covering death and disaster for small-scale fishers (SSF). While these risks are significant, SSFs face various other challenges that can severely impact their livelihoods.

Insurance schemes should encompass a comprehensive range of risks and uncertainties that small-scale fishers encounter daily. These may include accidents, injuries, illnesses, natural disasters, market fluctuations, and other socio-economic factors that can disrupt their livelihoods. By incorporating these additional components, livelihood insurance schemes can provide a more holistic safety net for SSF, mitigating the adverse effects of various risks and enhancing their resilience. This comprehensive approach acknowledges the diverse and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by SSFs, ensuring that they receive adequate protection and support in maintaining sustainable livelihoods.

Livelihood schemes can be designed to include components that support small-scale fishers in accessing markets and improving their market linkages. This can involve providing training on market research, product development, and

marketing strategies. At the same time, they should include social protection components, such as health insurance, pension plans, and disability benefits. This can help improve small-scale fishers' overall welfare and provide a safety net in the event of illness or injury.

Further, existing insurance schemes can be made better by customisation. The insurance schemes should be customised to the specific needs and risks of small-scale fishers, considering the variability of their livelihoods and the unpredictable nature of their work. For example, the insurance scheme should be designed to cover losses due to extreme weather events, accidents at sea, or illness. The insurance scheme for small-scale fishers should be accessible, with information available in local languages, a simplified application process, and flexible payment options. Premiums should be affordable, considering the economic realities of fishers, and subsidies or financial assistance can help reduce costs. Timely payouts are crucial in case of losses or disasters, achievable by streamlining the claims process and providing rapid response mechanisms.

Establish a Levy Tax on industrial fishing. Establishing a fisheries levy tax system and other direct redistribution mechanisms presents a sustainable approach to benefitting small-scale fishers and coastal communities.

This tax system is a direct form of taxation on the fishing industry, typically levied on the value of fish caught or landed that could generate revenue for

small-scale fishers.

A fisheries Levy Tax system on industrial fisheries should be ensured and coupled with other direct redistribution mechanisms. This form of taxation can generate revenue for small-scale fishers, which can fund fisheries management, conservation efforts and support for coastal communities.

Implementing a well-structured fisheries Levy Tax system is crucial, and it should be complemented by revenue-sharing arrangements where a percentage of the profits from fisheries exports are distributed to local communities.

Governments can create a sustainable funding source benefiting small-scale fishers by levying taxes on commercial fishing activities. Moreover, the Levy Tax system can significantly enhance the economic well-being of coastal communities that rely heavily on fishing. Governments can bolster social and economic development by reinvesting a portion of the revenue back into these communities. This could involve funding educational programs, healthcare facilities, infrastructure projects, and other vital services that contribute to the overall prosperity of the local population.

Create Better Pricing Mechanisms. Fair price mechanisms, minimum support prices, and other models must be created to ensure small-scale fishers can set and regulate prices.

A pricing policy framework should be developed, setting out the goals

and objectives of the price-setting mechanism. This framework should be based on an analysis of the fishery sector and the needs of SSF. The policy framework should also define the criteria for setting prices, the pricing mechanisms to be used, and how they will be implemented.

This should be done by establishing a consultative process involving small-scale fishers, small-scale fishers organisations, processors, traders, and other stakeholders, which is essential to ensure that the pricing policy framework is responsive to the needs and concerns of all parties.

The next step is to implement the price-setting mechanisms. These can include minimum support prices, market information systems, and contract farming arrangements.

Establish social safety nets. Establishing social safety nets, such as health insurance schemes and cash transfer programs, is paramount to supporting fishers during hardship and reducing their dependency on informal lenders.

The unpredictable nature of their work exposes fishers to various risks, including accidents and injuries, making access to affordable healthcare essential for their well-being and financial security. By providing comprehensive health coverage, anglers can seek medical treatment without financial strain, allowing them to focus on their livelihoods with peace of mind.

Cash transfer programs also offer financial aid to fishers facing temporary economic setbacks due to factors like adverse weather conditions or market fluctuations. This assistance is a crucial lifeline, helping fishers bridge the income gap and maintain their livelihoods without resorting to high-interest loans from informal lenders. Implementing these social safety nets demonstrates the government's commitment to supporting fishing communities and promoting economic stability, empowering fishers to navigate challenging times and contribute meaningfully to their community's growth and prosperity.

Ultimately, these measures strengthen the resilience of fishers and foster sustainable fishing practices, creating thriving and self-reliant fishing communities.

Establish community-based credit systems. States should establish community-based legal and regulatory frameworks to govern lending practices, ensuring transparency and fairness while protecting vulnerable groups from exploitative behaviours.

States should establish legal and regulatory frameworks that govern lending practices, including interest rates, loan terms, and credit assessment criteria, promoting a community-based approach. Community-based credit programs are lending programs that are managed by local communities. These programs can be tailored to the specific needs of small-scale fishers, communities and provide access to credit at affordable rates. States can support these programs by providing technical assistance, training, and other forms of support.

States can also play a crucial role in regulating credit systems to safeguard small-scale fishers from exploitative practices. By monitoring and enforcing compliance with fair lending practices, they can ensure that interest rates, loan terms, and credit assessment criteria are transparent and equitable. This proactive approach can protect vulnerable groups within the fishing communities and foster an environment where access to credit is fair and just.



SECTION 7: VALUE CHAINS, POST-HARVEST, AND A TRADE



The value chain of small-scale fisheries is often overlooked, but it involves various actors producing, distributing, and consuming fish and fishery products. This includes fishers, traders, processors, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers, all connected by economic transactions and relationships that add value to the product. The value chain is complex, involving multiple intermediaries, starting with fishers catching the fish and ending with selling to retailers or consumers after processing and distribution.

Post-harvest activities in small-scale fisheries encompass essential and meticulously orchestrated processes transforming the freshly caught bounty into market-ready products. From handling and sorting, skilled fishers deftly clean and sort the harvest. Preservation is critical at this stage, wherein various methods such as chilling, icing, smoking, drying, and salting are employed to safeguard the fish's quality and extend its shelf life. Following preservation, fish is transported for processing, involving expert cutting, filleting, and packaging to factories to create delectable portions suitable for consumption and distribution.

Transportation is crucial, and here, refrigerated trucks or boats transport fish from landing sites to markets or processing plants. Finally, the culmination of this value chain unfolds in the realms of marketing and sales, where the products find their way to wholesalers, retailers, and consumers.

MAIN FINDINGS

Through the evaluation of value chains within the researched countries, it became evident that small-scale fishers play a vital role in the livelihoods and food security of millions of people in this region. However, despite their crucial role, small-scale fishers communities often receive less support and investment than industrial fisheries. This discrepancy is particularly evident in post-harvest activities such as processing and preservation. Infrastructure, resources and technology are predominantly directed towards industrial fishing, leaving small-scale fishers needing more facilities and equipment to process and preserve their catch correctly. This inadequacy translates to lower-quality products and diminished profits. Additionally, the lack of appropriate infrastructure leads to increased post-harvest losses that not only compromise the income of small-scale fishers but also impact the availability of fish as a food source.

Regarding value chain and trade, industrial fisheries are frequently favoured over small-scale fishers. This includes funding for marketing and promotion and trade agreements that benefit larger-scale operations. As a result, small-scale fishers often need help accessing markets and receiving fair prices for its products.

Furthermore, the capacity and fiscal allocation for small-scale fishers often need to be improved compared to industrial fisheries. Capacity-building programs, such as training on sustainable

fishing practices and management, are critical for small-scale fishers, but these programs often need funding or availability. Fiscal allotments, including subsidies or tax incentives, typically lean towards industrial fisheries, resulting in an uneven playing field. Within value chains, SSFs find themselves positioned at the base of the power hierarchy, leaving their livelihoods vulnerable to the decisions of others in the chain. The perishable nature of fish is often cited as a factor that makes fishers bound to the dictates of intermediaries. The lack of access to formal credit is another hurdle to decent work, as loans generally demand substantial collateral and capital commitments.

Among the surveyed countries, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia report measures the government took to support the post-harvest value chain and market access. In Bangladesh, SSF cooperatives have access to equipment and facilities for fish processing, such as ice plants, cold storage facilities, and drying yards. SSF cooperatives also receive training and support from government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations to improve their fish processing and value-added activities. In a welcome move in Malaysia, there are Fishermen's Markets where SSF can sell its catch directly to the consumer. In addition, fish prices are regulated and available online for reference, making fair pricing possible for SSF. In Indonesia, policies and programs from the central government provide facilities such as cold storage and access to fish processing industries.

In India, the focus remains primarily skewed towards industrial fishing in terms of value chains, post-harvest technology, infrastructure, and trade. Recent initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampad Yojana schemes aimed at doubling fisher income primarily focus on aquaculture and deep-sea fishing, leaving small-scale fishers wholly excluded from these benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote and rethink small-scale fishers collaborative Models. Small-scale fishers should prioritise exploring alternative collaborative models as a transformative strategy to enhance their bargaining power, improve market access, and increase profits.

Small-scale fishers can harness its combined resources, knowledge, and skills to negotiate fair prices, establish direct market connections, and engage in value-added activities by fostering solid and resilient collective initiatives. These collaborative endeavors also offer a platform for small-scale fishers to address shared challenges, advocate for their rights, and promote sustainable fishing practices.

Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should actively support and invest in initiatives that empower small-scale fishers to develop and strengthen collaborative models, providing them with the necessary training, resources, and access to finance. By embracing this approach, small-scale fishers can unlock their full

potential, contribute to sustainable fisheries management, and secure a dignified livelihood for themselves and their communities.

Reimagining collaborative models can foster unity and collective responsibility among small-scale fishers, including women, creating a supportive network that empowers individuals and builds a strong sense of community. Collaborative initiatives facilitate knowledge exchange, skill-sharing, and peer-to-peer learning, enabling small-scale fishers, particularly women, to adapt and innovate in changing conditions.

The collective voice of united fishers carries more weight in policy-making, leading to inclusive and gender-responsive sustainable fisheries governance. Embracing a cooperative mindset, small-scale fishers becomes a powerful force for positive change, strengthening resilience, promoting gender equity, and enhancing the well-being of their communities.

Create small-scale fisheries markets. Governments and relevant stakeholders should prioritise establishing and supporting small-scale fishers markets to empower small-scale fishers, promote fair trade practices, and enhance their economic sustainability.

Creating platforms where small-scale fishers can sell their catch directly to consumers enables them to receive fair product prices. It provides an opportunity to establish direct connections with consumers, fostering

trust and transparency in the seafood supply chain. Governments should collaborate with small-scale fishers organisations and local communities to develop regulatory frameworks that allow small-scale fishers to set prices, regulate competition, and ensure market access.

Furthermore, providing necessary infrastructure, such as storage facilities and transportation networks, and facilitating market information and financial services can further strengthen the functioning of small-scale fishers markets.

Promoting and replicating the small-scale fishers market model can empower small-scale fishers, enhance their livelihoods, and contribute to sustainable fisheries and vibrant coastal communities worldwide. In this framework, collaborative models (such as cooperatives) as marketing agencies can facilitate direct sales to consumers by providing a collective platform for small-scale fishers to market their products and pool their resources. These models can help small-scale fishers to build their brand, develop marketing strategies,

and negotiate prices with buyers.

One way could be by establishing Community-Supported Fisheries (CSFs). In this model, consumers purchase shares in a local fishery, regularly receiving a portion of the catch. This model provides small-scale fishers with a guaranteed market and allows them to sell directly to consumers without intermediaries. One example of a Community Supported Fishers (CSF) model in Asia is Japan's "Satoumi Satoyama CSF" initiative. Satoumi and Satoyama are Japanese terms that refer to coastal and inland traditional landscapes, respectively, characterised by harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. In this CSF model, consumers can purchase shares or memberships in the local fishery, much like a subscription. By doing so, they directly support the Satoumi Satoyama communities and their sustainable fishing practices. In return for their membership, the consumers receive a regular supply of fresh seafood caught sustainably by the local fishermen.



SECTION 8: GENDER EQUALITY



Fishing is often considered a male-dominated industry globally, and fisheries management has been plagued by gender bias. This bias is partly due to narrow definitions of fisher and fishing that overlook key groups of fishers. For instance, census data on occupation may exclude part-time and subsistence labour. As women are more likely to fish part-time, their participation in fishing often goes unnoticed. In some cultures, it is culturally unacceptable for women to fish; in such cases, both women and men may downplay or discount women's participation. This may be further compounded by factors such as gender, social class, and wealth, where women's participation in fishing is viewed as an indication of poverty and shame.

Moreover, gender bias in fisheries management can lead to a lack of recognition of women's contributions to the sector and their needs. Women play crucial roles in various aspects of small-scale fisheries. They are actively involved in fishing activities, harvesting and processing fish and aquatic resources, and sometimes in specialised tasks unique to women. Additionally, women take on essential roles in marketing and selling these resources locally and in distant markets and engaging in community organising and advocacy to promote fishing community interests. Women's responsibilities extend to household management, including preparing meals featuring fish or aquatic resources. Furthermore, they possess valuable traditional knowledge related to fishing techniques, resource management, and the use of medicinal plants and natural resources, which are essential for the sustainability of small-scale fisheries. This wealth of knowledge is passed down through generations, contributing significantly to the sector's resilience and continuity.

MAIN FINDINGS

Women have always played a significant role in the fishing industry and its allied activities, contributing to food security and income generation in coastal communities. However, despite their essential contributions, women are often overlooked and excluded from the decision-making process, especially in the small-scale fisheries sector.

The study reports that, except in Malaysia, women's presence remains overlooked in official censuses, barring them from identity cards and the benefits of fisheries involvement. This absence of recognition and documentation engenders hurdles for women in obtaining credit, financial aid, and governmental assistance. Furthermore, women frequently encounter exclusion from co-management systems, whether state-based or within small-scale fisheries organisations, intensifying the marginalisation of their contributions and roles.

However, some positive examples of state support for women in small-scale fisheries exist. For instance, India and Indonesia provide women with general state backing for embarking on micro-enterprises, establishing savings accounts, and accessing microcredit. Bangladesh presents several fisheries-oriented schemes and subsidies tailored to benefit women, including initiatives such as the Women in Fisheries Programme, the Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation (SMEF), and the Fisheries and Livelihoods Development Project (FLDP). These initiatives provide

training, capacity building, and financial assistance to women, empowering them to enhance post-harvest practices, marketing, and value chain development.

Similarly, Indonesia's PNM MEKAR scheme extends a capital subsidy to coastal women to encourage the launch of micro, small, and medium enterprises. However, despite these positive examples, most women in small-scale fisheries still await integration into state support mechanisms and participatory decision-making processes.

Malaysia is a notable exception, where women holding leadership roles are granted fisher identity cards and enjoy equal tenure rights as their male counterparts. This recognition of women's contributions to the fishing industry has helped to promote gender equality and empowerment within coastal communities.

Overall, the study underscores that women in small-scale fisheries face significant challenges encompassing recognition, resource access, and decision-making power. While some countries have taken positive steps to address these issues, much more must be done to ensure women's vital contributions are acknowledged and supported in the fishing industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Establish a comprehensive and inclusive national-level definition

of small-scale fishing. Formally defining small-scale fishers (SSF) more inclusively, including allied activities such as processing, marketing, and selling fish, can also enable proper recognition and appreciation of women's significant contributions to the fishing sector.

Formally defining SSF more inclusively can yield several benefits. Firstly, women's significant contributions to the fishing industry can be duly acknowledged and appreciated by broadening the definition of fishing to encompass allied activities such as processing, marketing, and selling fish. This expansion allows for a more accurate representation of their roles, ensuring fair recognition of their invaluable work.

Secondly, based on this formal recognition, States can create fisher identity cards that include information about the person's fishing activities and their allied activities. This would also help document and recognise women's contributions to the fishing industry and ensure they can access government support and resources.

Thirdly, with a formal and inclusive definition, States can implement and monitor gender-sensitive policies and programs that address women's unique needs and challenges in the fishing industry. This could include providing training and capacity-building programs for women, ensuring equal access to credit and financial resources, and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes related to the fishing industry.

Adopting better policies for women in cooperatives: Small-scale fisheries cooperatives must actively recruit women members, ensure equal representation in leadership positions, conduct gender analyses to identify where women are involved and promote labor rights such as equal wages. Cooperatives can also adopt policies that ensure fair payment systems, conduct wage audits, and provide training programs to help women negotiate better wages and working conditions. By promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, cooperatives can create more equitable and sustainable value chains that benefit all members.

Enhance policies that support women's participation in small-scale fishers collaborative models (i.e. Cooperatives) By promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, small-scale fishers collaborative models can create more equitable and sustainable value chains that benefit all members.

Small-scale fisheries collaborative models must actively recruit women members, ensure equal representation in leadership positions, conduct gender analyses to identify where women are involved and promote labour rights such as equal wages compared to men and women working in other sectors.

Small-scale fisheries collaborative models can further enhance women's participation and empowerment by implementing policies prioritising fair

payment systems. Wage audits can be conducted regularly to ensure women receive equitable compensation for their work and contributions. Furthermore, training programs focusing on labour rights, technology, and negotiation skills can equip women with the tools and knowledge to advocate for better wages and improved working conditions within the fishing sector.

By taking these comprehensive steps, collaborative models can foster a more inclusive and gender-sensitive environment, supporting women's economic independence and elevating their status in the fishing sector.

Create gender quotas: Creating a quota system of % reservation for equitable gender representation in consultation with the Government can effectively promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender quotas can involve setting a target percentage of women's representation in decision-making bodies or other positions of power within a particular sector or industry, such as the fishing sector. Fiscal allocations can be made to support this initiative, such as providing resources for training and capacity-building programs, facilitating access to credit and financial resources, and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes.

To ensure the effectiveness of this quota system, it is essential to involve women in the design and implementation process. This could include working

with local women's organisations and other stakeholders to identify the specific needs and challenges women face in the sector and develop tailored strategies to address these issues. It is also essential to promote awareness and understanding of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment and to actively engage men in supporting these initiatives.

Regular monitoring and evaluation of the quota system should be conducted to ensure that progress is being made toward achieving gender equality and to identify areas where improvements are needed. This could include tracking the number of women in decision-making positions, assessing the impact of training and capacity-building programs on women's empowerment, and evaluating the effectiveness of fiscal allocations in supporting gender equality initiatives.

Implementing a quota system of % reservation for equitable gender representation in consultation with the government and providing fiscal allocations to support this initiative can help ensure that women's voices are heard, their contributions are valued, and they have equal access to resources and opportunities.

Provide small-scale fishers women with skills and capacity-building opportunities. Improve women's skills and knowledge and actively empower them to participate and thrive in the small-scale fishers sector.

Providing opportunities for education and training can improve women's skills and knowledge of fishing techniques, technology, processing, marketing, and other related activities. Financial literacy and access to banking services can help women to manage their finances effectively and access credit and other financial resources for their businesses.

To ensure the availability of these resources, collaborative efforts between governments and small-scale fishers organizations are essential in establishing training programs and forging partnerships with financial institutions. These programs can offer financial education and services specifically designed to cater to the needs of women in the small-scale fishers sector. By creating such targeted initiatives, women can access the necessary knowledge and

support to effectively manage their economic activities, strengthen their financial independence, and make informed decisions regarding their businesses and livelihoods.

In parallel, women's organizations and other stakeholders are vital in raising awareness about empowering women in the small-scale fishers sector. Through advocacy and community engagement, they can highlight the benefits of providing resources and training opportunities for women, promoting gender equality, and fostering women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes. Together, these collaborative endeavors can lead to the meaningful empowerment of women in small-scale fisheries, creating a more inclusive and sustainable sector for all.



SECTION 9: DISASTER RISK AND CLIMATE CHANGE



The effects of climate change are expected to hit natural resource-based communities worldwide, with small-scale fisheries located in coastal areas being especially vulnerable. This is due to an increase in average atmospheric and seawater temperatures and a higher frequency of extreme weather events, cyclones, storm surges, and coastal flooding and erosion predicted by the 2023 IPCC report. Small-scale fisheries must adapt to these circumstances. Still, their capacity to do so depends on the underlying conditions that either facilitate or inhibit the adjustment process and preparedness to face these situations.

The SSF Guidelines urge states to take measures to support the resilience of small-scale fishers and to mitigate the impact of climate change and related disasters that might occur. Disaster management is especially crucial in coastal areas. According to an FAO study, developing the capacity to adapt and manage the risks posed by climate change is necessary for the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries. The study highlights the importance of identifying the potential impacts of climate change, promoting sustainable management practices, and implementing measures to enhance community resilience.

Furthermore, the interconnected nature of small-scale fishing communities and their reliance on local ecosystems amplifies the need for collaborative efforts and comprehensive strategies. Integrated coastal management plans involving local stakeholders, governments, NGOs, and researchers can significantly build adaptive capacities. These plans should encompass not only ecological aspects but also socioeconomic factors, considering the livelihoods of fishing communities, their cultural practices, and the equitable distribution of resources. By fostering such collaborative approaches, communities can develop adaptive strategies that address immediate challenges and promote long-term sustainability.

MAIN FINDINGS

Although many countries have formulated policies and programs for disaster management and climate change adaptation and mitigation, the reality often shows that these efforts must be revised. In coastal areas, there has been a noticeable upsurge in development activities such as tourism infrastructure, ports, and roadways in recent years. This rapid development has rendered coastlines more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In several countries, economic development tends to overshadow environmental concerns, leading to the degradation of coastal ecosystems and a decline in the resilience of coastal communities.

For example, in Sri Lanka, despite the presence of a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, the rapid development of coastal areas for tourism and other economic activities has increased the coastline's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Similarly, the National Disaster Management Plan provides a comprehensive framework for disaster risk reduction and response in India. However, developing coastal infrastructure, such as ports and harbours, has increased erosion and damage to coastal ecosystems. Moreover, nations that possess robust policies, in theory, frequently encounter challenges when putting those policies into action and ensuring compliance. In Bangladesh, for example, the government has implemented several policies and programs for climate change adaptation and disaster management, including the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy

and Action Plan and the National Plan for Disaster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Setting 'Preventive Management Systems': Prevention of disaster should be an integral part of any disaster management plan, and not just limited to post-disaster rebuilding. States should prioritize proactive measures to prevent disasters before they occur, rather than just focusing on reactive measures after the fact.

This includes investing in early warning systems, disaster risk reduction measures, and community education and awareness programs. States should also consider incorporating climate change adaptation strategies into their disaster management plans, as the impacts of climate change are likely to increase the frequency and severity of natural disasters.

Discouraging false solutions to climate adaptation and mitigation: Using tetrapods and seawalls as coastal defense structures must be identified and flagged.

While these structures may provide short-term protection, they can have negative long-term consequences, such as exacerbating erosion and altering natural sediment transport processes. Rather than relying on these false solutions, it is important to invest in alternative strategies that are more effective and sustainable, such as beach nourishment, dune restoration and managed retreat.

Placing early warning systems: Fishers are among the most vulnerable groups during storms and cyclones, as they often work in open waters and are exposed to the elements. It is important that the state provides better accessible early warning systems and search and rescue operations to ensure the safety and security of fishers during such events.

Early warning systems can help fishers make informed decisions about when to venture out to sea and when to stay ashore, while search and rescue operations can assist in the event of an emergency. States can also invest in training programs to educate fishers on safety procedures and equip them with the necessary skills and equipment to navigate adverse weather conditions. By prioritizing the safety and security of fishers, the state can help ensure a sustainable and resilient fishing industry for years to come.

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) should conduct disaster risk assessments: Banks play a crucial role in financing infrastructure projects in coastal communities.

However, it is important that these institutions conduct disaster risk assessments before sanctioning funds for such projects to ensure that they do

not compromise the resilience of these communities. Such assessments should consider the potential impacts of natural disasters, such as storms and sea-level rise, on the infrastructure and the community as a whole. This will help to identify potential risks and vulnerabilities and enable the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures.

Prioritize community-centered climate solutions based on SSF traditional ecological knowledge/ States should prioritize community-centered climate solutions based on traditional ecological knowledge and practices of SSF communities, instead of technocratic and market-based approaches such as seawalls, tetrapods, blue carbon, and conservation carbon credit solutions.

Traditional ecological knowledge, passed down through generations, is deeply rooted in the understanding of local ecosystems and their dynamics. By involving SSF communities in climate solutions, states can tap into this wealth of knowledge and practices that have sustained these communities and their environments for centuries. Community-centered climate solutions empower local communities to take ownership of their environmental challenges and engage in decision-making processes.



SECTION 10: POLICY COHERENCE, INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION, AND COLLABORATION



The SSF Guidelines require effective coordination and cooperation between various governance mechanisms at different levels. This includes horizontal and vertical governance mechanisms, which must work together to achieve the desired result. Horizontal governance mechanisms refer to coordination between other institutions and organizations at the same level. In the context of SSF Guidelines, this means coordinating efforts between various national, regional, and international organizations to implement the guidelines effectively. For example, National Governments may need to collaborate with regional organizations to align their policies and regulations with the guidelines. Similarly, international organizations such as the United Nations and their agencies may need to work with regional organizations to ensure the procedures are implemented globally.

Vertical governance mechanisms pertain to how various levels of government, such as national and subnational administrations, collaborate and coordinate. In the case of SSF Guidelines, national governments must establish close cooperation with subnational government entities to guarantee the successful implementation of these guidelines at the local level. To achieve this, federal authorities might be required to extend assistance and allocate resources to local government departments, empowering them to implement the SSF Guidelines effectively.

MAIN FINDINGS

The assessment reveals a noteworthy discrepancy between state institutions' mandates, laws, and policies, which can often be contrary to the SSF Guidelines. Moreover, RAG members report a need for more policy coordination and collaboration among different state agencies, which is currently low and, in most cases, almost nonexistent.

The small-scale fishers perceive the following issues when it comes to this topic and report:

One primary concern is the need for consistent policies and strategies. Although international agreements and guidelines like the SSF Guidelines are in place, they must often be fully integrated into national policies and procedures. This lack of integration becomes evident in certain countries where policies related to small-scale fisheries management need to align coherently with broader policies concerning marine conservation or coastal zone management.

Another significant challenge is coordination among international agencies responsible for small-scale fisheries. Entities like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) may hold different priorities and approaches in their respective policies and strategies. Consequently, the lack of coordination among these agencies can result in conflicting messages and actions, hampering effective

implementation.

Furthermore, power dynamics among various stakeholders contribute to the need for more policy coherence in the small-scale fishers sector. Large commercial fishing industries tend to wield more significant influence over policy-making processes than small-scale fishers. This power imbalance can lead to policies that inadequately address the needs and concerns of small-scale fisheries, further exacerbating the challenges these communities face.

RECOMMENDATION

Apply a 'Systems Thinking' approach to policy development. A "Systems Thinking" approach can help achieve the linkages across various international instruments and policies mentioned in the SSF Guidelines by recognising the interconnectedness and interdependence of different system components.

Instead of isolating individual components, a "Systems Thinking" approach considers the entire system. It aims to identify the feedback loops and existing relationships between different parts. In the context of small-scale fisheries, a "Systems Thinking" approach would involve recognizing the connections between small-scale fisheries policies and practices and other policies and practices related to economic development, environmental protection, and disaster risk management. It would involve identifying how these policies and procedures can either support or hinder

the sustainability and well-being of small-scale fishing communities.

This approach acknowledges the significance of cultural factors, social relations, and governance structures in shaping fisheries management outcomes and sustainable practices. By considering these complex interactions, States can develop more effective and inclusive policies that address the multifaceted challenges faced by small-scale fishing communities.

Furthermore, adopting a systems thinking approach facilitates collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders involved in the management and governance of small-scale fisheries. This approach encourages governments, local communities, NGOs, and international organizations to work together to address common challenges and leverage their collective knowledge and resources. A “Systems Thinking” approach can lead to more innovative and integrated solutions for sustainable small-scale fisheries management by fostering cooperation and mutual understanding

Develop an integrated policy framework. Developing an integrated policy framework is vital for effective and sustainable solutions that promote the resilience and prosperity of small-scale fishing communities while safeguarding the environment.

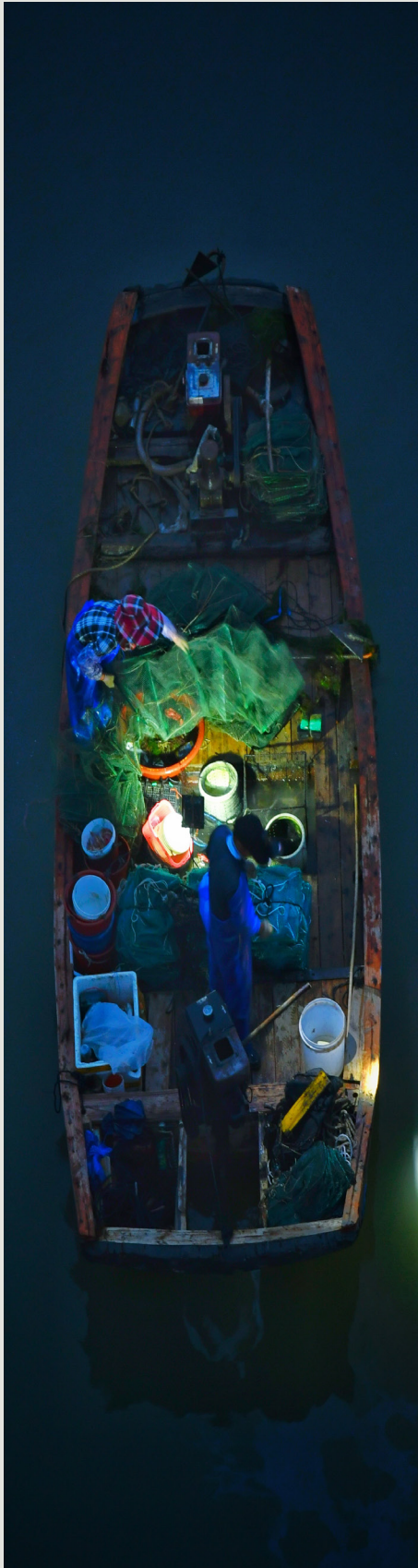
States should design a comprehensive and cohesive strategy that outlines how different policies and initiatives can synergise and complement each other.

This approach allows for more effective and sustainable solutions considering different small-scale fishers’ unique needs and contexts. communities.

Furthermore, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration is critical to the success of the integrated policy framework. States must promote cooperation among various government agencies, such as fisheries, agriculture, environment, and social welfare, to ensure that policies related to small-scale fisheries align with broader development goals. This cross-sectoral coordination enables policymakers to identify potential conflicts and complementarities between different approaches, ultimately promoting more efficient use of resources.

An integrated policy framework facilitates a more coherent and streamlined governance structure for small-scale fisheries. It helps bridge gaps and overlaps in decision-making processes, reducing bureaucratic hurdles and enhancing the overall efficiency of fisheries resource management. States can create a unified vision for sustainable small-scale fisheries through this approach, ensuring that diverse interests are harmonized and balanced to support the long-term resilience and well-being of small-scale fishers’ communities.

SECTION 11: INFORMATION, RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATION



The successful implementation of the SSF Guidelines relies heavily on the pillars of information, research, and communication. These three interconnected components play a crucial role in shaping policies, promoting sustainable practices, and empowering small-scale fishing communities worldwide.

Firstly, information serves as the foundation upon which effective policies and interventions can be built. Access to accurate and up-to-date data about the status of small-scale fisheries, including fish stocks, fishing practices, and the socio-economic conditions of fisherfolk, is essential for formulating targeted strategies. The information enables policymakers to identify the sector's challenges, gaps, and opportunities, guiding them towards evidence-based decision-making.

Secondly, research is pivotal in advancing knowledge and understanding of small-scale fisheries. Participatory research can bring valuable insights into these communities' complexities, intricacies, ecosystems, and vulnerabilities. Research fosters innovation by identifying sustainable fishing practices, resource management techniques, and adaptation strategies to climate change. Furthermore, research empowers small-scale fishers with the tools and information needed to participate actively in policymaking processes, making their voices heard and their perspectives acknowledged.

Thirdly, communication serves as the bridge that connects stakeholders and facilitates knowledge exchange. Effective communication fosters collaboration among governments, non-governmental organisations, academia, fisherfolk, and other relevant actors. It ensures that all stakeholders are well-informed about the guidelines' objectives, commitments, and responsibilities, encouraging ownership and participation.

MAIN FINDINGS

Quantitative versus Qualitative:

Across all countries it has been observed that fisheries data is often more quantitative than qualitative, which paints a limited picture of the reality faced by small-scale fishers. This has led to incomplete and exclusionary public policies since the data tends to focus on biological and economic indicators, such as fish stock assessments, catch data, and revenue generated by the fishing industry. While these indicators are important, they do not capture the social, cultural, and political dimensions of small-scale fisheries, which are critical for developing policies that are inclusive and equitable. For example, small-scale fishers may have different perspectives on the sustainability of fishing practices than scientists or government officials.

They may prioritize cultural and social values over economic considerations, or they may have different perceptions of risk and uncertainty related to climate change or other environmental threats. Without capturing these qualitative dimensions of small-scale fisheries, policies may not adequately address the needs and aspirations of small-scale fishers and may instead reinforce existing power imbalances and inequalities.

Moreover, fisheries data is often collected and analyzed at the national or regional level, which can lead to a lack of understanding of the diversity and complexity of small-scale fisheries at the local level. This can result in policies that are designed for a broad range of contexts but may not be appropriate or

effective for specific local situations.

Access: Effective communication channels are crucial for ensuring that small-scale fishers (SSF) have access to relevant information and are able to participate in decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods. However, in many cases, communication channels to SSF are poor and not often in mediums and languages that are accessible. This can lead to a lack of awareness and understanding of policies, regulations, and other important information that affect small-scale fisheries.

One of the main challenges is the limited availability of communication channels that are accessible to small-scale fishers. In many cases, government and non-governmental organizations rely on traditional mass media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, to disseminate information to small-scale fishers. However, small-scale fishers may not have access to these mediums or may not be able to understand the information if it is not presented in a language that they understand.

Furthermore, there may be a lack of understanding of the specific information needs of small-scale fishers. For example, small-scale fishers may have specific information needs related to weather conditions, market prices, or changes in fishing regulations that are not addressed by general communication channels.

Expertise: SSF are often tired of being treated as passive recipients of information and awareness campaigns

and not as knowledge experts. This is because they have a wealth of knowledge and expertise that is grounded in their lived experiences and interactions with the marine environment, which is often not recognized or valued by external actors.

Many SSFs have observed that external actors, such as government agencies, NGOs, and researchers, often prioritize their own agendas and perspectives, while overlooking the knowledge and needs of small-scale fishers. This is because there is a common perception that small-scale fishers lack formal education and scientific knowledge, and therefore do not have the expertise to contribute to fisheries management and planning. On the contrary, they have a wealth of knowledge and experience that is grounded in their lived experiences and interactions with the marine environment. This knowledge is often transmitted through generations and is based on observations, trial and error, and experimentation. This knowledge is critical for understanding the local ecological and social dynamics of small-scale fisheries and is often complementary to scientific knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Blend qualitative data with quantitative data in research to capture the complexity of small-scale fisheries. In fisheries management, it is crucial to incorporate qualitative and traditional quantitative data to capture the multifaceted nature of small-scale fisheries.

This integration ensures a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, and political dimensions that significantly influence the livelihoods and well-being of small-scale fishers. Making qualitative research mandatory in fisheries data collection involves adopting participatory approaches that actively engage small-scale fishers and other stakeholders in the research process.

Through participatory research, small-scale fishers become active participants in generating knowledge about their experiences and perspectives. This engagement fosters a sense of ownership and empowers them to contribute valuable insights into the complexities of their fishing communities. Ethnography, as one of the qualitative research methods, delves into the cultural and social aspects that shape the fishing practices and customs of small-scale fishers.

Participatory mapping provides spatial information that enriches the understanding of fishers' reliance on specific fishing grounds and their intricate connections with marine ecosystems. By incorporating these qualitative research methods, fisheries management can move beyond solely focusing on catch data and economic indicators, allowing decision-makers to consider the broader implications of policies and strategies on the social fabric of small-scale fishing communities. This holistic approach recognises the importance of qualitative data in shaping sustainable and equitable management practices that promote the well-being of the

fishers and the marine environment.

Prioritise traditional knowledge in fisheries management plans. Prioritising traditional knowledge is crucial for empowering small-scale fishers and ensuring their active participation in decision-making.

There is a need to address the institutional barriers that exclude small-scale fishers from participation in decision-making processes. This can involve creating institutional frameworks that prioritise integrating local knowledge in fisheries management and planning and recognizing the complementary nature of scientific and local knowledge.

Governments and relevant institutions should establish frameworks that prioritise integrating local knowledge in fisheries management and planning, recognising the complementary nature of scientific and traditional knowledge.

Policymakers can tap into the knowledge accumulated over generations by involving small-scale fishers in decision-making. Traditional knowledge is deeply rooted in the local environment and ecosystems, offering valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of marine and inland resources. Integrating this knowledge with scientific expertise enables a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by small-scale fishers and the ecosystems they depend on.

Reduce the digital divide between SSFs and other actors in fisheries management. By bridging the digital

divide and empowering SSFs through technology, fisheries management can become more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable, ensuring that the voices and interests of SSFs are fully considered in decision-making processes.

The digital divide between small-scale fishers (SSFs) and other actors in fisheries management and planning perpetuates their exclusion from decision-making processes. Investments in essential infrastructure, like broadband internet access, electricity supply, and technology hardware, are necessary to bridge this divide. Moreover, providing tailored training and capacity-building programs can enhance SSFs' digital literacy and technology skills, empowering them to access and use digital resources effectively. Ensuring affordability and accessibility of technology, such as smartphones and computers, is essential in removing financial barriers that hinder small-scale fishers from benefiting from digital resources.

Customised digital solutions designed to address the unique needs and challenges faced by SSFs can further promote their inclusion in fisheries management and planning. For instance, developing user-friendly mobile apps that offer real-time information on weather conditions, fish stock levels, market prices, and regulatory updates can empower SSFs to make informed decisions and enhance their efficiency in fishing operations.

SECTION 12: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT



Capacity development is pivotal in fisheries management, encompassing skill enhancement and knowledge dissemination and establishing robust support structures to sustain acquired capacities. While upskilling and training remain essential, a comprehensive approach to capacity development recognizes the need for sustainable and inclusive practices. Building the capacity of fishers, communities, and stakeholders involves fostering a deep understanding of the intricate interplay between ecological, social, and economic aspects of fisheries.

Capacity development must transcend mere technical expertise to effectively manage and sustainably utilize fishery resources. It should encompass institutional strengthening, empowering fishing communities to engage in participatory decision-making and co-management initiatives. By involving fishers in designing and implementing management strategies, capacity development cultivates a sense of ownership, encouraging responsible stewardship of resources. Inclusive governance frameworks, enabled through capacity building, foster dialogue and collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and fishing communities, fostering collective responsibility for sustainable fisheries management.

Moreover, capacity development must account for small-scale fishing communities' unique contexts and challenges. This requires tailoring programs to address fisheries' social, economic, and cultural dimensions, acknowledging local knowledge's centrality in resource management. Equipping fishers with the capacity to harness traditional wisdom alongside modern techniques ensures the preservation of cultural heritage while embracing innovation for sustainable practices—aquatic ecosystems.

MAIN FINDINGS

According to all the RAG members, the most significant capacity lacking in small-scale fisheries (SSF) is the ability to effectively engage with market dynamics and navigate institutional mechanisms across various governance scales concerning their rights and the means to advance them. Small-scale fishers often need help understanding and adapting to market fluctuations, making it challenging to secure fair prices for their catches and market their products efficiently. Additionally, they need help navigating complex institutional frameworks that dictate their fishing rights and access to resources, hindering their ability to advocate for and assert their rights effectively. Addressing this capacity gap becomes crucial for empowering small-scale fishing communities, enabling them to thrive economically and assert their rights within the larger governance landscape.

The RAG also needs more institutional capacities within state agencies governing fisheries. This deficiency often leads to a disconnect between these agencies and small-scale fishers, as state entities may need to fully appreciate and understand the valuable knowledge base held by small-scale fishers communities. Consequently, state agencies may not adequately incorporate the traditional wisdom and insights of small-scale fishers into their management plans, resulting in decisions that do not fully align with the realities and needs of these communities.

The underestimation of small-scale fishers knowledge hampers effective collaboration between state agencies and fisherfolk, hindering the development of holistic and sustainable fisheries management approaches that account for the expertise and local context offered by the small-scale fishing communities. Addressing this gap in institutional capacities is essential for promoting inclusive and participatory governance, ensuring that small-scale fishers' perspectives are integrated into decision-making processes and paving the way for more equitable and effective fisheries management strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide Government officials with capacities-building opportunities on the interdependent aspects concerning SSFs. The implementation of the SSF Guidelines has been slow and often hindered by the lack of capacity within Governments to appreciate the importance of interdependent aspects of sustainable small-scale fisheries

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines has been hindered by the lack of capacity within governments to fully grasp the significance of interdependent aspects for sustainable small-scale fisheries. To overcome this challenge, targeted capacity-building initiatives must be introduced to educate government officials about these crucial aspects.

Government officials and policymakers

should receive training programs that enhance their understanding and appreciation of gender considerations, value-chain concerns, equitable trade opportunities, market access, tenure rights, and disaster management in small-scale fisheries. By equipping them with this knowledge, officials can better integrate these factors into policy-making and decision-making processes, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable fisheries management.

To complement these initiatives, fostering partnerships and knowledge exchange between governments and small-scale fishers representatives can further enhance capacity-building efforts. Such collaborative efforts can facilitate the transfer of expertise sharing of best practices and ensure the implementation of comprehensive and context-specific strategies for sustainable small-scale fisheries management.

Provide small-scale fisher youth with skills and capacities-building opportunities. Youth training in marketing, trade, and other fisheries-related enterprises can build their capacity to engage in sustainable fisheries practices and develop livelihoods within the sector. In many coastal communities, youth are a significant demographic group with untapped potential for developing the fisheries sector. However, often, they need more skills and knowledge to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Empowering the youth in small-scale

fisheries with skills and capacity-building opportunities is vital for the sustainable growth and development of the sector. Many children face challenges accessing relevant training and education that can equip them with the necessary competencies to thrive in the industry. Bridging this knowledge gap is crucial to unlocking the full potential of young individuals and enabling them to play a pivotal role in sustainable fisheries practices and livelihood development.

The training initiatives should cater to the youth's diverse needs and learning styles. Combining classroom sessions, practical workshops, and mentoring programs can provide a comprehensive learning experience. Classroom sessions can impart theoretical knowledge, while practical workshops offer hands-on experience, allowing youth to apply what they have learned in real-world scenarios. Additionally, mentoring programs can play a vital role in nurturing talent and fostering a sense of guidance and support as youth navigate the complexities of the small-scale fishers sector.

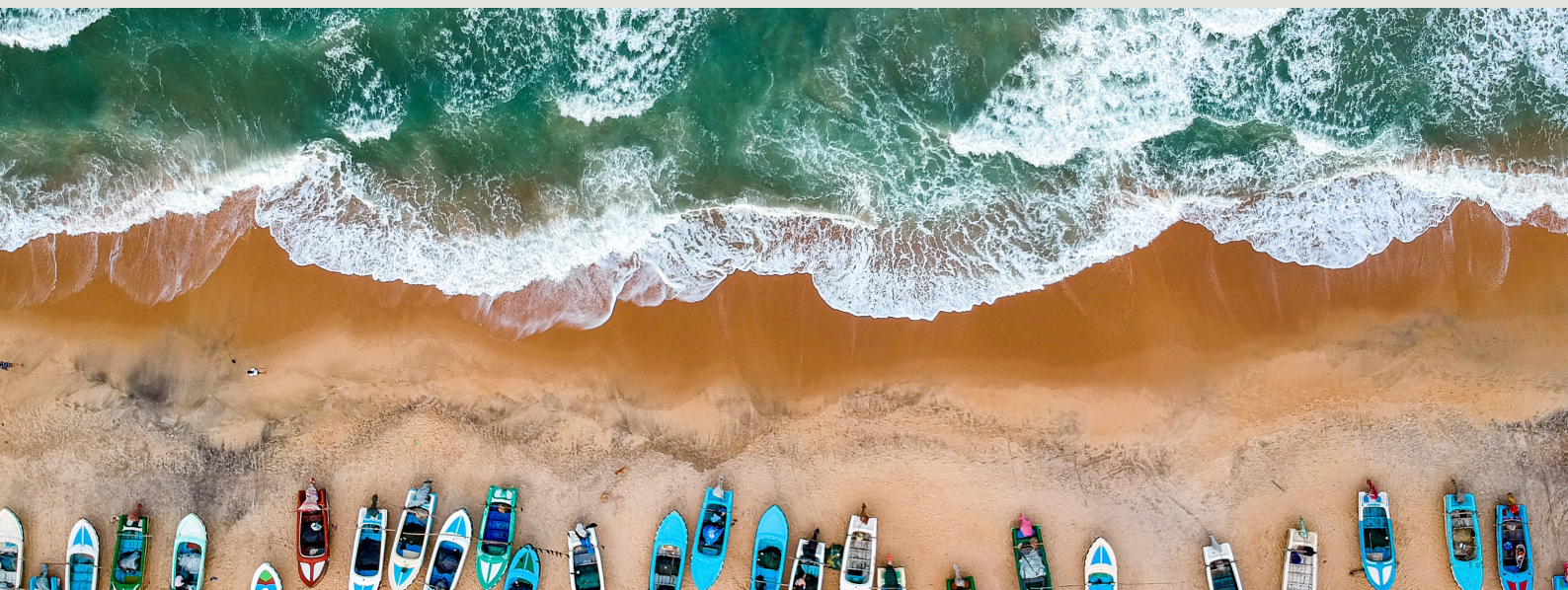
Training SSF on Civic Rights and Labour Laws: SSF need training on labor and civic rights, including issues such as inadequate working conditions, low wages, limited access to social protections, and marginalization from decision-making processes. By enhancing the capacity of small-scale fishers' leaders to participate effectively in decision-making processes, leadership training can ensure that the perspectives and interests of small-scale fishers are considered in policy

development and implementation.

About the prioritized topics, small-scale fishers often face challenges related to their labor and civic rights, including issues such as inadequate working conditions, low wages, limited access to social protections, and marginalization from decision-making processes. Labor and civic rights training for small-scale fishers can effectively empower them to advocate for their rights, enhance their livelihoods, and promote their well-being.

Some of the key topics that could be covered in these trainings for small-scale fishers could include:

1. Understanding labor laws and regulations: The training should focus on educating small-scale fishers about the laws and regulations that govern their work, such as minimum wage laws, occupational health and safety regulations, and laws protecting workers from discrimination and harassment.
2. Access to social protections: The training should include information on how small-scale fishers can access social protections such as healthcare, insurance, and pension schemes.
3. Advocacy skills: The training should equip small-scale fishers with the skills and knowledge to advocate for their rights, including engaging with policymakers and other stakeholders to promote their interests.
4. Building collective action: The training should emphasize the importance of building collective effort among small-scale fishers to enhance their bargaining power and promote their rights.
5. Civic engagement and participation: The training should provide small-scale fishers with the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively in civic processes, including engaging with local authorities and participating in decision-making processes related to fisheries management.
6. Gender and social inclusion: The training should address the challenges women and other marginalized groups face in the fishing industry and provide strategies for promoting gender equality and social inclusion.
7. Conflict resolution: The training should equip small-scale fishers with conflict resolution skills to address disputes and conflicts that may arise in their work.



CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the assessment report on the Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Guidelines provides valuable insights into the implementation of these guidelines. The report takes a nuanced approach by evaluating the implementation of these guidelines against different standards. The report recognizes that the SSF community is characterized by rich heterogeneity, both within each country and between countries. As a result, it acknowledges that no single country can fully represent the diverse ways of life and challenges faced by small-scale fishers. By drawing on case studies and through testimonies, the assessment provides analysis of the regional trends in implementing the SSF guidelines. It highlights both areas of non-compliance and instances where the guidelines are being met, thereby offering a balanced perspective. This approach allows for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the challenges and successes experienced by different actors within the SSF community.

Moreover, the assessment report takes into account the varying contexts and complexities associated with small-scale fisheries, considering factors such as geographical location, socioeconomic status, and the unpredictable nature of their work. This recognition of the unique circumstances faced by small-scale fishers enables the report to provide detailed and specific recommendations that address their specific needs and risks.

As we approach the 10-year mark of the Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Guidelines, it is imperative to emphasize the significance of conducting an Asia-Pacific assessment of the guidelines.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to a significant portion of the world's small-scale fishers, who play a vital role in ensuring food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable fisheries management. By conducting a comprehensive assessment specifically tailored to the unique challenges and contexts of the Asia-Pacific region, we can gain valuable insights into the implementation, effectiveness, and impact of the SSF Guidelines. This assessment will provide an opportunity to identify gaps, successes, and areas for improvement, enabling the refinement of strategies, policies, and interventions to better support small-scale fishers.

Furthermore, the assessment aims to foster regional cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration among stakeholders, ultimately strengthening the resilience and sustainability of small-scale fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region. As we reflect on the progress made over the past decade, undertaking an Asia-Pacific assessment of the SSF Guidelines will be instrumental in shaping future actions and policy reform in the years to come.

“EMPOWER FISHERS! ASSERT OUR RIGHTS”

ASIA-PACIFIC ADVISORY GROUP

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