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UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES FOR SECURING SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION

Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview of relevant developments since the endorsement of the “Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication” (SSF Guidelines), focusing on key challenges for the small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector in relation to value chains, post-harvest and trade related issues.

Suggested action by the Sub-Committee

- Provide further guidance for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and recommend key areas for further development stemming from the current activities, with particular attention to sustainability, market connectivity and equity in the value chains.



INTRODUCTION

1. The Thirty-first Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI 31) endorsed the SSF Guidelines¹ in July 2014. These guidelines are the result of a participatory and consultative process that involved over 4 000 representatives of small-scale fishing communities, civil society organizations (CSOs), governments, regional organizations and other stakeholders from more than 120 countries.
2. The purpose of this paper is to inform the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI:FT) on the content and the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, with a particular focus on value chains, post-harvest and trade issues, as well as recent activities in relation to those topics carried out by FAO.
3. The SSF Guidelines (COFI:FT/XV/2016/Inf.9) represent a global consensus on principles and guidance for SSF governance and development. They emphasize the role of SSF for food security and poverty eradication and complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF). They are directed at all those involved in the sector and intend to guide and encourage governments, fishing communities and other stakeholders to work together and ensure secure sustainable SSF for the benefit of small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities, as well as for society at large.

CHAPTER 7 OF THE SSF GUIDELINES - VALUE CHAINS, POST-HARVEST AND TRADE

4. The most relevant chapter for COFI:FT is chapter 7, which deals with value chains, post-harvest activities and trade. In this chapter, the SSF Guidelines recognize post-harvest and other value chain activities as crucial components for sustainable SSF. They, therefore, acknowledge the need to involve post-harvest actors in relevant decision-making processes and, in this context, call for support to associations of fishers and fish workers and stress the key role that women play in post-harvest activities. In addition, the SSF Guidelines call for improvements of the post-harvest sector through appropriate infrastructure and technology investments, value-addition activities, and post-harvest loss and waste reduction. The SSF Guidelines also highlight the need to provide small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities with timely and accurate market and trade information that will allow them to adjust to changing market conditions and facilitate market access at all levels. Furthermore, they call for due consideration to the impact of international trade of SSF, ensuring that benefits are fairly distributed and that market driven overexploitation is prevented. Current relevant initiatives supporting the application of the SSF Guidelines principles in this regard will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Support to fishers and fish worker associations

5. Organizations enable fishers and fish workers to access productive resources, financial services and technologies, improve their market bargaining power, and participate in decision-making processes to strengthen their development. Power imbalances exist in the fisheries sector, for example, between small-scale and large-scale fishers, and between SSF and other sectors such as energy and tourism. Organizations and collective action enable fishers and fish workers to make their voices heard and promote their own interests to improve their livelihoods and well-being and exercise their human rights. Where organizations are non-existent, the SSF Guidelines provide a powerful tool to support and catalyse the formation of organizations and associations across the value chain. Strong organizations can champion the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in their own community, country and region. Under FAO's new strategic framework², strengthening organizations and facilitating the empowerment

¹ FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department. 2015. *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*. Rome. 18 pp. (www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e/index.html)

² www.fao.org/docrep/018/mi317e/mi317e.pdf

of the rural poor is a key component for enabling access to resources, services and institutions in order to improve rural livelihoods and reduce poverty.

6. A scoping study³ prepared for the workshop on “Strengthening Organizations and Collective Action in Fisheries: A Way Forward in Implementing the International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries”, held in Rome in March 2013, revealed the diversity of collective action and organizations in the fisheries sector. These include customary organizations, cooperatives and societies, associations and unions, new ‘supported’ organizational forms, and hybrid and networked arrangements. Using this typology, in-depth case studies of specific organizations were conducted to better understand their situation, with a focus on the following aspects: origins, initiators and motivations for starting the organization; organizational structure and function; governance structures; networking and external relations; factors for success, dormancy or failure; and lessons and recommendations for action. The findings and recommendations of the in-depth case studies were presented and discussed during the workshop on Strengthening Organizations and Collective Action in Fisheries: Towards the Formulation of a Capacity Development Programme⁴, held in Barbados in November 2014.

7. Among other things, the in-depth case studies revealed the following findings: (a) revival of customary institutions and their role in conflict resolution; (b) move towards decentralization and involvement of fishing communities; (c) rise of new institutional arrangements for resource management, e.g. marine extractive reserves and marine areas for responsible fishing, which strive to integrate fishers’ knowledge with science; (d) development of innovative ways for facilitating access to market by SSF products; (e) emerging focus on and importance of youth; (f) “building back better” after natural disasters through the establishment of organizations to facilitate co-management; (g) importance of organization in sustaining fishing as a way of life and continuing the maritime tradition; (h) move towards addressing not only economic but social and environmental objectives, as well as issues such as fair and just distribution of benefits; (i) critical importance of enabling legislation that could address the power imbalance in favour of fishers; and (j) organizations as platforms for learning.

8. Recommendations that emerged to strengthen collective action and fisheries organizations address the following challenges: (a) mainstreaming gender; (b) weak leadership and lack of commitment from members; (c) undue control of part of the value chain of fish and fish-products by middlemen; (d) competition with traditional industries for a share of the market; (e) lack of autonomy vis-à-vis the government; (f) poor financial and business literacy; (g) lack of capacity to comply with market requirements, e.g. sanitary conditions; and (h) how to strike a balance between flexibility and formality in organizational design. Activities are currently being undertaken to implement the recommendations of the in-depth case studies, raise awareness about the SSF Guidelines, facilitate networking and promote exchanges among fisher organizations that contribute to the empowerment of rural people to move out of poverty.

9. Another activity to support and strengthen organizations is the establishment of the Maghreb Platform for Small-Scale Fisheries, which is actively engaged as a partner for institutions and development partners at national, regional and international level to promote the interests of its membership. Currently the platform represents 70 percent of the SSF actors in Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

³ Kurien, J. 2014. *Collective action and organisations in small-scale fisheries*. In: Kalikoski, D.C. and Franz, N. (eds), 2014, pp. 41–104. Strengthening organizations and collective action in fisheries: A way forward in implementing the international guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries, 18–20 March 2013, Rome, Italy. Rome, FAO (also available at www.fao.org/3/a-i3540e.pdf).

⁴ *Strengthening organizations and collective action in fisheries: Case studies and workshop report*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Proceedings 41 (in preparation).

Appropriate infrastructure and technology investments, value-addition activities, and post-harvest loss and waste reduction

10. There has been a paradigm shift in relation to SSF value chain development over the past years. The focus is now on consistently implementing informed interventions and on mainstreaming the sustainable value chain approach through evidence-based policies, strategies and programmes aiming at post-harvest loss and waste reduction, and at value addition. This approach requires context-specific analysis, with special attention given to gender aspects. It also requires the involvement of stakeholders to ensure ownership, including through collective and individual initiatives to unlock the multifaceted challenges in value chain operations.

11. This approach acknowledges the complexity and interconnectedness of factors that can undermine the sustainable development of post-harvest systems and the fundamental need to avoid 'one-size fits all' solutions with subsequent suboptimal outputs. Hence sustainable interventions rely on a combination of awareness, knowledge and skill development, as well as on technical, financial, infrastructure and policy support.

12. As a consequence of structural limitations, the SSF sector is heavily affected by post-harvest losses, generating undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges to the sustainability of this sector. Global losses and waste for the entire fisheries sector were recently estimated⁵ at 35 percent. It emerges from field observation that SSF record the largest share of this percentage, keeping them trapped in a poverty circle and limiting their contribution to a dynamic trade that could sustain their contribution to national development and food security.

13. In light of this, the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department has continued to provide scientific and technical support as summarized here below:

a. Post-harvest loss and waste: case studies to develop a better understanding of the magnitude, causes, impact and intricate dimensions of post-harvest losses to support tailored, inclusive, sustainable and efficient interventions

Within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)-FAO Fish programme a study in the Volta Basin riparian countries in West Africa on post-harvest losses was conducted⁶. Additional case studies were conducted through the SmartFish programme in the Indian Ocean and Eastern African countries, and by the Save Food Initiative⁷. Field assessments are ongoing in Indonesia and in the pipeline for India and Tanzania, focusing on investigating fish losses and wastes in the gillnet fisheries. Findings so far suggest that data for SSF waste and loss are well beyond the one third of production that is the average for the sector at global level. In addition, the volume of fish lost along the value chain resulting from physical or quantitative loss seems incommensurable to the overriding quantity of fish linked to quality loss. Another issue to draw attention to is related to losses in the form of reduced prices irrespective of the quality of the product, the control of which is key to ensuring a sustainable supply and securing equitable revenue distribution. In most systems assessed so far, market force losses ranked second after quality losses in volume and value terms, and at times, even first in value terms. In the Volta Basin study they represented about 32 percent of the total losses and in 8 out of the 12 appraised sites the losses both in volume and value of fish linked to market forces surpassed the quality losses. For instance, this is related to (i) a non-conducive security environment in production sites for commercial transactions, which represents a potential driver for artificial glut; (ii) massive ill-timed and uncontrolled imports

⁵ FAO. 2011. *Global Food Losses and Food Waste-Extent, Causes and Prevention*. Rome.

⁶ FAO. 2015. *Strengthening the performance of post-harvest systems and regional trade in small-scale fisheries: case study of post-harvest loss reduction in the Volta Basin riparian countries*. Fisheries and Aquaculture Circular No.1105. Rome. 111 pp. and a strategy paper in publication stage.

⁷ FAO. 2014. *Food Loss Assessments: Causes and Solutions. Kenya*. Case Studies in Small-scale Agriculture and Fisheries Subsectors. Rome. 92 pp.

of fish products; and (iii) the low enforcement of regional instruments on free movement of goods and persons. Therefore it is important to dedicate more attention to market force loss in future studies and loss reduction interventions.

b. Post-harvest technology platform assistance framework

Upstream improvements in skills and knowledge, as well as in technologies have been provided in several recent projects and standalone interventions. Lesson learned from development assistance experiences show that organizational capacity development and social/anthropological analysis of people's interest should be pillars of any improvement programme to support tangible impact. The platform approach is a response to this and consists of a knowledge transfer tool including on-site training and study tours for adoption of practices based on demand-driven research. For example, the FAO-Thiaroye fish processing technology (FTT-Thiaroye), a collaborative output between FAO and a fisheries institute in Africa, based on the Code of Practice of the Codex Alimentarius (CAC/RCP 68-2009), has been instrumental in addressing fish losses in several West and East African countries and in strengthening marketing opportunities such as the ethnic markets in the European Union (Member Organization) and North America. While interest is expressed for its introduction elsewhere, e.g. in Sri Lanka, upscaling requires considerable investment promotion and support programmes to ensure access by smallholders, including through credit schemes tailored to specific value chains and even individuals. The same applies for upscaling of success stories where low-cost technologies have been proven successful in promoting products from underutilized fish species and by-products in major SSF producing regions. Some field findings illustrate that the existing fragility and vulnerability of humans and natural resources is worsening because of weak coping strategies to offset losses, irresponsible fishing or post-harvest practices, especially during lean season and adverse climatic effects. An important element to address this is to explore and develop alternative or complementary income generating activities to support responsible behaviour of small-scale fishers *vis-à-vis* the fisheries resources.

c. Infrastructure and services

The role of sound technical-sanitary engineering and well-equipped landing sites, roads and other means of communication for SSF cannot be overemphasized. These elements have featured in most fisheries development projects and continue to constitute a sizeable part of the trust funds projects. As noted in previous paragraphs regarding technology innovation, it is paramount to mainstream gender friendly infrastructure, such as child care facilities, and services that alleviate the drudgery and enable women to purchase better quality raw material during early morning auctions, process adequately and target remote but more lucrative markets. However, it is also important that value chain actors are prepared for in-kind contributions and take responsibility for the management of the amenities and have a clear understanding of the benefits they are likely to reap from their efforts.

d. Policy support and law enforcement

Policy and institutional support are elements of an enabling environment for efficient post-harvest systems and marketing, for enforcing established rules or legislation and for socio-economic measures towards operators and consumers, especially encouraging greater access to alternative and cheaper sources of protein including cheaper species or fish products, which can be sold in portion sizes that suit the possibilities of poorer consumers⁸. As a concrete measure to strengthen policies and development strategies for SSF, it would be worthwhile to envisage the upscaling of the process and lessons learned in the development of the Volta Basin strategy developed following field studies as part of the implementation of the African Union (AU)/NEPAD African Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy Framework and Reform Strategy within the Volta Basin context.

⁸ FAO. 2014. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2014*. Rome. 223 pp.

e. Consumer level interventions

Sensitization, e.g. on the nutritional status of good quality fish and the “value” of legal size fish, are elements of interventions targeting the general public. However, this must be complemented by promotional activities and well-targeted socio-economic measures for the population with low purchasing power to facilitate their access to necessary nutrients and provide sustainable incentives for loss reduction.

Facilitation of market access for SSF, the impact of international trade, fair distribution of benefits and timely and accurate market and trade information

14. The rapid development and expansion of seafood ecolabels since their entry into the international markets in 1999 has raised concerns among member countries for nearly two decades. Despite the rapid increase in the number of voluntary certification schemes and the share of ecolabelled seafood traded along the value chain, firm evidence is not available on whether or not they are blocking market access for developing country seafood exports or harming small-scale producers. However, the potential is there and rising concerns about business to business supplier contracts requiring proof of certification, the high cost of private certification, and duplication of auditing costs if more than one label is required has contributed to the development of several national certification schemes. National certification schemes can facilitate international market access for products from small-scale fishers and aquaculture producers, especially in developing countries, and help share the costs of certification when fishers cannot afford this individually. At the request of the government of Thailand, FAO organized a technical workshop in Bangkok, January 2015, to inform the government of various aspects of seafood ecolabelling and third party certification schemes, and to raise capacity of Thai government officials who were considering whether or not to develop an ecolabel for Thai capture fisheries.

15. In relation to small-scale aquaculture production, a recent phenomenon is cluster certification through collective action. This form of ecolabelling for small-scale producers has successfully occurred in selected countries and could rapidly expand to aquaculture sectors in many more countries. Through participation in cluster certification schemes, small-scale farmers have an effective mechanism to enter international markets while sharing the costs of certification among many farmers. The private aquaculture certification schemes that utilize cluster certification and work closely with small-scale producers in developing countries help producers overcome challenges and improve farming conditions to meet international standards ensuring access to international markets.

Decent work and employment

16. It should be noted that several sections of chapter 6 of the SSF Guidelines, which deal with “Social development, employment and decent work”, are also relevant for value chain upgrading and fish trade. The SSF Guidelines recognize that fisheries do not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, the SSF Guidelines go beyond strictly fisheries-related issues and also provide guidance to address the socio-economic conditions of small-scale fishers, fish workers and their communities. In this chapter, the SSF Guidelines in fact also call for increased attention and action on issues related to decent work, for example, providing guidance on occupational health and safety and measures to improve safety at sea, on child labour and forced labour and by calling attention to the situation of migrant fishers and fish workers. The issue of decent work is increasingly gaining attention in international trade fisheries value chains.

17. FAO, therefore, in partnership with ILO and other stakeholders, has increased efforts to raise awareness about and address the shortcomings of decent employment and work in fisheries, as well as to explore the role of social protection in supporting sustainable resource management. Examples for

this are the preparation of a scoping study on decent work and employment in fisheries and aquaculture⁹, as well as the organization of dedicated events. One of these events was the Vigo Dialogue on decent work and employment in fisheries and aquaculture which started in 2014 during the FAO/CONXEMAR¹⁰ congress in Vigo, Spain, and which was held again in 2015 during the First International Stakeholder Forum in Vigo to discuss benefits and incentives of decent work. The Vigo Dialogue on decent work is expected to become a standing feature, allowing different fisheries stakeholders to engage on the subject. Another example was a technical workshop on the role of social protection in supporting natural resource management, in which the findings from a scoping study on how social protection interventions can be used to reduce the vulnerability and strengthen the resilience of fishing communities to sustain their livelihoods and food security were presented along with findings from in-depth field work conducted in countries such as Myanmar, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, to inform FAO's work plan on the subject. Decent work was also discussed during the Eighth Session of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture in October 2015.

CONCLUSION: SUPPORTING THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE SSF GUIDELINES

18. The third part of the SSF Guidelines is dedicated to ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation. It provides guidance on how to realize the principles and recommendations of the SSF Guidelines through policy coherence, institutional coordination and collaboration; information, research and communication; capacity development; and implementation support and monitoring.

19. During COFI 31 Members welcomed FAO's proposal for a Global Assistance Programme (GAP) to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines without delay and agreed on the overall inclusive and consensus-seeking strategic approach and the structure of the GAP around four components: raising awareness; strengthening the science-policy interface; empowering stakeholders; and supporting implementation. COFI 31 also recommended to further develop the GAP in a participatory manner and to define the roles of different partners in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, emphasizing the role of governments, as well as of regional and local fisheries organizations and building on existing experiences and institutional structures and processes.

20. In order to further consolidate the implementation approach of the SSF Guidelines, FAO organized an expert workshop for the Development of a Global Assistance Programme to Support the Implementation of the SSF Guidelines in December 2014¹¹. Some 60 individual experts from governments, regional organizations, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, resource partners, intergovernmental organizations and academia attended the workshop and provided guidance for consolidating the overall implementation approach for the SSF Guidelines. It was confirmed that FAO has an important role to play in terms of supporting and facilitating the implementation, and also in providing technical support and project implementation, based on demand. As a follow-up to the workshop, an FAO Umbrella Programme for the Promotion and Application of the SSF Guidelines was prepared. This programme acts as partnership framework intended to host several projects funded by multiple donors supporting the same overall goal and outcomes. It will support FAO in fulfilling its mandate to achieve food security for all and in using its comparative advantages to create and share critical information about SSF in the form of global public goods and to connect different partners and facilitate dialogue between those who have the knowledge and those who need it to improve the sustainability of SSF. This programme also contributes to FAO's efforts to further

⁹ FAO. 2014. *Scoping study on decent work and employment in fisheries and aquaculture. Issues and actions for discussion and programming Preliminary version*. Rome. 112 pp (available at www.fao.org/cofi/38663-08d8fbedacd6ad8bb6d8a20e4f9ec1e45.pdf).

¹⁰ Asociación Española de Mayoristas, Importadores, Transformadores y Exportadores de Productos de la Pesca y Acuicultura.

¹¹ FAO. 2015. *Towards the implementation of the SSF Guidelines*. Rome, 95 pp.

develop the Global Assistance Programme (GAP) to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The GAP is expected to be an evolving framework that facilitates the coordination and direct support to the SSF Guidelines implementation.

21. In July 2014, COFI also confirmed that the principles of the SSF Guidelines should be mainstreamed in policies and actions at all levels. It is encouraging to see that this is already happening at the global, regional and national level.

22. At the global level, the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems were approved by the Forty-first Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 15 October 2014. The Principles address all types of investment in agriculture and food systems - public, private, large, small - and in the production and processing spheres. They provide a framework that all stakeholders can use when developing national policies, programmes, regulatory frameworks, corporate social responsibility programmes, individual agreements and contracts. They are voluntary and non-binding, but represent the first time that governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies, development banks, foundations, research institutions and academia have agreed on what constitutes responsible investment in agriculture and food systems that contribute to food security and nutrition. Principle 5 on Respect tenure of land, fisheries, and forests, and access to water refers directly to the SSF Guidelines.

23. At regional level, the SSF Guidelines have been included in a number of recent policies and initiatives, including in particular the NEPAD/AU Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (IBAR) Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa; the Política de Integración de Pesca y Acuicultura 2015–2025 of the Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA); and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) First Regional Programme on Small-scale Fisheries for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea adopted in 2014. FAO, in collaboration with partners, has facilitated regional consultations on the SSF Guidelines for the Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Africa and Near East and North Africa regions. In each of these consultations, which aimed at identifying regional priorities and agreeing on opportunities for implementation, one working group dealt specifically with chapter 7 of the SSF Guidelines on “Value chains, post-harvest and trade” and another one with chapters 8 (Social development, employment and decent work) and chapter 9 (Gender equality). Regional organizations, in particular the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), GFCM and the African Union, have committed to follow-up activities in relation to these regional consultations.

24. Finally, COFI 31 acknowledged FAO’s role in the development and implementation of the SSF Guidelines, including a monitoring process through COFI. As an initial step in this direction, FAO has included a specific section on SSF in the questionnaire on the implementation of the CCRF

25. and its related instruments, which is submitted to COFI Members prior to every COFI session. The analysis of the results of this section of the questionnaire is expected to contribute to a better overview of the status of the sector and to allow for the tracking of change over time, contributing to an overall shared learning process on how to improve the SSF sector.