



Milestones

By **Ramya Rajagopalan**
(ramya.rajagopalan@gmail.com), Programme
Associate, ICSF

A historic development

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) was adopted at the 31st session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), in June 2014. The adoption of the SSF Guidelines marks an important event in the history of small-scale fisheries, especially for women. The SSF Guidelines' section on guiding principles, clearly states that gender equality and equity are fundamental prerequisites for development and that the role of women in small-scale fisheries, as well as equal rights and opportunities, should be promoted.

Section 8 on Gender Equality emphasizes gender mainstreaming as a crucial fisheries development strategy: "All parties should recognize that achieving gender equality requires concerted efforts by all and that gender mainstreaming should be an integral part of all small-scale fisheries development strategies. These strategies to achieve gender equality require different approaches in different cultural contexts and should challenge practices that are discriminatory against women".

The SSF Guidelines document urges States to comply with their international obligations, stating that "States should comply with their obligations under international human rights law and implement the relevant instruments to which they are party, including, *inter alia*, CEDAW, and should bear in mind the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action".

States are urged to secure women's equal participation in decision-making processes for

policies directed towards small-scale fisheries. States are further urged to adopt specific measures to address discrimination against women, while creating spaces for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), in particular those of women fishworkers, to participate in monitoring their implementation. Women should be encouraged, the document states, to participate in fisheries organizations, and relevant organizational development support should be provided.

Other obligations of States, it is stated, include ensuring that small-scale fishers, fishworkers and their communities have secure, equitable, and socially and culturally appropriate tenure rights to fishery resources (marine and inland) and small-scale fishing areas and adjacent land, with a special attention paid to women with respect to tenure rights.

The SSF Guidelines document encourages States to establish policies and legislation to realize gender equality and, as appropriate, adapt legislation, policies and measures that are not compatible with gender equality, taking into account social, economic and cultural aspects. According to the guidelines, States should be at the forefront of implementing actions for achieving gender equality by "recruiting both men and women as extension staff and ensuring that both men and women have equal access to extension and technical services, including legal support, related to fisheries".

The document also urges all parties to encourage the development of better technologies of importance and appropriate to women's work in small-scale fisheries. ▀