

A Huge Struggle

A recent workshop at New Delhi discussed capacity building for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines)

A national workshop on 'Capacity Building for the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines)' was held during 21–22 March 2016 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. While this was the first in a series of workshops supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to be organized in various countries and regions, for India it was the culmination of a series of workshops and consultations held across the country since early last year.

The national workshop was organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), in collaboration with the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF) to promote awareness about the SSF Guidelines and to mobilize support for their implementation. The workshop also aimed to highlight the small-scale fishery organizations' efforts at empowering the fishing communities and valorizing the subsector; and to discuss how Indian policies and legislation to protect the lives and livelihoods of small-scale fishers, fishworkers and fishing communities can benefit from the SSF Guidelines.

The New Delhi workshop was planned to coincide with the second anniversary of the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, which Chandrika Sharma, the former Executive Secretary of ICSF, was on board. At the workshop, representatives from WFFP, WFF and ICSF spoke about her support for the struggles of small-scale fishworkers

the world over, and how we need to carry on the fight in her honour.

In the spirit of the SSF Guidelines, the workshop brought together a range of actors of relevance to the small-scale fisheries sector, in an attempt at developing a coherent intersectoral response. Nearly 96 participants attended the workshop. There were distinguished participants not only from marine and inland fishing communities across India, but also from a cross-section of ministries, departments and agencies, both at the Union and state level, dealing with human rights, rural development, decentralization and local governance,

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labour and employment, disaster preparedness, finance, tribal affairs, planning, marine and inland fisheries as well as representatives of CSOs/NGOs, research institutions, FAO, IFAD and BOBP-IGO. Panel discussions focusing on each component of the SSF Guidelines brought forth a range of information, opinions and experiences from different stakeholders. Group discussions on the second day helped concretize recommendations towards action plans based on what emerged from the panel discussions.

Concerns raised

International small-scale fishworker forums, represented by their Indian members, raised their concerns plaguing the sector and what needed

*This article is by **Mariette Correa** (mariettec@gmail.com), Senior Programme Co-ordinator, ICSF*

to be done to protect their rights and promote their interests. These included the importance of securing access to tenure rights to coastal and inland land and water bodies and protection of customary rights; the need for measures to ensure their social development including decent housing, sanitation facilities, potable water, education and health infrastructure; ways in which decent

the imminent threat to coastal communities due to sea level rise, global warming and acidification of oceans adversely impacting marine life.

The plethora of challenges women faced was highlighted by several speakers. Fisherwomen had low access to government finances, were not recognized as 'fishers' and were therefore unable to lease inland water bodies without protracted struggles. As workers, they often received less than the minimum wage, and their lack of collateral also left them at the mercy of middlemen and moneylenders. They lacked facilities at landing centres, including access to drinking water, leave alone water for cleaning fish. Among the many issues raised were—the lack of marketing facilities, exploitation of women in markets, lack of security as well as facilities for women who travel intra - and inter-state to sell fish, work displacement of women caused by factors such as male-friendly technology development which decreased their access to fish, loss of access rights to traditional fish drying areas, and poor access to education, health, entitlements and property. Also, it was pointed out that the high levels of alcoholism among men in fishing communities were the cause of great suffering for the women.

Participants at the workshop condemned the practice of giving value to trash fish in the form of fishmeal for poultry. They also spoke out against the government incentivising the export sector, adversely affecting the domestic market and food security. They also condemned the dumping of toxic waste in oceans, large-scale destruction of mangroves for 'development' projects, flattening of sand dunes for sand mining, and the lack of a system of punishments for violations of environmental laws.

Framework

The workshop participants felt that the SSF Guidelines now provide a framework to address these issues. Government representatives from a wide range of ministries and research

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work could be ensured for workers; how the role of women in small-scale fisheries needed to be valorized, their participation strengthened and capacities built for value addition, leadership and marketing; and, the need to address the implications of climate change and natural disasters on small-scale fisheries. They discussed the importance of pensions for fisherpeople, safety at sea, insurance policies against disasters, protection of fishers across territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone, and compensation during fish ban periods. Issues concerning migrant workers on fishing boats were highlighted, the need for facilities, insurance covers and registration in the places where they work and that interdepartmental coordination between fisheries and labour is needed at the national and state levels. Suggestions were made regarding zoning, including reserving areas for traditional small-scale fishers, and for different gear groups to reduce inter-gear conflicts.

Participants at the workshop explained how the tenure rights of both men and women were weak and not guaranteed, and pointed to their poor access to health, housing, water and sanitation facilities, and how fishing communities were especially affected by natural and man-made disasters and developments in the coastal and inland areas, including

institutions as well as international agencies welcomed the SSF Guidelines and highlighted its importance in a country like India where 95 per cent of its fisherfolk are in the small-scale subsector. They recognized the threats to small-scale fisheries and said that though some aspects of the SSF Guidelines were reflected in the 2004 Comprehensive Marine Fishing Policy, the draft 2015 National Marine Fisheries Policy and the Marine Fishing Regulation Acts at the state level, some issues like disaster risk reduction and climate-change mitigation were new to the fisheries authorities. They spoke about the role they could play and how the SSF Guidelines could provide guidance for legislation, policies and research of relevance to fisheries and fishing communities.

Attention was drawn to how existing policies and legislation deal with life and livelihood issues of both men and women and how gaps in legal and policy instruments as well as the gap between the research conducted and the realities confronting the communities could be meaningfully addressed by implementing the SSF Guidelines. The roles that local bodies or *panchayats* can play in economic, infrastructure and social development and the importance of fisheries cooperatives were highlighted. As the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has started monitoring flagship social protection programmes of the government, fishing communities can bring to the notice of NHRC their particular vulnerabilities or poor access to these flagship programmes.

At the New Delhi workshop, data and information gaps were pointed out, and participants expressed the need for baseline documentation of traditional rights on inland and marine fisheries in order to protect traditional rights from getting extinguished. They also discussed data on landings, a data bank of migrant-sending and receiving states, an inland fishery survey, and the need for gender-disaggregated data to make the role of women in fisheries more visible. There was also a call for a National Data Acquisition

Plan for Fisheries, with fishing licences accompanying a mandatory requirement of sharing catch data.

The workshop participants were given a glimpse of FAO's efforts towards implementation of the SSF Guidelines. There was recognition that the Indian Constitution and human-rights law place great value on the human rights principles reflected in the SSF Guidelines, but the reality is different and political will is needed to ensure that these principles are actually protected and promoted to ensure the human rights of small-scale fishing communities. It was acknowledged that the SSF Guidelines are unique in that they are developed within the framework of two main approaches—the human-rights-based approach as well as an ecosystem approach to fisheries—which, therefore, attempt to achieve better benefits for small-scale fisheries and fishworkers as well as sustainability of fishery resources. The participants of the workshop enumerated the positive steps taken, including key climate finance initiatives by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which have helped to build resilience and to improve efficiency, IFAD's post-tsunami livelihood programme, the aquarian reforms in Kerala where fishing is restricted to fishing

ICSF



David Brown, Ujjaini Halim, M Illango and V Vivekanandan at a panel discussion at the National Workshop on Capacity Building for the Implementation of the SSF Guidelines, New Delhi, India

communities, and NHRC's responses to safeguard the collective rights of communities.

What came across throughout the workshop was a concern about the future of small-scale fisheries, and how the sector has changed drastically over the years with changes in technology, depletion of fish stocks and exploitation of resources leading to a change in the livelihood patterns of SSF communities and their increasing vulnerabilities. SSF communities are the most vulnerable, exposed to the vagaries of nature, prone to the maximum number of natural calamities, and difficult to reach, both geographically and politically. Many communities have benefitted from advances in technology, but the SSF sector has actually worsened, while others, including trawl fisheries and tourism, are threatening the entitlements of SSF to coastal and marine resources.

At the New Delhi workshop, the importance of active participation of small-scale fishing communities in fisheries management, research, and in decision-making bodies as well as in community-based resource management systems for monitoring the implementation of the SSF Guidelines was underscored by both fishworker organizations and government representatives.

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The New Delhi workshop helped to inform all the participants about the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines, highlighting the small-scale fishery organizations' efforts at empowering the fishing communities and valorizing the subsector. The importance of SSF was recognized as a major contributor to poverty eradication and food security. Most importantly, the workshop provided a space for government representatives and

small-scale fishworker organizations to freely engage with one another and exchange views and recommend action plans on how to take the concerns of small-scale fisheries on board.

Small-scale fishing community representatives were exposed to policies and schemes of various ministries and how they can be applied to their communities; they were also told about the gaps that needed to be filled. Ministry representatives, on the other hand, heard the voices and concerns of small-scale fishworkers, and were made aware of the SSF Guidelines and the role that they can play in its implementation, including the possibility of developing policies and measures or implementing existing ones that protect the interests of the subsector.

The SSF Guidelines, in fact, can give guidance on how various national and state schemes offered by many different ministries can be extended to small-scale fishing communities and how each level of government up to the *panchayat* level has a role to play. The need for a plurality of agencies to address the needs of the small-scale fisheries sector was recognized as was the need for a concerted response. The importance of a National Plan of Action for implementing the VGSSF was acknowledged, with the lead taken by the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DADF) under the Ministry of Agriculture and with the active involvement of FWOs and CSOs. Capacity building of the various departments responsible for dealing with SSF would be a necessary prerequisite. The government expressed willingness to develop indicators, with the participation of FWOs, to monitor the progress of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and to measure the outcome. The timing of the workshop was appreciated as a new national legislation is taking shape for marine fisheries and the recommendations supporting SSF could still be incorporated in the new marine



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fisheries policy. The need for a National Inland Fisheries Policy was felt if one wanted to adopt the SSF Guidelines in the inland context. It was hoped that the workshop would provide avenues for cooperation and collaboration between FWOs, the government, civil society and research institutions.

Much more needs to be done to understand the inland fisheries sector which is very complex in India. While it was felt that semi-intensive or intensive aquaculture was negatively impacting the SSF, some other participants at the workshop pointed to the mariculture advantage, where the gender issue can be addressed by giving more rights to women. These issues need to be looked into further. The lack of private sector participation is also a matter of concern, particularly as the SSF Guidelines include them as one of the stakeholders and because their interests could clash with the SSF sector.

The New Delhi workshop was just one step towards the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The challenges ahead are huge in a country as diverse as India where even the definition of what constitutes a small-scale fishery is difficult. Moving from awareness and capacity building to actual implementation

in terms of policy and legal changes with benefits reaching the small-scale fisheries sector is far from easy. Much more needs to be done to formulate ideas and action plans for implementation as well as to ensure that the multiple players work together for a coordinated response.

The federal system with its multi-layered governance structures can be a blessing and a challenge when it comes to converting the SSF Guidelines into practical measures for implementation. Action plans or interventions towards implementation need to be contextualised and developed at the national, state and local levels. Further, the SSF Guidelines place the responsibility for implementation on multiple stakeholders—government, civil society, private sector, fishworker organizations—leaving it to those with ‘greater’ stakes to push for its implementation. Though sustainability of lives, livelihoods and natural living resources are considered global and national priorities reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals and country plans, in reality, there is always a huge struggle to reflect these in action. ❧

For more



sites.google.com/site/ssfguidelines/home/india-national-workshop-on-capacity-building-for-the-implementation-of-ssf-guidelines

India National Workshop on Capacity-building for the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries