

A Strong, Cohesive Voice

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Brazil will need to be nested in local and territorial realities, with the participation of fishers and their communities as the main agents of change

Small-scale fisheries in Brazil are responsible for the livelihoods of over 1.7 mn people, accounting for more than 55 per cent of the total capture-fishery production, which, in 2011, corresponded to 553,670 tonne (gross figures from the now extinct Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture). In addition to food security, the history and culture of these people have significantly contributed to important aspects of the Brazilian coasts, lakes and rivers, spanning a rich variety of tropical and subtropical ecosystems.

However, since 2007, fisheries statistics in Brazil have been facing continuous setbacks among other important reversals in fisheries policies such as closed season insurance and muddled implementation of conservation policies for endangered fish species. Social movements' leaders involved in fisheries management and marine biodiversity conservation policies, therefore, have too often the feeling of living in a battlefield.

March 2017 will be remembered by the small-scale fisheries subsector's shout of despair, when over 200 small-scale fisheries organizations signed an Open Letter against one of the most recent backlashes to the hopes for a human rights-based approach to fisheries at the state level: the transference of mandate over fisheries policies to the Ministry of Industry, International Commerce and Services. More worryingly, these organizations claim that since 2015 cuts in public investments for social purposes towards fisheries have significantly affected local economies in several communities. There is also a general lack of specific government

programmes for health treatment and prevention of occupational diseases affecting fishworkers, as well as lack of access to documentation and information for the remaining social-security programmes. Furthermore, the country's regional fisheries-management forums—often waved by the government as success flags of participation, transparency and fisheries governance decentralization—are still mostly failing to operate in minimal conditions to show any signs of serious transition towards fisheries sustainability.

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Unfortunately, this arena is still characterized by the volatility of state commitments; the recurrent reshuffling of governmental structures and interlocutors disabling serious and rational progress in policy implementation; and the dominance of vested corporate interests and corruption scandals deeply rooted in the traditional political parties taking over fisheries-management mandates.

Confrontation

Overall, we are very sorry for having to admit that the state of affairs remains one of unfortunate confrontation, with fisherfolks continuously struggling for very basic levels of participation and transparency. The feelings are of governmental paralysis and inertia when it comes to safeguarding the

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rights of access and the sustainability of traditional artisanal fisheries territories, always having to start over and over again when it comes to public-policy building and dialogue with government.

Due to constant problems faced by the activity (for example, poor political organization, overexploitation of resources, conflicts between artisanal, industrial, game fishing and industrial aquaculture, piracy, poor labour conditions, and so on) many

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families are leaving the subsector and/or are becoming increasingly more reliant on non-extractive economic practices. The importance of small-scale fisheries is not just to preserve an economic activity, but to preserve a portion of the cultural and environmental heritage present in each corner of Brazil. And, while pressed to reinvent itself and adapt, traditional fishing identities are still suffocated by flawed socio-political structures for trying to represent such a wonderful culture on the grounds of Brazilian state bureaucracies. The small-scale fishing institutional framework and the civil society fishing organizations—or other types of autonomous organizations—are still politically fragile at a national level and, unfortunately, still frequently suffering from political misrepresentation at strategic policy-building debates.

The recognition of the unequal power relationships, between value-chain stakeholders and those vulnerable and marginalized groups, may require special support to enhance fisherfolks' associations to participate in decision-making processes. There are key elements to be considered: how to move forward to improve small-scale fisheries governance and sustainability, and how to foster the implementation of

international legal instruments while supporting the evolution of fishers' own socio-political institutions.

This sentiment inspired the formation of a 'network of networks' of small-scale fisheries stewards, including fisher leaders, researchers and extensionists in 2013 (the Artisanal Fishing Web—TeiaPesca) to jointly help improve inter-network technical-political organization, communication and learning. The artisanal fishing web was born at the same time of the process of construction of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication—the SSF Guidelines—in which Brazil is often considered one of the three countries that contributed the most to its approval after over a decade of discussions held at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and bottom-up consultations in member countries. Ever since then, TeiaPesca has got involved to provide an opportunity tantamount to internalize the contents and issues of the SSF Guidelines.

The launch of the SSF Guidelines by Member countries in 2014 is not the endpoint of the historical collaborative process that building them turned out to be. Enforcement by Member countries now embrace the challenges of implementing the SSF Guidelines and how to use them to help regulate national policies and strategies for small-scale fisheries at national, regional and local levels. Without a clear recipe in hand, a major initiative towards the implementation of the SSF Guidelines was launched in Brasilia in June 2016. The five-day event, entitled "National Seminar on Capacity Building for the Implementation of the SSF Guidelines", was sponsored by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), with contributions from the Too Big to Ignore initiative (TBTI) and other local funds. The seminar brought together over 40 fishermen and

women, community leaders, representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), researchers and other SSF change agents alike, with the goal of promoting awareness and building capacities among stakeholders for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the country.

During the week, a preliminary version of the main outcome document was presented at a public event to stakeholders from both the government and the private sector, including representatives of FAO, federal attorneys, and government agents. Among the participants, were the ambassador of Costa Rica, NGOs and potential funders. The document is entitled “Vital Fisheries: Setting pathways for the implementation of International Guidelines for Small-scale Fisheries in Brazil” and includes a national strategy envisioned for each of the ten major themes of the SSF Guidelines. The Vital Fisheries report became a key policy instrument to help reform the complex legal and institutional framework of artisanal fisheries. A Working Group formed by small-scale fishers’ representatives

and technical supporters within TeiaPesca has been working for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines through co-design of a suite of ideas to raise the profile of SSF in the country.

This group met at the University of São Paulo (Research Centre on Human Population and Wetlands) in April 2017 to design a work plan on how to disseminate the SSF Guidelines to fishing communities, including the methods, strategies and capacity building needed to facilitate a widespread learning process. Hopefully, the outcomes of this strategy will integrate fishing communities, Brazilian society and the government agencies into a nationally distributed and bottom-up agenda of knowledge exchange and policy-building interactions.

In addition to the SSF Guidelines, the UN and Members states are now also reflecting about the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG-14 that deals with Life Below Water. Given the general close link between ocean health and the vitality of small-scale fishing

Table I: Relationships between propositions elicited by the Sustainable Development Goal # 14 (SDG) targets and the SSF Guidelines themes, with a focus on Brazilian policies (X = strong; XX = very strong) (MPA: Marine Protected Areas; MSP: Marine Spatial Planning)

SDG 14 targets vs SSF VG	1- International instruments	2A – Governance of tenure	2B – Resource Management	3 – Social development	4 – Value Chains	5 – Gender Equality	6 – Disasters & Climate	7 – Policy Coherence	8 – Information & Research	9 – Capacity development	10 – Implementation & Monitoring
14.1 Pollution			X				X	X			X
14.2 Marine Biodiversity		X	X	X			X	X	X	XX	X
14.3 Ocean Acidification							XX		X		X
14.4 Fisheries Management		XX	XX						XX	XX	X
14.5 MPAs & MSPs		XX	X	X				XX	X	X	X
14.6 Fisheries Subsidies			X	X	X				X		X
14.7 Developing & Island States			XX	X	XX	X		X			X
14.a Ocean Science							X		X	XX	X
14.b SSFs’ Economies		XX	X	XX	XX	XX		X			X
14.c High-Seas	XX						X				X

territories, commitment to several SDG-14 targets may also directly benefit the well-being and health of fishing communities in Brazil. Table I offers a preliminary exercise in depicting the strong relationships that exists between SDG-14 and the SSF Guidelines themes in the country, with a focus on the Vital

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Fisheries report, highlighting that the synergistic field of action somehow encompasses all SDG-14 targets. Small-scale fisheries are one of the most important players in this new multi-level policy arena.

Amongst other activities, the upcoming United Nations Ocean Conference (New York, June 2017) will comprise seven Partnership Dialogues (PD), in parallel with eight plenary meetings, with the objective of setting recommendations to support the implementation of SDG-14. Below, we take Table I exercise forward by outlining an example of how a SDG-14 implementation narrative may interrelate with the implementation of SSF Guidelines in Brazil, and in what ways they relate to the upcoming PD I-7:

PD1 SDG-14.1: Various types of land-based (for example, domestic waste, sewage, plastic) and sea-based (ghost nets, small oil spills) marine pollution degrade the productivity of marine ecosystems and thus influence the availability of seafood.

PD2 SDG-14.2 and SDG-14.5: Brazilian fishers must be regarded as central players in the management, protection, conservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems. It has passed the time to abandon the top-down designation of marine reserves, and the sectorial and technocratic planning approaches that favours ocean grabbing by private interests of big industry (energy,

mining, aquaculture, transport). Brazilian fishers have their own agenda towards the sustainability of fishing territories, such as the ongoing national campaign for a new public policy to safeguard the formal recognition and designation of traditional fishing territories. Such ideas and their proponents must be urgently taken on-board in the early developmental stages of a national Marine Spatial Plan, an ongoing inter-ministerial ocean policy-building process led by the Brazilian Navy. Area-based approaches for marine conservation and Blue Growth must not reproduce the old-fashioned planning style; but there is a risk this is exactly what may happen under the current government and the corporate rationality dominating the Brazilian national legislative chambers.

PD3 SDG-14.3: Despite the sense of urgency flagged by some environmental and scientific circles, the minimization and address of ocean acidification remains a wicked problem, which is still not addressed by Brazilian public policies, especially when considering their co-ordination with, and practical engagement of, fishers across the huge Brazilian coastline. Small-scale fishers are often the first to observe and/or directly bear the consequences of such large-scale environmental changes on the availability and health of fish stocks. Sea-level rise and the intensification and increased frequency of extreme events (temperatures, winds, waves and tides) directly affect their infrastructure and workplace, summing up with the impacts of the displacement of fishing households from the shoreline already driven by urban, mass tourism, aquaculture and other powerful societal sectorial developments.

To counteract unsustainable developmental trends, large-scale collaborative and transdisciplinary initiatives need incentives from all sectors, to allow for adaptations in traditional/local ecological knowledge and livelihoods to emerge from the bottom up, as well as to help scientists and policymakers

understand and co-design more sensitive transformative sustainability pathways and processes at multiple levels. It is not at all fair that small-scale fishers bear the costs of the largely carbon-intensive lifestyles of global citizens living away from the sea.

PD4 SDG-14.4 and SDG-14.6: Making fisheries sustainable will require not only the recognition of traditional fishing territories (theme 2A) and seriously improving fisheries management (2B) but also actions that support social development through employment and decent work (theme 3), with consistent transformations on value chains, post-harvest and trade mechanisms and infrastructures (theme 4). It is critical to eliminate existing subsidies for industrial fisheries that remain in conflict with fisheries sustainability goals and the very existence of SSFs, and streamlining such policies to more rational and science-informed socioeconomic monitoring approaches (themes 2B, 3, 4 and 8).

PD5 SDG-14.7 and SDG-14b: In addition, the increase of economic benefits to SSFs through access to marine resources and markets requires a range of actions that

clearly interrelates with the above. Some examples include: responsible governance of fishing territories (theme 2A); acknowledging and empowering women's key role in all levels of the fish chain (theme 5); sustainable business development like community-based tourism enterprises (theme 4); education for empowerment and community development (theme 3); legislation adjustments; and support for technical adaptations in fish chains to improve homogeneity in quality, safety and handling practices, transport and packaging, to cope with strict sanitary and phytosanitary measures (theme 4).

PD6 SDG-14a: The implementation of the SSF Guidelines will also be largely reliant on more collaborative and transdisciplinary science, research and technology capacities. The quality of information, research and communication we collectively promote (theme 8), capacity development (theme 9) and renewed support for implementation and monitoring progress (theme 10) should advance with ever more participation and direct contribution of local ecological knowledge. Therefore, given the strong



Forty participants attended the National Seminar on Capacity-building for the Implementation of the SSF Guidelines, Centro Cultural de Brasília, 13-17 June 2016. The small-scale fishing institutional framework is still politically fragile at a national level

relationship between the condition of fisheries and the ocean's health, it is inevitable that the implementation of SDG-14 in Brazil will not overall succeed if fisheries-related data streams continue to be non-existent or collected in fragmented ways; or through insisting in single-species data-intensive stock assessment approaches that usually rely solely on the contribution of data experts such as scientists and technicians, amongst other external actors.

PD7 SDG-14c: Finally, actions to streamline Brazilian ocean

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and fisheries governance with international law are paramount. In particular, we may refer to the fundamental and urgent need of the Brazilian Congress to ratify key international agreements (theme 1), such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Work in Fishing Convention (C.188) and the 2016 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, amongst others.

We would be delighted to announce any sign of consistent political commitment towards the narrative outlined above, but we cannot yet dare to enter the realm of an optimistic discourse. Given the present political crises in Brazil, the corruption allegations in the fishery sector, and given that small-scale fisheries largely depend on public policies to improve their livelihoods, the SSF Guidelines implementation process will need to be nested in local and territorial realities, with the participation of fishers and their communities as the main agents of change. Moreover, there is a shared perception amongst TeiaPesca members that the internalization of the SSF Guidelines in the country will need to rely on a bottom-

up approach that is (somewhat) independent from the government. However, there is a remaining challenge for fishers in Brazil, which is to unify the different movements in order to come together as a strong and cohesive voice when negotiating with the government. Also needed is dialogue with global fisher forums like the World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers (WFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) to be part of the international fishery policies within the FAO and other UN agencies like the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ILO and others.

Small-scale fishers should be regarded as sustainability stewards and champions, pursuing means to reduce their own ecological footprint while inspiring other citizens to care for the ocean. As global citizens and stewards of ocean health, we are all responsible to help fulfil the expectations raised above and thus turn an holistic, human-rights-based moral perspective to social, environmental science and policy actions of the new standard practice for a sustainable Blue Economy.

Therefore, we look forward to learn about the evolution of an integrated SDG and SSF Guidelines agenda. At least two new policy forums are currently being set to foster the UN sustainable development agenda: a composite government + civil society National Commission for SDGs (eight members each) to monitor implementation and; an autonomous Civil Society Working Group for Agenda 2030, that is preparing a "Shadow Report" to highlight SDG implementation challenges and prospects to be launched in a meeting with UN commissioners in Brasilia and then to be widely publicized on 6 June 2017. 📌

For more



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