

# A Fishbowl Approach

An overview of the Danish Institute for Human Rights' international expert meeting on the contribution of human rights to the sustainable development of fisheries

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its resolution, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” for the overarching goal of poverty eradication and the realization of the human rights of all. Of the 17 Goals and 169 targets – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – it set for the global community, the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources (Goal 14) has acquired renewed urgency, especially in light of the 2017 United Nations Ocean Conference, which highlighted both deteriorating marine resources and the range of human-rights issues pertinent to the fisheries sector.

In this context, the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), supported by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), has initiated a three-year project to document and address the human-rights implications of fisheries and aquaculture in Bangladesh and Chile. The work of DIHR, an autonomous state-funded institution, was previously oriented towards promoting human-rights education, capacity building of national human-rights institutions (NHRIs) and strengthening the human-rights compliance of businesses in 15 countries worldwide. As an initial step towards realizing its objectives in the project countries, DIHR organized an international expert meeting, titled “The Contribution of Human Rights to the Sustainable Development of Fisheries,” held at the DIHR office in Copenhagen from 19 to 20 June 2018.

Bringing together diverse representation from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as from academia, civil society, industry and NHRIs, the meeting sought to identify key human-rights impacts associated with fisheries, globally and in the two project countries, and

**...a three-year project to document and address the human-rights implications of fisheries and aquaculture in Bangladesh and Chile.**

to discuss strategies to address these at multi-stakeholder forums at the national, regional and global levels. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) was invited to the meeting to share its most recent work on disaster risk management and climate change, and their intersection with small-scale fishing communities' right to a healthy environment.

The organizers applied the Chatham House rule to the entire programme to provide anonymity to speakers and to encourage openness during the discussions. Therefore, this report will not reveal the identity or the affiliation of any participants.

## Topical presentations

The introductory sessions on the first day set the stage for topical presentations by identifying key

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international instruments, both universal covenants and sector-specific adaptations of human-rights norms, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, ILO Convention No. 188 and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). Given DIHR's experience with the private sector, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights were also identified as a useful resource to specify the roles and responsibilities of businesses in the seafood value chain.

These instruments were then used to plot a number of issues pertaining to the right to food; the right to a healthy environment; indigenous peoples' rights to lands, territories and resources; labour rights; and the right to equality, non-discrimination, in the fisheries sector. Several obstacles to the realization of these rights in fisheries were identified, such as the extraterritorial aspect of

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fishing; the marginalization of fishing communities, particularly small-scale fisheries, from decision-making roles; value chain and traceability complexities; and the limited capacity of many NHRIs to engage with the sector.

There was a consensus among participants that the SSF Guidelines were best suited to articulate and advocate for human rights in fisheries, albeit from a small-scale perspective. But it was recommended that they be translated into actionable points for the private sector, for example, on documenting working conditions and value chains, and promoting consumer awareness. It was also pointed out that the challenge of balancing conservation and human-rights imperatives in small-scale fisheries was a common theme in both SDG 14 and the SSF Guidelines.

Participants got a chance to delve deeper into these issues in a cleverly designed session, consisting of presentations on three cross-cutting themes – gender and other vulnerable groups; climate change, disaster risk management and the marine environment; and labour issues – followed by group discussions (led by the presenters) on the same themes. The discussion points were then shared in the plenary, using the 'fishbowl' method, allowing diverse perspectives to emerge.

The second and final day of the meeting had two goals: to develop a human-rights perspective on responsible business in the fisheries sector; and to explore the issues discussed over the two days through the project countries, Bangladesh and Chile. On the business side, participants were given an overview of platforms and initiatives that engage the private sector in promoting sustainable ocean businesses. The UN Global Compact brings together a large number of corporations, including ocean businesses engaged in transport, energy, minerals and seafood, who have volunteered to implement sustainability principles in their operations. The Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship (SeaBOS) is an initiative resulting from a series of Keystone Dialogues between the scientific community and the largest global seafood companies. The Seafood Slavery Risk Tool informs businesses about the risks of forced labour, human trafficking, and hazardous child labour in their fisheries value chains. A DIHR presentation explained how the Institute provides businesses with guidance and tools to conduct human-rights and sector-wide impact assessments.

### **Specific challenges**

The country-specific presentations gave participants a chance to hear directly from fishworker and labour organizations in Bangladesh and the NHRI in Chile on specific human-rights challenges in their fisheries. While the focus in Bangladesh is on recognizing the rights of small-scale capture fishing communities, in Chile, aquaculture is



Women preparing fish for smoking on a modern Chorkor oven, Yeji, Lake Volta, Ghana. One key outcome of the DIHR expert meeting was a plan to map the main components of the fisheries and aquaculture value chains along specific clauses in human-rights instruments and guidelines

the priority area, particularly conflicts over the country's salmon farms, where labour rights and the exclusion of artisanal fishers are thorny issues.

While the meeting recognized the enormous complexity of the sector and the obstacles impeding concerted efforts towards the sustainable development of fisheries, several actions were proposed to forge partnerships between human rights and fisheries actors, and to participate in global and regional processes and initiatives. One key outcome was a plan to map the main components of the fisheries and aquaculture value chains along specific clauses in human-rights instruments and guidelines, resulting in an online "fish and human rights dictionary". Another was capacity building for NHRIs, who can use their mandate to promote human rights in fisheries at the country level.

The meeting concluded with a look ahead to upcoming processes, platforms and events where the human-rights-based approach can be advocated: the FAO Committee on Fisheries and

Committee on World Food Security; the Our Oceans Conference, 2019 and UN Ocean Conference, 2020; and the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2022. 📌

#### For more



<https://www.humanrights.dk/>  
**Danish Institute for Human Rights**

<http://sdg.humanrights.dk/>  
**The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals: Linking human rights with all Sustainable Development Goals and targets**

[https://www.icsf.net/images/what%20is%20new%20page/ICSF%20Note\\_SDGs.pdf](https://www.icsf.net/images/what%20is%20new%20page/ICSF%20Note_SDGs.pdf)

**ICSF Note for CSOs: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Small-scale Fisheries**

<http://www.un.org/en/index.html>  
**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Small-scale Fisheries**

[https://www.icsf.net/images/what%20is%20new%20page/Voluntary%20commitment\\_1393%20by%20ICSF%20Trust.doc](https://www.icsf.net/images/what%20is%20new%20page/Voluntary%20commitment_1393%20by%20ICSF%20Trust.doc)

**Voluntary Commitments for the Ocean Conference at a Glance: 1395 total commitments As on 14 July 2017 - Compiled by ICSF Trust**