

# A Watershed Year

**In this International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture, the focus should now turn to developing coherent and meaningful policies and legislation for small-scale artisanal fisheries**

The International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022) provides a great opportunity to proclaim to the world the diversity and richness of the small-scale artisanal fisheries subsector—both marine and inland—and its contribution to food security and poverty alleviation. Women and men in the sector work with an amazing repertoire of knowledge, skills and practices in fishing, processing and marketing, and are engaged in every link in the complex fisheries value chain.

IYAFA 2022 is also an occasion to celebrate the culture and traditions of small-scale artisanal fishers, fishworkers and their communities who often live and work in remote and challenging environments. In spite of being hit hard by COVID-19, the inland



and marine small-scale fisheries subsector has thus far been reasonably resilient in supplying fish to the domestic market. It has also reinforced its role in providing food security to the local people during a crisis.

It is opportune now to recognize the vital role of this subsector and to create conditions to retain and attract youth to it through decent employment and income along the value chain, together with effective fisheries management and social-protection measures. Small-scale fisheries face many threats, such as loss of access to the coast/shore and fishing grounds. Combined with their vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events, these threats place the subsector and its workers in a very precarious situation.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the

SSF Guidelines) offer pathways to address many of the threats and other persistent problems facing small-scale fisheries. Considering that the SSF Guidelines were unanimously endorsed by the members of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), governments and civil society should redouble their efforts to apply the Guidelines to help fishing communities thrive.

The SSF Guidelines promote a human rights-based approach, which makes it necessary for different arms of the government to work

together towards common outcomes such as conservation and sustainable use of aquatic living resources, food security, and the social development and well-being of fishing communities. These communities and their organizations should

be active participants in making decisions that are relevant to the sector. Women, indigenous peoples and vulnerable groups such as migrants should have access to resources, decent work and dignified livelihoods appropriate to their cultures.

By the end of this year, collective and collaborative actions of all stakeholders, we hope, should create greater awareness among the larger public about the role of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in food production, and about the traditional knowledge and rich cultural diversity of fishing communities.

As we need to move toward a carbon-neutral, equitable and sustainable future, IYAFA 2022 should provide the right impetus to develop coherent and meaningful policies and legislation at various levels. Let us hope it becomes a historic watershed for small-scale artisanal fisheries and dependent communities. †