

The Fishing World's (Virtual) Oyster

A new virtual platform for knowledge sharing and engagement that collates experiences and stories from small-scale fishery actors around the world

Small-scale fisheries are vulnerable to persistent threats from climate change, overfishing and lack of representation in policy discussions and decision making processes. As we have seen over the last year, the

with them could easily connect and support one another, they could be better equipped to ensure their livelihoods. Fisheries knowledge exchanges highlight the impact of engagement and communication among small-scale fishing stakeholders.

On a fishery knowledge exchange trip in 2016, a group of Indonesians travelled to meet with their Belizean counterparts, where they discovered they had more in common than they expected and much to learn from one another's experiences in sustainable fishery management.

Exchanges across seemingly different cultures, languages and traditions are powerful ways to inspire change but are difficult to make a reality. The Small-Scale Fisheries Resource and Collaboration Hub (SSF Hub) is a new digital platform due to get launched in January 2021. It will connect the people working in, with and for small-scale fisheries, bringing these knowledge exchanges into a globally accessible online platform.

As small-scale fishing communities around the world face the COVID-19 challenges, it is especially critical to provide opportunities for fishers and other fishing professionals to share their experiences and connect with one another virtually. Even prior to the pandemic, there has been a growing need for online and collaborative platforms that can bring together the diversity of resources and knowledge that exists to empower small-scale fishing communities to ensure their long-term sustainability and viability. Many organizations, networks and

COVID-19 pandemic has brought a range of new challenges and risks for the communities that depend on fisheries.

In the north of Peru, small-scale fishing is one of the main economic activities; hundreds of families depend on fishing for their food and livelihoods. The challenges brought on by COVID-19 have hit them hard—from regulations limiting fishing activity to disruptions in the supply chain, putting the health and sustenance of fishers and their families at risk. Community members are working together more than ever to overcome these challenges. Small-scale fishers have come together to develop and implement a set of innovative solutions, such as new sanitation and safety measures, to be able to fish and sell their catch.

Other small-scale fishing communities around the world are simultaneously innovating to address their respective challenges. If these communities and the people working

28

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Blue Swimming Crab fishers in Indonesia working with the Smart Boat Initiative Programme. The SSF Hub is an online platform where people can learn, share and grow together. When on the Hub, people will be able to easily access tools and resources

29

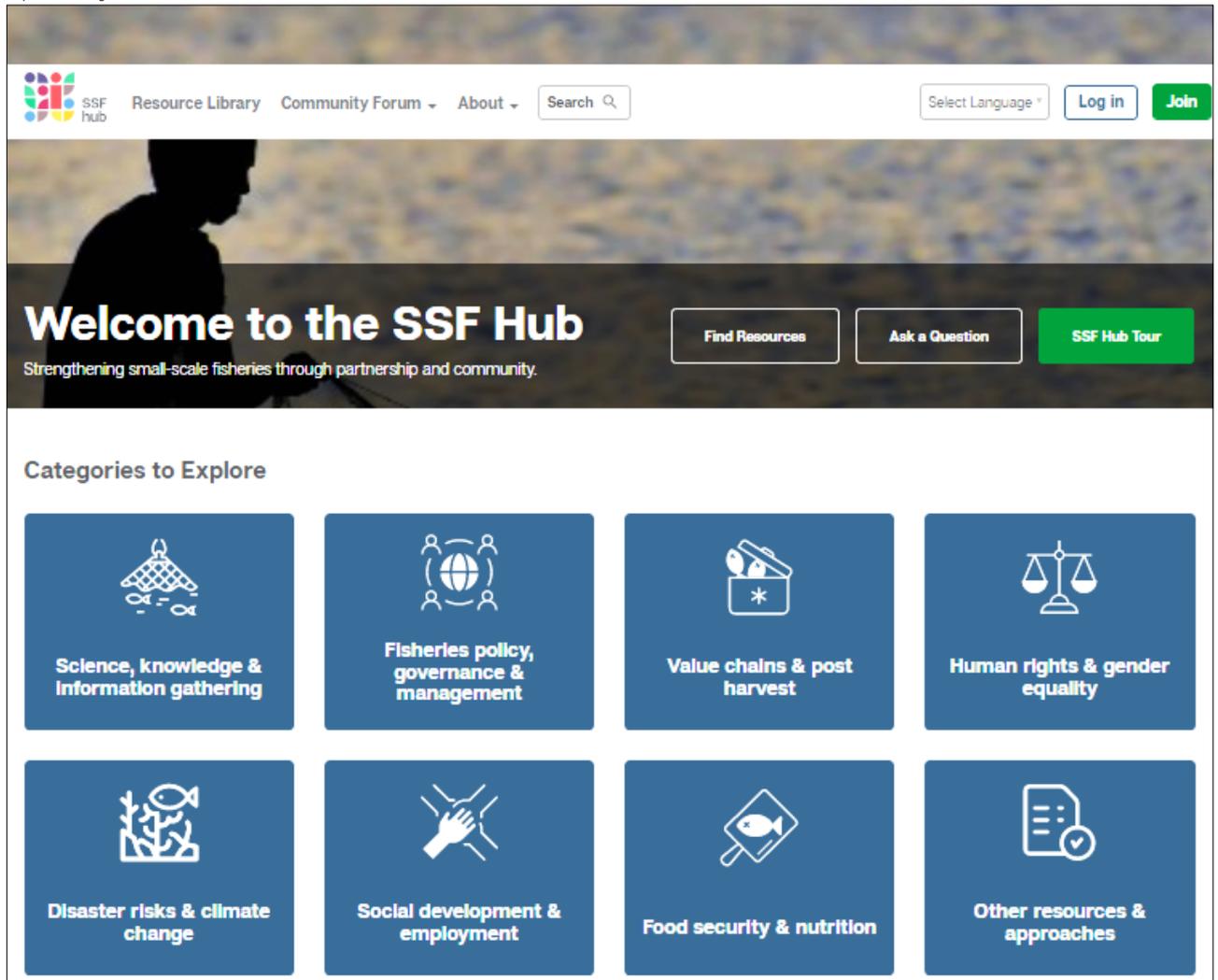
people have been working to highlight the contributions that small-scale fisheries make to food and nutrition security, livelihoods and poverty alleviation, and to elevate their profile on the global agenda to ensure their future. Hearing stories and experiences from peers around the world—separated by distance and language—can be inspiring and help bring people together for collective action.

In recognition of this need, on the heels of the FAO International Symposium on Fisheries Sustainability in November 2019, a coalition of partners working in small-scale fisheries came together to discuss ways they could better support small-scale fishery actors and empower them to share their experiences with others around the world. Since last year, these partners—including environmental groups, fishing organization advisers

and other experts in small-scale fisheries—have been developing the SSF Hub: An interactive online space for small-scale fishers, fishworkers, their communities and the people who work to support them.

The SSF Hub is an online platform where people can learn, share and grow together. When on the Hub, people will be able to easily access tools and resources they would not otherwise be able to obtain, while also being able to contribute their own experiences and ideas with others. People from all over the world and different types of fisheries can join the SSF Hub by creating a user profile, adding pictures from their communities and describing their fisheries and areas of interest. Access to multilingual content and a rotation of featured community highlights allow Hub members a chance to explore global stories without the barriers of language.

https://ssfhub.org/



30

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A knowledge exchange similar to the one between Belizeans and Indonesians could virtually take place within the SSF Hub through real-time translations of content and discussions. A fishworker from India could search the Resource Library on the Hub in their native language for information about how to add value to their product and find an example under the ‘Value add and processing’ category on how women who are key to the value chain in Tanzania helped do this for *dagaa* or sardines. The Resource Library has tools and resources that can be filtered by category, region, type and or language. So this fishing community member could also search for examples specific to Asia or for specific e-courses, case studies or videos. This person could also go to the ‘Community

Forum’ where they can ask questions in a discussion board or browse through related discussions. They also have the option of connecting directly with individuals or organizations behind those examples or search the member directory and see what other members have in that same area of interest.

Similar challenges

Public or private groups can be created on the SSF Hub with members who have similar interests or face similar challenges. For example, you could create a group around a common topic, species or region. In support of work being done on technology for small-scale fisheries, you can join a group on ICT4Fisheries to meet with others who are developing information and communication technology solutions

for small-scale fisheries across the globe. Groups could also be formed for discussions about tuna or octopus fishing to share insights about the gear used or gear innovations in those fisheries, management or market strategies and how resources within the Hub are being applied in these fisheries. A private group could be formed in support of a co-management committee for members to both discuss plans and to share relevant information. Regional groups can share information on prices, where to find weather or ocean conditions, and relevant laws and regulations.

There is also an events page where Hub members can see upcoming small-scale fishery events at local, regional or international levels, and network with others who might attend. This could serve to bring together a group of fishers to present their successes, challenges and lessons learned with broad audiences or to come together to advocate for, or amplify, topics of mutual interest.

Inclusion and participation have made the SSF Hub what it is today. Over 100 people from 19 different countries—representing fisher organizations, conservation groups and expert advisers—have provided feedback throughout the Hub's development. Hub partners held virtual consultations via Zoom, WhatsApp and Facebook to discover what participants wanted out of it. These conversations collected thoughts on what topics to cover, what essential interactive features to include and how to design the Hub to ensure it was user-friendly and met the needs of fishers and other users.

Much of the feedback was about the Hub being a dedicated space for small-scale fishers and those supporting small-scale fisheries. "I appreciate the Hub because it's focused on SSF. First time I've seen it [a site like this] focused more on the fisherfolk," said Mario Gasalatan, NGO consultant and fisher representative from Cebu City in the Philippines.

Participants noted how useful and significant the Hub could become in their regions while providing real-world examples of other small-scale fishery efforts around the world. People were

interested in the tools, how to use them and the examples of how they were being used by other fishers through case studies and success stories.

Early in the testing process, many of the participants expressed their interest in the collaborative aspect of the Hub—the Community Forum—where they could "create genuine and meaningful exchanges" through discussions and groups. They were excited about being able to communicate with others on the Hub across multiple languages.

Other testers noted that their attention was drawn to how the resources on the Hub are related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how the Hub can amplify the role small-scale fisheries play in them. The Hub can be used to strengthen small-scale fisheries governance and community development while supporting implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

The design of the Hub was largely driven by the feedback received through this consultative development process. With this input, the SSF Hub has been adapted into a platform that speaks to the needs and expectations of fishery stakeholders around the world. After the Hub's public release it is expected to grow and evolve based on member feedback.

It is hoped that the SSF Hub helps bring together a mosaic of the diverse people involved in small-scale fisheries by creating a space to share their stories, experiences and resources to inspire others. The strength of the SSF Hub lies in its diversity and in its role as a place to highlight the importance of sustainable fishing practices, food security and poverty alleviation around the world.

The Hub welcomes all stakeholders of the SSF community; their experience and stories can have an impact in other parts of the world. Together they can strengthen the well-being of small-scale fisheries, elevating their profile and their importance for food and nutrition for local cultures and economies. 

For more

SSF Hub: Strengthening small-scale fisheries through partnership and community

<https://ssfhub.org/>

Implementation of the FAO's SSF Guidelines

<https://igssf.icsf.net/>

Implementation of the SSF Guidelines

<https://sites.google.com/site/ssfguidelines/>