

Agenda for Action

The following Statement was made at the 'Asia Workshop: IYafa 2022-Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries', organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) at Bangkok, Thailand from 5 to 8 May, 2022

We, the representatives of small-scale fishworker associations, co-operatives, trade unions, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations from 11 South and Southeast Asian countries* that account for nearly 30 per cent of global capture fishery production (marine and inland) and nearly 45 per cent of the world fishers' population;

Having met in Bangkok, subjected to all COVID-19 protocols, during the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYafa), as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 72/72, appreciating its emphasis on the participation of small-scale fishery stakeholders in policy development and fisheries management strategies and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines);

Upholding the principles of regional and international co-operation as well as collaboration among all forms of small-scale fishworker and support organizations, plus consultation and participation in all development activities affecting the land or water bodies of interest to small-scale fishing communities;

Celebrating the knowledge and skills of marine and inland small-scale fishers and fishworkers;

Cognizant of the continued relevance of small-scale fisheries, marine and inland, in the context of food and nutrition security, poverty eradication and cultural heritage;

Aware of the important role that women play in the inclusive development of small-scale fisheries;

Concerned about losing traditional/customary tenure rights of small-scale and Indigenous Peoples to water bodies and land to live, operate fishing gear, and to process and market fish (especially for women), including the drying of fish. (Such loss occurs as a result of: reclamation/conversion for tourism-related activities; special economic zones; real estate projects; navigable waterways; coastal aquaculture, wind farms and power plants; infrastructure development, including ports; compulsory resettlement of fishing families; and impoverishment of fishers to wage labour or contract labour in fish farms and other forms of marginalization.);

Further concerned about the adverse impacts of sea-level rise, climate change, extreme weather events and pandemics;

Conscious of how conservation and sustainable use of living aquatic resources and components of the marine, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems is fundamental to the enjoyment of all forms of tenure rights; and how tenure rights can protect access of women and men to their resources and markets (SDG 14b);

Taking note of women facing a range of challenges across the Asian region, some of which follow from different national contexts, it is recognized that there are many common challenges. Women often face a quadruple burden, trying to balance household responsibilities (caring for their families and children); engaging in post-harvest activities (drying, salting, selling); participating in community organizations and mobilizations; and dealing with discriminatory social and governmental conditions; and

Further concerned about the range of impacts of COVID-19, the subsequent lockdowns and economic crisis on fishing communities, plus the need to promote social development and provide effective social protection schemes to all persons along the fisheries value chain;

Call upon Asian governments, private parties, civil society organizations, and the international community to:

- Address threats from upstream dams to national and transboundary rivers that reduce water flow and availability of fish in the downstream fishing grounds of small-scale fishers; in this context, provide adequate compensation to small-scale fishers for damages suffered from degradation of the ecosystem;
- Adopt fair and equitable allocation of water to allow small-scale fishers and fishworkers to practice their fishing for livelihood activities round the year, taking note of the multiple uses of freshwater resources;
- Allocate and raise awareness about tenure rights to land and water bodies, and further strengthen capacity of local communities, including women, to enjoy these rights in an unhindered manner, especially in the context of the recognition of co-management and community-based management rights under national legislation in inland and coastal fishing grounds;
- Protect traditional/customary tenure rights, to restore these rights if they be denied, and to provide reparation and just compensation to affected communities, should these rights be annulled after due consultation;
- Promote greater security of tenure in consultation with fishing communities; in this context governments should make adequate provisions to extend budgetary support to improving security of tenure in relation to land and water bodies (marine and inland);
- Provide space for women to participate in fisheries governance and co-management processes, both so their concerns are heard, and so they can contribute directly to developing programmes for addressing the obstacles they face;
- Recognize women's labour for its crucial contributions to the fisheries sector. Women's work is too often invisible, and seen as familial duties without economic compensation. Yet, women's household, care, pre- and post-harvest work are central to the functioning of the fisheries sector;
- Facilitate women's organizations and space for network building where women can discuss common challenges, support each other, and develop ways to address the issues they are facing;
- Undertake industrial, as well as aquaculture and domestic effluent treatment before it is released into marine or inland water bodies;
- Provide improved access to healthcare and medical facilities including to treat diseases caused by exposure to industrial pollution in coastal areas;
- Develop and institute legal measures to proscribe or phase out the use of destructive fishing gear and practices that have a negative impact on equity and sustainable use of aquatic resources and biodiversity. Measures must be put in place to phase out bottom trawling from internal, archipelagic, territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone within a reasonable period of time;
- Improve access to sustainable fishery resources for small-scale fishers using non-destructive and responsible fishing gear and practices, including through the provision of affordable fuel to ease their hardships;
- Consider alternative livelihood opportunities for small-scale fishers and fishworkers during off-seasons;
- Discourage arrest and detention and promote humane treatment of small-scale fishers for unintentionally crossing into waters under the jurisdiction of other States; in this context, create inter-governmental mechanisms to deal with issues related to transborder movement of fishing vessels;
- Provide accident, vessel and gear, life, natural calamity and pandemic insurance schemes for all fishers through government subsidies and closed season allowance irrespective of their membership status in fisheries cooperatives or

associations and ensure timely access to benefits from these schemes at times of accident, illness or death, or for permanent or partial loss of fishing equipment or opportunities;

- Ensure maritime safety agencies are well-equipped to improve disaster preparedness and marine rescue operations in light of increasing incidents of cyclones/typhoons and sea surges;
- Develop a database of migrant fishers and fishworkers and remove all forms of discrimination against them including denial of membership in cooperatives and trade unions and access to social protection schemes;
- Extend to fishers and fishworkers all social protection benefits for which the workers in non-fishery sectors are eligible. In this context, improve awareness about social protection schemes at various levels that can benefit small-scale fishing communities;
- Ensure that men, women and children of fishing communities at the national level enjoy the same level of access to education facilities as other citizens in the same country. Capacity-building of women at the community levels is crucial. This includes increasing their access to education and training programmes, technology, and opportunities to learn from and be inspired by women leaders;
- Document the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods of small-scale fishing communities and their ability to recover and provide support to move towards greater resilience;
- Provide adequate budget support, especially to poorly-funded local governments to improve sanitation, industrial and domestic waste management and to implement effective pollution control measures;
- Improve access to electricity of fishing communities and facilitate power supply to remote fishing villages through innovative power distribution mechanisms;
- Protect easement zones at the local level assisting pre-harvest and post-harvest activities as well as docking and launching of small-scale fishing vessels from being displaced by the tourism industry to establish resorts and hotels;
- Build capacity of local governments to be at the forefront of social development for small-scale fishers and fishworkers;
- Strengthen capacity of fishers and fishworkers to participate in designing social protection policies and schemes, to monitor the quality of these services and to report to the authorities;
- Strengthen sex-disaggregated registration of all fishers, fishworkers, and members of fishing and fish farming families to bring authenticity to beneficiaries and greater visibility to small-scale fisheries stakeholders;
- Protect autonomy of fisheries administrations and encourage them to coordinate with agencies in other fields on issues outside of their mandate;
- Improve sea safety by: (i) reducing intrusions of larger vessels into the fishing zones designated for small-scale fishers; (ii) providing training on safety at sea to small-scale fishers; (iii) enforcing life-saving equipment on all small-scale fishers in light of greater uncertainty and unpredictability at sea from climate change and extreme weather events by integrating it with the registration process for fishing vessels.

In this International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022), we are fully aware that the implementation of the SSF Guidelines within a human-rights-based approach can help governments at various levels to address our concerns and to take up our recommendations in South and Southeast Asia.

Implementing the SSF Guidelines, we believe, can promote justice and fair treatment of men and women, protection of tenure rights of small-scale fishing communities and promotion of participatory and effective management regimes, as well as the achievement of social development of children, youth, men and women of fishing communities and Indigenous Peoples in coastal and riparian areas.

* Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.