

# Stewardship, Resurgence

A decade after the adoption of the SSF Guidelines, a renewal of commitment and initiatives is needed to promote the sustainability, prosperity and well-being of small-scale fisheries in Asia

The International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 (IYafa) was celebrated worldwide. It provided a global platform to highlight the importance of small-scale fisheries and artisanal aquaculture, their role in sustainable development and the myriad of ways they ensure food security and poverty alleviation in dependent coastal and rural communities. As the lead agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) co-ordinated with member countries, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and partners to organize meetings, seminars and consultations around the world.

All these partners have a stake in supporting small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. They have highlighted the need to support the implementation of the international instruments in support of sustainable fisheries, particularly the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

In Asia, activities organized to celebrate artisanal fisheries and aquaculture began with a webinar held by FAO and INFOFISH. Titled 'Celebrating Small-Scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Asia: Spotlight on Small-Scale Aquaculture in Asia', it featured presenters from fisheries departments, NGOs and research institutions from Bangladesh, Cambodia and the Philippines. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), SEAFDEC and WorldFish were also represented. During the event, FAO and INFOFISH launched the IYafa 2022 e-photobook, a testimonial to the diversity, innovation and resilience of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture farmers in Asia.

In early 2023, the IYafa 2022 Closing Ceremony for Asia was organized by Thailand's department of fisheries, INFOFISH and the TBTI Global Foundation, with technical support from FAO. Titled 'Towards a New Era of Support for Small-Scale Fisheries and Aquaculture', this hybrid event was attended by key SSF advocates, including representatives from the Regional Advisory Group of the Global Strategic Framework in support of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA), ICSF, the Ocean University of Sri Lanka, and the Sri Lanka Forum for Small-Scale Fisheries.

## Important but unrecognized

These partners emphasized that artisanal fisheries and aquaculture are of immense significance in Asia, playing a multifaceted role in the region's socio-economic and ecological landscape. SSF and aquaculture in Asia serve as primary sources of aquatic foods, playing a pivotal role in ensuring nutrition and food security. Millions of people, men and women, depend on these resources spanning both marine and freshwater ecosystems. Beyond their immediate socio-economic contributions, artisanal fisheries and aquaculture have the potential to contribute significantly to biodiversity and ecosystem conservation through the adoption of sustainable practices that prevent over-exploitation. The inter-generational transfer of skills highlights their cultural importance, underscoring the need to preserve cultural heritage.

The key conclusions and recommendations from this event focused on a forward-looking, renewed commitment to support the SSF sector. Continuous advocacy and

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support are imperative to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14) of adaptation to climate change in rural communities that rely on these sectors. However, despite their substantial contributions, these sectors are often overlooked by policymakers, emphasizing the need for greater support. Policymaking in Asian fisheries should be guided by evidence-based research, local knowledge and a transformative perspective.

Involving small-scale fishers and farmers in decision-making processes is essential for the effective management of resources and aquatic spaces. Their participation ensures the protection of customary rights, access and traditional tenure, promoting transparency and accountability in policies that may negatively impact small-scale fisheries. To support and enhance this engagement, the foundation is already laid by the Asia Regional Advisory Group (RAG) for SSF, convened under the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC).

RAG's primary purpose is representing the interests of small-scale fishers and to support the implementation of guidelines that can benefit these sectors. The group provides a platform for SSF actors to engage and utilize their advice effectively. Governments, agencies and organizations are encouraged to collaborate with the Asia RAG. This collaboration will promote greater participation in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, reinforcing the principle of inclusiveness in decision making.

Secure tenure and responsible governance are critical for the sustainability of SSF and aquaculture. There is a need for efforts to protect customary rights, access and traditional tenure. It is vital to establish a framework that emphasizes consultation, participation, transparency and accountability in the policies and decisions that may affect SSF and small-scale aquaculture (SSA).

This is particularly relevant in the face of competing interests that may arise, such as the need for conservation and the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs), the demands of tourism, freshwater management, infrastructure development, industrial-



Small-scale fishing family. Secure tenure and responsible governance are critical for the sustainability of SSF and aquaculture

scale activities and the pursuit of Blue Economy initiatives. Efforts must also be directed towards addressing issues related to pollution and the degradation of habitats caused by activities in other sectors. These challenges not only threaten the environment but also the very resources that small-scale fisheries and aquaculture rely upon.

### Challenges and opportunities

Promoting fishery management that is sensitive to the needs of SSF is of paramount importance. It requires actions such as designating small-scale fishing zones, co-ordinating conservation measures, addressing over-capacity and overfishing, investing in stock assessment and data collection, combating illegal fishing, and supporting monitoring, control and surveillance. These actions will also serve to lay the groundwork for combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Additionally, supporting small-scale fishers' access to markets by offering capacity building that takes into account gender and culturally appropriate approaches to improved post-harvest and handling technologies, promoting equitable access to market information, ensuring the production of safe and healthy food, and implementing fish product certification training programmes are vital steps to boost these sectors.

Promoting decent work, safety and sound operational conditions in SSF and aquaculture is essential. Identifying elements of poor or unsafe working conditions for women and men working in these sectors, addressing the underlying drivers and seeking solutions with stakeholders is key. The introduction of safety guidelines at sea and in inland waters, as well as in aquaculture, improved infrastructure and landing sites, support for weather forecasts and notifications, and promoting risk communication and awareness are essential components of management.

Developing capacity in SSF and aquaculture communities and addressing gender issues is not only crucial for securing fishery resources but also for sustaining livelihoods, achieving gender equality and breaking the cycle of poverty. Providing adequate training and employment opportunities for youth in fishing or rural communities, and supporting women's organizations are essential for offering viable livelihood alternatives and prospects for the younger generation, to ensure continuity and vitality of SSF and aquaculture, while also addressing youth unemployment. Supporting and empowering women's organizations through training, leadership opportunities and access to resources is a key element of capacity-building efforts as women play a significant role in SSF and SSA. Their inclusion and participation are essential for the sector's success.

Social protection remains critically important for vulnerable households in SSF and aquaculture. This includes supporting fair access to credit, offering preferential rates, developing reasonable insurance and compensation mechanisms to address crises and natural disasters, and providing access to occupational healthcare. Recognizing the unique challenges and hardships faced by women and developing policies to address gender-related discrimination are also crucial components of social protection.


The tenth anniversary of the endorsement of the SSF Guidelines represents a significant milestone in global efforts to support these vital sectors. The implementation of these

Guidelines, in conjunction with the 2012 FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security offers a comprehensive pathway to address a range of critical issues. This is particularly important in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 14 that focuses on life below water, emphasizing the importance of conserving and sustainably using oceans, seas and marine resources.

The emergence of National Plans of Action (NPAs) for the SSF Guidelines implementation and dedicated SSF policies in Asian countries demonstrates a commitment to supporting SSF at a regional level. These NPAs ensure the practical application of the Guidelines in diverse cultural and environmental contexts.

Participation in the Second Biennial Small-Scale Fisheries Summit, organized in conjunction with FAO COFI 2024 in Rome, Italy, will provide a platform for stakeholders to share insights, best practices and progress in SSF development, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange.

FAO and its partners will continue providing countries with support for SSF and aquaculture. To this end, FAO is developing assessment tools for data-poor, multi-species and multi-gear fisheries, crucial for informed decision making and resource management. Other areas of focus include the review of fishery support measures and their application to SSF, as well as the promotion of SSA and mariculture activities as alternative livelihood options for coastal communities, reducing pressure on wild fish stocks.

In 2024, marking a decade of progress since the adoption of the SSF Guidelines, a renewal of commitment and initiatives to promote the sustainability, prosperity and well-being of small-scale fisheries remains essential in contributing to the achievement of global sustainability goals. 

#### For more

##### **The small-scale fisheries and aquaculture sector in Asia: Small in scale, big in value**

<https://www.fao.org/3/cc0026en/cc0026en.pdf>

##### **Towards a new era of support for small-scale fisheries and aquaculture**

<https://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/6123/icode/>

##### **SSF Guidelines website**

<https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en/>

##### **Asia Workshop: IYafa 2022-Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-scale Fisheries, 5 to 8 May 2022, Bangkok, Thailand**

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/asia-workshop-iyafa-2022-celebrating-sustainable-and-equitable-small-scale-fisheries/>