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STOCKTAKING OF THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES FOR SECURING SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION

Executive Summary

The year 2024 marks the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). This document briefly recalls their origin and main features and summarizes selected SSF Guidelines-related developments, initiatives and achievements that illustrate advancements in relation to ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation. The summary also highlights areas to support action on the topics identified in the SSF Guidelines as being most critical to securing sustainable small-scale fisheries.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Small-scale fisheries provide at least 40 percent of global marine and inland fisheries catch and contribute at least partially to the livelihoods of about 500 million women and men. The 31st Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2014 marked a milestone for small-scale fisheries by endorsing the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), the world's only global policy document specifically dedicated to the sub-sector.
2. The SSF Guidelines are a global reference tool for guiding actions, policies, strategies and legal frameworks concerning small-scale fisheries. They are global in scope and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. The final text of the SSF Guidelines was negotiated by FAO Members and endorsed by COFI in 2014, after a long participatory process that demonstrated strong commitment from both governments and civil society to bring about positive change in small-scale fisheries.
4. Grounded in a human-rights based approach, Part 1 of the SSF Guidelines lists the following objectives:
 - a) to enhance the contribution of small-scale fisheries to global food security and nutrition and to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food,
 - b) to contribute to the equitable development of small-scale fishing communities and poverty eradication and to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and fish workers within the context of sustainable fisheries management,
 - c) to achieve the sustainable utilization, prudent and responsible management and conservation of fisheries resources consistent with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code) and related instruments,
 - d) to promote the contribution of small-scale fisheries to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the planet and its people,
 - e) to provide guidance that could be considered by States and stakeholders for the development and implementation of ecosystem friendly and participatory policies, strategies and legal frameworks for the enhancement of responsible and sustainable small-scale fisheries, and
 - f) to enhance public awareness and promote the advancement of knowledge on the culture, role, contribution and potential of small-scale fisheries, considering ancestral and traditional knowledge, and their related constraints and opportunities.
5. To bring together responsible fisheries and sustainable development the SSF Guidelines address key thematic issues such as governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management; social development, employment and decent work; value chains, post-harvest and trade; gender equality and disaster risks and climate change.
6. The SSF Guidelines also focus on ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation through policy coherence, institutional coordination and collaboration; information, research and communication; capacity development and implementation support and monitoring.
7. The SSF Guidelines are addressed to FAO Members and non-Members, at all levels of the country, as well as to subregional, regional, international and intergovernmental organizations and small-scale fisheries actors. They are also aimed at research and academic institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and all others concerned with the fisheries sector, coastal and rural development and the use of the aquatic environment.

II. LOOKING BACK TO ADVANCE BETTER: EXAMPLES FROM 10 YEARS OF SSF GUIDELINES-RELATED ACHIEVEMENTS

8. COFI initiated and enabled the development of the SSF Guidelines, providing a unique level of global legitimacy and an opportunity to lead and monitor progress. The 10th anniversary of the SSF Guidelines provides the opportunity to increase awareness about their value and importance also for younger generations; to collectively take stock of their implementation; to capture good practices, as well as failures to learn from; and to identify and promote the way forward for further implementation. This paper aims to contribute to this.

9. In addition to and often in collaboration with FAO, an increasing number of partners from government, small-scale fisheries organizations, regional organizations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and academia have taken action to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. This includes fostering their inclusion in global policy processes and instruments, anchoring them in regional policies, specific actions at country level, the establishment of new partnerships, preparation of dedicated research, tools, guidance, and advocacy, just to name a few.

10. Both bottom-up and top-down approaches are used to drive uptake of and commitment to the SSF Guidelines. A comprehensive inventory and assessment of all initiatives is beyond the scope of this paper, which instead will summarize selected SSF Guidelines-related developments, initiatives and achievements that illustrate advancements in relation to ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation, and in relation to advancing action on the thematic topics identified in the SSF Guidelines as being most critical to securing sustainable small-scale fisheries. It provides an idea of the extent of partners owning the SSF Guidelines and driving their implementation through a large number of activities spanning the whole globe.

11. Complementary regional reviews on the implementation and uptake of the SSF Guidelines in Africa, Asia, and in Latin America and the Caribbean are under development by small-scale fisheries organizations.

12. The dedicated webpages¹ of the SSF Guidelines and the monthly SSF Update newsletter² provide more detailed information on the SSF Guidelines implementation and access to related resources.

Policy coherence, institutional coordination and collaboration

13. The SSF Guidelines acknowledge that small-scale fisheries provide a multitude of functions, including food security and nutrition, poverty eradication and sustainable use of resources. They go beyond what usually is dealt with by fisheries administrations only or through fisheries-focused policy processes, which makes their implementation more challenging, but also more lasting in relation to impact and long-term sustainability. Important achievements have been made in relation to increased policy coherence, institutional coordination and collaboration.

14. Globally, the SSF Guidelines have catalysed the inclusion of small-scale fisheries into global policy processes and instruments, such as those of the Committee on World Food Security, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The SSF Guidelines have also featured in events and statements informing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has included a specific recommendation on small-scale fisheries in its deliberations in 2022.

15. The actions related to the SSF Guidelines by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) provide a good example of their impact at a regional level. The GFCM is

¹ See www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en

² See www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/news/newsletter/en

championing a 10-year Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries, which among other covers decent work, the role of women, and climate and environment.

16. At the national level, a number of actions to advance policy coherence, institutional coordination and collaboration have been taken in relation to social protection, showing an increasing recognition of the linkages with ensuring sustainable fisheries and inclusive development.

17. For example, The FAO SocPro4Fish project (see COFI/2024/INF/14) has facilitated the establishment of the Inter-institutional Group of Social Protection for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Colombia, and the FAO Framework for Analysis and Action and Diagnostic tool provides guidance to support coherence between social protection policies and programmes and fisheries management. These initiatives contribute to the increased inclusion of small-scale fisheries actors in appropriate social protection schemes, supporting graduation out of poverty and compliance with fisheries management measures.

Information, research and communication

18. It is crucial that governments and relevant stakeholders are aware of and understand the principles and provisions of the SSF Guidelines if they are to apply them in their work. Similarly, improving the understanding of and evidence base for small-scale fisheries remains of primary importance to guide related policy-decisions and actions. Great advancements have been made on these aspects in the last decade.

19. Partners have translated the SSF Guidelines into local languages. They are now available in 23 languages, as simplified versions, animated videos and an interactive card game. These materials are widely disseminated and frequently used for awareness raising and to support workshop discussions.

20. A large number of topic-specific implementation guides, information and training materials has been produced by FAO and partners, often through participatory processes and for different target audiences, to facilitate the understanding and catalyse specific action on the ground. This includes publications, videos and e-learning courses, all of which are frequently applied in national and regional capacity development activities.

21. Research on small-scale fisheries-related topics and specific references to or papers on the SSF Guidelines has grown since 2014, involving both, established researchers as well as early career scientists, contributing to a new generation of increasingly integrated thinking. This is also thanks to partners like the Too Big To Ignore Research Partnership on small-scale fisheries³, which has a dedicated cluster on the SSF Guidelines, produced two books specifically on the SSF Guidelines and regularly dedicated sessions to the SSF Guidelines in its scientific symposia.

22. A major effort in relation to strengthening the science-policy interface is the FAO, Duke University and World Fish study Illuminating Hidden Harvests – The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development (IHH)⁴. The collaboration of over 800 people and the interdisciplinary approach has generated a new baseline for the sub-sector. IHH has triggered a number of related academic papers, country-and regional policy briefs, guidance on the IHH country case study approach and in-country capacity development, followed-up with activities grounded in specific needs of the country, and is expected to inform a new Fisheries and Aquaculture Science Program of the University of Liberia through a collaboration with Duke University and established with support of the World Bank.

23. Academic science efforts are complemented by the recognition and promotion of traditional and local knowledge, for example through a recent publication on Environmental stewardship prepared with Saint Mary's University, Canada, and the Community Conservation Research Network. The publication is complemented by a website, which provides a wider range of stewardship experiences, as well as an interactive global map showcasing the diversity of stewardship locations.

³ See <https://tbtiglobal.net/>

⁴ See <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/ihh/en/>

24. Small-scale fisheries organizations and support organizations have also partnered to launch global campaigns, for example A Call to Action for Small-Scale Fisheries or the Rise Up small-scale fisheries cluster, which are gaining traction in global and regional processes and unite different actors behind the shared objective to implement the SSF Guidelines.

Capacity development

25. To create real change and impact, implementation of the SSF Guidelines needs to happen at the national and local levels. This requires that those taking action have the actual organizational, institutional and technical capacity to do so, in particular governments and small-scale fisheries actors and their organizations. Empowering stakeholders for securing inclusive and sustainable small-scale fisheries has been a crucial pillar of the SSF Guidelines implementation efforts over the last ten years.

26. It is noteworthy that 2024 also marks the 40th anniversary of the International Conference of Fish workers and their Supporters (ICSF), the first time that fishers and fish workers gathered at the global level, in Rome, marking the beginning of their collective action which ultimately led to the development of the SSF Guidelines. ICSF remains a driving force for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, preparing thematic reports, conducting workshops and trainings for its members and participating regularly in policy processes and events at all levels.

27. Similarly, at the global level support to the IPC Working Group on Fisheries has resulted in the establishment of three regional advisory groups. This allowed to fill a void in terms of civil society organizations in the Asia region, where the inter-governmental regional body Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), among others, is already a well-established and active regional inter-governmental partner who has initiated workshops and policy briefs and carried out trainings for its members to advance the SSF Guidelines implementation.

28. In Africa, the African Union Non-State Actor Platforms on Fisheries and Aquaculture have been strengthened and a pan-African platform and the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET) have been established, becoming reference points for peer-learning and participatory policy processes in the region. AWFISHNET continues to establish new national chapters across the continent, supporting gender equality in small-scale fisheries. The African Confederation of Professional Organizations of Artisanal Fisheries and the Federation of the Artisanal Fishers of the Indian Ocean have both expanded their capacity to serve their members, engage in policy processes and support peer-learning. The regional inter-governmental organization CECAF has revived its small-scale fisheries working group which has compiled and analysed socio-economic information on small-scale fisheries to inform management and policy, among other.

29. The Ibero-American Network for Small-Scale Artisanal Fishing (RIPAPE) has recently been established to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in Spain, Portugal and Latin America and the Caribbean. This complements the inter-governmental efforts of the Commission of small-scale, artisanal fisheries and aquaculture of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPESAALC) which actually changed its name and mandate to better align with the SSF Guidelines, and of OSPESCA.

30. In the Caribbean, the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations is a long standing partner who has collaborated with other regional partners, such as CERMES of the University of the West Indies, to advance the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP), and specifically the 'Protocol on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries for Caribbean community fisherfolk and societies', that was endorsed by the 12th Ministerial Council of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism in 2018 to implement the SSF Guidelines.

31. An enabling environment for small-scale fisheries also requires that the institutional set-up for participatory approaches is part of government structures and that government agencies and institutions have the knowledge and capacity to apply this knowledge to support the SSF Guidelines implementation. In collaboration with the International Ocean Institute a training on governance of small-scale fisheries has therefore been developed and delivered by FAO, as well as related guidance and an e-learning.

32. FAO has also launched the global legal and policy data base FAO SSF LEX, providing country profiles that can inform legal and policy reform. It also features information about those countries that have specifically taken action to formalize the SSF Guidelines in their national legislation, policies or management regulations, which is a strong expression of political will.

33. A major commitment to implement the SSF Guidelines is through the participatory development and implementation of National Plans of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF). The United Republic of Tanzania, Namibia, Madagascar, Uganda, Malawi and the Philippines are the global champions in this regard. Guidance to support this process is available on the FAO website, and it is encouraging to see that other development partners or stakeholders are embracing these NPOA-SSF as a shared framework for action, complementing initial support for these processes provided by FAO.

Implementation support and monitoring

34. The SSF Guidelines specifically call on all parties (e.g. governments, small-scale fisheries organizations, development partners, academia, research institutes, regional organizations, NGOs etc.) to implement the SSF Guidelines in a collaborative manner, and an increasing number of examples for this are now available by now.

35. A major achievement in this regard was the global celebration of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022⁵ which triggered events at the global, regional and national levels, led by all types of partners, often in collaboration. Legacies of IYAFA 2022 include a large number of publications; the launch of new partnerships, e.g. RIPAPE mentioned above, or the national TBTI Philippines consortium, which leveraged funding for a dedicated project on the national implementation of the SSF Guidelines; as well as the establishment of the Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Summit.

36. The SSF Summit, held for the first time during IYAFA in 2022, provides a space primarily for small-scale fisheries organizations and movements, as well as other non-state small-scale fisheries supporters and governments, to collectively plan and advise; get to know each other; and to share and learn. COFI 35 '*emphasised the unique opportunity to gather commitments and recommendations at a summit on small-scale fisheries, which is encouraged to be held every two years prior to COFI, subject to resourcing, to sustain and inform continued support to the sub-sector.*' This can be considered an indicator of progress made for the recognition and inclusion of small-scale fisheries actors since their first conference held in Rome 40 years ago.

37. Funding support is crucial to ensure that the SSF Guidelines can drive change on the ground. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the European Commission have provided invaluable contributions to FAO for this, catalysing many related initiatives. Many other development partners have incorporated the SSF Guidelines in their own investment policies (e.g. GIZ, GEF) or used resources to develop products in support of the SSF Guidelines uptake (e.g. USAID).

38. Oak Foundation has established a dedicated funding stream for small-scale fisheries which has enabled a large number of initiatives in support of the SSF Guidelines to flourish. One of these is the SSF Hub, which provides a online platform for information sharing, dialogue and engagement around small-scale fisheries.

39. The SSF Guidelines also highlight the need for monitoring of progress towards securing sustainable small-scale fisheries and ensuring the effective participation of small-scale fisheries actors in this process. Related guidance and tools are available and being applied at country level, for example the FAO Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, the IPC Working Group on Fisheries People Centred Assessment, and the USAID country-level assessment tool. In addition, the

⁵ See <https://www.fao.org/artisanal-fisheries-aquaculture-2022/home/en/>

indicator for monitoring SDG 14.b is also directly capturing initiatives to implement the SSF Guidelines.

III. THE WAY FORWARD

40. The visibility and recognition of small-scale fisheries in global, regional and national policy has arguably increased over the last decade, but a lot remains to be done to fully implement the SSF Guidelines. Challenges such as accelerating climate change, and fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic, growing inequities pose additional issues, but can also be turned into opportunities.

41. Under the Umbrella of FAO's Blue Transformation, FAO will continue to support countries and other partners to implement the SSF Guidelines, with a focus on local and national level action. This will include in particular the following:

- the improvement of legal and regulatory frameworks and related capacities for inclusive and secure small-scale fisheries governance and development;
- the strengthening of small-scale fisheries organizations, including women, youth and Indigenous Peoples; and
- improved multi-dimensional, inter-disciplinary data and information generation and analysis to inform small-scale fisheries policy, governance and management.

42. Thematically, environmental community-led stewardship and sustainable use through participatory, comprehensive management approaches, sustainable tenure systems, as well as capacity development for the adaptation to the impacts of climate change on small-scale fisheries will receive increased attention.

43. Engagement in and capacity development in the context of regional and global institutions and policy processes will continue, within the fisheries policy domain and beyond, to ensure the full contribution of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development.

44. Initiatives led by partners in government, small-scale fisheries organizations and movements, inter-governmental regional organizations, resource partners, NGOs and academia remain indispensable, to further develop actions, knowledge and skills to support sustainable small-scale fisheries, in an inclusive, participatory manner that ensures aid effectiveness and values the comparative advantage that each partner brings to the table.