

Beyond lip service

Civil society organizations across continents are working to ensure that the SSF Guidelines, comprehensively address the issues of the sector

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Will the International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines), currently being developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), move beyond paying lip service to gender issues in fisheries? Will they ensure that clear direction is provided on how gender issues, and, particularly, how the interests of women, can be addressed systematically in all aspects of fisheries? These are some of the issues being raised by civil society organizations (CSOs) even as the Technical Consultation to negotiate the final text of the SSF Guidelines comes up shortly, from 20 to 24 May 2013.

CSOs have fully supported the decision to develop the Guidelines, and have engaged closely and constructively with the process so far. They have organized 20 national-level workshops spanning Asia, Africa and Latin America, and two regional workshops in Africa, as well as consultations among small-scale fishers and fishworkers in the European Union and Canada in the period between September 2011 and December 2012. More than 2,300 people have participated in these consultations and shared their aspirations and proposals in relation to the Guidelines. The proposals that emerged have been compiled into a synthesis document. The entire process has been intensive, bottom-up and highly participatory. It has been co-ordinated by the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), and the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty (IPC).

Drawing on this consultative process, CSOs have consistently emphasized that the Guidelines should overtly promote a human rights-based approach to fisheries, and that they should focus primarily on vulnerable and marginalized groups within small-scale fisheries, including women, towards achieving food security and poverty eradication. They have also stressed that the Guidelines should be binding (not voluntary), especially as they are consistent with, and draw on,

relevant provisions in existing international law. Moreover, the Guidelines should be global in scope, that is, they should apply to small-scale fisheries in all countries and regions at all stages of economic development.

CSOs have also outlined a strong gender agenda to ensure that the Guidelines steer away from the mainstream approach of equating fisheries with fishing, with a focus on fishermen. They have stressed that the Guidelines should apply to the full range of activities along the fisheries value chain, including the pre- and post-harvest sector, and all fishing and harvesting activities, whether in an aquatic environment or on land, whether undertaken by men or women, whether in the formal or informal sector, and whether taken up on an occasional or part-time basis and/or for subsistence.

CSOs have proposed that gender equality be included as a separate principle in the Guidelines, recognizing the need to ensure the equal rights of women and men to the enjoyment of all human rights, while acknowledging that women face specific forms of discrimination and that specific measures are needed aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality, especially by ensuring that the work of women in small-scale fisheries, including their reproductive work, is recognized, valued and supported.

A fundamental proposal is that the issue of gender and, in particular, the role of women, be mainstreamed and strengthened across all sections of the Guidelines, with the section on gender equality and equity retaining only the broad, overriding principles, and, particularly, the reference to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Strengthening attention to gender across sections is important, as women's rights and interests need to be protected in all aspects of small-scale fisheries, whether it be related to resource access and management, social development, decent work, post-harvest fisheries, climate change and disaster, or to policy coherence, research and capacity building, and monitoring and implementation of the Guidelines.

In relation to governance of rights and resource management, several proposals have been made. The right of women to participate in all aspects of the management of marine and inland fisheries and to receive equitable benefits from fisheries needs to be recognized and protected. Specific attention is needed to ensure the equitable participation of women in resource-management bodies and processes. While it is important to recognize customary

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law and systems of governance and their role in resource management, such laws and systems of governance need to be consistent with human-rights commitments and should protect the rights of women to equitable participation in governance. It is thus recognized that customary systems in many parts of the world discriminate against women and other marginalized groups.

Respecting and recording the legitimate tenure rights of men and women in fishing communities, using socially and culturally appropriate ways to record such rights is important. The rights of fishing communities to land for decent housing and for fishery-related and sociocultural activities, particularly in areas where their access is most threatened such as in urban and tourism areas and aquaculture sites, need to be secured. Titling policies must provide mechanisms to ensure *de facto* and *de jure* equality for women. Where rights to fisheries resources, land rights and access to infrastructure are redistributed to achieve a more equitable distribution of resources, specific measures must be put in place to ensure that women benefit equitably. Further, recognition and support for fisher's knowledge, culture, traditions and practices to inform the management of resources should be ensured, recognizing the specific knowledge of women fishers and fishworkers in the process.

In terms of social development, CSOs have highlighted the need to enhance access of communities to basic services such as sanitation, health, water, decent housing, food and electricity, with specific steps to address HIV-AIDS. All parties need to take steps for raising awareness on gender issues and women's rights, to encourage men to support women in their diverse roles in the sector, to institute measures that aim to protect against and eliminate sexual violence, including

domestic violence. It is critical to create conditions for men and women of fishing communities to fish and carry out fisheries-related activities in an environment free from violence, criminal activities, piracy, theft, sexual abuse, corruption and abuse of authority.

Social-security schemes should make provision for maternity and retirement benefits for women working within both formal and informal employment. Labour rights, including the right to decent work of men and women workers, and of women working as collaborative partners, must be guaranteed.

In terms of decent work and employment, it is suggested that States should address occupational health issues and unfair working conditions of all vessel- and shore-based small-scale fishers and fishworkers by ensuring that the necessary legislation is in place and is implemented, including in accordance with the relevant conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Regarding post-harvest fisheries and trade, CSOs have pointed to power relations in the value chain, and especially the role of intermediaries, that undermine the equitable accrual of benefits to small-scale fishers and fishworkers, so that they are effectively price takers and not price setters. Such inequitable power relations are also leading to acute forms of exploitation, such as the sex-for-fish trade. There is need to enhance the capacity of fishers and fishworkers to address such forms of exploitation. Moreover, the right of women engaged in post-harvest activities to have access to the fish that is landed needs to be specifically recognized.

It is proposed that specific support should be provided to women in the post-harvest sector. Such support should include improving access to transport, credit, infrastructure, market- and harbour-based facilities, particularly storage, water and sanitation, as well as amenities that facilitate the work participation of women, such as crèches, toilets and sanitary facilities, and secure shelters and spaces. It is also suggested that trade policies should prioritize fish for local consumption over fish for export or for reduction to fishmeal.

With regard to regional trade, where small-scale fisheries actors engage in sub-regional and regional trade in fish and fish products from small-scale fisheries (as in many parts of Africa), States should support such trade through fiscal measures to benefit artisanally processed fish products traded within the region, and by improving transport links, establishing provisions for product storage and preservation at border areas, taking steps to eliminate corruption and harassment of small-scale traders at customs and security checkpoints.

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Participants at the Senegal SSF Guidelines Workshop. Women's rights and interests need to be protected in all aspects of small-scale fisheries

It is suggested that States should ensure coherence between laws and policies related to investment, trade, spatial planning, pollution control, conservation and coastal zone management, and the vision and policy framework for small-scale fisheries, and that special attention should be paid to mainstreaming gender issues.

The importance of collecting gender-disaggregated statistics and enumeration of women's work in both inland and marine fisheries, and in all aspects of the fisheries chain, is highlighted. On capacity development, it is suggested that all parties should ensure the creation of legitimate, democratic, representative structures at various decision-making levels, and ensure that the range and diversity of the small-scale fisheries subsector along the entire value chain is appropriately represented. Specific attention must be paid to the need to work towards the equitable participation of women in such structures. Where appropriate, separate spaces and mechanisms that enable women to organize autonomously at various

levels on issues of particular relevance to them, may be supported.

With regard to implementation, it is proposed that a plan of action stating lines of action with targets and indicators to facilitate monitoring, be developed, with a specific plan of action for implementing the gender-related components of the guidelines. Further, States and other parties should develop a specific set of materials on gender, based on the SSF Guidelines, to secure the effective dissemination of information on gender and women's role in the small-scale sector and to highlight steps that need to be taken to support their work.

The Guidelines can provide both a useful framework for supporting small-scale fisheries and an opportunity for all concerned to acknowledge and address the discrimination that women fishers and fishworkers face. CSOs, drawing on the participatory process they have organized, have pointed to how women-specific language and issues can be integrated in all sections of the Guidelines. It is important to heed these proposals. ❏