



# Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Mekong Region: SSF Guidelines in Action

Proceedings of the Mekong Region Workshop on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

30 April – 1 May 2016  
Nakhon Pathom, Thailand





## Acknowledgements

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### *Collaboratively organized by:*



- International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC);
- Centro Internazionale Crocevia (CIC);
- International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF);
- World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP);
- Transnational Institute (TNI);
- National Federation of Thai Fisherfolk Association;
- Focus on the Global South;
- Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF).

### *Financially supported by:*



- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD);
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



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## Introduction

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This regional workshop was organized to discuss implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)<sup>1</sup> in ASEAN countries and in particular in the five countries of the Mekong River Basin. Across the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, small-scale fisheries contribute to livelihoods, food security, and local and regional economies. In most countries, the majority of fishers and fish workers work in small-scale fisheries. Diverse small-scale fisheries throughout the region support different activities in different contexts, but some common characteristics can be identified. They are typically characterized by open access, low levels of empowerment and a general lack of organizational structures and formal representation in decision-making processes. They also typically involve complex livelihood strategies combining fishing and other activities.

Small-scale fisheries are facing multiple threats including declining resources as a result of habitat degradation and vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change. Increasing competition for access to resources between small-scale and commercial fisheries as well as other sectors are increasing difficulties for the poor in accessing resources, and governance is challenged by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and low levels of formal representation, amongst other problems. Large numbers of small-scale fisher-folk and fishworkers have low and irregular income, and have limited capacity for improving post-harvest quality.

### *Objectives of the Workshop*

The objectives of the workshop were firstly to raise awareness about the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) in the Mekong region, particularly amongst those who derive their livelihood from inland and coastal small-scale fisheries.

Secondly, in direct reference to Paragraph 13.6 of the SSF guidelines, which promotes the development of a regional plan of action for their implementation, the workshop was also aimed at beginning the process of developing a draft Mekong Regional Plan of Action to support their implementation in the region.

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<sup>1</sup>The SSF Guidelines were endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in June 2014.

## ***Workshop Programme***

The programme of the workshop was focused on inland small-scale fishery sectors in the Mekong region. The first day examined and analyzed the trends of development plans in the Mekong basin, and five country presentations provided a review of the current status of small-scale fisheries in this region. Time was also dedicated to provide a recap of the process for developing the SSF guidelines, the key components of the guidelines, and how they have been adopted in other regions. In addition, a newly completed translation of the SSF guidelines into Thai, Lao, Burmese, and Khmer was shared amongst the participants in addition to the English version. A USB of relevant documents on fisheries in each country was also shared with all participants along with the full participant list.

On the second day, the participants were divided amongst small groups according to topic of interest, and translation was provided to allow the participation of different Mekong countries in each focus group. These groups identified the priority issues to be addressed, how to ensure that the SSF Guidelines are put into practice, and proposed strategies for collective action at national, regional and international levels, including the elements of a regional plan of action to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. For reference, the original schedule of the workshop programme is included in Annex 2.

## ***Participants***

A total of 74 people participated in the workshop. The majority of these, 41 participants altogether, were civil society, local authority and government agency representatives working with small-scale fishers and fishworkers in the Mekong region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam). The participating civil society organizations were predominantly members of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP). A further 17 participants were from regional and international organizations working to support small-scale fishers and improve fisheries policies, including International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), Centro Internazionale Crocevia (CIC) and International Collective in Support of Fisherworkers (ICSF). Many of these regional and international participants made presentations and helped facilitate discussions. A staff of 16 ensured translation and logistical support for the smooth running of the workshop.

Women were well represented at the workshop, comprising approximately a third of the workshop participants and half of the facilitators and resource persons. Conscious efforts were made to maintain a gender balance during the discussions, with the result that women made a strong contribution to all sessions.

## **Structure of this Report**

This workshop report is divided into three parts. The first is a synthesis of the main issues presented and discussed during the two day workshop. The second is an outline of presentations made and plenary discussions in roughly chronological order. This includes opening remarks and resource inputs, reports from small group discussions on implementation of the SSF Guidelines and closing remarks.

In most cases, questions of clarification following panel discussions are not reported separately but incorporated into the summary of the presentation to which the questioner referred, along with the relevant response. Discussion points which were responded to by panel speakers are also treated in the same way. In most cases it was not possible to identify the name of the participants from the floor, therefore all except the resource persons have been identified in this report by their country.

The final part is a set of annexes which lists the different participants and presents the final schedule for the workshop.

In order to keep this workshop report to a reasonable size for electronic distribution, participant presentations have been compiled into a companion document entitled 'Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Mekong Region: SSF Guidelines in Action – Participant Presentations the Mekong Region Workshop on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.'

## **Use of Colour in This Report**

To provide extra clarity when reading this workshop report, the following colour scheme has been adopted:

### **Headings**

All headings are coloured **dark blue**, with different font sizes used to indicate different levels of headings.

### **Speakers, Participants and Direct Quotes**

The names of, or references to, speakers and participants are coloured **dark brown**, as are words directly spoken by speakers and participants. (The only exception is when speaker names are included within headings, in which case they are coloured dark blue, as indicated above.)

### **Participant Presentation References**

Participant presentation references are provided in square brackets, i.e. [...], and are coloured **dark green**. These references can be used to identify the corresponding presentation in the companion document of participant presentations mentioned above.

## Introduction

## Part 1: Summary of Discussions and Main Proposals Identified

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*“We share a Mekong identity in the region. We used to have a happy life and abundant resources. This river is a common identity that the ASEAN community needs to protect.” - (Thai participant at the workshop)*

### Issues Raised Concerning Fishing Communities in the Region

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The livelihoods of over 60 million people in four countries are dependent on the Mekong River Basin. The peoples of the region represent highly diverse ethnicities and cultures. The majority are living by subsistence on agriculture or fisheries or often both. Their livelihoods are intertwined with those of others along the river. For fishing communities, fishing is not only a practice, it is a way of life, and the “mother river” is revered as the giver of life.

The river systems of the Mekong are the habitat for an estimated 1,100 freshwater fish species, and several are endangered. The region is second only to the Amazon in terms of biodiversity. Certain areas, such as the lower Songkram River, the Don Sahong Channel, the Tonle Sap and many others are especially crucial in the survival of the fish populations along the entire river. All fisheries in the Mekong River are small-scale fisheries. However, in general, inland fisheries have been poorly understood, and insufficient data has been generated to learn about and monitor the resources throughout the river system, particularly those resources on which small-scale fishing communities depend. Much of what is caught is not traded, and there is lots of trade without statistics, for example of fermented fish and dried fish, between Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

#### ***Threats to Environment and Livelihoods***

The governments of region are committed to market-based development. Under the ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Investment Agreement (ACIA) and Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation Programme (GMS), huge investments are made in the region on extractive industries, industrialisation, energy and transport infrastructure and commercialisation, with support of international donors including Japan, India, US, China, EU, ADB and the World Bank. Since 2012 the GMS economic corridor approach has been launched, planning roads, ports, bridges, dams, transmission lines, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and plantation schemes all to create zones of industrialization. While these investments will have an impact on environment and the life cycle of fish, implying major

economic losses for riparian communities and the nation, there are no investments to support small-scale capture fisheries.

Dams are bringing changes not only to the flow of water but also the entire water ecology, resulting in loss of fish habitat, loss of riverbank gardens (an important source of food), and biodiversity. The fertility of the Mekong delta area is dependent on the deposit of sediment flows from upstream, but flows are disrupted or blocked by upstream barriers. SEZ projects planned in Chiang Saen, Nong Khai, Nakorn Panom and Mukdahan in Thailand are also likely to put fishing grounds and water quality at risk, but there is little information available to the downstream riparian communities. These problems raise the question of who these investments are for? Through these projects economic interests are being put above the public interest, and investor rights are being put above human rights.

### *Inadequate Legal Frameworks*

Legal reform processes have begun in several countries of the Mekong to introduce new fisheries laws, which could be guided by the SSF Guidelines. However, broader reforms are needed as fisheries are also affected by other laws such as investment laws and EIA laws. The lack of binding agreements at the regional level, or national laws that are cross-boundary in scope, limits the protection of the rights of fishing communities from projects located in another country.

Several problems were raised about EIA processes and inadequate impact studies that miss important data, ignore relevant communities, are too site specific and fail to take the cumulative effects of planned projects or the lessons of past projects into consideration. The impression is that EIAs are only conducted as a part of a process to promote and legitimize investments. Villagers report that they can never trust these studies or the information contained in these reports about the potential impact. Often the results of EIAs are not published, and it is very difficult for communities to access them, contrary to the principle of participation which is central to the SSF Guidelines. Communities are often not consulted at all about projects which will directly impact their livelihood.

Governments cannot deny their responsibility to work together for the sustainability of inland fisheries, because the SSF Guidelines have been agreed by each of the governments of the region. A regional framework for cooperation is required between the riparian states, towards addressing the above issues at the regional, national and local levels. The 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC) may be relevant as a regional legal framework to look at transboundary issues related to fish. Vietnam has ratified the Convention and Thailand is considering doing the same.

### *Coastal Areas*

In coastal areas, small-scale fishing communities with insecure tenure rights are being displaced due to the construction of deep sea fishing ports, tourism developments, and most importantly at this moment from plans to construct coal-fired power plants. It is essential to preserve the fishery economy. The polluting operation of oil rigs and the practice of destructive bottom-trawling, harvesting even the very smallest fish for use in animal feed, are threatening the marine ecology. The consent of communities is rarely sought when bringing such projects to the region. Mangrove forests are also being destroyed as agricultural fields and aquaculture plots are developed along the coast.

### *Climate Change*

Climate variability is highly relevant as fish migration and spawning are dependent on the arrival of the rains and seasonal interconnected water flows. Any delay in the rains or obstruction of these flows affects the whole system. The root causes of climate change lie in the economic and business sectors. Mega development projects, including hydropower dams, all contribute to climate change. Based on human rights principles, local people have the right to compensation, and the right to be involved in decisions about adaptation and mitigation. Climate change and development strategies should mainstream the concerns of small-scale fishers.

## Implementing the SSF Guidelines in the Lower Mekong River Basin

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The importance of the SSF Guidelines for both inland and marine small-scale fisheries in the lower Mekong River Basin countries is recognized in the above background: (i) to bring about better governance reforms in relation to small-scale marine and inland fisheries, and especially to facilitate unhindered and equitable access to fisheries resources for small-scale fishing communities; (ii) to eradicate hunger and poverty; (iii) to adopt measures for the long term conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources; (iv) to promote complementary alternative livelihoods; and (v) to protect tenure rights to land and water. The SSF Guidelines can assist in setting priorities for the sustainable and responsible use of fisheries, as well as strengthening initiatives to establish principles and standards that regulate activities impacting small-scale fishing communities in the river basin ecosystem.

The implementation of the SSF Guidelines at the regional, national and local levels demands the involvement of all stakeholders, including both governments and civil society. Countries like Vietnam and Laos are introducing co-management of fisheries.

A legal foundation should be laid for supporting implementation of the SSF Guidelines, especially applying human rights-based approaches, ecosystem approaches and gender sensitive approaches. Policies and legislation for mainstreaming implementation of the SSF Guidelines should not only be technically sound, but should respect local culture, customary rights and traditions. Equal space for women should be ensured in this process.

All forms of support, including financial support, should be mobilised for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Scientific research supplemented by local knowledge is needed to influence national decision makers. Such knowledge development should not just focus on biological aspects, but also cover the importance of resources for local populations and for social and economic development.

International discussion and exchanges between networks are very important, as they can lead to better understanding and increased solidarity between countries, different constituencies, and different actors. The SSF Guidelines take a holistic approach, and address rights to different types of natural resources, so it's important to build and strengthen links between fishery, land, anti-dam and forest rights movements, since all of these social movements participated in the development of the guidelines. Participants suggested that at least one focal person in each country should be encouraged to work together on follow-up activities after this workshop.



### **Gender Equality**

Gender was a very important cross-cutting theme discussed during the meeting, including strategies to ensure that men and women can actively participate in value chain activities in equal ways – ensuring access to health, education, child care, maternity benefits etc. Lack of child care or maternity benefits prevents women from engaging in significant and more visible parts of the value chain. The care work that women provide is also fundamental, as it is the practical labour of women that enables men to go out and fish and trade and drive trucks to distribute produce etc. Yet mostly women’s part in the value chain is invisible. Gender issues guidance for the fisheries sector will be developed soon with the support of ICSF and the FAO. Other measures to ensure women’s empowerment were discussed, for example, ensuring women’s participation, promoting leadership and providing financial support. Gender budgeting strategies are also important, along with an analysis of how much money is allocated from government programmes to benefit women specifically.

### **Workers Rights**

Poverty, living from hand-to-mouth, combined with the high cost of sending children to school, results in many children having no choice but to work alongside their parents. Many communities do not have physical access to schools. Fisheries departments have not always been willing to work with other departments, for example those governing labour and social protection, but in Thailand this is changing, and labour protection and welfare are now considered important issues in fisheries. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been developed to regulate and provide safeguards for migrants. However, there are large numbers of informal migrants who have no formal documents. Reduced income is causing distress migration, and fishworkers are moving across borders to work on commercial marine fishing boats, sometimes under dangerous conditions.

### **Tenure Rights**

***“Indigenous people’s rights and customary rights are not being respected, because human rights instruments are considered voluntary, while investment rights are considered binding.”***

The SSF guidelines clearly state that tenure rights to land in the coastal/waterfront area are critical for ensuring and facilitating access to fisheries, for accessory activities (including processing and marketing), and for housing and other livelihood support. However, in most areas, governments do not recognise coastal tenure rights, and communities are evicted by the military, by development activities and by private sector actors on a daily basis. In inland fishing communities too, in areas like the Tonle Sap, few people have land titles because all the land and water belongs to government. In practice

fisher-folk do not have any real power to access and use fisheries. Waterways are being captured and diverted for investment. Small-scale fisher-folk need to have secure rights to make use of these resources for their livelihoods, and as a means to generate income.

The meeting was innovative in drawing complementarities with other relevant voluntary guidelines, in particular the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (Tenure Guidelines) developed under the auspices of the Committee on World Food Security. The Tenure Guidelines recognise the importance of common pool resources – which is very important for fishers. The abuse of legitimate tenure rights has now been established as an abuse of human rights. However, there has been little work at the regional level to implement the Tenure Guidelines in South East Asia.

This is a particularly important global moment in the life of small-scale fisheries. The SSF Guidelines present us with a key moment to influence regional and national policy specifically for the small-scale fishery sector, whether inland or on the coasts.

## Action Points from Riverside Statement

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### *Governance of Tenure in Small-scale Fisheries and Resource Management*

- Develop laws and regulations applying a human rights-based approach, ecosystem approach and a gender-sensitive approach.
- Secure the rights of fishing communities to land for decent housing and for fishery-related activities, particularly in areas where their access is most threatened. The specific needs of women harvesters and fish processors for access to land for fishery-related activities should be prioritised.
- Improve current arrangements for access to land and fishery resources for small-scale fisheries, both marine and inland.
- Review existing tenure rights systems for fisheries and land to protect small-scale fisheries.
- Ensure equitable participation of small-scale fisheries in co-management and other initiatives and frameworks.

### *Social Development, Employment and Decent Work*

- Empower small-scale fishing communities through an integrated ecosystem/holistic approach for small-scale fisheries development. Establish a national platform representing all stakeholders to support the SSF Guidelines implementation in a participatory manner.
- Address issues related to trans-border movement of workers to support an environment for small-scale fisheries communities to enjoy decent work.
- Promote investment in human resource development such as education, health, basic sanitation and drinking water. Enable access to education and health facilities including medical insurance that meet the needs of small-scale fishing communities and ensure access of women to such services. In this context, consider learning from the best practices in the region.
- Strengthen capacity building of women and youth.
- Address occupational health issues and unfair working conditions of all small-scale fishers and fishworkers.
- Ensure comprehensive social protection to small-scale fishing communities.
- Promote consumer education to support small-scale fisheries development.

### *Value Chains, Post-harvest and Trade*

- Improve access to credit, infrastructure, market- and landing centre 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, to enable women to retain and enhance their livelihoods throughout the value chain.

- Strengthen cooperatives and build their capacity to improve bargaining positions of small-scale fishers, fishworkers and fish processors. Ensure women have the support and educational resources to occupy leadership positions in such cooperatives.

### *Disaster Risks and Climate Change*

- Promote more research and use of alternative energy sources (solar, wind, etc.) instead of coal or hydro power plants.
- Protect communities against disasters and communities should be compensated if impacted by climate change and disasters.
- Link national strategies for climate change and disaster risks to the local level.
- Adopt measures to protect crops from flooding and undertake research into varieties of rice and fish that are more resistant / suitable for new situations, giving preference to indigenous species and traditional practices.
- Provide better information and knowledge on how the Mekong River Basin is affected by climate change and human activities with regard to fish, habitats, livelihoods, ecosystems, etc. and what the root causes are, including how upstream activities affect communities downstream. This also includes the need for proper impact and vulnerability assessments, and before and after evaluations.
- Disseminate and communicate existing knowledge (including between countries).
- Develop early warning systems with regard to water quantity and quality upstream to make sure downstream communities have information. This should include tools for detecting fish disease.
- Promote, at the government level, harmonised regional policies and regulations and regional mechanisms for sustainable and responsible fisheries and develop safeguards against negative impacts of infrastructure projects through ASEAN and SEAFDEC, as appropriate.
- Involve existing regional CSO mechanisms, or establish new ones, if needed, in the Mekong River Basin to share experiences through social media and regular meetings with regard to government policies towards achieving positive changes for fishing, farming and indigenous communities. One person in each country should be appointed to follow-up and be the focal point.
- Small-scale fisheries organisations need to be strengthened and there is a need to develop capacity of community leaders with special emphasis on women and indigenous peoples.

***To Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)***

The proposed development of the Southeast Asian Regional Approach in the Implementation of the FAO SSF Guidelines including processes for monitoring and evaluation in June 2016 by the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) was welcomed by the participants. It was proposed that the recommendations from this Workshop including the action points should be integrated into its outcome. It was suggested that CSOs should be part of the design process of such an approach.

***“We hope that Mekong region fishing communities will keep up this work, and stay connected to continue building camaraderie.”***



## Part 2: Outline of Presentations and Contributions to Discussion

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### Welcome Statements

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A warm welcome to all participants was extended by *Naseegh Jaffer, Secretary General of the WFFP*<sup>2</sup>, noting that participants had gathered together from five Mekong countries - Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam – as many fisher-folk as it was possible to support with limited resources. This regional workshop is the first of its kind, and represents a milestone in the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The idea of the SSF Guidelines was first raised in Bangkok, so it is an appropriate place to begin to talk about how to implement the guidelines now that they have been officially endorsed.

On behalf of the local hosts, *Sama-ae Jehmudor, Secretary General of the FFF*<sup>3</sup> welcomed all and introduced the Thai participants, which included not only fisher-folk from inland and marine fisheries, but also representatives from the Thai Department of Fisheries. He expressed the eagerness of fisher-folk to learn from each other, recalling successful exchanges during the series of workshops hosted by COFI as part of the process to develop the SSF Guidelines.

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<sup>2</sup>The World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) is a mass-based social movement of small-scale fisher people from across the world founded on 21 November 1997 in New Delhi, India by a number of mass organizations from the Global South. WFFP currently has 29 member organizations from 23 countries and represents over 10 million fisher people from all over the world.

<sup>3</sup>National Federation of Thai Fisher-folk Association.

## Opening Addresses

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Introducing the next speaker from the Thai government, **Naseegh** noted that the guidelines are the responsibility of the state, however other parties also have an interest in making sure that the guidelines are implemented. **“Strategically, practically, and tactically,”** he emphasised **“the implementation of the guidelines is for everyone, we all need to sit around the table and plan.”** Governments can take the lead as they are in a good position to bring all the different stakeholders and actors into the process.

**Assoc. Prof. Kangwal Chantatachot, Fisheries Advisor, Thailand’s Department of Fisheries** acknowledged that Thailand is facing a crisis of natural resource use, and that the Department of Fisheries is trying to improve its regulatory methods, laws and governance structures in line with international standards with the aim of achieving sustainable fisheries. In this process it is clear that the small-scale fishery sector cannot be ignored. In her personal opinion, there is a long way to go to achieving a good understanding of good fisheries governance in the region. A book on interactive fisheries governance, to which she contributed, argues for a better assessment of governability. Small-scale fisheries are quite diverse and complex, which requires a differentiated approach. She posed a question to the workshop of whether small-scale fisheries in this region should be transferred from open to regulated access, in line with VGSSF, and if so, to begin to develop an action plan together.

**Naseegh** raised two important contextual perspectives to bear in mind during the two days of discussions. Both the SSF Guidelines and the Tenure Guidelines, as they stand, are stated to be ‘voluntary.’ However, fisher-folk do not consider their livelihoods and their rights to access a voluntary matter. It is a basic need for people to have security of livelihood, and together with this the place to earn an income. Accepting that the guidelines are devised as voluntary, he said **“we must make sure that they are eventually set within local legal and policy frameworks, because only by doing this can we ensure [obligations] are met.”** This is why we must work with governments to agree upon a strategic framework that fits within the regulatory framework of each country.

Secondly, it is important to elevate the discussion from looking only at the national level. Problems occur when such frameworks govern only one country, given that ecosystems connect countries together – the fish harvested in Laos do not only swim in the waters of Laos – so cross-border regulatory frameworks, organisations and joint implementation strategies are needed.

Introducing the next speaker from the FAO, **Naseegh** noted that the biggest contribution in developing the guidelines was from fishing communities all over the world. However the FAO played an important facilitating role through its Committee on Fisheries. He asked how the FAO in the region understands the guidelines – what sort of mechanisms



can be established and how to work with fishing communities to bring these guidelines to fruition?

**Vili Fuavao, Deputy Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific** addressed this question before presenting his opening remarks. The SSF guidelines are no different from other sets of guidelines. They are a broad framework, which will be adopted through practice. *“How the guidelines are used will not necessarily depend on work at the global level, it will depend entirely on stakeholders putting a mark on the sand – to say this is ours, and this is how we will use it.”* It is important for local stakeholders to take ownership of the guidelines and act locally. The FAO and other organisations can help to support.

**Mr. Fuavao** explained that the SSF Guidelines were developed as a complement to the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, recognizing the need for an international instrument that provides consensus principles and guidance on addressing small-scale fisheries. FAO’s mission for the fisheries sector is to facilitate and secure the long-term sustainable development and utilization of the world’s fisheries and aquaculture resources. This implies an awareness of the characteristics and limits of the resources and ecosystems, and of the fundamental social and economic role which is played by the fisheries and aquaculture sector in meeting basic objectives, such as fostering global and national sustainable food security, alleviating poverty in fishing and rural communities through employment, and generating national income.

Marine and inland capture fisheries and aquaculture contribute to the food security and livelihoods of millions – globally, in the region and in Thailand, and are important to economies and to trade. However, in recent years, capture fisheries production has levelled off, and more fisheries have become over-exploited. The reasons for this are complex but include, for example, overcapacity of the fishing fleet, encroachment over natural resources, including marine and coastal ones, marine pollution and habitat modification.

He explained that the SSF Guidelines were developed in collaboration with large number of stakeholders in order to: provide complementary guidance with respect to small-scale fisheries in support of the overall principles and provisions of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; support the visibility, recognition and important role of small-scale fisheries; contribute to global and national efforts towards the eradication of hunger and poverty; support responsible fisheries and sustainable and inclusive social and economic development, with an emphasis on small-scale fishers and fishworkers, including vulnerable and marginalized people; promote a human rights-based approach and secure the tenure rights of small-scale fishers.

**Naseegh** closed the session by adding two comments from the perspective of fisher movements globally relating to the issues raised by the opening speakers.

*“The way we have been fishing and are fishing and the way we live has been gradually or speedily commoditised. [Fisheries have] become an entity that can be bought and sold, given and taken, which has resulted in reduced control over our livelihoods. Somebody can take fishing rights away from us and lease or sell them out to a company that only wants to make big profits. We want to make a living, but we also contribute to the economy.”*

*“Importantly our way of fishing protects our livelihoods because it is sensitive to the environment. The SSF Guidelines are not just about fishing. Commercial fishing companies who want fishing rights, they only want the right to fish. For us, fishing is connected to human needs, the interconnectedness of communities, the relationship between people and nature, the spirit in our cultures ... The guidelines promote whole human beings within society, and keep in focus our other human needs – access to sanitation, health, education etc. Our strategy and our plan must speak to all of these [needs]. This is inherently political. We need to be sure that all have their say, but most importantly those who are most affected – the fishing communities must be heard louder, if not the loudest. Our communities need to speak as a region.”*

Thanks were expressed by all speakers to the organisers, and particularly **Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk, Director, Sustainable Development Foundation**, for helping to bring so many participants, especially from fisher-folk organisations around the region, to join the discussion.

## Session 1: Presentations from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam

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### *Cambodia: Youk Senglong, Deputy Executive Director, Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT)*

**Senglong** briefly introduced his compatriots from Cambodian NGOs, government agencies (6) and community fishery groups (5). His presentation [*01 Youk Senglong FACT Cambodia*] focused firstly on the Tonle Sap Great Lake. Rich in biodiversity, the resources in this vast ecosystem, spanning 2,500 square kilometres, play an important role supporting livelihoods of 3 million Cambodian people who are directly dependent on the Tonle Sap. The Mekong and Tonle Sap are integrally related – the Mekong flows into the Tonle Sap from June to October, and then flows back from the Tonle Sap to the Mekong from November to May.

Recognized as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1997, the area is rich in biodiversity and ecology, including several endangered species – such as the giant sting ray. It is divided into three main areas: core zone, buffer zone and transition zone. Normally, fishing in the core zone is strictly prohibited, but activities such as research can be carried out with permission from the government or the community, depending on the area. Access to the buffer zone is constrained by very strict rules and regulations, while access to the peripheral transition zone is less strictly controlled.

**Senglong** then described the lives of fishers in Cambodia, with examples of three main house designs: houses built on stilts, and floating houses which are either fixed to a certain area or mobile, all of which are adapted to the seasonal changes in water level. None of these houses have land titles, because all the land and water belongs to the government. People make a living from many activities, including tourism in certain areas. But in general life is very hard, and men, women and children have to work very hard to survive. Even women with small babies on their backs fish in the open waters.

Finally, **Senglong's** presentation described some of his organization's activities, including: 1) Conservation and patrolling, to conserve fishery resources with the support of fishers; 2) Support for capacity building on livelihoods and conservation work, educating people about the legal framework and fisheries law; 3) Small grant support. For example, his organization provided 49 grants of 2,500 USD each to small-scale fishery groups and community-based organisations. These grants are used for various purposes, from fish conservation activities to the development of alternative livelihoods in order to lessen the pressure on fishery resources. 4) Policy dialogue to improve fishery resource management in Cambodia. Working to strengthen relations with high-level government officials, and working to secure amendments to relevant legal frameworks. 5) Advocacy campaigns, not just at the national level, but also the regional and international levels,

against hydropower development. They have been working on a broader network approach, not just coordinating with national networks such as the River Coalition of Cambodia, but also working closely with other NGOs at the regional level – for example Save the Mekong Coalition – issuing letters and petitions from civil society, including submitting statements to US President Barack Obama and to ASEAN Summit meetings.

***Laos: Phouvong Phetphayvanh, Independent Filmmaker, Siphandone Islands***

***Phouvong Phetphayvanh*** presented a film made in the villages of the Siphandone Islands in Southern Laos, based on his work as a freelance film maker in the region over the past 20 years. Entitled ***'If the Fish Change, the Food Changes,'*** it was produced in collaboration with Mekong Watch from Japan. Archive footage from 1996 showed the abundant harvests of Pa Suay obtained in the past. These days, many things have changed for the island people. Families never used to have to import fish to eat, but this year they had to import Pa Suay from the city. Siphandone (literally '4000 islands') sustains the livelihoods of the people of around 140 villages, all of whom live on fish caught in the river. Challenges have multiplied recently, and the limitations faced in Laos are different from other countries.



*Figure 1: A still from the film 'If the Fish Change, the Food Changes' by Phouvong Phetphayvanh.*

***Thailand: Sama-ae Jehmudor, Secretary General, National Federation of Thai Fisher-folk Association (FFF)***

Thailand presentations were given by two speakers – to address the different issues of the coastal and inland fisheries. The first presenter was ***Sama-ae Jehmudor***, Secretary

General of the FFF. He explained *[02 Sama-ae Jehmudor FFF Thailand]* that the country is so rich in coastal resources: mangroves, beautiful coastal areas which attract many tourists, many coastal fishing resources on which Thai fisher-folk depend – shrimp, shellfish and squid as well as fish. However, coastal resources are threatened by the construction and polluting operation of oil rigs, deep-water seaports, and most importantly at the moment is the threat from plans to construct coal-fired power plants along the coast.

Different fishers access resources in different ways: small-scale fisher-folk mostly fish the near-shore waters; commercial fishing companies and some fisher-folk fish further out at sea and even in foreign waters. Some small-scale fisher-folk have their own boats, either with or without engines. Some are especially poor and have no boat of their own. But whether small- or large- scale fishers, there are those people who use inappropriate fishing gears. So a new law is being drafted to bring about a change in our fishing methods, based on the results of academic research.

Thailand is over-exploiting its marine resource base, for example harvesting even the smallest of fish for use in animal feed. With better management, and gradual rehabilitation of marine resources, we will have more abundant resources. As small-scale fisher-folk we pledge to take care of our fishery resources, and to work to ensure marine resources remain plentiful for future generations. We will continue to work with coalitions of different organisations all over Asia on this.

***Thailand: Nipon Munmuangsean, President, Promotion of Sustainable Basin Development Association***

***Nipon Munmuangsean*** explained that his organization is working on water resource management, including fisheries management, all along the Mekong River. The 1995 Mekong Agreement of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) talks about cooperation among the lower Mekong countries, regarding the exploitation of resources. Data from the MRC shows that from Laos to the Mekong River Delta approximately 4.4 million tons of fishery products are harvested annually, with a value of around 550 billion THB per year. In Thailand the Mekong River spans 850 km from Chiang Rai Province to Ubon Ratchatani Province, bordering a total of 8 provinces with a population of around 2.6 million people dependent upon resources from the Mekong River.

The Mekong is facing economic expansion, population growth, and construction of hydropower dams on both the main river and its tributaries. All four of the lower Mekong countries have common concerns about the disappearance and degradation of the natural resources upon which riverside communities depend. Yet there are no studies on the future impact of these developments on the river and its resources.

A major concern is the impact of dam construction and irrigation projects on fisheries and ecosystems – including the lifecycles of fish and their spawning and feeding areas. There are 750 species of fish that migrate all the way from the Mekong River delta in Vietnam up to the southern part of China. There is especial concern regarding the Lower Songkram River, which is the largest fish spawning area along the Mekong River (it is similar in nature to the Nam Hin Boun / Xe Bang Fai area in Laos, which is also a major fish spawning ground). Areas like this are particularly crucial for the health of fish populations along the entire length of the river.

What kind of cooperation can the Mekong River countries develop together? According to MRC, there are more than 60 million people in the four lower Mekong countries that are dependent upon the Mekong River and who will be impacted by these development projects. If these four countries continue with such development projects – like the Special Economic Zones in Chiang Saen, Nong Khai, Nakorn Panom and Mukdahan – this will put fishing grounds and water quality at risk, which will impact upon the environment and the lifecycle of fish all along the Mekong River. A plan is needed to strengthen cooperation, and international support is needed to protect the interests of fisher-folk across the entire Mekong region.

A question was raised about regional mechanisms to deal with the kind of problems raised, for example based upon the UN Convention on International Waters. So far, only Vietnam is part of this UN process. In Thailand an initial discussion was conducted by IUCN. But overall the governments of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia still lack clear understanding. Civil society organisations in Thailand are campaigning for a new Fishery Act and Water Act, and have discussed applying UN frameworks to the development of national laws. As for reaching agreement between countries in the region, a discussion within the Mekong River Commission would probably be the best way to get started.

**Magnus Torell** added that the Mekong River Commission Agreement has been signed by the four countries of the Lower Mekong. The agreement is supposed to cover the issue of protecting river flows, for example ensuring the crucial reverse flow of the water in the Tonle Sap, with a balance between dry season and wet season flows. But there are criticisms that the MRC is not fulfilling its mandate. In summary, the provisions for international cooperation are there, but they are not really being used effectively.

**Vietnam: Dinh Xuan Lap, Deputy Director, International Collaborating Centre for Aquaculture and Fisheries Sustainability – ICAFIS**

**Dinh Xuan Lap** discussed the Mekong Watershed with a focus on the highlands of Vietnam, covering 71,000 square kilometers [03 **Dinh Xuan Lap ICAFIS Vietnam**]. He outlined the plans for dam construction in this area. If all plans are completed, there will be a total of 19 hydropower dams in Mekong Highlands, and up to 200 small-scale dams.

Data shows that there are over 200 fish species, of which 32 species are included in the IUCN endangered species list. Most of those engaged in fisheries are small-scale fishers – and 60% of these are engaged in fisheries only part time. ICAFIS has identified 200 different types of fishing gears which are being used, several of which are on the list of banned fishing gears. Data is very limited for inland fisheries, with the most recent data available coming from 2007. More up to date data is available for the more than 3,000 coastal fishing areas, but the latest data available is still only from 2011. Data reveals that catches are decreasing, and for 2 main reasons: i) climate change and ii) the impact of hydropower dams in the area.

Provincial fisheries offices were only recently established in 2009, covering the three provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lia, Quantun. Fisheries management is not concentrated within a single agency, which leads to overlaps and conflicts of authority in some areas. Vietnam has now established a fisheries co-management model in Buon Triet Dak Lak, with communities playing a lead role in developing their own regulations, for example determining which fishing gears should be considered appropriate. This co-management approach is working well.

Past policies have been focused on commercial fisheries and marine fisheries. Many of the regulations are not suitable for inland fisheries, because the fish species and fishing gears are not the same. So ICAFIS has been working to improve fishery policy – so far there are only three policies which they consider relevant.

### ***Myanmar: Mi Thiri Oo, Andin Youth Organization, Andin Village, Ye Township, Mon State***

***Mi Thiri Oo's*** presentation focused on community research carried out in seven villages in the coastal area of Mon State, Myanmar, around the Parlain Mountain [***04 Mi Thiri Oo AYO Myanmar***]. People in these communities rely on three main sources of income: betel nuts, fishery and paddy farming. Two villages in particular depend mainly on fishery. Mangrove forests are important as a source of food and income – from fresh fish, dried fish and crabs – and they also act as a spawning ground for many species.

In 2014, a Thai company arrived to construct a coal-fired power plant in the area. The community opposed this, and working together with a Thai organization they devised and developed a community-based research project. The community researchers recorded the number of households, the number of fishers, the number of motorized boats etc. The current population is 7,160 people, distributed among the seven villages. If the coal-fired power plant project goes ahead, its operation would require a workforce of 10,000 people. However, fishing areas would be closed down, so local communities would lose their main source of food, as well as their homes.

In 2013 the Myanmar government and the Thai company had signed a MoU without the knowledge of the local people. Officials came to the area a year later in 2014 to ask the local people for their consent. The villagers didn't agree, but nobody listened to them. No information was given to the villagers about the project. Instead, the villagers had to gather information about the project by themselves, from the investors' website. There was no consultation process. Fear led the communities to find a way to resolve this problem – carrying out their own assessment, without relying on an external study. The communities felt the Thai company did not give them any respect. The Thai company wanted to build a 128 megawatt power plant and sell power to Thailand, all without any electricity being transmitted to the local community.

### ***Reactions and Comments from Participants***

***Comment from Thai participant:*** A Thai participant shared the experience of Thai communities facing the construction of coal-fired power plants in the south of the country. The company promoting the development offers free food, takes local leaders out on field trips etc. There are some consultations, in the form of environmental impact assessments conducted by academics. But even though the villagers express the opinion that they do not agree with the project, somehow the report produced always paints a positive picture. Villagers can never trust these studies, nor the information about the potential impacts contained in these reports. They do not cover all the potential problems which could arise and cause problems for local fisher-folk.

***Comment from Thai participant:*** Natural resource management, harvesting and governance are all important, but we should also talk about rehabilitation and conservation. It is important to discuss the rights of small-scale fishers, because many small-scale fishers don't have secure settlement rights – most of land they occupy is owned by state. In terms of fishing rights, ineffective enforcement of existing laws is a major problem. We do not have a way to effectively implement the SSF Guidelines in order to secure food security and protect small-scale fisher livelihoods. We need to monitor development projects that might potentially impact our livelihoods, including coal-fired power plants, and be sure communities have adequate access to information.

***Comment from Thai participant:*** We all face common issues and challenges. In Thailand and Laos, we also find the big fish highlighted in the Tonle Sap example. Mega development projects have severe impacts on local communities. How can such projects be allowed to go ahead when they bring about such crises in our livelihoods? In South-eastern Thailand, for example, fishing communities have been displaced by tourism. How can we preserve the fishery economy? Since the EU's ban, we are being boycotted by the international community, so we are all affected by the influence of capitalist economics. The state declares a special economic zone and leases land to business groups. We have tried to protect our rights, by lodging a case with the administrative court. But the case was dismissed on the grounds that there is no law to govern transboundary issues. So



many issues remain unaddressed. ***“We are like small mice trying to help rescue a lion – we have to work together.”*** In Thailand we are also facing problems from coal-fired power plants and waste management projects. No consultation with local communities: the project just arrives one day, and we have to get together and protest against it. Businesses follow a similar pattern: they try to get community leaders on board, so we need a new generation of community leaders to campaign and protest. If there is a public hearing, they only tell us about the positive aspects, and never mention the negative impacts.

***Comment from Cambodian participant:*** After listening to all of these presentations, I can see that we all have very similar concerns about the fish and the people living in the river basin. I also heard many people mention building up a civil society action plan. What should we do to work together in order to protect our fisheries? How do we become bigger and stronger? How do we advocate and campaign together across our five countries?

***Comment from Thai participant:*** We have heard about so many negative impacts upon our fisheries – state development projects, natural disasters, climate change. Can we use this workshop as an opportunity to plan for future collaboration, to discuss strategies for bringing about change? Together we should come up with a plan which we can propose to our governments, in order to ensure responsible fisheries management and sustainable livelihoods for small-scale fishers.

### ***Panel Responses***

***Response from Youk Senglong (Cambodia):*** I agree that the MRC is not really performing its role effectively. It is like a paper tiger. We need to strengthen regional platforms and legislative frameworks. The 1995 Mekong Agreement is only voluntary. Laos pressed ahead with the construction of dams on the Mekong River – at Don Sahong and Xayaboury – and other governments in the region were unable to stop it. Civil society in both Cambodia and Thailand put pressure on the Laos government, and a petition was organized. A boycott of Angkor Beer was proposed, because their main shareholder is the CEO of Mega First company, which is investing in dam construction. But none of this was enough.

Many of the issues we face in the Mekong Region are regional and international issues. So it is important that we strengthen our planning and frameworks at the regional level, especially regarding hydropower. (Even droughts and forest fires affect fish and their habitats. Recently hundreds of tons of fish died. We’ve never experienced anything like this before.) ***“It’s as if the Mekong is not a river anymore. It’s blocked, like a pond. The water doesn’t flow like it used to.”*** We need funding support from our international friends to address these issues.

Tenure over fishery resources is important for the autonomy of small-scale fishers. In Cambodia the system is still open access. We have almost a hundred laws related to the management of fisheries. Small-scale fishers have rights on paper, but in practice they have no real power to access and use fisheries. Civil society can partner with national governments to strengthen the tenure and autonomy of grassroots fishers.

**Response from Dinh Xuan Lap (Vietnam):** We have seen significant drought and salinity problems this past few months in the Mekong Delta. Saltwater has intruded as far as 60-70 kilometres upstream. Normally, during flood season, we see native freshwater species arrive, but we are no longer flooding as we used to, and so the freshwater species are no longer coming. Again, this is a result of the construction and operation of dams upstream. I agree there is a pressing need for regional initiatives.

The government in Vietnam used to be too focused on commercial fishery and aquaculture activities. But following initiatives by communities and with support from donors, the government has begun paying more attention to small-scale fishers. Vietnam's fishery law is currently being amended. It includes a chapter on inland fisheries, and introduces community-based management schemes, in recognition of the fact that for centuries now local communities have been doing a rather good job of managing fisheries. This new fishery law will hopefully be passed next year.

**Herman Kumara** concluded the session by summarizing the main points: i) the importance of seeing the Mekong River as a common resource shared among different countries, rather than considering segments of it to be distinct national resources; ii) the need to strengthen regional planning; iii) the need to improve collaboration in working to help sustain the river and its resources.

## Session 2: Impacts of Trade and Investment, Dam Construction and Hydropower and IUU on Small-scale Fishers in the Mekong Region

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### *Shalmali Guttal – Focus on the Global South*

*Shalamli* presented on 'Trade and Investment Trends in the Mekong Region' [*05 Shalmali Guttal Focus Region*]. The Mekong Region hosts huge cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. (It is home to 398 different languages.) There is also significant geographic diversity with swamps, forests, and valleys created as the Mekong River shaped the region around it. The area is rich in natural resources and minerals. Cambodia has many legends about how the land rose out of the water, showing the important relationship between land and water.

The Mekong Region is also a biodiversity hotspot. Despite its size, Laos is second only to India as the largest contributor of rice biodiversity in the world. The region as a whole is second only to the Amazon Basin in terms of fish biodiversity. There are an estimated 1,100 freshwater fish species, many endemic to the region. Certain fish are found only in the upper or lower Mekong. The livelihoods of over 60 million people are dependent upon the river and its resources. The majority of these people have subsistence livelihoods based around small-scale agriculture and fishery.

The region's governments are committed to market-based approaches to socio-economic development. An estimated 10 billion USD has been invested in the Mekong Region to promote extractive industries, energy production, transport infrastructure, industrialization and commercialization. This has included investment by international donors from Japan, India, China, the European Union, the United States, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

The recently established ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has its own strategy and blueprints for economic development. The ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) was signed in 2009 to achieve economic integration and progressive liberalization of the region to trade. This offers greater protection for investors, with improved regulation of rules and procedures to promote more investment. Agreements have also been signed with the European Union, China and India, all with the aim of making the region more open to investment.

Multi-sector investment has been supported in the region since 1992 through the Asian Development Bank's Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) programme. In 2012 the economic corridor approach was launched, with plans for roads, bridges, ports, dams, transmission lines, plantation programmes, special economic zones and industrial zones.

The rules governing these programmes are supportive of investors but not of local communities. Governments are incurring private debt to finance projects. Furthermore, projects are moving forward without assessment of social impacts, although it can be expected that there will be multiple impacts on water, ecosystems and the environment.

Negotiations are currently underway to establish the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Studies has shown this partnership is likely to have a negative impact on genetic resources, but the impacts on fisheries have yet to be investigated. The RCEP will include provisions for Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). These provisions will allow litigation of national governments if they impose measures deemed to infringe upon the rights of investors. The RCEP does not, however, make any provision for local communities to sue investors. *“Economic interests are being put above the public interest; investor rights are being put above human rights.”*

One major concern is cumulative transboundary impacts. The MRC Agreement does not bind any national government or dam builder, and the MRC itself has proven unable to engage China in constructive dialogue. China has instead established its own cross-border mechanism called the Lancang River Commission – in China the Mekong River is known as the Lancang River – which mostly mediates over economic issues between the Upper and Lower Mekong Regions.

Waterways are being captured and diverted to support investment. The many tributary rivers that feed the Tonle Sap are being dammed. In Laos, for example, almost every major river has been dammed. Tributaries are important watersheds in their own rights, and sustain very many livelihoods. Dams are bringing changes not only to stream flow, but also to water ecology as a whole, resulting in loss of habitats, loss of riverbank gardens (an important source of local food) and a decrease in biodiversity.

Reduced income is causing distress migration. Fishers are moving to work on commercial fishing boats. Many workers on Thai fishing boats originate from Cambodia and Myanmar. Citing the example of the 150,000 hectare plantations of Pheapimex Group, *Shalmali* noted that land concessions, and other developments such as mining projects, can severely impact small-scale fishers even if operations are not located adjacent to rivers. The diversion of water to support operations significantly reduces local peoples' access to water resources.

Many development projects have high climate footprints, although often these are not recognized. Hydropower is often promoted as a source of green or clean power. But hydropower projects contribute to climate change, with high emissions from dam construction, forest clearing, and methane emissions from flooded vegetation. More thorough assessments of hydropower project impacts are therefore needed.

Professional conservation organizations and international financial institutions like the World Bank are promoting and supporting carbon offset schemes, like Reducing

Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). ‘Blue carbon’ schemes are being promoted in Vietnam. Of course carbon offset schemes do not reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but rather allow investors to proceed with potentially damaging projects elsewhere. In this way, carbon offset schemes are frequently used as a way to justify ongoing investment in development projects in other areas. At the same time, however, they tend to restrict the rights of local people to access the ‘conserved resources.’

The World Bank is supposed to promote free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). But they practice only prior informed consultation, which is a much lower threshold, denying communities the right to reject a project. *“Indigenous peoples’ rights and customary rights are not being respected, because human rights instruments are considered voluntary, while investment rights are considered binding.”* There have been many human rights violations in the region, along with criminalization of human rights defenders.

### *Premrudee Doaruang – Project SEVANA Southeast Asia*

*Premrudee* presented on ‘The Situation in the 3S Mekong Basin’ [*06 Premrudee Doaruang SEVANA Region*]. On the upper part of the Mekong River, China is planning to build a total of eight dams. Six have already been constructed, and two more are currently being promoted. The ultimate aim is to construct a total of 15 dams. Meanwhile, the lower part of the Mekong River is being negatively impacted by the operation of existing dams. Laos is currently constructing two large dams – one in the north at Xayaboury, and one in the south at Don Sahong. Many smaller dams are planned for tributaries. Thailand has already built a lot of dams in the past.

*Premrudee’s* presentation focused on the so-called ‘3S’ river system. Comprised of the Sekong, Sesang and Srepok Rivers, it connects Southern Laos to Northern Cambodia and the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The three rivers converge in Cambodia. The current situation in this important area reflects what is happening more broadly in the Mekong Region.

*Premrudee* made seven distinct points:

1. There is great ethnic diversity in the Mekong Region. The 3S area alone is home to many groups, including the Phnong people, considered the original inhabitants of Southern Laos. The 3S area also supports a wide variety of fish species – 214 species in the Sekong River, 133 species in the Sesan River and 204 species in the Srepok River. Many of these fish species are very special, such as giant catfish and freshwater dolphins. Considered together, the ethnic and biological diversity make the 3S area hugely important. Many people are dependent upon the rivers for their livelihoods, because there are few lowland areas suitable for agricultural development.

2. When national governments and private investors talk about dams, they overlook all of this diversity. The environmental impact assessment for the lower Sesan River made no mention of the area's ethnic diversity, nor of the impact of the dam's construction on the Tonle Sap Great Lake and the Mekong River as a whole. Most of the dam studies are like this – lots of information and knowledge is missing. With inadequate research and insufficient knowledge, countries are giving the go-ahead to hydropower dam projects. This is deeply saddening, and a key problem in the region.
3. Despite ardent campaigns by local communities, several dams have already been constructed on the Sesan River, starting with the 720 megawatt Yali Falls Dam built in 1993. Construction of the dam begun without local people being informed. A major flood occurred in 1996, killing 37 ethnic Cambodian people. People died because of the hydropower dam. The Sesan River used to be a source of drinking water for local people. Now it is dry. Have we learned any lessons from the negative impacts of existing dams?
4. Currently there is a proposal to build the first dam on the Cambodian stretch of the Sesan River, at the point where the Sesan meets the Srepok. Cambodia's government and the construction company claim the dam is already 50% complete. Very few local people know about the dam project. When they hear about it, most are opposed to it. Many local people have already been affected by the Yali Falls Dam, even though they may not know of its existence. Ethnic people in the area suddenly found there were no fish. They thought they had done something wrong, and were being punished by the spirit that protects their village. One woman made a startling comparison: ***“The Lower Sesan Dam will leave us in a worse state than the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge killed the people, but they didn't uproot whole communities.”***
5. Cambodia has a lot to lose. The construction of the Lower Sesan Dam will wipe out 9% of the country's annual fish catch, some 2 million tons valued at around 1,500 million USD. This will have a negative impact not only on local fishers, but on the whole economy. It begs the question – who is this dam for?
6. Resettlement areas are being built, but many local fishers insist that they won't move, because they would have to travel long distances to be able to continue fishing. From the resettlement areas, some people would have to travel for one hour by motorbike in order to reach a place where they would be able to fish.
7. For local communities, fishing is not just as occupation, it is a way of life. It is something much deeper than dam-builders and other outsiders will ever be able to understand. For local communities, fishing is the work and the livelihood of everyone. The value systems of small-scale fishers and dam-builders are completely different. To understand the values of local people, you have to create a space where you can sit and talk together with equality and equity. That space is not at the table of national governments or private companies. The most important voice is the voice of local people. If we want to help them, then we have to empower them. We have to create these spaces of equality and equity. The Mekong River Commission has stated it has no agenda to provide such spaces for local people. The commission is not working. If it cannot do better, it will never help anyone.

***Magnus Torell – Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)***

**Magnus's** presentation focused on three main issues: climate variability; illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; the impacts of these issues on fisheries and fisher-folk. Climate variability is very relevant to fisheries management as migration and spawning are highly dependent on the arrival of the rains and seasonal interconnected water flows. Any delay in the rains or obstruction of the seasonal flows affects the system as a whole. Wetland rice fields are also integral parts of river basin systems. Infrastructure planning is often based on dry season maps, and problems arise when rainy season arrives. Wet season maps are much better for infrastructure planning.

There are many different ways of calculating the economic benefits derived from fisheries. Except in Cambodia, for example, rice fields are typically not considered part of national fisheries. If the economic benefits of local fisheries are not properly calculated, their importance is underestimated which disadvantages local communities. There are very few investments which support small-scale capture fisheries, but there are very many investments which obstruct small-scale capture fisheries, whether through diversion of water flows, soil erosion caused by road construction etc. ***“The Mekong Delta is dependent upon sediment flows. Dams reduce the flow of sediment. These problems are being exacerbated by climate change, but there is a tendency to blame climate change alone, rather than looking at river mismanagement.”*** Mismanagement of the coastal area can increase vulnerability. It is essential to maintain sediment flow and avoid erosion.

While environmental impact assessments are conducted, they are often part of a process to ensure ongoing investment. Frequently they are too site specific, do not examine the cumulative impacts of successive dam projects, and do not consider the societal impacts on local communities.

The fisheries programme of the Mekong River Commission estimates capture fisheries in the region amount to 4 million tons per year, making an important contribution to both local and national income. Beyond this, there is a lot of trade which is not covered by such statistics, especially the trade in fermented fish and dried fish that takes place between Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. There is the potential to increase both the volume and the value of this trade, in order to bring greater benefit to local communities.

We don't have enough information about inland fisheries. With better record-keeping we can improve our knowledge and understanding, which will give us a stronger voice when opposing inappropriate investment and the dam construction lobby. With better regulation, people's rights will be more secure, properly registered, and taken into account by local authorities. With improved laws, we can clarify what is legal and illegal, and put a more effective legislative framework in place. But we cannot focus only on fishery laws, as oftentimes other legislation is given a higher status, such as investment law and

environmental impact assessment law, and this negatively impacts upon fisheries management. If we don't revise these other laws, our fishery laws will remain very weak.

### *Reactions and Comments from Participants*

**Comment from Cambodian participant:** Dams impact upon the livelihoods of small-scale fishers, of all people living along the river. They affect fish exports. By allowing companies to construct dams, we fail to protect the fishers. Those with money and influence are able to gain title over the mangroves and destroy the biodiversity that is found there. There are so many problems. We work so hard to advocate and campaign.

I hope that through this workshop we can find ways to work together. We need to unite, to collaborate on solutions, in order to ensure the sustainability of our fisheries, whether inland or marine. The Cambodian delegation would like to propose that we petition the relevant ministries in our countries, including those countries through which the Mekong River does not flow. We should establish a committee or working group comprised of members from our countries to take a lead on this advocacy.

### **Comment from Vietnamese participant:**

From our point of view, environmental impact assessments and public consultations are very poor. For example, regarding the public consultation for the Lower Sesan Dam, those participating were not clearly informed that it was a public consultation. The environmental impact assessment indicated that local people were in agreement with the project. Most local people have had to be resettled. The quality of the housing at the new sites is very poor. The situation is similar when it comes to other dams in the Lower Mekong Basin: access to information is a major challenge, and environmental impact assessment results are often not published or difficult to access, even after partitioning for their release.

### *Panel Responses*

**Magnus** responded to a question from a Vietnamese participant about who should be responsible for collecting data on IUU fishing, and whether small-scale fishers can do this themselves. He explained that addressing IUU fishing is the responsibility of the national government. For example Laos has a national plan of action to combat IUU fishing.

**Premrudee** responded to the various comments about environmental impact assessments. She recommended that local people should not wait for an environmental impact assessment to be commissioned. The process of consultation takes a long time, and so it must start as early as possible. Local people need time to prepare themselves. However, when democratic process is weakened, as is currently the case under military



rule in Thailand, access to information is very limited. Local people must be allowed the freedom and the space to mobilize, otherwise their rights to access and use natural resources in a sustainable manner will continue to be eroded.

**Shalmali** agreed that ‘expert studies’ and specific types of assessments can sometimes represent a trap. Decision makers will go ahead anyway. She reiterated that the main problem relates to priorities – for investors and governments, economic growth is placed above people’s rights.

*“Communities can ask for, and do their own, studies representing their own paradigm of wellbeing and of life – but will they ever be able to stop these projects? Even if one dam project can be stopped, another dam, a special economic zone, a plantation, a housing estate, will be waiting in line to take the local people’s water. The much deeper question is, what kind of development paradigm do we want to promote?”*

## Session 3: Overview of SSF Guidelines and Related Instruments



Figure 2: Guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines, from the presentation of Lena Westlund, FAO.

### Lena Westlund – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

**Lena** presented an overview of the SSF Guidelines [07 Lena Westlund FAO VGSSF], noting that the guidelines concern both marine and inland waters and concern not only fishing, but pre- and post-harvest activities as well. She emphasised that the guidelines were developed with the direct input of over 4,000 stakeholders from around the world, and identified the guiding principles in developing the guidelines as equity and equality, consultation and participation, the rule of law, accountability, transparency, respect for cultures, non-discrimination, social responsibility, holistic and integrated approaches, social and economic viability, and social, economic and environmental sustainability (see Figure 2 above).

The SSF Guidelines will only have an impact through implementation at the local level. National governments have the main responsibility, but fishers and fishworkers should be the main drivers. NGOs, researchers and academics have a supporting role to play. National and international level action is also needed in order to address transboundary issues, and the FAO is able to provide regional level support. ASEAN level mechanisms and national human rights organizations should also collaborate in these efforts.

## How were the SSF Guidelines developed?

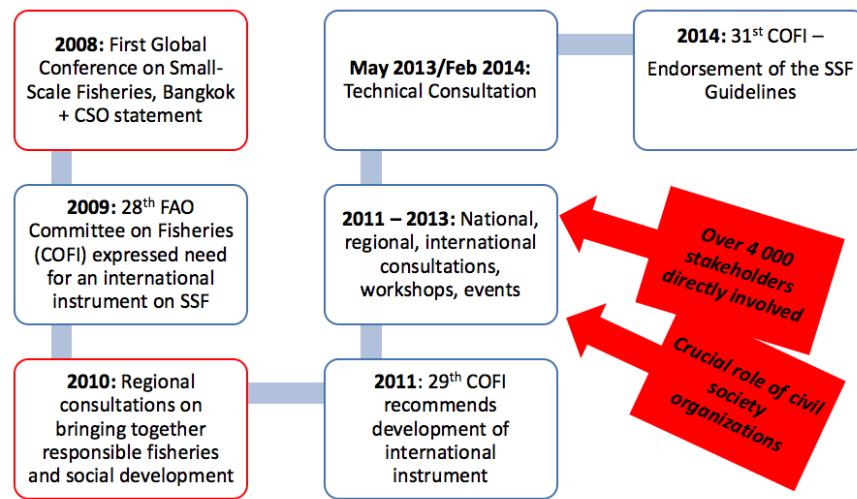


Figure 3: History of the development of the SSF Guidelines, from the presentation of Lena Westlund, FAO.

Specific activities need to be carried out, but at the same time the SSF Guidelines should be mainstreamed into all fisheries-related work plans.

A three-and-a-half day regional workshop for Southeast Asia was organised by the FAO in Bali, Indonesia in August 2015. The workshop was attended by CSOs, NGOs, national governments, research institutes and other stakeholders. A report has been produced by the FAO and is [available here](#). Working group discussions focused on: i) tenure – identifying the need to improve access, legalize customary tenure and carry out zoning; ii) the need to strengthen and empower fishing associations to play a role in management, along with the need to adopt ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management; iii) social development, decent work, improved conditions and gender equality; iv) value chain development, including post-harvest activities and trade, ensuring equitable benefit sharing, and levelling the playing field for small enterprises.

Two further opportunities to discuss these various issues were highlighted. Firstly, SEAFDEC will organise a regional consultation from 7-9 June 2016. The recommendations from this workshop will feed into that regional consultation. SEAFDEC regularly conducts such regional consultations, but is now increasingly encouraging civil society organizations to participate. Secondly, the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) will discuss the Global Strategic Framework for the Implementation of the SSF Guidelines in July this year.

### **Sebastian Matthew – International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)**

**Sebastian** outlined the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines and Human Rights Law [08 **Sebastian Matthew ICSF Principles**]. ICSF’s latest [Samudra Report](#) has seven articles on implementation of the guidelines, together with reports on meetings held in all regions from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. (All regions except the Atlantic.) Surprisingly, there has been little focus on inland fisheries at any of the previous meetings.

As noted earlier, the issue of participation is central to the SSF Guidelines – to ensure that communities participate in decision-making. Many small-scale fishers don’t even have access to information about the ecosystem in which they live. Participation can help make sure information is more accessible.

Also central to the SSF Guidelines is the application of human rights based approaches. Key human rights principles and standards at the regional and international levels, which all five countries represented at this meeting have ratified, include the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

#### SSF Guidelines, Article 3.1

Human rights and dignity: recognizing the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable human rights of all individuals, all parties should recognize, respect, promote and protect the human rights principles and their applicability to communities dependent on small-scale fisheries, as stipulated by international human rights standards: universality and inalienability; indivisibility; interdependence and interrelatedness; non-discrimination and equality; participation and inclusion; accountability and the rule of law. States should respect and protect the rights of defenders of human rights in their work on small-scale fisheries.

All non-state actors including business enterprises related to or affecting small-scale fisheries have a responsibility to respect human rights. States should regulate the scope of activities in relation to small-scale fisheries of non-state actors to ensure their compliance with international human rights standards.

*Box 1: The first of the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines, from the presentation by Sebastian Matthew, ICSF.*

The SSF Guidelines refer to universal, inalienable, interdependent, and interrelated human rights (see Box 1 above). Accountability and rule of law are also emphasised to combat corruption. Non-state actors have a responsibility to respect human rights, which means that all the hydropower dams discussed earlier must not violate the human rights of local communities. States have an obligation to regulate the activities of businesses to ensure compliance with human rights. The entire architecture of the guidelines is framed according to these principles.

**Sebastian** described many other instruments including the 2007 ASEAN Charter and the 2013 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, which talk about respect for the rule of law. Even

the Laos Constitution, although avoiding the term human rights, offers legal protection to workers, women and children, and protects the rights of different ethnic groups. In other words, he said ***“Many rights emphasised in the SSF Guidelines are already part of the legal framework in the region.”***

### ***Reactions and Comments from Participants***

***Comment from Thai participant:*** The SSF Guidelines read like a vision, looking forward to the future. But the current reality is that each country is pushing development projects that impact fishing communities, water resources and our river basins. What can we do to effectively implement the SSF Guidelines? If our countries truly recognize them, they should be implemented to ensure that governments address the basic needs of the people.

***Question from Thai participant:*** How can we make each country properly acknowledge small-scale fishers? How can we influence policy makers in each country? How can we ensure participation in policy development, especially regarding inland fisheries?

### ***Panel Responses***

***Response from Sebastian:*** One problem is that so many different communities are affected, not only fishing but also farming communities. This needs a joint initiative reflecting different uses of aquatic resources. We are a ‘weak’ stakeholder when it comes to water resources, and we are pitted against very powerful interest groups. There needs to be an initiative bringing farmers and fishers together, nationally or regionally. Transposing human rights standards and principles into national level policies and legislation requires pressure from below. We need to engage at all the regional and international platforms to avoid being marginalized. Now that we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have to bring fisheries management back to the reference frame of river management. The number of people dependent upon inland water resources is huge.

***Response from Magnus:*** Regarding the question about how to ensure the SSF Guidelines are effectively incorporated into national legislation, we should conduct a comparative analysis between the SSF Guidelines and existing national legislation. This will provide a basis for advocating legislative change where needed.

### *Shalmali Guttal – Focus on the Global South*

**Shalmali** presented an introduction to a parallel set of guidelines known as the ‘Tenure Guidelines’<sup>4</sup> [09 *Shalmali Guttal Focus VGGT*]. These guidelines were developed via a process overseen by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which has a mandate to support mechanisms to develop policies that will help ensure food security. Like the SSF Guidelines, the Tenure Guidelines are based on mandatory human rights frameworks. After three years’ work, they were adopted in 2012 by almost every government in the world, so this is an internationally agreed document.

The process to develop the Tenure Guidelines was supported by a large number of social movements representing peasants, pastoralists, forest dwellers, fishers etc. These various social movements engaged in the process because they want to see people’s rights protected legally, not just voluntarily, and because they are seeking corporate accountability.

The CFS is quite different to other United Nations mechanisms in that civil society organizations have a very high standing, and are able to engage and negotiate with government delegates on an almost equal footing. The CFS knew the support of civil society organizations was crucial to the success of the Tenure Guidelines. This led government delegates to give tremendous respect to civil society organizations, with their views taken very seriously.

The Tenure Guidelines themselves refer to other important declarations like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Similarly, the draft ‘Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas’ refers back to the Tenure Guidelines. Many of the most important clauses in the Tenure Guidelines relate to access to fisheries. Security of tenure is not only about land titles – it also concerns securing access to broader ecosystems and the commons. Tenure rights are often seen as individual rights, but it is increasingly acknowledged that for communities, collective rights are often more important. Tenure arrangements can be quite complicated. Even areas which may appear to be individually owned may be accessed and exploited by others within the community from time to time, and their rights must also be recognized.

The Tenure Guidelines represent a step forward in recognizing different types of tenure systems. Importantly, the guidelines recognize the importance of common pool resources, which is crucial for fishers. This ‘opens the door to broadening tenure governance.’ The abuse of tenure rights is now recognized as an abuse of human rights. Governments are obliged to fulfill, protect and respect all human rights, and businesses must also respect human rights. The Tenure Guidelines also recognize the rights of

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<sup>4</sup>The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) are [available here](#).

indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), as established in UNDRIP, and identify similar rights for non-indigenous groups.

Since the Tenure Guidelines are a negotiated document, and had to accommodate the interests of diverse stakeholders, there are inevitably some limitations. The language used in some instances is somewhat ambiguous, although this can be both an advantage as well as a disadvantage. The guidelines do not include tenure rights to water resources, and they accept that in certain circumstances, large-scale transfer of tenure rights (essentially land grabbing) may be permissible. Currently, at the regional level within Southeast Asia, little work has been done to implement the Tenure Guidelines.

**Questions from participants:** Given that the Tenure Guidelines and the SSF Guidelines were developed via different mechanisms, how do we ensure that government delegates in the CFS are sufficiently well informed about fisheries issues? Perhaps the FAO should undergo reform and modernize its fisheries instruments?

**Response from Shalmali:** We have to strategize and work together with special rapporteurs, ILO staff etc. The CFS is not the only place of struggle. Different social movements and civil society organizations have different spaces in which they work. They have to make strategic decisions about which spaces they should target.

However, we should not fall into the trap of advocating the rights of one group over another, despite efforts to artificially divide the various issues into separate boxes. For example, when debating the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment that Respects Rights, Livelihoods and Resources (PRAI), many argued they shouldn't cover agricultural workers, and we had to fight to protect this group's rights. Similarly, when discussing tenure, many would ask what it has to do with small-scale fishers. Our analyses must always retain an interconnected approach.

**Response from Naseegh Jaffer:** It is important to reform the fisheries sector globally. The more pressure small-scale fishers are able to apply, the more we seek the support and opinions of various agencies within the United Nations, the better off we will be. For decades now we have been mobilizing for change, for the protection of our rights and our livelihoods. In the SSF Guidelines and the Tenure Guidelines we have two new tools at our disposal. In the next session, we'll discuss how to put them to use.

## Session 4: SSF Guidelines in Action

### *Clara Park - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

**Clara** gave a gender perspective on the SSF Guidelines, and talked about empowering women in small-scale fisher communities [*10 Clara Park FAO Gender*]. The SSF Guidelines on gender equality. **Clara's** presentation outlined what is meant by gender, gender equality and gender discrimination, and why working on gender equality is important in the fisheries sector.

The struggle for the empowerment of women is a political issue, and often intersects with other struggles for equality related to ethnicity and caste/class. Relevant questions include: Who can do what? Who decides what? Who benefits from what? Gender-based violence remains a concern in all countries, and women are under-represented in decision-making forums.

#### What do the SSF Guidelines say on gender?



- Gender equality is mainstreamed in all policies and laws relevant to fisheries, in particular SSF
- Policies and laws are in line with international instruments
- Ensure equal participation in decision-making processes for SSF policy development, or encourage women to participate
- States should address discrimination and create spaces for CSO and women to participate in monitoring
- Encourage women to participate in fisheries organizations and provide organizational development support
- Policies and laws set out clear implementation mechanisms to achieve gender equality including through access to extension, services and legal support
- Encourage technologies that are appropriate to women's work in the sector

*Figure 4: Gender perspectives in the SSF Guidelines, from the presentation of Clara Park, FAO.*

Of those people working in the fisheries sector, around 50% are women. Women are mostly engaged in post-harvest activities – though in inland areas many women also fish – and have key roles at the household level. The key roles played by women in small-scale fishery are recognized in the SSF Guidelines. Other international fisheries instruments are also beginning to recognize and incorporate gender equality and human rights. Nonetheless, women's role in small-scale fishery remains undervalued, and actions are



needed to advance gender equality, empower women and ensure meaningful participation in decision-making and management mechanisms.

The SSF Guidelines call on governments to enact, or where appropriate adapt, legislation in order to promote gender equality and accelerate de facto equality. Grassroots communities and civil society organizations can initiate bottom-up processes and apply the SSF Guidelines in awareness raising, mobilization and advocacy.

**Clara** explained that the FAO's regional office is working to raise awareness about women's role in the fisheries sector, and to mainstream gender equality and gender analysis within the region. The FAO follows up on requests for support from member countries, and would be happy to respond to any identified needs in the Mekong Region. **Clara** clarified that the FAO is not a funding agency, but can help to develop proposals to submit to donors. Gender guidance for the fisheries sector will be developed soon with the support of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

#### ***Praulai Nujmon – Department of Fisheries, Royal Thai Government***

**Praulai** made a presentation about social development, employment and decent work for sustainable fisheries [[11 Praulai Nujmon DoF Work](#)]. Her presentation was based on her experiences working with the Department of Fisheries, work which has mainly involved the marine fisheries sector. However, **Praulai** emphasized the need to apply the SSF Guidelines and adopt ecosystem-based approaches in both inland and marine fisheries, making linkages between the different areas of the Mekong Basin and the regions coastlines, and acknowledging the different techniques employed by local small-scale fishers.

There is a need to improve living and working conditions, to strengthen workers' rights, and to educate workers about their rights. Equally, boat owners must be made aware of their duties and responsibilities. Many people from neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar, come to look for work in Thailand's fisheries sector. The guidance of the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been very helpful, and we learned a lot from the experience of receiving a yellow card from the European Union (EU). Some rules still meet with resistance from fishers themselves – for example the rule that workers under 18 years old should not be allowed out to sea.

**Praulai** explained that in the past the Department of Fisheries was not willing to work with the Ministry of Labour. But this has changed, and labour protection and workers' welfare are now considered important issues to be addressed by the Department of Fisheries. MoUs have been drawn up to help protect migrant workers from Myanmar – to ensure that workers know their rights and are paid the minimum wage. Nonetheless, problems still exist where there are middlemen involved. Many agencies have to be

coordinated to address these issues: the Department of Fisheries, the Ministry of Labour, the Harbour Department, the Navy and the Police.

The basic lesson we have learned is that we need to ensure the security of our fishers. Within the region there are many international fisher organizations that can help facilitate this work, and help us ensure our legislation addresses the concerns detailed in the EU's yellow card. We need to learn directly from the experiences of our fishers.

Finally, *Praulai* noted that in the days shortly before this workshop, the Department of Fisheries had conducted a consultation on the SSF Guidelines and their implementation in Thailand, attended by small-scale fisher representatives from all of the country's provincial fishery committees.

### *Herman Kumara – Special Invitee, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)*

*Herman* spoke about tenure rights to land and water bodies, livelihood security and sustainably fisheries. The SSF Guidelines clearly state that tenure rights to coastal land are critical for ensuring and facilitating access to fisheries, for related activities such as processing and marketing, and for housing and other forms of livelihood support. However, in the majority of cases, national governments do not recognize the tenure rights of small-scale fishers, and local communities are evicted or relocated by the military, development activities and private enterprises on a daily basis. In times of crisis, such as following natural disasters like the Indian Ocean Tsunami, or in the presence of armed conflict, various actors including the government, the military and investors take advantage of the situation to seize lands that small-scale fishers had settled to support their livelihoods. Macro-economic development projects, such as tourism expansion and special economic zones, violate both our customary tenure rights and various other fundamental human rights.

In order to ensure that our rights are respected and that small-scale fishers needs and concerns are more carefully considered during the planning and implementation of development projects, prior consultation is of fundamental importance. Small-scale fisher organizations can apply pressure upon national governments and local authorities, through advocacy and negotiation, to develop a clear process of the concrete implementation of the SSF Guidelines. These are our guidelines – it is up to us to ensure they are implemented.

### *Lena Westlund and Florence Poulain – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

*Lena and Florence* spoke about natural and human-induced disasters and climate change in the context of the SSF Guidelines [\[12 Lena Westlund Florence Poulain FAO Disaster](#)

**Climate].** Their presentation pointed out that the livelihoods of 2.5 billion smallholders around the world are dependent upon agriculture and fisheries. The economic impact of natural disasters on the fisheries sector is enormous, conservatively estimated to be in the order of billions of dollars. Information was presented about the impacts of climate change on capture fisheries, aquaculture, and the overall safety of fisheries operations. Displacement caused by natural disasters and climate change leads to conflicts. Fisheries governance needs to be strengthened to address such conflicts and increase fisheries resilience.

Now that the SSF Guidelines have been developed, it is important to ensure they are implemented, improving national management regimes so the fisheries sector is properly equipped to face climate change. This will require a holistic approach, taking in factors outside of by impacting upon the fisheries sector. Risks and impacts also need to be assessed and reduced at the community level. The SSF guidelines encourage national governments to support small-scale fisher communities affected by disasters and climate change, through a combination of aid, mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

#### ***Naseegh Jaffer – World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)***

**Naseegh** completed the panel presentations, speaking about ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation. Different actors have different levels of capacity and resources when it comes to ensuring the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Small-scale fisher communities do not have as many opportunities as other more formal actors to directly support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. National governments and government agencies are better able to assess the importance of fisheries to the economy, and to direct resources to the fisheries sector.

Promoting and supporting the implementation of the SSF Guidelines will require, in the first instance, the development of new policies at both national and local levels. Economic, social and environmental development policies must acknowledge and adhere to the fundamental principles of human rights. Crucially, policies and legislation at all levels must be aligned and integrated across sectors and between departments – we cannot limit our focus to just the fisheries sector alone. Furthermore, our efforts need to encompass not only technical matters, such as harvesting, processing and marketing, but also socio-cultural matters and the broader needs of small-scale fisher communities.

***“National governments and small-scale fishers together have a joint responsibility to manage resources. However, civil society organizations and small-scale fisher communities have perhaps the most important role in driving forward the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. We are the people for whom the guidelines were developed. We should be organised and work as a collective. The way we move forward together should reflect our cultures, traditions and customs.”***

### ***Reactions and Comments from Participants***

***Comment from Vietnamese participant:*** Given that we have limited resources, would it be more feasible to select just some articles from the SSF Guidelines, and prioritise those for implementation, rather than trying to advocate for every article?

### ***Panel Responses***

***Response from Herman:*** Every day our governments fail to meet their obligations. It is the responsibility of civil society and social movements to put pressure on our governments in order to ensure the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

## Session 5: Small Group Discussions on SSF Guidelines Implementation

### Session Introduction

**Shalmali Guttal (Focus)** introduced the session by noting that the economic, social and cultural contributions made by small-scale fishers to domestic economies is under valued by wider society. The SSF Guidelines are one tool we can use to raise society's awareness of small-scale fishers' contribution.

Fishers are often also farmers, and rural constituencies must work together. Civil society organizations should support this coming together of rural constituencies, rather than focusing piecemeal on the individual struggles of different communities to protect their rights and resources.

### Report A: Value Chain, Post-Harvest and Trade – Empowering the role of women in small-scale fishing communities. Ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation in the Mekong Region

This group discussed the roles of women and men along the value chain in the fisheries sector. Women play many important roles, from capture through to sale, including, importantly, saving earnings at the household level and making decisions about financial investments (see Table 1 below). This group contained no participants from Laos, so the table covers only four countries. Participants from other groups later added that in the region, whilst women are not encouraged to fish at sea, they frequently participate in inland fishing.

Activities		Women	Man		Women	Man		Women	Man		Women	Man
Fishing	Cambodia		X	Myanmar		x	Thailand		x	Vietnam		
Fishing preparation ( fishing gear/ clean board/ tools)		x			x			x				
Middle man		X				x			x		x	x
Processing/trading		X			x			x	x		x	x
Consumer		X	X		X	X		x			x	X
Keep money		x			x			x			x	
Decision to spending money/importance issues at family		x	x		x	x		x	x		x	X ( to buy/invest in large scale)

Table 1: The roles of women and men along the value chain in the fisheries sector, from Report A – Empowering the Role of Women.

Only women in Vietnam receive maternity benefits, and only then if they work in the public sector. In all four countries the burden of childcare rests primarily with women. Sanitation infrastructure is limited for many communities in Cambodia and Myanmar, whereas in Thailand and Vietnam most communities have access to drinking water and toilet facilities.

A major issue for women fishers is credit relations. In most of the countries, loans can be obtained from traders relatively easily, often without proof of assets. However, these loans usually tie fisher households into selling their catch to the same traders at below-market price. In Thailand and Vietnam, communities have begun to establish savings cooperatives which provide credit to members and help negotiate a fair price for fishery produce with local traders. Additionally in Vietnam, women fishers can gain access to formal credit if they are registered as head of the household.

Key demands for women in fishery sector				
Support needed	Cambodia	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam
Health care	they aware of the lack of healthcare and drinking water to the gov' but they didn't reply.	Government need to provide more information to women and men,	The commune has volunteers to work with hospital for treatment;	Government need to provide more support regarding to healthcare insurance and sharing healthcare information.
Education	√ (consumer education to make sure gender equality and support for small scale fishery development)			
Financial resource	√ (government need to regulate the financial situation at commune or village to avoid middle man take advantages from women)			
Participation	√ (to support women in leadership position and discussion related to fishery sector)			
Leadership	√ (strengthen capacity building among women, youth group, provide legal, financial support, education and information to women)			

Table 2: The key demands of women in the fisheries sector, from Report A – Empowering the Role of Women.

In all four countries, women fishers have to work during pregnancy. In Cambodia, there is no government healthcare insurance scheme. In Myanmar, although healthcare is offered by the government, in practice there are very few hospitals and healthcare centers. A lack of information and transportation further prevent women from accessing hospital care, and so women often depend on local healers. In Thailand, basic healthcare insurance is

provided by the government, but women often pay by themselves for specific treatments. In Vietnam, the government provides healthcare for ethnic groups. In addition, Vietnamese factories and fisheries companies sometimes provide healthcare insurance for women workers, but many women workers do not know about their entitlements.

Measures to empower women fishers were also discussed, e.g. ensuring women's participation, promoting women leaders and providing financial support. Quotas may be necessary in some cases to ensure adequate and equitable representation of women versus men and inland versus coastal fisheries in relevant policy-making spaces. Gender budgeting techniques should also be applied to review spending on government programmes and ascertain the proportion of funds specifically benefiting women.

***Report B: Tenure Rights to Land and Water Bodies, Livelihoods and Responsible/Sustainable Fisheries – Ensuring an enabling environment and supporting implementation***

In all countries in the region, small-scale fisher communities have been continuously campaigning to protect their rights. Civil society organizations continue to advocate for the rights of small-scale fisher communities, including community land tenure and customary tenure arrangements, pushing to have these rights recognized and incorporated into policies, laws, strategies and plans at the national level in each country.

Considerable effort is required to ensure stakeholders, and especially small-scale fisher communities, have awareness and knowledge of the SSF Guidelines. A common understanding must be reached amongst all stakeholders. Small-scale fisher communities can apply the SSF Guidelines in developing their own strategies for the conservation and management of local fishery resources. When raising awareness about the guidelines with small-scale fishers, creative communication methods should be employed that are appropriate for use at the grassroots level e.g. live theatre, short films etc.

Policies, governance mechanisms and decision-making processes must reflect the different nature and different needs of different localities, protecting important ecosystems and respecting the rights and wellbeing of small-scale fisher communities. Building understanding at the community level is the best way to begin the process of policy change. Social movements and small-scale fishers in each country should create spaces for in-depth discussions about the SSF Guidelines, developing their own interpretations about the significance of each article, and deciding how best to apply the guidelines to improve the situation of small-scale fishers. It is important for social movements and small-scale fishers to develop their own interpretation of the guidelines, as this will avoid the problem of other stakeholders imposing their own different interpretations.

For the SSF Guidelines to effectively protect the rights of small-scale fishers, including their tenure rights, it is crucial that the guidelines be concretely incorporated into national legislation. Important opportunities for such policy integration currently exist in both Cambodia and Vietnam, since in both countries the existing fisheries legislation is currently being revised. Small-scale fisher groups can use the SSF Guidelines to lobby candidates during election campaigns at both the commune and national levels. Non-governmental organizations will be able to play only a supporting role, empowering communities to strengthen their political voice. Small-scale fishers must be prepared in advance, with a clear understanding and their own interpretation of the SSF Guidelines, so they can represent their own interests powerfully and convincingly.

Small-scale fisher representatives participating in the workshop emphasized the importance of discussion and exchange across networks and between countries. They explained it leads to improved understanding and greater solidarity, not just between different constituencies, but also between different stakeholders. Small-scale fishers can learn a lot from one another, like how small-scale fishers in Sri Lanka receive compensation from the government when certain areas there are officially closed to fishing.

Small-scale fishers must remind national governments that they participated in the process to develop the SSF Guidelines, and agreed to the final draft of the SSF Guidelines, so they should respect and work to implement the SSF Guidelines. Social movements and civil society organizations should work to raise awareness of the SSF Guidelines with National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs) in each country, and with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) at the regional level, to ensure the guidelines are consulted and referenced in their assessments and recommendations. Advocacy at the regional level is also important, both within the Mekong Region and more broadly within ASEAN. Local people, social movements and civil society organizations have in the past directed campaigns toward the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and the ASEAN People's Forum (APF), a good example being the 'Statement by Local People on Dams in the Mekong Region.' This kind of regional level advocacy and campaigning should continue.

Finally, a variety of different social movements participated in the development of the SSF Guidelines, and as a result the guidelines take a holistic approach, covering rights to a range of different natural resources. In advocating for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, it is therefore important to build and strengthen the links between these various social movements, which include land rights and anti dam groups, forest-dwellers, farmers and fishers.



### ***Report C: Climate Change and Fisheries***

This group discussed natural disasters, human-induced disasters and climate change. Human-induced disasters considered by this group included the construction of dams, factories and coal-fired power plants in Myanmar, as well as macro-economic development projects and the expansion of shrimp cultivation in Thailand, which is leading to mangrove deforestation and making coastal areas more vulnerable to tsunamis, sea surges and coastal erosion.

In terms of natural disasters, the Mekong Region has been struck by severe droughts in recent years, significantly impacting upon rice production, and storms are expected to bring heavy flooding later in the year. Local people tend not to understand that many of these phenomena are related to climate change. Such natural disasters have already had significant negative impacts on food and livelihood security, health and wellbeing, habitats and ecosystems, local economies, and even local knowledge and cultural traditions. These various impacts have yet to be properly assessed, quantified and understood.

International instruments on human rights entitle local people to compensation from disaster-induced losses, and stipulate that they should be involved in decisions related to climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this context it is important to clearly identify who should be responsible for addressing climate change impacts, including national governments in the region as well as industrialized nations around the world.

Early warning systems and long-term monitoring regimes should be established to address extreme weather events and climate change impacts. Monitoring regimes should include water quantity and quality indicators, and results should be made available to small-scale fishers and other local communities. Local communities in downstream areas need to be given access to monitoring indicators for upstream areas, so they are better able to predict changes to migration, spawning, planting and harvesting seasons. Local communities in downstream areas are currently unable to plan rice cultivation because of uncertainties regarding water quantity and quality. In Vietnam, the government has requested that China release water from its dams to help alleviate the situation.

Macro-economic development strategies and climate change adaptation initiatives must take into account the needs and concerns of small-scale fisher communities. High-level action plans should be developed to secure long-term funding, with concrete projects added following detailed consultations with local communities. Existing development projects, including dam construction, should be subject to research and evaluation to assess ecosystem impacts and changes before and after implementation. Such studies should be carried out in a participatory manner with the involvement of impacted local communities. Indigenous and traditional knowledge and good practice within local communities should be acknowledged and documented.

Regarding implementation of the SSF Guidelines, this group emphasized the need for awareness raising and capacity building, including sharing information through social media, conducting training workshops and public forums, and establishing pilot sites to demonstrate concrete implementation of the guidelines' recommendations. This group also highlighted the need to support ongoing networking amongst civil society organizations both within and between countries, including facilitating regional collaboration on developing ASEAN-wide regulations.

### ***Report D: Social Development, Employment and Decent Work***

This group focused on poverty and other social problems within small-scale fisher communities. The root cause of many of the problems considered is overfishing.

Many small-scale fishers live from hand to mouth in a state of poverty, for example the inhabitants of Cambodia's floating villages. The high costs involved in sending children to school means many children have no choice but to work alongside their parents. Many parents consider their children to be safer at their side while they work, as opposed to being left alone at home. For these reasons it is not uncommon to find children working in the fisheries sector. Children in small-scale fisher communities in Laos often start working from the age of ten, fishing for up to two hours a day. Traditionally, children are often involved in nighttime fishing activities, such as squid jigging. Even some boat owner-operators are below the age of eighteen.

Many small-scale fisher communities are not served by local schools. Even when there is a school nearby, daily travelling costs can be prohibitive – for children in Cambodia's floating villages, for example, travelling to school by boat each day is very expensive. There are also many expenses involved with enrolment. As a result, many small-scale fisher families do not have access to affordable education. Vocational training for young adults therefore needs to be promoted.

The Vietnamese government has special schemes to promote access to affordable education in remote areas, including islands. The schemes, which have been in operation since 2011, provide boarding school education to rural children from the age of six. Ethnic children are entitled to 12 years of schooling, other rural children 9 years. All receive full board and lodging for a fee of 40 USD. As an incentive to attract staff, the teachers who support these schemes are paid double the usual salary. Most of the teachers in the programme are women. Laos operates similar schemes, but with fewer incentives for teachers.

With regards to migrant labour, Thailand has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam to regulate and provide safeguards for migrants. Across the region, however, there remain a large number of informal migrants who lack legal documents. For example, there are significant numbers of informal

migrants from Vietnam in both Cambodia (specifically the Tonle Sap area) and China. The implications of increased freedom of movement of migrant labour within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) have not yet been fully understood. Furthermore, some indigenous groups require special consideration. The Moken, Urak Rawoi and Chao Lay 'sea gypsies' of Thailand, for example, are not afforded many of the basic rights granted to Thai citizens. Without a social safety net, they are heavily dependent upon their fishery livelihoods as a means of subsistence.

The group also discussed the typical health problems faced by small-scale fishers and fishworkers in each country. They were identified as: Cambodia – diarrhea, dysentery, skin diseases and diabetes; Laos – small-scale fisher communities are in generally good health; Thailand – asthma and loss of hearing; Vietnam – eye problems, back problems, kidney stones and premature ageing. Access to healthcare facilities is generally poor in Cambodia, and infant mortality is very high in the country. In contrast, universal healthcare works well in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Laos has a cluster approach to healthcare, and the government has introduced a scheme which provides free maternal health benefit together with financial assistance for infant healthcare. Thailand has designated healthcare centers in rural villages.

The group had the following main recommendations: i) Improved social protection is needed in the small-scale fishery sector; ii) Boarding schools may help solve the problem of affordable education; iii) Adopt a cluster approach to healthcare in remote areas; iv) Redress power inequalities between small-scale and commercial fishers, protect and empower small-scale fishers, and ensure their access to natural resources; v) Establish regional labour standards in the fishery sector.

Discussions following this group's presentation made reference to workers standards for the fishery sector which already exist or are under development. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have together developed guidelines for fishery workers. Separately, the ILO is developing standards covering small-scale fishery which are expected to enter into effect during 2017. Furthermore, it was suggested that the ISO 26000 Social Responsibility guidelines be used as a framework to develop private enterprise ethical and social responsibility standards for the fisheries sector, covering fisheries management and the production of fish meal and fish oil.

### ***Participant Discussion Covering All Four Group Reports***

***Comment from Thai participant:*** Who will follow up on what has been discussed here? We should appoint at least one person from each country in the region to act as a focal point so that we can continue to work together, and we should establish clear follow-up activities. During the next five months we should launch pilot projects in each of the five countries in the region, focusing on the effects of government policies and climate

change, so that we can learn from one another and collectively develop policy recommendations.

**Comment from Thai participant:** I have learned from friends in Pakistan that small-scale fishers themselves do not contribute to climate change, but as a sector help to protect the climate. On the contrary, the root causes of climate change – large development projects – originate from the business sector and the macro-economic sector. We therefore need to have a clear position and campaign strongly against these large development projects. We must communicate to the public that dams are dangerous and destructive, and we must actively participate in policy development.

**Comment from Herman Kumara:** It is crucial for us to raise community awareness, not only about the SSF Guidelines, but also about the Tenure Guidelines and other international instruments of relevance. How can we work to help communities learn about and understand these guidelines, and incorporate these tools into the work they do? These guidelines have only just been translated into some local languages, so some friends and colleagues are just seeing these guidelines for the very first time. This is somewhat disturbing, given that a large number of government agencies and civil society organizations have been working on these guidelines since 2008. We face clear challenges in addressing this lack of awareness and knowledge.

**Comment from Shalmali:** We should try to ensure greater discussion at the community level about these various international instruments – the SSF Guidelines, the Tenure Guidelines, the Right to Food Guidelines<sup>5</sup>. All of these instruments have good content and provide clear analyses of issues. They can be applied readily at very local levels, and can be used by communities to help protect their rights.

**Comment from Praulai Nujmon:** We need more systematic gathering of data for the Mekong Region. We need to know how many people are engaged in small-scale fishery, and we need to know more about the fishery resources on which they depend. This information will help us to manage potential impacts. This could involve carrying out resource mapping for the region. We have some data available for the coastal areas of Thailand, but I'm not sure what data is available across the rest of the Mekong Region.

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<sup>5</sup>Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security.

## Session 6: Country Recommendations – Protecting Life and Livelihoods. How can the SSF Guidelines help shape legislation, policies and research of relevance to fisheries and fishing communities?

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### *Country Perspectives*

**Chanthaphone Thammavong (Laos):** Laos is a very small country. Nonetheless, there are more than 700 fisher communities, so fisheries are very important to the people of Laos. Our formal fishery legislation was based upon fishery co-management guidelines. I believe that the SSF Guidelines can be used to further develop fishery management and fishery communities in our country. Through cooperation between the government and non-governmental organizations we can improve our methodologies and tools. The next step should be to conduct consultation workshops with relevant government agencies, reviewing and adapting the SSF Guidelines for application at various levels. Throughout Laos there are many different cultural groups, so the guidelines also have to be adapted to different local contexts.

**Mi Thiri Oo (Myanmar):** The SSF Guidelines are very important in the Myanmar context. In Myanmar our legislation is not so strong. But we can use the SSF Guidelines as a basis for proposing new laws. The guidelines will allow us to send a strong message to our government.

**Dinh Xuan Lap and Nguyen Thi Hong Van (Vietnam):** The SSF Guidelines will be very useful for building the capacity of government agencies, in areas such as benefit sharing, gender equality and climate change impacts. This will be true not just in Vietnam, but across the Mekong Region. In Vietnam we have already carried out some value chain analysis, but this work only covers large-scale fisheries, not small-scale fisheries. We should also carry out an assessment of climate change impacts on small-scale fisheries in the Mekong Delta. But we must remember that fishers in Vietnam are affected not only by climate change, but also the construction of hydropower dams.

**Youk Senglong (Cambodia):** The SSF Guidelines will be very important for developing regional standards and national legislation. But we still face many challenges and threats, such as the existing laws in each country. In Cambodia, for example, civil society organizations have been campaigning for many years for the abolishment of the Commercial Fishing Act. The latest version of this law, the 2006 Commercial Fishing Act, is still in effect. Whilst it has clauses relating to large-, medium- and small-scale fishing activities, there are many omissions. In particular it fails to clarify which fishing activities, fishing gears, mesh sizes etc are permitted when fishing in the lakes.

Given the challenges and threats faced, maybe some countries do not have enough readiness or capacity to implement the SSF Guidelines by themselves. I expect a lot of

help will be needed from communities, partners and networks at the regional and international levels in order to put the guidelines into practice. There are so many issues we need to tackle: livelihood security, access to information, education and empowerment, political voice, upholding access and tenure rights, and so on. Autonomy is very important. Small-scale fishers are the custodians of local resources. Their right to exploit these resources, as a source of food, income and secure livelihoods, must be secured.

Small-scale fishers and commercial fishers are forever coming into conflict, and small-scale fishers almost always end up losing out. Occasionally small-scale fishers and commercial fishers come to an agreement, whereby the commercial fishers provide support to the small-scale fishers. But usually small-scale fishers don't expect to receive support from government agencies. So we need to ensure that small-scale fishers are protected from the impacts of commercial fishing activities, some sort of social protection.

However, small-scale fishers cannot focus solely upon managing fisheries resources. Large development projects and climate change are bringing about very rapid change. Water resources are being contaminated, fish are dying, stream flows and sedimentation rates are changing radically. So we can't talk about development projects and fisheries management in isolation from one another. When we talk about hydropower dam projects, we have to simultaneously talk about their impacts on local fisheries.

But at the same time, we might have to explore alternative livelihood options, with appropriate sources of external funding, in order to reduce the overall pressure on fisheries resources. The more approaches we can apply the better. We need to find leverage points that will help us bring benefits to small-scale fisher communities. In Cambodia and other countries, this should include pressuring prospective candidates and existing policy makers during upcoming elections.

***Kridasakorn Silaraks (Thailand):*** I work with a community of small-scale fishers in the area where the Rasi Salai Dam was constructed many years ago on a tributary of the Mekong River. For the past 20 years we have been working to address depleting fisheries resources and associated community impacts. I am very happy that at this workshop we have been talking about inland fisheries. Thailand's Department of Fisheries is a fairly large department with a significant budget and a range of work plans. But none of these are focused on inland fisheries. It has been interesting to hear the department, which has been around for some 80 years, explain that it has little knowledge of inland fisheries. The department hasn't really identified Thailand's freshwater fisheries, or the small-scale fisher communities who depend upon them.

In the Northeast of Thailand there are some 19 provinces where people's livelihoods revolve around natural resources from rivers and other inland fisheries. ***"It has been very useful to learn about the SSF Guidelines, and that inland fisheries are strongly***

*recognized within them. There are many government projects around the area where I work, including dams and dykes to prevent soil erosion and divert water to the industrial sector. But so far there are no measures which promote and support biodiversity in inland waters.”* It’s good to learn that the SSF Guidelines will be used to highlight such linkages, and bring about change in Thailand’s Department of Fisheries.

Last year a new Fisheries Act was enacted, but within months it had been replaced by the current Fisheries Decree. The Fisheries Act should be revised and reinstated, as the Fisheries Decree fails to ensure some basic protections. Work is urgently needed to review and assess the current status of Thailand’s rivers and inland waters, and a large programme of research should explore management options for Thailand’s inland fisheries and related natural resources. Developing this knowledge would help bring about changes in policies, and end the neglect of inland fisheries in the country.

The SSF Guidelines empower small-scale fisher communities to uphold and protect their rights. The Thai government has signed up to the SSF Guidelines, and so they cannot deny their responsibility. The government must work together with other actors and stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of Thailand’s inland fisheries.

### ***Perspectives and Recommendations from Participants***

***Comment from Vietnamese participant:*** Based on what we have discussed during this workshop, we believe that applying the SSF Guidelines in our province, which is right at the very end of the Mekong River, should improve small-scale fishery a lot. We can use the SSF Guidelines as a basis for developing our own laws and regulations. Small-scale fisheries are particularly sensitive to environmental changes, and most small-scale fisher communities are very poor. Therefore, governments must make special efforts to protect the rights of small-scale fishers. We already have specific action plans based on existing government policies, and we will continue to further develop inland fisheries in our province.

Using our own existing resources, we can conduct awareness raising activities with local communities. We can conduct training workshops for field staff, local officials, mass-based organizations and others. We can gather inputs from local people, then consult with local leaders at a higher-level. If we conduct such consultation processes carefully, we will be able to regulate fishing activities in sensitive fisheries areas, and at the same time introduce projects and activities so small-scale fishers have increased incomes and more sustainable livelihoods. We can also target youths, students and local media, providing them with information to improve their knowledge of laws and regulations. We will use the SSF Guidelines to see how we might improve our work in the future.

***Comment from Nipon Munmuangsean (Thailand):*** In river basins like the Mekong River Basin people’s main source of protein is fish, and people also rely upon fresh water from

the river system. So these resources are very valuable. But the present situation is that the small-scale fishers who depend upon these resources for their income and their livelihoods are increasingly being threatened by large development projects, which are attempting to capture water for industrial enterprise and household consumption. These kinds of development projects are already damaging fisheries resources, decreasing fish populations and forcing small-scale fishers to migrate to work outside the fishery sector.

From a human rights perspective, local communities living in the Mekong Region have had their rights violated by big business – those responsible for dam construction and industrial enterprise. The food security of local communities has been negatively impacted – some areas have become so polluted that local people can no longer fish or safely eat fish caught from the river system.

At the Mekong River Commission we have been trying to find solutions to these problems, and ensure we have sufficient resources to meet the needs of local people. But however hard we try, we never really reach local communities. We only have rough estimates about the fishery resources in the Mekong Region, and how local communities make use of them. Ideally, the five or six countries in the region should work together and try to conduct joint studies. For example, at present we cannot clearly assess transborder impacts. Fish are not constrained by national borders, they migrate from country to country. They are a common resource, so we need a common solution. We have to consider the food and livelihood security of small-scale fishers and small-scale farmers.

***Comment from Nguyen Thi Hong Van (Vietnam):*** Cross-sectoral cooperation that encompasses governments, academia and local communities is very important. We need a combination of scientific research and local knowledge to give our findings proper weight and ensure they will be considered by national level decision makers.

On a separate issue, we need to come up with more specific strategies for promoting women's role in small-scale fishery. More than half of those engaged in small-scale fishery are women. We need to very clearly identify, with comprehensive supporting information, how women are contributing to the small-scale fishery sector as a whole. We cannot afford to overlook the important role of women.

***Comment from Naseegh Jaffer:*** A word of caution about advocating alternative livelihoods, particularly in areas where fisheries resources are already overexploited. Advocating alternative livelihoods in such circumstances may play into the hands of industrial enterprise and the private sector, providing them with a rationale for prohibiting people from fishing. The SSF Guidelines clearly indicate that alternative livelihoods should be complementary. So restocking and rehabilitation are important, as is ensuring small-scale fishers continued access and management rights following restocking and rehabilitation.



## Closing Remarks and Votes of Thanks

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**Mi Thiri Oo (Myanmar):** Through this workshop I have learned a tremendous amount from friends and colleagues in the Mekong Region. I have to say that this is a very new experience for me. I work with a youth group in my village, a very small community. I don't represent the whole country of Myanmar, just the small-scale fishers in my village and the surrounding area. But in this context the SSF Guidelines are very important. With the knowledge I have gained through participating in this workshop, I will be able to do a lot more to help the small-scale fishers in my village.

**Hong Van Thuong (Vietnam):** I would like to thank the organizers of this workshop for providing us with the opportunity to gain an overview of the issues faced by small-scale fishers in the Mekong Region. Learning from one another in this way is crucial to helping us find solutions. Exactly how the SSF Guidelines are implemented will depend upon the different local contexts in each country, and so each country will need to have their own unique action plan. To ensure maximum impact, we need to promote and facilitate cooperation and collaboration across sectors and between levels. Furthermore, to be able to make informed decision about the management of small-scale fisheries, we need to conduct research on stream flows, water levels and water quality throughout the Mekong Region.

**Long Sochet (Cambodia):** A big thank you to the organizers for arranging this very useful workshop, which has been very beneficial for the participants from Cambodia. We have learned many things that we can directly put into practice back in our country. We will share our new knowledge with our friends and colleagues back home, so that our small-scale fisher communities will have new methods to help improve their quality of life. During the workshop we have also had the opportunity to exchange and discuss about the problems we face, and this will help us to advocate and campaign together in the future. The connections and relationships that have been established and strengthened through this workshop will be sustained going forward – we will keep working together to improving the conditions for small-scale fishers in each of our countries.

**Chainuek Phakhounthong (Laos):** I am honoured and very happy that I was able to participate in this workshop. This kind of forum is very important in helping us develop strategies and approaches to improve the lives and livelihoods of small-scale fishers. I very much hope we will be able to conduct workshops like this again in the future, so that we can continue to share our experiences and provide updates about our changing situations. We have heard about many problems and issues during this workshop, but we have also shared knowledge and discussed solutions, things that we can use to improve our work. I hope to be able to continue to engage in the process with you all, as we work to ensure the future sustainability of our small-scale fisheries.

***Suchat Kruekearnpet (Thailand):*** During the past two rather intense days, we have gained a lot of new information and made a lot of new friends. This is very empowering. ***“We share a Mekong identity in the region. We used to have a happy life and abundant resources. This river is a common identity that the ASEAN community needs to protect.”***

We have seen that there are some common challenges – we are being excluded from accessing the river, primarily because of neoliberal policies which dominate the policies of our national governments, transforming natural resources into commodities to be exploited for profit. Depending upon our particular situation, some of us will have more space for political participation than others. But whatever our situation, we should all make use of the SSF Guidelines as a tool to ensure people’s participation at all levels. At present I am an advisor to Mekong Community Council for Thailand’s Seven Northeastern Provinces. I will take all that I have learned from this workshop and discuss it with the committee, so that we can come up with some relevant policy recommendations. If I were prime minister, if I had the power, I would incorporate the SSF Guidelines into national legislation. I would ratify relevant United Nations conventions, and I would invite China to do the same.

I would like to thank everyone who has been working to develop the SSF Guidelines these past eight years. Now we have to ensure they are applied and implemented in our countries. We must advocate for policy change and campaign for concrete implementation. ***“The answer lies within the community.”*** If we are united with a common purpose from community to community, we will be able to continue the struggle. As we say in our local language: ***“If a bird has no friends then it cannot fly very high.”*** We have to keep talking about these issues, and we have to actively engage the younger generation, in order to keep the struggle alive.

***Naseegh Jaffer*** closed the workshop by reflecting upon the above comments, and recalling the moment that the SSF Guidelines were dramatically approved:

***“It was not easy, and we weren’t at all sure it would happen - but it did. We are grateful and we are thankful. It is a victory for small-scale fishers across the world. We hope that the Mekong Region’s small-scale fishers will keep up this work, and stay connected to continue building camaraderie.”***

## Annexes

### Annex 1: Workshop Participants

PARTICIPANTS FROM 5 MEKONG COUNTRIES				
No.	Name	Country	Sex	Organization – Position
1	Ms. Nguyen Thi Hong Van	Vietnam	F	Center for Water Resources Conservation and Development – National Coordinator
2	Ms. Trinh Thi Khanh Chi	Vietnam	F	Research Center for Resources and Rural Development (RECERD) – Gender & Development Specialist
3	Mrs. Cao Le Quyen	Vietnam	F	Vietnam Institute of Fisheries Economics and Planning (VIFEP) – Deputy Director
4	Ms. Cao Thi Thien	Vietnam	F	Hoangphong Commune Women’s Union – Chairwoman
5	Mr. Dinh Xuan Lap	Vietnam	M	International Collaboration Centre for Aquaculture and Fisheries Sustainability (ICAFIS), Vietnam Fisheries Society (VINAFIA) – Deputy Director
6	Mr. Nguyen Hai Nam	Vietnam	M	Nguloc Commune Fisheries Community – Member
7	Mr. Ly Duc Tai	Vietnam	M	Center for Water Resources Conservation and Development – Project Coordinator
8	Mr. Hong Van Thuong	Vietnam	M	Bac Lieu Aquaculture Association – Member
9	Mr. Ha Binh	Vietnam	M	Ngu My Thanh Fishery Association – Member
10	Mr. Tran Van Minh	Vietnam	M	Ngu My Thanh Fishery Association – Member
11	Mr. Phuvong Phetphayvanh	Laos	M	Siphandone Islands, Southern Laos – Independent Filmmaker
12	Mr. Nouxay Kommasith	Laos	M	Tholatu Island Village, Khong District, Champasak Province
13	Mr. Chanthaphone Thammavong	Laos	M	FISHBIO, Laos Fishery Department of – Member
14	Mr. Chainuek Phakhounthong	Laos	M	Fishery Section, Bolikhamxay Province – Deputy Director
15	Ms. Seng Kimsreu	Cambodia	F	Community Capacity Development (CCD) – Program Manager
16	Ms. An Soheat	Cambodia	F	Kho Chiveang Community-based Organization – Chief
17	Ms. Ros Chhorvivorn	Cambodia	F	Village Support Group (VSG), Battambang – Executive Director
18	Ms. Vorn Hory	Cambodia	F	Kampong Phluk Coalition of

				Community-based Organizations – Committee Member
19	Ms. Norng Lim Heang	Cambodia	F	Koh Kong Province
20	Mr. Youk Senglong	Cambodia	M	Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) – Deputy Executive Director
21	Mr. Lorm Sinath	Cambodia	M	Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) – Project Officer
22	Mr. Prak Leang Hour	Cambodia	M	Kampong Chang Fisheries Administration – Branch Manager
23	Mr. Eang Eangnaim	Cambodia	M	Prek Koy Village/Commune
24	Mr. Long Sochet	Cambodia	M	Coalition of Cambodia Fishers (CCF) – Chief
25	Mr. Sok Sokhom	Cambodia	M	Cambodia National Research Organization (CNRO) – Branch Manager
26	Mr. Kridsakorn Silaraks	Thailand	M	Assembly of the Poor, Pakmun Dam Area – Advisor
27	Mr. Pariwat Pinthong	Thailand	M	Assembly of the Poor, Pakmun Dam Area – Advisor
28	Mr. Udom Sangpong	Thailand	M	Assembly of the Poor, Pakmun Dam Area – Advisor
29	Mr. Suchat Kruekearnpet	Thailand	M	Mekong Community Council for Thailand’s Seven Northeastern Provinces – Advisor
30	Mr. Nipon Munmuangsean	Thailand	M	Promotion of Sustainable Basin Development Association – President
31	Mr. Suriya Kotamee	Thailand	M	Songkram Basin Working Group – Leader
32	Mr. Sama-Ae Jehmudor	Thailand	M	Federation of Thai Fisher Folk Association (FFF) – Chair
33	Mr. Alee Charnnam	Thailand	M	Federation of Thai Fisher Folk Association (FFF)
34	Mr. Aren Prakong	Thailand	M	Federation of Thai Fisher Folk Association (FFF)
35	Mr. Sawang Khun-Art	Thailand	F	Federation of Thai Fisher Folk Association (FFF)
36	Ms. Benchawan Pengnoot	Thailand	F	Thai Sea Watch Association – Coordinator
37	Mr. Winai Sakorn	Thailand	M	Eastern Thailand Small-scale Fisher Network
38	Mr. Jinda Thammachat	Thailand	M	Eastern Thailand Small-scale Fisher Network
39	Ms. Mattana Boonnak	Thailand	F	Eastern Thailand Small-scale Fisher Network
40	Ms. Mi Ni Mar Oo	Myanmar	F	Andin Youth Organization, Ye Township, Mon State
41	Ms. Mi Diri Oo	Myanmar	F	Andin Youth Organization, Ye Township, Mon State

RESOURCE PERSONS / SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS				
No.	Name	Country	Sex	Organization – Position
1	Ms. Benedetta Merlo	Italy	F	Croceviaterra
2	Ms. Zoe Wilen Brent	Netherlands	F	Transnational Institute
3	Mr. Muhammad Ali Shah	Pakistan	M	WFFP Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum – Co-chair
4	Mr. Mogamad Naseegh Jaffer	South Africa	M	World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) – Secretary General
5	Mr. Herman Kumara Wijethunge	Sri Lanka	M	National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO)
6	Mr. Sebastian Mathew	India	M	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)
7	Mr. Mads Christian Barbesgaard	Denmark	M	Africa Contact
8	Mr. Carsten Pedersen	South Africa	M	WFFP International Secretariat, Masifundise
9	Assoc Prof Kangwal Chantatachot	Thailand	F	Thai Department of Fisheries – Fisheries Advisor
10	Dr. Vili A. Fuavao	Regional	M	FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific – Deputy Regional Representative
11	Mrs. Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk	Thailand	F	Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) – Director
12	Ms. Shalmali Guttal	Regional	F	Focus on the Global South (Focus) – Director
13	Ms. Premrudee Daoreuang	Thailand	F	Project SEVANA Southeast Asia – Human Rights Advocate
14	Mr. Magnus Torell	Regional	M	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)
15	Ms. Lena Westlund	Regional	F	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
16	Ms. Clara Park	Regional	F	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
17	Dr. Praulai Nujmon	Thailand	F	Thai Department of Fisheries – Senior Expert on Marine Fisheries

<b>SUPPORT STAFF / ORGANISING TEAM</b>				
<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Organization – Position</b>
1	Ms. Wipaphan Korkietkachorn	Thailand	F	Thai Translator
2	Ms. Bencharat Sae-Chua	Thailand	F	Thai Translator
3	Ms. Khuyeh Luu	Vietnam	F	Vietnamese Translator
4	Ms. Nguyen Thi Thu Ha	Vietnam	F	Vietnamese Translator
5	Mr. Vannaren Neang	Cambodia	M	Cambodian Translator
6	Mr. Thong Neang	Cambodia	M	Cambodian Translator
7	Mr. Prakart Reungdit	Thailand	M	Technician
8	Mr. Preecha Amornmannant	Thailand	M	SDF Secretariat
9	Mr. Kittikorn Kerdkul	Thailand	M	SDF Secretariat
10	Ms. Ratchaneewan Wannachat	Thailand	F	SDF Secretariat
11	Ms. Kesinee Kwaenjaroen	Thailand	F	SDF Secretariat
12	Ms. Waraporn Ketjinda	Thailand	F	SDF Secretariat
13	Ms. Varanthorn Kaewtankam	Thailand	F	SDF Secretariat
14	Ms. Sriyanakarn Chuaywong	Thailand	F	SDF Secretariat
15	Ms. Ramita Suchanok	Thailand	F	SDF Secretariat
16	Ms. Somchai Singso	Thailand	F	Media and Information Technician

Total of 74 persons: 41 participants from 5 Mekong countries, 17 participants from supporting organisations including resource persons, and 16 support staff from the organising team.

## Annex 2: Workshop Programme

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### Workshop on ‘Securing Small Scale Fisheries in the Mekong Region: SSF Guidelines in Action’

Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016

Sampran Riverside, Pet Kasem Road, Sampran District,  
Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand

#### Day 1: Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2016

08:30-09:00	<b>Registration</b>
09:00-09:15	<p><b>Welcome Statements</b></p> <p><i>Mr. Naseegh Jaffer</i>, Secretary General, World Federation of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)</p> <p><i>Mr. Sama-ae Jehmudor</i>, Secretary General, National Federation of Thai Fisher-folk Association (FFF)</p>
09:15-10:00	<p><b>Opening Addresses</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Mr. Naseegh Jaffer, Secretary General, World Federation of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)</i></p> <p><b>Assoc. Prof. Kangwal Chantatachot</b>, Fisheries Advisor, Thai Department of Fisheries</p> <p><b>Dr. Vili A. Fuavao</b>, Deputy Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific</p> <p><i>Workshop Overview: Mrs. Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk, Director, Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF)</i></p>
10:00-11:15	<p><b>Session 1: Presentations from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Mr. Herman Kumara, Special Invitee, World Federation of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)</i></p>

**Cambodia: Mr. Youk Senglong**, Deputy Executive Director, Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT)

**Laos: Mr. Phouvong Phetphayvanh**, Independent Filmmaker, Siphandone Islands

**Thailand: Mr. Sama-ae Jehmudor**, Secretary General, National Federation of Thai Fisher-folk Association (FFF)

**Thailand: Mr. Nipon Munmuangsean**, President, Promotion of Sustainable Basin Development Association

**Vietnam: Mr. Dinh Xuan Lap**, Deputy Director, International Collaboration Centre for Aquaculture and Fisheries Sustainability (ICAFIS)

**Myanmar: Ms. Mi Thiri Oo**, Andin Youth Organization, Andin Village, Ye Township, Mon State

**11:15-13:00**

**Session 2: Impacts of Trade and Investment, Dam Construction and Hydropower and IUU on Small-scale Fishers in the Mekong Region**

**Ms. Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South:** Trade and Investment Trends in the Mekong Region

**Ms. Premrudee Doaruang, Project SEVANA Southeast Asia:** The Situation in the 3S Mekong Basin

**Mr. Magnus Torell, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC):** Climate Variability, IUU Fishing and Associated Impacts

**13:00-14:00**

**Lunch**

**14:00-15:00**

**Session 3: Overview of SSF Guidelines and Related Instruments**

*Session Moderator: Mr. Naseegh Jaffer, Secretary General, World Federation of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)*

**Ms. Lena Westlund, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO):** An Introduction to the SSF Guidelines

**Mr. Sebastian Matthew, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF):** The Guiding Principles of the SSF Guidelines and



	Human Rights Law  <b>Ms. Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South:</b> An Introduction to the Tenure Guidelines
<b>15:00-15:20</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>15:20-17:00</b>	<p><b>Session 4: SSF Guidelines in Action</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Ms. Zoe Wilen Brent, Transnational Institute (TNI)</i></p> <p><b>Ms. Clara Park, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO):</b> A Gender Perspective on the SSF Guidelines</p> <p><b>Dr. Praulai Nujmon, Thai Department of Fisheries:</b> Social Development, Employment and Decent Work for Sustainable Fisheries</p> <p><b>Mr. Herman Kumara, Special Invitee, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP):</b> Tenure Rights to Land and Water Bodies, Livelihood Security and Sustainably Fisheries</p> <p><b>Ms. Lena Westlund and Ms. Florence Poulain, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO):</b> Natural and Human-Induced Disasters and Climate Change in the Context of the SSF Guidelines</p> <p><b>Naseegh Jaffer, World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP):</b> Ensuring an Enabling Environment and Supporting Implementation</p>

### Day 2: Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016

<b>09:00-12:00</b>	<p><b>Session 5: Small Group Discussions on SSF Guidelines Implementation (Discussions in Groups)</b></p> <p><i>Guidance notes were provided to each small group as a framework for their discussions. They can be found at the end of the workshop schedule.</i></p> <p><b>Group A: Value Chain, Post-Harvest and Trade – Empowering the Role of Women in Small-scale Fishing Communities</b> Group Facilitator: Ms. Zoe Wilen Brent, Transnational Institute (TNI)</p> <p><b>Group B: Tenure Rights to Land and Water Bodies, Livelihoods and Responsible/Sustainable Fisheries</b> Group Facilitator: Mr. Herman Kumara, Special Invitee, World Forum of</p>
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	<p>Fisher Peoples (WFFP)</p> <p><b>Group C: Natural and Human-induced Disasters and Climate Change</b> Group Facilitator: Ms. Lena Westlund, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)</p> <p><b>Group D: Social Development, Employment and Decent Work for Sustainable Fisheries</b> Group Facilitator: Dr. Praulai Nujmon, Thai Department of Fisheries</p>
<b>12:00-13:30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>13:30-14:30</b>	<p><b>Session 5: Small Group Discussions on SSF Guidelines Implementation (Reports in Plenary)</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Ms. Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South</i></p> <p><b>Group A: Value Chain, Post-Harvest and Trade – Empowering the Role of Women in Small-scale Fishing Communities</b></p> <p><b>Group B: Tenure Rights to Land and Water Bodies, Livelihoods and Responsible/Sustainable Fisheries</b></p> <p><b>Group C: Natural and Human-induced Disasters and Climate Change</b></p> <p><b>Group D: Social Development, Employment and Decent Work for Sustainable Fisheries</b></p>
<b>14:30-16:00</b>	<p><b>Session 6: Country Recommendations – Protecting Life and Livelihoods. How can the SSF Guidelines help shape legislation, policies and research of relevance to fisheries and fishing communities?</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Mr. Muhammad Ali Shah, Co-chair, WFFP Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum</i></p> <p><b>Laos: Chanthaphone Thammavong</b>, FISHBIO, Laos Department of Fisheries</p> <p><b>Myanmar: Mi Thiri Oo</b>, Andin Youth Organization</p> <p><b>Vietnam: Dinh Xuan Lap and Nguyen Thi Hong Van</b>, International Collaboration Centre for Aquaculture and Fisheries Sustainability (ICAFIS) and Center for Water Resources Conservation and</p>

	<p>Development</p> <p><b>Cambodia: Youk Senglong</b>, Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT)</p> <p><b>Thailand: Kridasakorn Silaraks</b>, Assembly of the Poor, Pakmun Dam Area</p>
<b>16:00-16:15</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>16:15-17:00</b>	<p><b>Synthesis / Adoption of Riverside Statement</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Mr. Sebastian Matthew, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)</i></p>
<b>17:00-18:00</b>	<p><b>Closing Remarks and Votes of Thanks</b></p> <p><i>Session Moderator: Mrs. Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk, Director, Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF)</i></p> <p><b>Myanmar: Mi Thiri Oo</b>, Andin Youth Organization</p> <p><b>Vietnam: Hong Van Thuong</b>, Bac Lieu Aquaculture Association</p> <p><b>Cambodia: Long Sochet</b>, Coalition of Cambodia Fishers (CCF)</p> <p><b>Laos: Chainuek Phakhounthong</b>, Fishery Section, Bolikhamxay Province</p> <p><b>Thailand: Suchat Kruekearnpet</b>, Mekong Community Council for Thailand's Seven Northeastern Provinces</p> <p><i>Final Reflections and Formal Closing: Mr. Naseegh Jaffer, Secretary General, World Federation of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)</i></p>

### Guidance Notes Provided for Small Group Discussions

<b>Group A</b>	<p><b>Group A: Value Chain, Post-Harvest and Trade – Empowering the Role of Women in Small-scale Fishing Communities</b></p> <p>How is the participation of women in the harvesting, post-harvest and distribution stages of the value chain protected, thereby enhancing their income, livelihood security and well being (e.g. legislation, policies and measures to: pay living wages; ensure access to savings, credit and insurance schemes; guarantee better working conditions; provide social</p>
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protection; ensure provision of amenities and services, etc)?

What institutional mechanisms are in place (e.g. cooperatives and professional organizations), designed especially to protect the rights of women in harvest, post-harvest and trade (inland and marine), and to enhance their participation in decision-making processes?

How could women's participation in cooperatives and professional organizations as both members and leaders be improved?

Are there effective measures in place to ensure fair distribution of benefits from both domestic and international fish trade along the small-scale fisheries value chain?

#### Group B

#### **Group B: Tenure Rights to Land and Water Bodies, Livelihoods and Responsible/Sustainable Fisheries**

Do inland and marine small-scale fishing communities (including both men and women) have secure tenure rights to land and fisheries, including for habitation, fish processing and marketing?

How can securing the tenure rights of small-scale fishing communities contribute towards the equitable allocation of fisheries resources, resolution of internal and area-based conflicts, tackling IUU fishing and combating over-capitalization, thereby helping to ensure the responsible and sustainable use of aquatic biodiversity?

#### Group C

#### **Group C: Natural and Human-induced Disasters and Climate Change**

What are the implications of natural disasters (e.g. tsunamis, cyclones, floods, etc), human-induced disasters (e.g. pollution, coastal erosion, destruction of coastal habitats, etc.) and climate change with regards to food security, adequate nutrition, post-harvest and trade (e.g. changes in fish species and abundance, fish quality and shelf-life), housing and livelihoods?

What are the critical human rights issues when considering disaster risk reduction and management (e.g. non-discrimination, compensation, etc)?

Are there policies and plans, together with monitoring / early warning systems, in place to address natural and human-induced disasters in the fisheries sector at various levels? Do they include a human rights perspective?

Are there local/sub-national/national strategies for adaptation and mitigation in relation to climate change and small-scale fisheries?

**Group D**

**Group D: Social Development, Employment and Decent Work for Sustainable Fisheries**

How can decent work for all small-scale fisheries workers (including both men and women) be promoted in the formal and informal fishery sectors?

*Note: Decent work in this context would include all rights associated with employment, working conditions, social security and social dialogue throughout the entire fisheries value chain and covering all workers, including inter-state migrants.*

What is the adequacy of measures to ensure access of fishing communities (including both men and women) to social development and, in this context, what are the gaps that need to be addressed?

*Note: Social development includes the provision of, and access to, food security, adequate nutrition, health, education, literacy, digital inclusion, housing, basic sanitation, potable water and sources of energy*





# Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Mekong Region: SSF Guidelines in Action

**Proceedings of the Mekong Region Workshop on the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication**

**30 April – 1 May 2016**

**Nakhon Pathom, Thailand**

This regional workshop was organized to discuss implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) in ASEAN countries and in particular in the five countries of the Mekong River Basin. In direct reference to paragraph 13.6 of the SSF Guidelines, which promotes the development of a regional plan of action for their implementation, the workshop was also aimed at beginning the process of developing a draft Mekong Regional Plan of Action to support their implementation in the region. The workshop focused primarily on the inland small-scale fisheries sector in the Mekong Region.

The workshop was organized in collaboration between International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), Centro Internazionale Crocevia (CIC), International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), Transnational Institute (TNI), National Federation of Thai Fisherfolk Association, Focus on the Global South and Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF).

A total of 74 people participated in the workshop. The majority of these, 41 participants altogether, were civil society, local authority and government agency representatives working with small-scale fishers and fishworkers in the Mekong Region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam). A further 17 participants were from regional and international organizations working to support small-scale fishers and improve fisheries policies.

As well as these proceedings, a companion publication containing participant presentations from the workshop is also available.

Financially supported by:



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Organization of the  
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