

Too Big to Ignore

Powerful messages emerged from the pilot event of the Regional Small-Scale Fisheries Governance Training Course for Africa

The quote below is a sobering reflection. "...821 million people across the world—one in nine—still go to bed on an empty stomach each night. Even more—one in three—suffer from some form of malnutrition. Eradicating hunger and malnutrition is one of the great challenges of our time." - UN World Food Programme

They epitomize one of the key motivations in the development and implementation of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). One that envisions healthy and thriving small-scale fisher communities, in place of the vulnerable and challenging conditions they currently face. The SSF Guidelines are embedded within the human rights-based approach that guide its principles toward equitable, socially just, economically viable and environmentally sustainable reform of small-scale fisheries.

economic losses of up to US\$100 billion every year.

Exacerbating the challenges for fisheries governance in Africa are its diverse political, social and institutional landscapes—complicated by political instability, civil war, inequality, poverty and hierarchical top-down approaches to governance. Yet, the past two decades have seen immense and commendable strides toward an increased recognition in advancing approaches to human rights, sustainable development, and a move toward participatory modes of governance for small-scale fisheries. Several countries have begun to develop and implement new and participatory approaches, policies and instruments.

It is in recognition of these challenges that the Regional Small-Scale Fisheries Governance Training Course for Africa was developed by the International Ocean Institute - Southern Africa (IOI-SA). Designed to improve the understanding of good governance approaches and encouraging the implementation of these approaches in policy and practice, the course aimed to address the unique challenges of the small-scale fisheries sector in Africa. This would, in turn, contribute to creating an enabling environment for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

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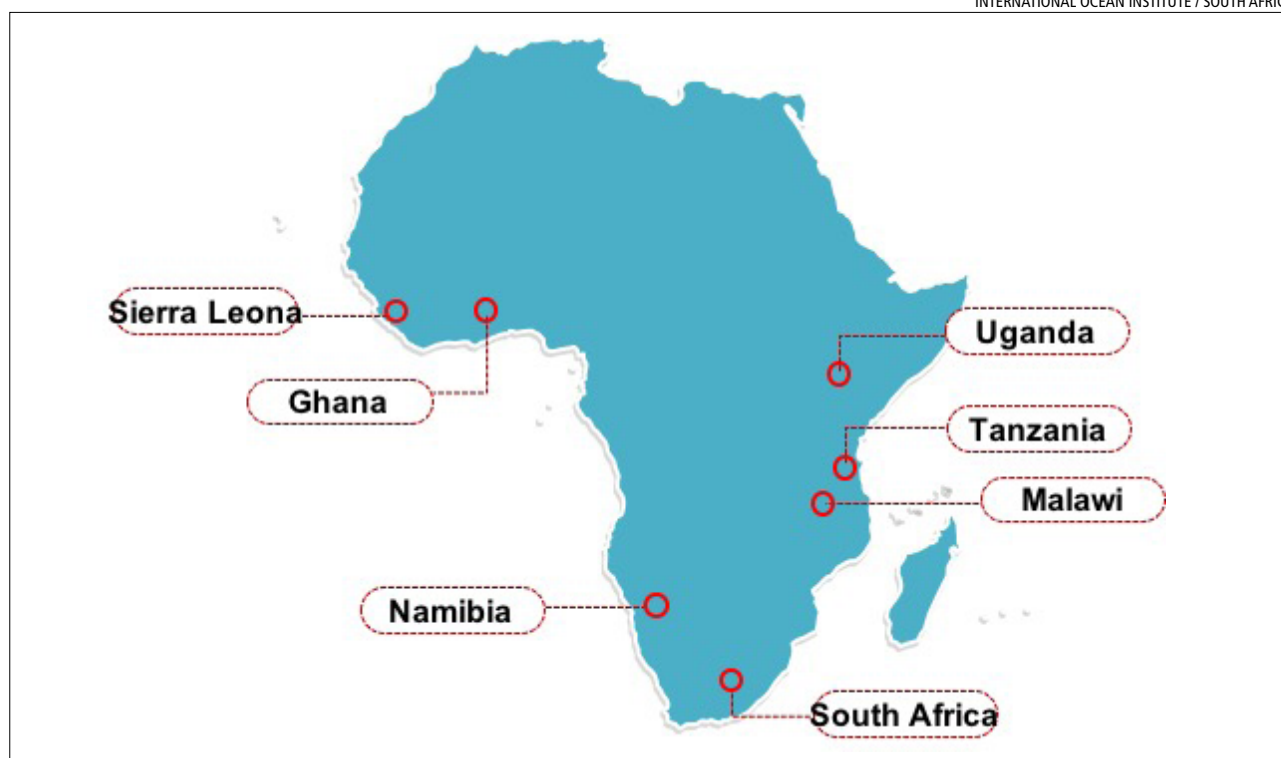
What has governance got to do with it?

Small-scale fisheries have been the pillar of coastal communities in Africa for thousands of years. Today, in a continent that experiences widespread economic strife, small-scale fishing activities offer a lifeline to food security and socioeconomic development of its people. Yet, estimates indicate that poor fisheries governance in Africa can cause

SSF Guidelines in Africa

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to necessitate the prioritization of our safety and those of others, in February 2021, a collaboration between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the IOI-SA brought together seven African countries to participate in a week-long virtual pilot training course.

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FAO regional office consultants from Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. These countries were nominated because they are already working with FAO on small-scale fisheries projects toward implementation of the SSF Guidelines in their national contexts. In addition, regional fisher representatives, regional bodies and non-governmental organizations from Western, Eastern and Southern Africa were also invited.

Adapting to the virtual world

While the IOI-SA had originally developed an in-contact training event to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, the pandemic necessitated a switch to a virtual event. The virtual environment poses unique challenges, but also unique opportunities, one of which was hosting expert speakers from the continent and abroad. In continuing to adapt to the new norms, the 21 training participants embarked on a virtual journey together over the period of five full days. The packed training schedule saw them discussing a number of issues pertinent to small-scale fisheries governance in Africa. Content was presented by

experts whose regional experiences and commitment to enhancing small-scale fisheries in Africa were displayed through their dynamic talks and sessions.

Each day of the training event focused on a specific training module.

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Day 1 was about getting to know the participants and setting the African scene with regard to the SSF Guidelines. This was done through introductory talks by the FAO, the World Fisher Forum (WFF) and the participants themselves, who gave an interesting snapshot of their national SSF profile. A dynamic talk on SSF as complex socio-ecological systems by the University of Cape Town introduced many of the participants, for the first time, to the term of 'wicked problems'. This certainly became one of the buzzwords for the rest of the

training! Once it is understood, it really encapsulates the complex challenges of small-scale fisheries.

Day 2 kicked off with the Module 2 on Governance. The organizers were honoured to have AUDA-NEPAD as a guest speaker on the international and regional frameworks. This backdrop set the scene for framing SSF governance and the various instruments that guide and complement the development of the SSF Guidelines.

However, it was the session on Responsible Governance of Tenure, by the Legal Resources Centre of South Africa, that had participants glued to their screens. Wilmien Wicomb delved into the legal status of small-scale fishers, their human rights, tenure rights and legal rights. This session forced participants to critically reflect on their national constitutions, to analyze the extent to which they reflect human rights, and which policies they should look toward or develop in protecting the rights of fishers. The theme of fisher rights as human rights came through strongly in each module.

In the afternoon, speakers from the University of Cape Town and the

Guidelines. Through the use of ICT, it addresses issues from the incorporation of local knowledge, empowerment in the value chain, gender equity, disaster risk and climate change, and social development. This brought us to Module 4: Understanding small-scale fisheries as complex socio-ecological systems.

The virtual field trip was novel to Abalobi and IOI-SA. The participants were not sure of what to expect. They did their best to replicate an on-location field trip by having interactive sessions, photos and videos. Is there any virtual setting that can take the place of actually being in the field, meeting the fishers, immersed in the activities and the fresh air? Probably not, but everybody was making the best of the difficult circumstances.

Day 3 also encompassed dedicated sessions on two of the key thematic areas of the SSF Guidelines: gender and social development. The talks were delivered by the University of Cape Town and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

Towards implementing SSF Guidelines in Africa

In the final days of the training, attention shifted toward Modules 5-6, which consider the various institutions and role players involved in implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It is important in understanding which agencies (and their capacities) play a role in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. What is the specific role of States or fisher organizations in the implementation process? The modules also aimed to reflect on the barriers and opportunities to implementing the SSF Guidelines in the national context—with a view to the way forward.

A session was presented by the FAO and Duke University on the importance of data and information on SSF—specifically highlighting the Hidden Harvest study—and the important role this type of information can play in informing the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. With the AU-IBAR and the University of the Western Cape, the module also discussed Blue Economic Strategies at length. The focus here was in relation to social justice and the concept of Blue Justice. This was another session that forced participants to

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University of the Western Cape took the participants deeper into Module 3: Concepts, principles and approaches for small-scale fisheries governance. It focused on participatory approaches and understanding legal pluralism or multiple levels of governance that involve state and customary systems.

Governance in action—and armchair travel

Midway through the training event on Day 3, the participants donned their sunhats and sunscreen as they were (virtually!) whisked off to a virtual field trip to the Southern and Western Cape of South Africa by the Abalobi ICT4Fisheries team. The Abalobi programme encapsulates many of the best practices set down in the SSF



Virtual field trip. In continuing to adapt to the new norms, the 21 training participants embarked on a virtual journey together over five full days to the Southern and Western Cape of South Africa, in a trip organized by the Abalobi ICT4Fisheries team

critically evaluate the role of small-scale fisheries in policies and instruments.

The training event concluded with a focus on tools and processes for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Participants were involved in the development of a group exercise centred on the draft NPOA-SSF toolkit developed by the FAO. The toolkit aims to assist countries in implementing the SSF Guidelines in the national context by providing a template for a comprehensive implementation plan. The objective of the exercise was to familiarize participants with the process of developing a NPOA-SSF toolkit.


Champions of change

Though the training was intense, the participants rose to the occasion. They showed great commitment and appreciation of the content. They were enthusiastic, engaged and motivated. One of the highlights came towards the end of the training event. Participants were discussing the challenges and opportunities in implementing the SSF Guidelines in their respective countries. The challenges were coming thick and fast! There was a range of

very real issues such as lack of political will, lack of funding, lack of awareness, lack policy harmonization, the need to capacitate fisher organizations, and the need for institutional collaboration and communication.

Too big to ignore

Yet, when participants spoke of the opportunities, the possibilities that the implementation of the SSF Guidelines presented were so overwhelmingly empowering that all the challenges seemed to disappear! The participants spoke about achieving gender equity, about the empowerment of women, access to markets and what this would mean, equality, recognition, food security and nutrition. The participants spoke about how they felt motivated and empowered to effect change that could improve the lives of vulnerable people and marginalized groups. This was the training's takeaway message:

They have fed the world. They have come from a place where they have been ignored. And now, for the first time, the world is looking in their direction. They are too big to ignore... Small-scale fishers' lives matter! 

For more



International Ocean Institute – Southern Africa (IOI-SA).

<http://ioisa.org/>

UN World Food Programme

<https://www.wfp.org/>