

Recognizing Green Leaders

Across the world, small-scale fishers have set examples of leadership to meet the environmental challenge. Now, a university initiative documents such exemplary efforts

Small-scale fishers (SSF) have a long history of environmental stewardship and conservation of their local environments, safeguarding natural resources and local livelihoods. Such efforts need greater recognition and support. It is in pursuit of this goal that the SSF-Stewardship initiative is engaging with small-scale fisher organizations and fishing communities around the world, highlighting their experiences in environmental conservation and stewardship.

understand the barriers they face and the good practices that promise success. SSF-Stewardship identifies the kinds of support they need.

The stewardship experiences of small-scale fishers

With a high level of engagement by small-scale fishing communities and organizations, the initiative has assembled a wide range of stewardship experiences. It covers several kinds of activities, carried out across varied political, economic and social contexts, and in a broad range of fisheries and ecosystems.

Some examples of the locations and stewardship activities are Greece, where SSF are promoting sustainable harvests of endangered crayfish in an artificial reservoir; Russia, where Indigenous Peoples are managing river and lake fisheries in the North; and Bolivia, where Indigenous fishing communities are improving monitoring and reduction of bycatch in the catfish fishery of the Upper Amazon. In Ghana, Costa Rica and India, SSF are harvesting crabs, oysters and small fishes sustainably, all the while conserving mangrove forests. In Indonesia, SSF actions are promoting the sustainability of octopus fisheries. Fishing communities are also fighting external threats, for example in South Africa, where SSF are protecting nearshore fisheries from the impacts of industrial activities.

Many of these examples highlight the role of traditional knowledge in the practices of SSF communities. In Hawai'i, United States, one case study links traditional knowledge and science in community-managed subsistence fisheries. Community-based monitoring of marine protected areas in Turkey is a positive example of

By bringing together the voices of small-scale fishers and fishing organizations, the project is seeking to support their work in protecting and caring for the natural environment, fishery resources and fishing livelihoods

Saint Mary's University in Canada is leading the initiative, along with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and global fisher organizations. It connects with the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

An interactive global map on the SSF-Stewardship website provides a showcase for the many varied experiences and allows us to see how small-scale fisher organizations and fishing communities are working on similar and different challenges, with many shared interests and concerns, and common and unique experiences. By bringing together the voices of small-scale fishers and fishing organizations, the project is seeking to support their work in protecting and caring for the natural environment, fishery resources and fishing livelihoods. It tries to

This article is by Alison Macnaughton (aemacnaughton@gmail.com), Shannon Hicks (Shannon.Hicks@dal.ca) and Anthony Charles (tony.charles@smu.ca), members of the SSF-Stewardship team at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Canada.

A MACNAUGHTON



A fishing boat on the banks of the Ichilo River, Bolivia. Indigenous communities are improving monitoring and reduction of bycatch in the catfish fishery of the Upper Amazon

29

participatory conservation measures. In more examples of participatory management, small producer cooperatives in the Galapagos sustainably manage their fisheries, while in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, SSF participate in building governance capacity.

Multiple challenges limit the efforts to conserve and manage ecosystems that sustain fisheries. At the same time, there are common elements in these varied situations.

For the most part, stewardship is expressed as a perspective and a practice, a way of engaging with the natural world and the local environment. Most fishing communities and organizations sharing experiences on SSF-Stewardship are engaged in long-standing work, which involves several types of activities that have evolved over time. Some have positive, supportive relationships with the government. Others engage

the government, and advocate for recognition of their rights as fishers, together with their right to participate in conserving the resources that their livelihoods depend on.

For the most part, stewardship is expressed as a perspective and a practice, a way of engaging with the natural world and the local environment

For example, on behalf of the Federation of Thai Fisherfolk Associations, Sama ae Jahmudor shared some of their experiences at the recent SSF-Stewardship webinar: “Our life and survival depend very much on an abundant and rich biodiversity ecosystem.... Small-scale fishers see it as our responsibility to protect and conserve coastal resources in our community as well as networking among

coastal communities to collectively look after coastal resources. We fight for stopping use of destructive fishing gear and to collect mainly mature marine resources. Our fisherfolk movement advocates to supermarkets to stop selling small fishery products, and advocates to consumers to buy quality fish products.”

Similar to Jeohmodor’s experience, several initiatives involve a combination of strategies. This sometimes starts with physical stewardship—protecting and restoring spaces in freshwater and marine environments, then adding new activities in time.

Oyster harvesters from the Densu Estuary in Ghana shared their story at the recent SSF-Stewardship webinar. Lydia Sasu of Development Action Association said when fishers recognized the local mangroves were over-harvested and depleted and the catch was lower, they started to work on mangrove restoration. Subsequently, they supplemented their efforts by installing natural barriers to protect the riverbank from erosion. Most

Many SSF representatives related their efforts to address multiple ongoing challenges that are often compounded by impacts of climate change and, more recently, by the COVID-19 pandemic

recently, they secured the lease for the oyster harvesting area, implementing a seasonal closure to protect the health of the fishery. Frances Agbeshie, who is active in the initiative and has been collecting oysters since he was a child, said, “I have learned how to plant mangroves, and how to take care of oysters and put them in the river to rebuild it (by protecting the banks). Now we have children, so we are looking at sustainability, making sure we have a supply of oysters that will continue for future generations and remain available.”

Among the speakers at the webinar was Ismail Mahamoudou of the Iconi Fishers Association in Comoros. He described a combination of activities to care for the local environment, while

also addressing climate-change impacts and steps to improve livelihoods. These included promoting changes in building practices to eliminate the removal of coral and sands; new infrastructure to protect the association’s landing site from storm surges; working to improve fishing practices; protecting sea turtles; and organizing municipal waste collection to reduce the impact of household trash on sensitive reef ecosystems.

Climate change is a recurring theme. Many SSF representatives related their efforts to address multiple ongoing challenges that are often compounded by impacts of climate change and, more recently, by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Omar Ortuno of the Association of Cochabamba Fishers in Bolivia, raised concerns around dealing with changes in the hydrological cycle along the Ichilo River in the country’s Amazon region: “There are extended, very hot dry seasons, and then when it rains, it rains a lot, and with force. It sweeps a lot of mud down from the banks, and the water becomes very turbid, and this starts to kill the small fish... While we have a lot of measures that we can take to contribute to protection, there are these other big problems, like climate change that I don’t know how we will be able to solve... We—those of us who live from fishing—feel that we are dependent on the climate.”

He noted that climate concerns run parallel to their work to improve fishing practices by raising awareness around harmful practices, co-ordinating with all levels of government to improve regulation. This included creating and implementing a ban on fishing for *blanquillo*, a local scavenger catfish species. This is because wild game is used as bait for its harvest; the association recognized that this practice is harmful to the local forests.

Such instances of stewardship by small-scale fishing communities and organizations, fitting within local contexts and priorities, were demonstrated throughout the experiences shared in the initiative. There is much that can be learned from such examples. Fishing communities

RICHARD NYBERG / USAID



A fish market in the Solomon Islands. Many of the examples in the SSF Stewardship initiative highlight the role of traditional knowledge in the practices of SSF communities, and the importance of abundant and rich biodiversity and ecosystems for the survival of small-scale fisheries

31

and organizations are leading the way in restoring local environments and stewarding resources.

These experiences also indicate that SSF leadership can expand further if fishers' rights, tenure and access are strongly recognized and reinforced. For this to happen, support is needed in the areas of policy, finance and capacity.

Next steps

Small-scale fishing communities and organizations can share their experiences in the interactive SSF-Stewardship collection. To do so, all they need to do is visit the SSF-Stewardship website (<https://ssf-stewardship.net>) and follow the link to 'SSF Participation'.

These stewardship experiences are collected with the aim of stimulating networking and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. It will also provide an important foundation for a new FAO report highlighting the environmental

leadership of small-scale fishers; the various forms of stewardship activities in small-scale fisheries; the successes and the challenges they experience; and how governments and others can best support and enhance fisher-led environmental stewardship. ↴

For more

SSF Stewardship

<https://ssf-stewardship.net/>

SSF-Stewardship Webinar

<https://ssf-stewardship.net/ssf-stewardship-webinar-highlighting-environmental-leadership-by-small-scale-fishers/>

Stewardship in Small-Scale Fisheries Workshop, July 29-30, 2016, St. John's, NL, Canada

http://toobigtoignore.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/TBTI_Stewardship-Workshop-Report-final.pdf