

# Leaving No One Behind

**The National Plan of Action (NPOA) for Small-Scale Fisheries help implement the SSF Guidelines at the country level, factoring in varying national and regional legal and policy frameworks**

No matter where in the world, small-scale fisheries (SSF) represent a critical source of food security, nutrition and livelihoods for coastal and riverine communities. In fact, almost 500 million people depend at least partially on SSF for their livelihoods, with 60 million of them employed either part- or full-time in SSF activities across the value chain, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Duke University and the 2023 WorldFish Illuminating Hidden Harvests study.

However, SSF face numerous challenges that threaten their capacity to continue providing nutritious food and livelihoods in the long run and ensuring the continuity of their activities. While there are various challenges or threats to the sustainability of the SSF sub-sector, among the most critical ones are the effects of climate change, conflicting interests with other sectors, and over-fishing.

To support SSF actors overcome these challenges, the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) in 2014, as the first international instrument entirely dedicated to SSF. These Guidelines were developed through an extensive participatory process with a multitude of SSF actors; they provide recommendations to the wide range of stakeholders involved in the development of the sub-sector—SSF actors, civil society organizations, governments, academia and others in areas that include sustainable resource management and tenure, social development, gender equality and climate change.

Efforts to implement the SSF Guidelines and reflect them in national legal and policy frameworks vary from region to region, and from country to country. The experience so far suggests that it is at the global and regional levels that the SSF Guidelines appear to have gained more traction, partially because of their non-binding nature. However, although great progress has been made in the last ten years, implementation at the national and local levels still lags behind. It is here that implementing the guidelines would most likely result in better gains for the sub-sector in the medium and long terms.

Since 2017, increasing demand from countries has allowed the SSF Guidelines to be brought back to where they really belong: the national and local levels. For this, FAO has developed guidance on the development and implementation of National Plans of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF). By now, countries that have successfully developed NPOA-SSF include Namibia, Malawi, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. In addition, Madagascar, Indonesia and the Philippines are currently finalizing their respective NPOA-SSF. Interest has picked up in other regions, and it is expected that various countries from South America will initiate their NPOA-SSF in the near future.

## Participatory mechanisms

NPOA-SSF are participatory mechanisms characterized by a good number of consultations with relevant stakeholders so that potential interventions in support of the sub-sector are informed by those whose livelihoods, food security and culture depend on it. In order to increase the participation of small-scale fishers and fishworkers in the process, whenever an NPOA-SSF is set in motion,

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MANOELA MILITÃO DE SIQUEIRA



12 Group picture during a High-Level Dialogue on the Malawi NPOA-SSF at Lilongwe, Malawi. NPOA-SSF are participatory mechanisms characterized by a good number of consultations with relevant stakeholders so that potential interventions in support of the sub-sector are informed by those whose livelihoods, food security and culture depend on it

it is recommended that a National Task Team (NTT) be established and tasked with leading its development and implementation. The composition and name of this team may vary from country to country but, ideally, includes representatives from SSF organizations, Indigenous Peoples, relevant government representatives, academia and other civil society organizations.

Through this inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders from the very first conversations and meetings related to the NPOA-SSF, countries help ensure that the needs and concerns of the sub-sector are properly reflected. In addition, further down the road, an NPOA-SSF includes the establishment of a National Platform, an even wider group of stakeholders, the exact tasks of which can go from overseeing the labour of the National Task Team, ensuring that the NPOA-SSF process remains true to its purpose and keeps SSF at the core of the discussion, to taking over the development process once a good foundation has been established.

In addition to having SSF representatives as key players

throughout the process via their involvement in the National Task Team and the National Platform, NPOA-SSF processes place enormous efforts to reach as many SSF actors from all segments of the value chain as possible, ensuring that more feedback and inputs are collected and that these are properly included in the formulation of the NPOA-SSF. Given that the SSF sub-sector is dynamic and that its characteristics vary widely, consultation processes are tailored to the specific context of the country. For instance, in Uganda, consultations were organized around the five major lakes of the country that concentrate the majority of small-scale fishers and fishworkers. In the Philippines, it was deemed that the best way to approach consultations was to arrange them per Fisheries Management Areas, which are areas designated based on fish stock distribution and related management arrangements.

#### **Challenges differ**

As stated, challenges in implementing the SSF Guidelines differ depending on the country in question. Similarly,

the conditions under which an NPOA-SSF can be successfully initiated and the requirements for its effective development and implementation may vary. However, experience has shown that some key elements are always needed, otherwise the process may be flawed. For instance, an initial profiling of the SSF sub-sector to properly identify who should be part of the National Task Team is crucial, since it will help ensure that SSF are truly represented.

Given that governments have the prerogative of law—any required amendment of existing laws and policies will fall under their responsibility and that several ministries may be in charge of certain areas that either directly or indirectly affect the sustainability of the sub-sector—inter-ministerial co-ordination and collaboration is required to maximize the contribution of a given government to the NPOA-SSF process. As part of this collaboration and co-ordination, ministries can institutionalize the NPOA-SSF by formally endorsing an NPOA-SSF and aligning their policy process to it.

NPOA-SSF also have the distinctive feature of enabling and promoting enhanced collaboration among SSF actors. In countries where an NPOA-SSF has been developed, or is currently being developed, supporting already existing SSF organizations, or formally establishing new ones in cases where groups are organized informally, becomes a priority. Not only that, NPOA-SSF also contribute to improving networking among groups, allowing for the establishment of national-level groups and, in some cases, also connecting them to the regional level.

The development and implementation of an NPOA-SSF is, per definition, a national process. It is up to national stakeholders to make it a reality from its very inception. However, due to the often-complicated nature of this process, FAO provides support to countries willing to embark on this process through a variety of means. First and foremost, FAO provides technical support to guide National Task Teams during consultations, drafting of the actual NPOA-SSF and any other activities as needed.

In addition to this, FAO has developed a set of publicly available

## The Philippines

In the Philippines, for instance, the initiators of the NPOA-SSF process agreed to formally establish a group under the name of the National Technical Working Group. This group, although chaired by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), is characterized by a great representation of SSF through the membership of fisheries organizations and Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils (FARMCs). These, in turn, comprise fisherfolk organizations, co-operatives and non-governmental organizations involved in the development of the sub-sector.

## Africa

AWFISHNET is an African network of women small-scale fish processors and traders that serves as a platform for collaboration and co-ordination, as well as learning and collective action. NPOA-SSF have contributed to the establishment of several AWFISHNET national chapters. By first linking local women's SSF organizations to a national organization and then with a regional platform, these are able to gain representation in relevant fora, acquire important soft and hard skills and be better connected. This contributes to their resilience. Examples of these national chapters are NAMFISHNET in Namibia and Malawi.

materials that interested stakeholders can use to learn about NPOA-SSF and how their development and implementation should look like. Available materials include open-access online training, tools and materials to support stakeholders in all steps required to initiate, develop, and implement an NPOA-SSF, manuals on the use of these materials, and the SSF-LEX database, which can help in diagnosing the degree of alignment of legal and policy frameworks with the recommendations of the SSF Guidelines.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the SSF Guidelines. Let us use this opportunity to raise awareness on the many and major contributions of SSF to sustainable development and to serve as inspiration to continue working towards a more resilient sub-sector by increasing the number of NPOA-SSF that are developed and implemented around the world. More experiences are needed to fine-tune the process, ensuring that with every new one that is set in motion, the SSF sub-sector enjoys more benefits, and its long-term sustainability becomes a reality. With every new NPOA-SSF, we are closer to leaving no one behind. ↴

### For more



#### **Illuminating Hidden Harvests: The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development**

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/34646086-8b46-4040-b3b9-c569058bceb9>

#### **National Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF)**

<https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/npoa-ssf-toolkit/about-the-toolkit/en>

#### **NPOA-SSF in Namibia**

<https://namibia.un.org/en/207292-national-plan-action-small-scale-fisheries-2022-2026-npoa-ssf>

#### **NPOA-SSF in Uganda**

[https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ssf/documents/npoa\\_uganda.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ssf/documents/npoa_uganda.pdf)

#### **NPOA-SSF in Malawi**

[https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ssf/documents/npoa\\_malawi.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ssf/documents/npoa_malawi.pdf)

#### **NPOA-SSF in Tanzania**

[https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/ssf/documents/Tanzania\\_National\\_Plan\\_of\\_Action\\_Book.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ssf/documents/Tanzania_National_Plan_of_Action_Book.pdf)