

# Adoption of guidelines on small-scale fisheries

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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations adopts voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF) in the context of food security and poverty eradication. This document complements the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF). Despite small-scale fisheries represent about 90% of world's 39.4 million capture fishers; they often face various forms of discrimination and due attention not given to their needs and communities. The guidelines focus on addressing poverty, food security, social and economic equity and if properly implemented will address most of Environmental Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) issues in fisheries sub-sectors.

Key words: Sustainable development, Resource management, Code of conduct

## Introduction

### Small-scale fisheries (SSF)

Defining small-scale fisheries is a big challenge as the terms have been used for traditional fisheries involving fishing households, using relatively small amount of capital and energy, relatively small fishing vessels (if any), making short fishing trips close to shore and mainly for local consumption (FAO, 2011). The FAO Glossary tends to equate "artisanal" with "small-scale". While small-scale and artisanal fisheries clearly differ from industrial and recreational fisheries, the subtle distinctions between them are hard to pin down. In practice, this definition varies between countries. Important criteria such as type of craft/vessel, size of fishing craft, vessel or engine, number of man-on-board, knowledge and technology have been used to define small scale (Figure 1). It encompasses all activities along the value chain – pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest – undertaken by men and women who are involved in full-time, part-time or seasonal fisheries activities (FAO 2014). Small-scale fisheries tend to be communities based, having historic links to adjacent fishery resources, traditional lifestyles and values, and support social cohesion.

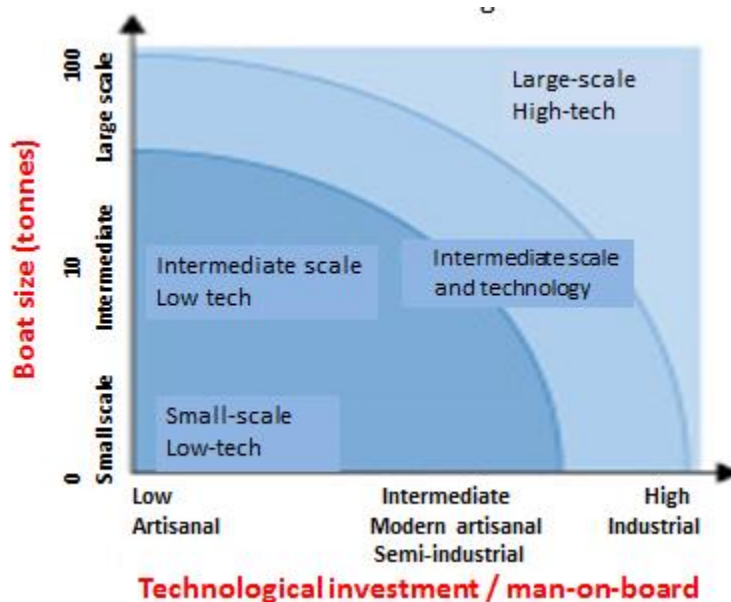


Figure 1. Graphic definitions of small-scale, artisanal and industrial fisheries as a function of vessel size and relative technological investment

Courtesy: <http://www.fao.org/figis/servlet/IRS?iid=24658>

Small-scale fisheries, include fishing and fish farming, provide a vital source of food, employment, recreation, trade and economic well-being for people throughout the world and should therefore be developed in an environmentally sustainable manner. FAO in 1998 reported that small-scale fishing provides 98% of fishing

jobs worldwide; contributes about half of global fish catches and employs more than 90 percent of the world's culture and capture fishers, and fish workers (UN General Assembly, 2012). Though the fish species involved; vessels used and fishing method; and management approaches used may vary widely around the world, many of the resource use, environmental impact, constraints and policy issues are similar.

Small-scale fishing communities are commonly located in remote areas and tend to have limited access to modern technology, capital and markets, basic infrastructure or social services and lack alternative livelihoods. Competition/conflict with other sectors is high. They work in unhealthy and unsafe conditions and have inadequate organizational structures. Overexploitation of resources and threats to habitats and ecosystems such as pollution, removal of coastal mangroves and other coastal habitats negatively affect fisheries resources. All these factors make it difficult for their voices to be heard, defend their human rights and tenure rights, and secure the sustainable use of their fishery resources (FAO 2003).

The important role of small-scale fisheries in resource use and in social and economic impact is becoming more strongly recognized and the necessity to protect their right (FAO 2015). The need to develop the international guidelines on small-scale fisheries was based on the objectives of 1995 FAO Code of conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the code) and on the increasingly important contribution of small-scale fisheries to food security and poverty reduction.

### **Guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF)**

In 2008, a global conference on small-scale fisheries was held in Thailand and they discussed three main priority areas of small-scale fisheries. The main areas were (a) Securing sustainable resource use and access rights (b) Securing post-harvest benefits and (c) Securing social, economic and human rights. The response to these issues necessitates the call for the development of an international instrument on small-scale fisheries. The 29th session of the Committee on Fisheries agreed on the development of international guidelines, which the FAO coordinated through a three year consultation process with more than 4 000 stakeholders. The report of the Technical Consultation was discussed on 7 February 2014 but was formally adopted on the 31st session of Committee on Fisheries in June 2014

These Voluntary Guidelines for securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication have been developed to complement and support the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code) and its related instruments. They were developed to provide complementary guidance with respect to small-scale fisheries in support of the overall principles and provisions of the Code. The Guidelines were intended to support the visibility, recognition and enhancement of the already important role of small-scale fisheries and to contribute to global and national efforts towards the eradication of hunger and poverty (FAO 2014). The Guidelines will support responsible fisheries and sustainable social and economic development for the benefit of current and future generations. Emphasis has been placed on small-scale fishers, fish workers and related activities; including vulnerable and marginalized people and promoting human rights-based approach. Their goal is to support responsible governance of fisheries while securing the rights of small-scale fishers to sustainably utilize their fisheries resources and promote the social and economic development of their communities (FAO 2014). The important linkages between small-scale fisheries and aquaculture were recognized, but these guidelines were principally the first dedicated international instrument to directly address small-scale capture fisheries.

Guidelines described a wide range of important considerations and principles, including equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability and the rule of law, and the principle that all human

rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. They were consistent with and promote existing rights and obligations under national and international law and other voluntary international instruments on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests. These Guidelines recognized the need for responsible and sustainable use of aquatic biodiversity and natural resources.

**The Objectives of the Guidelines were:**

- a) To enhance the contribution of small-scale fisheries to global food security and nutrition and to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food;
- b) To contribute to the equitable development of small-scale fishing communities and poverty eradication and to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and fish workers within the context of sustainable fisheries management,
- c) To achieve the sustainable utilization, prudent and responsible management and conservation of fisheries resources in consistent with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code) and related instruments,
- d) To promote the contribution of small-scale fisheries to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the planet and its people,
- e) To provide guidance that could be considered by States and stakeholders for the development and implementation of ecosystem friendly and participatory policies, strategies and legal frameworks for the enhancement of responsible and sustainable small-scale fisheries; and
- f) To enhance public awareness and promote the advancement of knowledge on the culture, role, contribution and potential of small-scale fisheries, considering ancestral and traditional knowledge, and their related constraints and opportunities.

These objectives focus on addressing poverty, food security, social and economic equity and these could be achieved. If the guidelines are properly implemented, they will address most of human right and socio-economic issues in fisheries sub-sectors. The limitations in the guidelines are; they are voluntary and are under the jurisdiction of the participatory nations. The health of aquatic ecosystems and associated biodiversity which are fundamental basis for their survival is not well addressed. Small-scale fisheries need some form of environmental assessment because there is high potential for the clusters of small-scale farmers to collectively create unexpected significant environmental impacts. Also, environmental assessment will accord the small-scale fishers some formal protection from negative impacts on their resources caused by themselves and from other external activities.

**Impact Assessment in Fisheries Subsector**

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure is generally applied to large developments, such as oil installations, power generation projects, mining and dam construction. However, its application within the fisheries and aquaculture sector is limited (FAO, 2009; Hambrey, 2009). Most countries encourage the development of clusters of small-scale farmer at the coastal areas (mariculture parks). The thresholds or criteria used for screening process such as size, production, type and location are applied in most cases. Which individual farms do not measure up to and are exempt from the process of EIA. More over EIA is inadequate and cannot effectively address cumulative impacts on the water body associated with large numbers of small scale aquaculture developments. The EIA procedure is most commonly applied to intensive marine finfish culture and to proposals for large-scale shrimp farm developments. Nugent (2009) stated some reasons why EIA is not widely used in fisheries and aquaculture in Africa, which could apply in other region.

A review on the requirements, practice, effectiveness, and improvements, of EIA and monitoring in aquaculture from Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe and America indicate that some countries with significant large-scale aquaculture industries where EIAs are not apply to aquaculture development rely on rigorous licensing and permitting regimes which require different forms of environmental assessment, and a range of alternative environmental management procedures (Hambrey 2009). Such production is regulated using standards and practical guidelines generated by local government units, department of fisheries and aquaculture and/or environmental agencies. Such guidelines define the minimum standards expected, and often state the types of activity. Most times, Agriculture/Forestry/Fisheries activities often bring large chronic and negative environmental and social impacts, through weak policy and non-compliance to guidelines and regulation.

**Some weakness in EIA and why it is not widely used in fisheries and aquaculture production are:**

- Small-scale fisheries are often perceived as “low risk” and not on priority list for environmental authorities;
- Small size of large scale aquaculture operations;
- Often perceived as bureaucratic process and obstacles for local investors;
- Lack of appropriate objectives and standards, and clarity of institutional responsibilities
- Insufficient trained staff in environmental and fisheries departments;
- Duplication with standard management procedures
- Inadequate in addressing cumulative impacts and effects on the wider environment
- Complex, subjective and speculative nature of ecological impacts with inadequate baseline data.
- Lack of technical and decision-making capacity.
- Lack of capacity to undertake monitoring and feedback into management system.

EIA has both strengths and weaknesses, and it is important that these are recognized in its application. The present level of aquaculture development, countries should consider using Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the sector rather than relying only on individual project-level environment impact assessment. SEA will provide the information for good strategic planning, as well as environmental information needed for the planning of individual projects. Successful SEA should make project-level EIA more efficient and less burdensome. Bringing SEA to the fisheries subsectors will extend the benefits of sustainable fisheries development. Provisions for SEA exist in many countries, but its application is limited. Scotland is an example of where it has been use, an SEA was required for a government supported “farm relocation programme” (Scottish Executive, 2007). Several countries have introduced requirements for SEA, including China, Hong Kong and European Union countries. However, some other countries have less formal versions of SEA incorporated in various integrated coastal management programmes.

**Conclusion**

The environmental management of water resources has increased in importance throughout the world in recent years, and comprehensive frameworks on environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management now exist in many countries. There are wide variation in the degree and complexity of environmental regulation and management. There is need for a periodic formal environmental assessment of fishery activities. Guidelines should be adapted to the specific needs at the national level and local circumstances. In absence of specific guidelines, small-scale fisheries and aquaculture activities must follow the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF), the Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA) and the specific guidelines to support their implementation. Where large cumulative impacts exist, the legislation should involve a formal impact assessment.

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