



## International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty SSF-GSF Advisory Group

Esteemed members of the Governmental Delegations,  
Dear COFI observers,

With the creation in 2016 of the FAO Umbrella Programme to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) also welcomed the development of an informal framework to support the former. The Global Strategic Framework in support of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines (SSF-GSF) was thus created to facilitate the collaboration of rightsholders and stakeholders and lead to coherent and inclusive planning of FAO-supported work. The role played by civil society gathered in the alliance space of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) in supporting the creation of the SSF Guidelines was recognised through the invitation to its members to become the SSF-GSF Advisory Group. As the rightsholders of this international instrument, the Advisory Group plays a role in guaranteeing the inclusive and human rights rooted nature of the SSF Guidelines.

It is for this reason that, together with IPC's global civil society networks and other regional civil society networks, we have established Regional Advisory Groups in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, whose role is to strengthen the collaboration among small-scale fisheries organisations, and foster their participation in SSF Guidelines implementation projects.

We consider it is paramount that governments and institutions recognise small-scale fisheries communities and civil society organisations as essential actors, without whose participation no real change can take place. Our fishing methods, Indigenous and traditional knowledge, the essential and yet too often neglected contribution of women in the post-harvest activities, and intergenerational wisdom deeply embedded in our fishing culture are the backbone for sustaining nature and life for generations to come.

It is as a bearer of this responsibility that we bring to COFI members and observers our concerns and recommendations regarding the urgency of taking more concrete actions to implement the SSF Guidelines at regional and national levels.

We want to express our concert for how the 34th COFI session's modalities are de facto excluding civil society from participation in COFI's proceedings. Efforts have to be made to make COFI more participatory process and allow civil society members to meaningfully participate in the discussion and decision-making, in line with the principles of participatory governance.

This is all the more alarming in the light of how the COVID-19 pandemic has severely hit small-scale fisher and Indigenous communities, wherever they may be across the globe. In some cases, the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 have been even worse than the biomedical impacts. Yet, government relief and support efforts tend to overlook the working poor, including small scale fishers, and do not reach



those most in need. Access to adequate health care is insufficient. Many small-scale fisher and Indigenous communities, whose very survival is at stake, are being squeezed by lack of healthcare, loss of work and livelihoods. This emergency impacts us even more, as it comes on top of the already irreparable damage that climate change is causing to water bodies and oceans.

At the same time, 800 million people globally are expected to join the ranks of the hungry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Calls are growing to transform the current food systems paradigm into one that would enable affordable healthy diets, where small scale fishers are critical. We are part of the solution to the crisis. We provide healthy and nutritious fish through local and sustainable value-chains, and we are the source of income and livelihood for millions worldwide.

In this context, the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and their holistic, human-rights based approach, is more relevant and urgent than ever. We call on all COFI members to prioritise the implementation of the SSF Guidelines working closely together with civil society and support small-scale fishing communities in their essential role as food providers and stewards of oceans and inland waters worldwide. We also support the collaboration with other FAO-led initiatives that highlight the importance of the SSF Guidelines, such as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAF 2022) and the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNFFF).

We also greet the renewed commitment of the governments of Canada, Indonesia, Norway, Peru and Tanzania to the SSF-GSF Friends of the Guidelines, and we invite other Governmental delegations to join this group. Their role is crucial in setting an example for all other governments and actors involved in implementing the SSF Guidelines.

Finally, we call for the creation of the SSF-GSF Knowledge Sharing Platform, a key player in the functioning of the SSF-GSF. Composed of representatives from academia and the NGO sector, the unique know-how they bring to bear on the priorities set out by civil society is crucial to the design of effective implementation projects.

We hope that these recommendations will be heard and taken on board in the final COFI statements. We have in our hands a unique international instrument in terms of importance and effectiveness. It is time for it to be effectively incorporated into national policies and implemented in the territories. Not only for the benefit of small-scale fishing communities, but also for the benefit of our ecosystems and the millions of people for whom we provide food on the table.

For further information,

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

<http://www.fao.org/3/ca7737en/CA7737EN.pdf>

