



IYAFA Regional workshop: Getting the story straight and envisioning a fair future for small-scale fisheries in Europe

Vilanova de Arousa, Galicia, Spain, 13-16 November 2023

As part of a series of regional workshops¹, ICSF organised the European regional workshop from 13-16 November 2023, at Vilanova de Arousa, Galicia, Spain in collaboration with [Asociación de Mulleres Salgadas](#) – a member of the [AKTEA platform](#) and [Low Impact Fishers of Europe \(LIFE\)](#). Forty-five representatives from small scale fish worker organisations, indigenous peoples, civil society organisations and academia across sixteen European countries convened in Vilanova de Arousa to forge a shared vision and define pathways for sustainable fisheries and seafood systems in Europe.

The participants acknowledged that defining and shaping a future for small-scale fisheries in Europe is a difficult task considering that fishing communities are being wiped off the map and policy spaces. The current economic model of development based on the unsustainable extraction of natural resources, privatisation and consolidation are disenfranchising communities dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, increasing vulnerability and reducing their resilience. These are systemic dynamics that affect and disrupt many realms of human activity; livelihoods, cultures, equity, well-being. In addition, they also threaten the ecological pillars that sustain life on Earth.

In the case of coastal and inland fisheries, the dominant development narrative and the blue economy scenario have enabled activities such as industrial fishing, oil, gas and renewable energy exploitation, industrial scale aquaculture, pollution, and mass tourism. This has adversely affected the livelihoods of small-scale fisheries and disrupted the ecological balance necessary for sustaining life. In addition, this has a long lasting impact on sustainable fish supply, stewardship of aquatic resources, employment, and generational renewal. This narrative justifies privatisation policies that have deprived our coastal and rural communities of a sustainable future.

This narrative has led to:

¹ The UN General Assembly has proclaimed 2022 as the [International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture \(IYAFA 2022\)](#) with FAO as the lead agency. This offered an opportunity to further reiterate the objectives and promote the implementation of [the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines](#). In the context of IYAFA, [ICSF](#), its members and partners have organised regional workshops, including women in fisheries' exchanges, in [Asia](#) (May 2022), [Latin America](#) (November 2022) and [Africa](#) (February 2023), in partnership with fishworker organisations globally to discuss matters concerning small-scale fisheries.

- Current systems of European fisheries management and allocation of fishing opportunities, which are detrimental to small-scale fishing;
- The marginalisation of small-scale fishers and fishworkers and lack of their representation in decision-making forums;
- Discrimination against women in fisheries, who are therefore also facing the increasing burden of unremunerated work;
- The increasing control over and concentration of ownership of our food systems in the hands of a small number of often transnational corporations, putting our future food security at risk and undermining the inclusion of a human rights based approach in fisheries management;

In addition to this, challenges posed by climate change and international conflicts profoundly impact small-scale fishers and fishworkers.

The workshop attendees acknowledge that if the logic of such fisheries development is not questioned, and corporate ownership and investment is not controlled, fishing communities and small-scale fisheries will cease to exist. During four days of the workshop, the group crafted positive narratives and strategies for small-scale fisheries (SSF) in Europe, within a human rights-based approach. They called for a future shaped by collective effort and will, wherein:

- The small-scale fisheries of Europe are a cornerstone of vibrant coastal communities. They are in a position to champion equitable, inclusive and transparent policies with ecosystem regeneration at its core, ensuring the basic right of access to resources that sustain life.
- Co-management policies based on shared responsibility weave together environmental stewardship within the social fabric and dynamic culture of communities.
- Well-established small-scale fisheries support viable enterprises that provide decent employment, promote generational renewal, gender equality and inclusivity, and foster fair and participative processes.
- The traditional, local and experiential knowledge of small-scale fishers and fishworkers, including women and indigenous peoples is recognized along with scientific knowledge in making conservation and management decisions for fisheries.
- Markets reflect the true value of sustainable small-scale food production that delivers fair rewards along the value chain of aquatic food systems .
- SSF communities are resilient to the effects of climate change, natural and human disasters
- Fishers and fishworkers' practices set global benchmarks for sustainability and leave no one behind.

Call for Action

In this backdrop, We call upon like-minded organizations, scientists, and policymakers to advance:

Recognition of Small-scale fisheries' Contributions and Decent Work: Governmental authorities, business entities and civil societies should acknowledge the contributions made by small-scale fishers and fishworkers and ensure that secure decent work is provided all along the value chain in small-scale fisheries.

Gender equity: The role of women in fisheries needs to be recognised and respected and their specific challenges addressed.

Participation in Marine/Inland Spatial Planning: Small-scale fishers and fishworkers must be included, and enabled to participate meaningfully in marine and inland spatial planning and on an equal footing with other stakeholders. The local and traditional knowledge of SSF has to be considered alongside scientific advice in making decisions concerning SSF.

Preferential Access: Small-scale fishers must have preferential access to fishing grounds and resources and protection from competing aquatic resource users, based on social, cultural, economic, and environmental criteria.

Generational Renewal: Support youth in fisheries by mentoring and training, focusing on leadership and communication skills and establishing co-management and information sharing groups.

Adaptive Co-Management: Adaptive co-management that includes small-scale fishers and fishworkers, guaranteeing their shared authority in decision-making guided by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and equity. It is necessary to provide the resources for adequate implementation and capacity-building to support effective small-scale fishers' participation.

Adaptation to Climate Change: Support an adaptive approach to fisheries management that takes into account the impact of climate change and accommodates the specific needs of small-scale fishers and fishworkers.

Market Access: We call for fair and sustainable food systems that address the challenges faced by small-scale fishers and fishworkers in accessing markets and infrastructure, promoting platforms that connect them directly with consumers to enhance their visibility and viability.

Foster collaborative partnerships: Broaden collaborations and explore potential alliances with multiple stakeholders with shared visions, to improve lobbying, market opportunities and to broaden the scope of issues in line with the specific concerns of small-scale fisheries'

Promote inclusive technology and digital literacy: Advocate for the development of inclusive technologies and equitable digital tools to boost the livelihoods of SSF. Support capacity building of SSF to access these technologies and tools.

Without the recognition and support of the action points mentioned above, the small-scale fishing sector will continue to decline and eventually disappear, causing coastal communities, their traditions, culture, knowledge and skills to be lost. We therefore resolve to work together to ensure that this Call for Action is widely disseminated, incorporated and implemented at all levels.