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General Fisheries
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the Mediterranean

In collaboration with



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SMALL-SCALE FISHERS' FORUM

SSF Forum consultation: defining collectively the SSF Forum 2023-2024 programme

Rome, Italy, 9-10 March 2023

Report

Executive summary

The SSF Forum consultation was held at FAO headquarters, from 9 to 10 March 2023. The meeting was attended by 50 small-scale fisheries actors from 13 Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, including the European Commission, together with 4 partner organizations. The meeting objective was to give a stronger voice to small-scale fishers in the region and contribute to the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea ([RPOA-SSF](#)). In particular, the consultation aimed to co-develop the SSF Forum 2023-2024 programme of workshops, which is a mechanism for participatory capacity development offered to small-scale fisheries actors by the GFCM and the Friends of SSF. The main priorities emerging from past SSF Forum sessions, particularly the SSF Summit held in September 2022, served as the starting point for discussions. The results of the questionnaire, previously distributed to fishers and fish workers in the region for assessing their perception of the RPOA-SSF and its implementation, were presented and discussed during the consultation. Via a participatory process, participants agreed on four topics of interest to be developed as workshops in 2023-2024: 1) strong SSF organizations; 2) marine pollution; 3) invasive species; and 4) selective fishing gear. Furthermore, participants stressed the need to encourage the participation of young fishers and women in these events and that the optimal time of year for such events was winter. Following this session, it was agreed that the GFCM Secretariat would work to plan the specific workshops, in consultation with the Friends of SSF, with a view to launching the SSF Forum 2023-2024 programme online by mid-2023.

Summary of discussions and key issues

Introduction and objectives of the meeting

The SSF Forum consultation was held in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Headquarters in Rome, Italy, on 9-10 March 2023. It was attended by 50 small-scale fisheries actors from 13 Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, including the European Commission, together with 4 partner organizations. The list of participants is provided in Appendix 2. Participants discussed topics for future workshops, as well as their contents and modalities, starting from the priorities identified during previous SSF Forum workshops.

The GFCM Secretariat recalled that the SSF Forum was an initiative responding to the recommendations of the RPOA-SSF to offer support to small-scale fishers and fish workers to further develop their capacities and provide a mechanism for fishers to exchange experience. Furthermore, it was recalled that this consultation was a direct outcome of a conclusion of the dedicated Mediterranean and Black Sea session of the SSF Summit, held in Rome in September 2022. The GFCM Secretariat noted that a second SSF Summit is foreseen to be organized in 2024, ahead of the next Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the FAO, which could be an opportunity to assess advancements in the SSF Forum and brainstorm about the 2025-2026 programme.

The GFCM Secretariat presented the agenda, available in Appendix 1, and objectives of the meeting which were to discuss the capacity-building topics of interest and identify the content of the SSF Forum 2023-2024 programme, as well as the modalities for successful workshops. Participants were encouraged to engage in the discussions and share their views on priorities and training needs of the SSF sector.

Stakeholder feedback on the implementation of the RPOA-SSF

In view of assessing the current state of the implementation of the RPOA-SSF among small-scale fishers and stakeholders, the GFCM Secretariat circulated a questionnaire prior to the meeting to understand how much the participants knew about the RPOA-SSF and their perception of its implementation. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed and presented to the participants to collect their feedback and understand how their interests, work and activities align with the provisions of the RPOA-SSF. 32 replies to the questionnaire had been received, whereof about half from small-scale fishers and fishworkers, and half from other small-scale fisheries stakeholders (e.g., in academia and non-governmental organizations (NGO)). Overall, the participants agreed with the results although it was noted that further analyses would be useful to understand differences in views between fishers and fish workers on one hand and other stakeholders on the other as well as between countries and sub-regions.

The ensuing discussion confirmed that most of the participants knew about the RPOA-SSF and agreed with its provisions. While the sections of the RPOA-SSF receiving the most interest were “Participation of SSF in decision-making processes”, “Climate and Environment”, and “SSF management measures”, participants noted that all sections covered needs of the SSF sector and require targeted actions. Several examples of local and national initiatives were given illustrating how small-scale fishers, fish workers, SSF organizations and other stakeholders actively support the implementation of the RPOA-SSF to improve the state of the small-scale fisheries sector. Activities included capacity development, establishing and strengthening partnerships with research institutes, including for data collection, developing collaboration with administrations, and building networks of SSF organizations. It was noted that fishers were also active in preserving the environment by engaging in marine protected areas and the establishment of no-take zone. Other initiatives focused on minimizing pollution and implementing fishing tourism for reducing fishing effort while improving revenues, as well as addressing invasive species, including the assessment of potential value chains to cope with this issue.

In addition to detailing some actions undertaken in their countries, participants also raised many concerns regarding small-scale fisheries activities, most notably the lack of generational turnover and difficulties in attracting young fishers, climate change, more specifically, pollution (plastic, chemical, lost or abandoned

fishing gear), and non-indigenous species (blue crab, pufferfish, lionfish, Asian algae, finfish - depending on the subregion), abandoned or lost gear, the negative impacts of recreational fisheries and illegal fishing. While the situation may differ from a country to another, women remain poorly involved and visible in the SSF sector; social protection coverage isn't well balanced in the region leading to a pressing need to ensure a level-playing field. Participants further noted a general lack of resources and capacities as fishers face difficulties in creating cooperatives and participating in decision-making processes to ensure the representation of the SSF sector; they also need support in applying to funding and developing project.

The SSF Forum: future capacity building needs

Following a summary of past SSF Forum activities with a total of 24 workshops since 2020, the GFCM Secretariat presented the next steps for the SSF Forum in 2023-2024, aiming for a series of regional workshops defined collectively during this consultation, to be held in parallel with targeted workshops for GFCM research programmes on select species. A first open discussion ensued identifying a list of key topics to be addressed in the framework of the regional SSF Forum workshops.

The GFCM Secretariat carefully noted down key elements of the discussion and assembled a list of potential topics for the upcoming SSF Forum workshops. This long list of topics was narrowed down to ten thematic areas through a voting exercise. Participants were thereafter divided into groups per language and asked to select four out of the ten thematic areas that they would like to see addressed in SSF Forum workshops. They were asked to provide justifications for their choices by answering a list of questions, including the type of capacity building exercise needed, audience targeted, likely benefits and expected outcomes. Each group reported back in plenary and, while all ten topics on the initial list gathered interest, four thematic areas were eventually agreed on:

1. Strong organizations: the basis for developing projects and funding requests
2. Marine pollution: impacts, interactions and solutions
3. Invasive species: from health and safety to marketing opportunities
4. Selective fishing gear: from impacts to alternatives

Consolidating a proposal for the SSF Forum 2023-2024 programme

A second round of group discussions were held regarding the details and modalities of the workshops that would deal with the four selected thematic areas, including date, place, format, participants to be involved, potential speakers and specific issues within each topic. As the participants reported back in plenary, the GFCM Secretariat noted a consensus on organizing the workshop in fall or winter to maximize the participation of fishers, with an exception for some workshops which may require on-site visits during specific periods of the year (e.g. a workshop on non-indigenous species may require aligning the timing with the season when the species is most prevalent). Participants also emphasized that the workshops should include generally between 30 to 50 participants and should last for two to three days to allow for exchanges and ensure productive and effective outcomes and results.

Based on the feedback received from each group, the GFCM Secretariat consolidated a programme of 4 workshops to be organized in 2023-2024, as follows:

1. Strong organizations: the basis for developing projects and funding requests - the workshop would aim to address how to establish a sustainable organization with a clear objective, factors for a successful organization, project development and funding/fundraising, effective management of funds;
2. Marine pollution: impacts, interactions and solutions – the workshop would aim to focus on the identification of pollution stemming from fisheries and how to minimize impacts, funding opportunities and alternative livelihoods in addressing this issue for example collect marine litter or lost or abandoned fishing gear;
3. Invasive species: from health and safety to marketing opportunities – the workshop would aim to explore how to handle dangerous invasive species, as well as exchange on marketing and sales of invasive species;

4. Selective fishing gear: from impacts to alternatives – the workshop would aim to focus on the impact of different fishing gear and fishing techniques, providing basic information for new fishers on adapting to more selective gear, exploring alternative livelihoods such as fishing tourism that could help compensate for lower catches from selective gear, as well as good practices of communication with administrations and authorities.

Participants further noted that there were numerous ongoing projects, relevant to these topics, in the region and expressed interest in improving communication and sharing experience between the different subregions, in particular through exchanges and on-site visits. They noted such workshops would be productive to build capacity and learn from communities which have successfully developed systems and models that could be replicated. Specifically, regarding the workshop on invasive species, participants raised that it is worth considering a subregional approach in order to focus on the issue and solutions at a more local level. Overall, it was emphasized that each workshop should be structured in a way for effective implementation on the ground, as well as ensure to include local trainers to replicate the training at local level.

The GFCM Secretariat noted the need to identify the most relevant approach, either regional or subregional, according to each topic. Participants also stressed the need to engage young fishers and women in the workshops and underlined that promoting generational turnover and gender equity should be a cross-cutting theme across all workshops.

Main conclusions and way forward

The main outcome of the meeting was the agreement on the four workshops to be organized in the framework of the SSF Forum for the next two years (2023-2024) on building strong SSF organizations, marine pollution, invasive species and selective sustainable gear. In addition, the discussions in plenary and in groups resulted in the following set of conclusions, agreed by the participants:

- Engaging the next generation of small-scale fishers is a priority issue to be included within the different topics addressed in the framework of workshops;
- Gender and involvement of women is a cross-cutting theme: special attention should be given to ensure balance and include women in the workshops;
- Capacity of small-scale fishers and fish workers to group and establish strong organizations/cooperatives should be strengthened to ensure their voice is heard at the decision-making level;
- It is crucial to consider a subregional approach when addressing invasive species: the challenges faced in the different Mediterranean subregions vary depending on the species although handling and marketing solutions may be common;
- Communication should be boosted around the profession of fisher at small-scale level to attract the younger generation and ensure sustainability of the sector;
- Social protection remains a key issue: efforts should continue towards providing assistance to access social protection programme and better coverage;
- Showcasing alternative solutions and good practices to diversify sources of income will help fishers to build more resilient livelihoods;
- Partnerships and connections with the scientific sector, including participatory research and data collection, should continue to be pursued to carry out further studies on emerging issues and potential solutions.

The GFCM Secretariat concluded that next steps would involve further developing the logistics of the programme, in line with the identified topics, with a view to launching the SSF Forum 2023-2024 programme by mid-2023. Participants further agreed to meet again, in 2024, the framework of the RPOA-SSF mid-term event and the second SSF Summit, in order to assess advancements and discuss the programme for 2025-2026.

Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Stakeholder feedback on the implementation of the RPOA-SSF
3. The SSF Forum: future capacity building needs
4. Consolidating a proposal for the 2023-2024 SSF Forum programme
5. Conclusions and next steps

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