



SMALL-SCALE FISHERS' FORUM

SSF Forum survey 2025

Report

Introduction

Following the conclusion of the SSF Forum programme (2023–2025), it was timely to reflect on its outcomes, achievements and lessons learned, to inform the future phases of the SSF Forum. The 2023–2025 programme was defined and agreed on directly by small-scale fisheries stakeholders through a participatory approach, ensuring that the content reflected their lived realities and operational needs. Specifically, the programme consisted of four workshops, organized in collaboration with regional or local organizations, on the following topics:

- **Non-indigenous species: from health and safety to marketing opportunities**, 21–23 November 2023, Gökova Bay, Türkiye, in collaboration with the Mediterranean Conservation Society (MCS)
- **Strong organizations: the basis for developing projects and funding requests**, 18–20 April 2024, Torre Vieja, Spain, in collaboration with the *Federación Nacional de Cofradías de Pescadores* (FNCP), the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF)
- **Marine pollution: impacts, interactions and solutions**, 29–30 October 2024, Monastir, Tunisia, in collaboration with *Notre Grand Bleu*
- **Selective fishing gear: from impacts to alternatives**, 9–10 April 2025, Split, Croatia, in collaboration with WWF

In this context, and in line with the participatory approach to engage stakeholders in the design of activities, participants were invited to complete an anonymous survey reflecting on the 2023–2025 SSF Forum programme. The survey aimed to assess how participation influenced knowledge, attitudes and practices related to sustainable small-scale fisheries, as well as identify opportunities to enhance the overall impact of the SSF Forum. It was designed to explore processes of knowledge exchange, social learning and network-building, and to support the identification of priority topics for future SSF Forum sessions.

This survey is part of a broader collaborative effort between WWF, the GFCM and the Leibniz Center for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF) to consolidate lessons learned and guide the future development of inclusive stakeholder engagement mechanisms.

Participation overview

A total of 50 replies were received out of 120 SSF Forum participants interviewed, representing a response rate of 42 percent. The sessions with the highest number of respondents were:

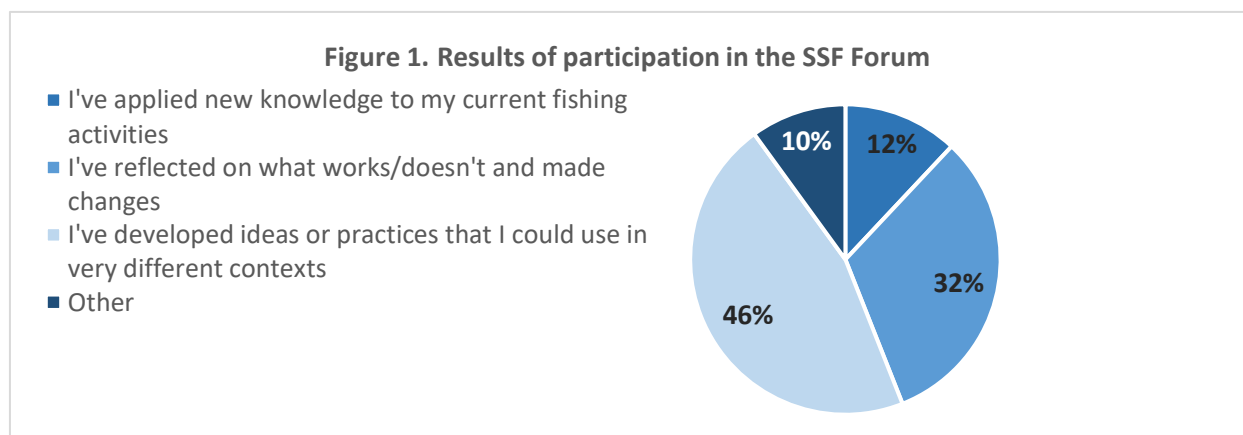
- Marine pollution: impacts, interactions and solutions (29 responses)
- Strong organizations: the basis for developing projects and funding requests (20 responses)
- Selective fishing gear: from impacts to alternatives (15 responses)
- Non-indigenous species: from health and safety to marketing opportunities (10 responses)

Overall, the responses offer useful insight into how the SSF Forum format shaped participants' experience and learning.

Learning and changes in perception

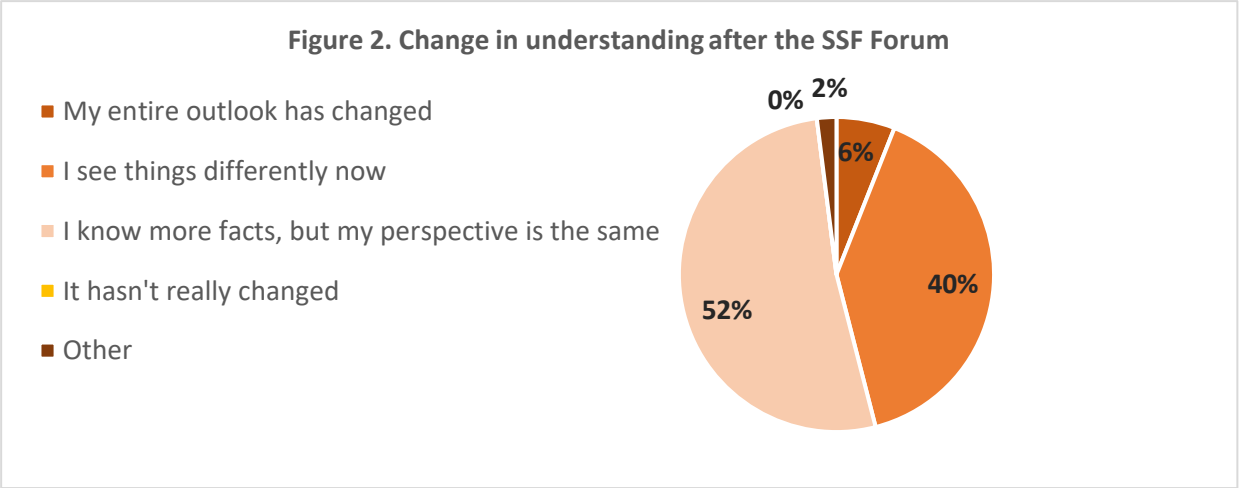
As the survey aimed to assess the impact of the SSF Forum's learning format – grounded in discussions, peer-to-peer exchanges and on-site visits – the results provide insight into how these methods shaped participants' experiences. Survey responses indicate that the SSF Forum generated tangible learning outcomes but also meaningful shifts in how participants understand and approach key issues.

Overall, results show concrete outcomes for participants following their involvement in the SSF Forum (Figure 1). Nearly half of respondents (46 percent) perceived the SSF Forum as a source of adaptable solutions, by developing ideas or practices that could be used in different contexts. In addition, 32 percent of participants reported applying new knowledge directly to their current fishing activities, suggesting a strong practical impact on day-to-day practices. A smaller share (12 percent) indicated that they reflected on their own work and introduced changes, highlighting the SSF Forum's role in stimulating self-assessment and learning.



There is also a clear evolution in participants' understanding following their participation in the SSF Forum (Figure 2). A majority of respondents (52 percent) reported that they learned new facts while maintaining their overall perspective, indicating that the SSF Forum reinforced and deepened existing knowledge. At the same time, 40 percent stated that they now see issues differently, reflecting a shift in perceptions. A smaller proportion (6 percent) indicated that their entire outlook had changed, pointing to more transformative learning outcomes for some participants. Only 2 percent reported that their understanding had not really changed.

Overall, these findings suggest that the **SSF Forum played an important role both in consolidating knowledge and in reshaping how participants understand sustainable fishing and associated challenges.**



Social learning and peer influence

A key finding of the survey is the central role of collective learning within the SSF Forum. Most respondents reported that discussions with other participants contributed significantly to their learning through the exchanging work experiences and challenges faced by fishers in other countries.

As shown in Figure 3, 84 percent indicated that exchanges with others significantly shaped what they learned. A smaller but meaningful share also noted that regular interactions made a difference, while a few participants felt that they could not have learned as effectively without the contributions of their peers. These **findings underline the strong value participants placed on dialogue-based learning and reflecting together.**

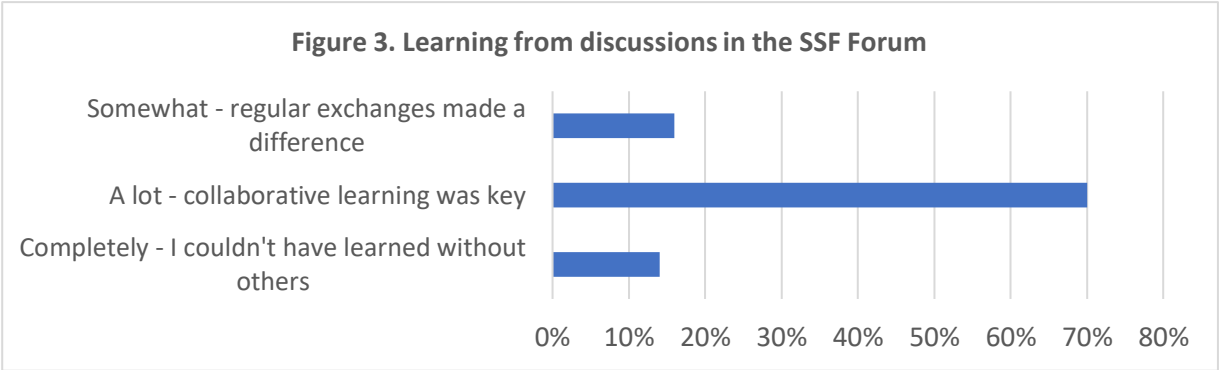
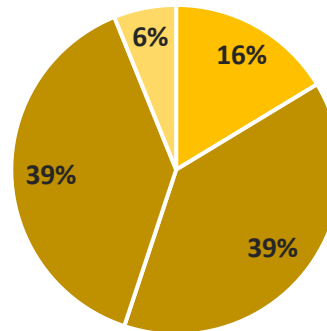


Figure 4 further illustrates how peer interactions influenced participants’ understanding of fishing practices. Most respondents (78 percent in total) associated their learning with collective thinking – either through shared ideas and reflections or through group activities. Sixteen percent highlighted that being part of the SSF Forum community changed how they perceive themselves as fishers, pointing to deeper forms of social and identity-related learning. Only a very small portion (6 percent) reported that peers mainly provided information without broader engagement.

Figure 4. Peer influence on understanding fishing practices

- Being part of this community changed how I see myself as a fisher
- We learned through joint action or doing things as a group
- We explored ideas and problems together
- They mostly provided information



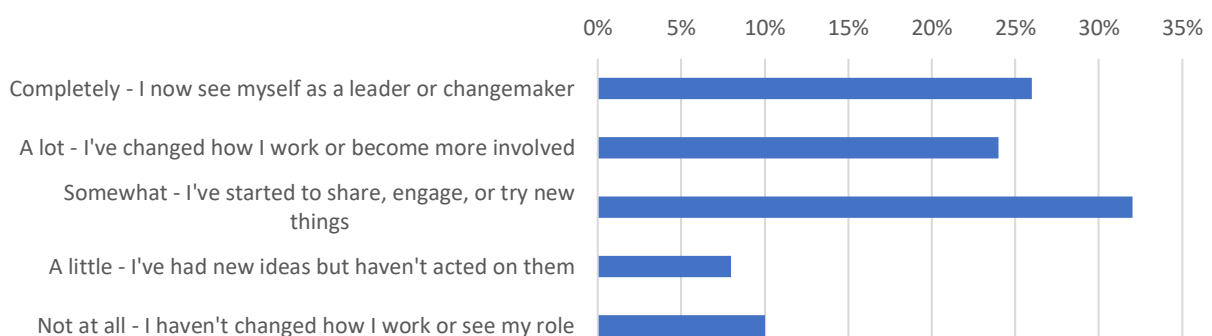
Overall, these results demonstrate that **practical experiences shared by peers were more influential than technical presentations**. The SSF Forum’s emphasis on peer-to-peer exchange fostered a rich environment for mutual learning: beyond acquiring new knowledge, participants strengthened their sense of community.

Self-perception and shared vision

The SSF Forum programme aimed to foster knowledge exchange, social learning, and network-building, with a view to influencing participants' individual roles and discussing a shared vision for sustainability. The survey results confirm significant positive outcomes (Figures 5–7) as many respondents indicated that participation in the SSF Forum strengthened their sense of belonging to a broader community of small-scale fishers while also reinforcing their confidence in their role as stewards of the sea.

The vast majority of respondents reported a medium-to-high level of change in their self-perception. Specifically, the results demonstrate a strong emergence of leadership and active engagement with half of respondents reporting a high impact, stating they either see themselves as a leader or changemaker (26 percent) or have significantly changed how they work/become more involved (24 percent). A second segment (32 percent) reported a medium impact, having started to share, engage, or try new things, illustrating the success in stimulating tangible, proactive behaviour at the local level.

Figure 5. Impact of participation on fishers’ self-perception

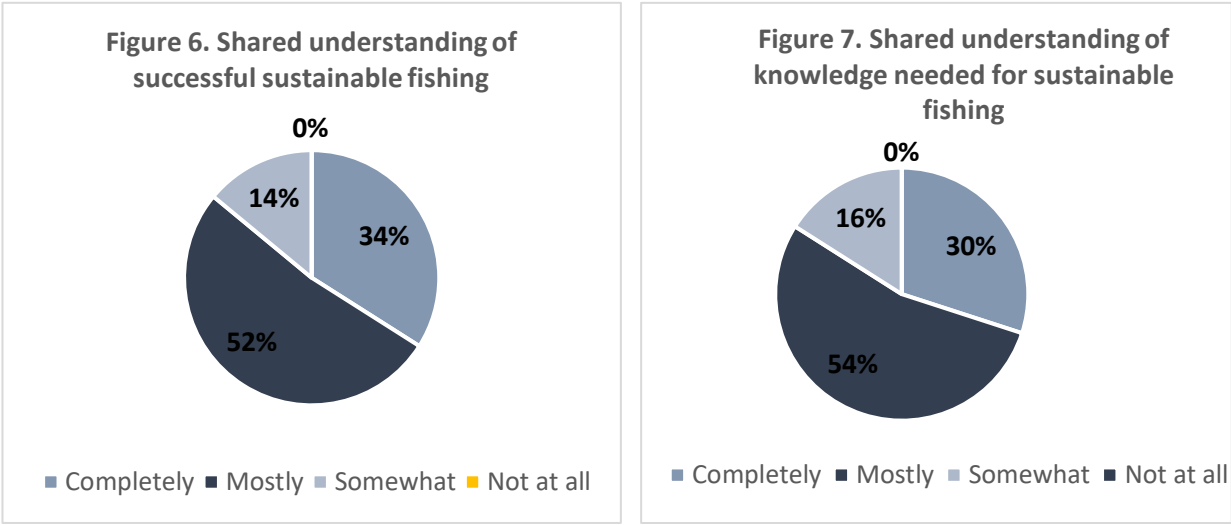


In addition, the survey indicates that the SSF Forum was successful in developing a strong shared vision and shared understanding among participants.

As shown in Figure 6, 86 percent of respondents reported having a shared understanding that was either completely (34 percent) or mostly (52 percent) aligned with others, suggesting a broad consensus on

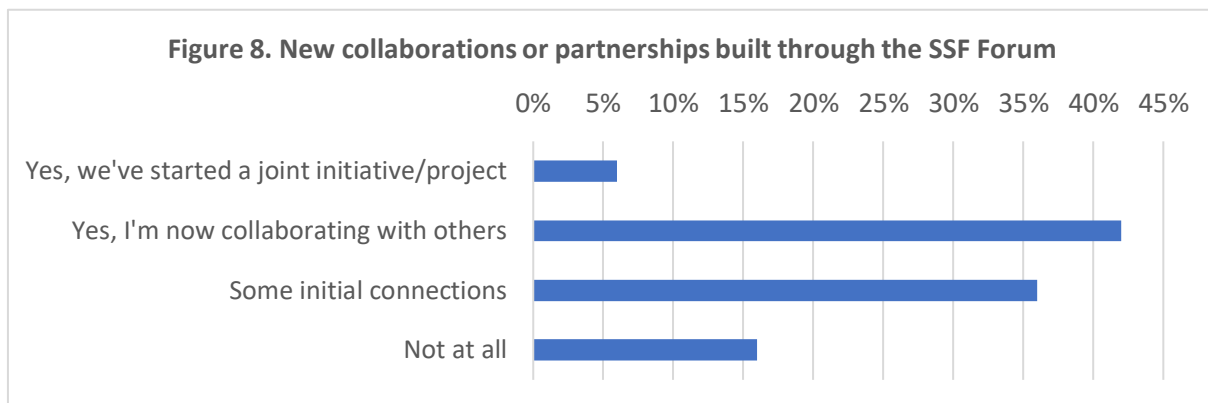
the goals of sustainable fishing. Similarly, in defining the knowledge needed (Figure 8) to achieve sustainable fishing, 84 percent of respondents agreed they had a shared understanding that was completely (30 percent) or mostly (54 percent) aligned. This result is nearly identical to the shared vision for success, demonstrating that SSF Forum discussions effectively made the link between defining what should be done and understanding how to do it through shared knowledge.

In both figures, no respondents selected "Not at all," highlighting the positive effect of social learning. These positive outcomes demonstrate that the **participatory approach effectively fostered a common vision for understanding both objectives and practices of sustainable fishing and the technical knowledge required to achieve them.**



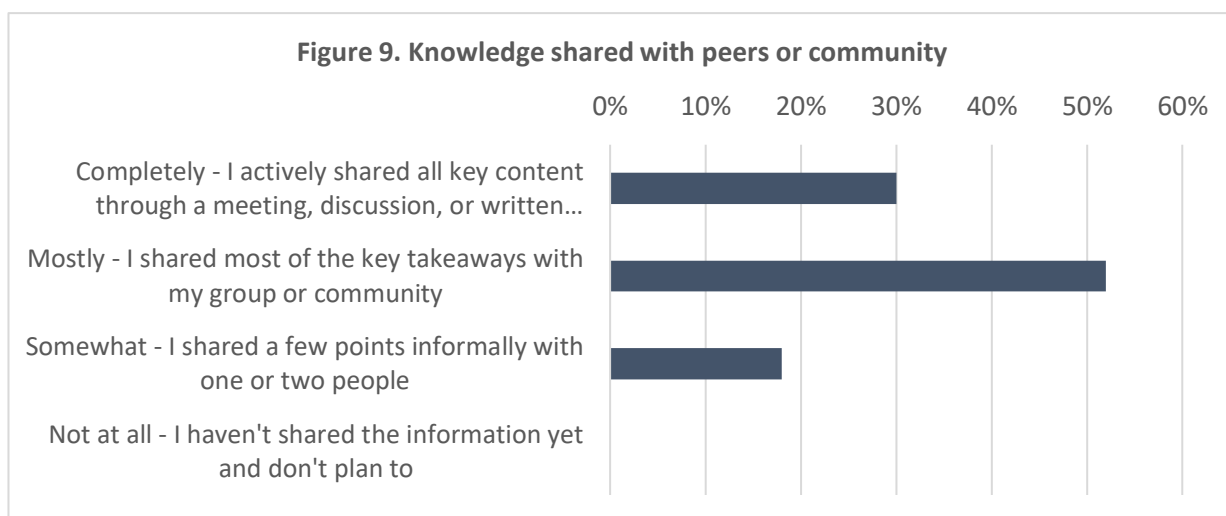
Building networks and partnerships

The SSF Forum appears to have created meaningful spaces for exchange, where professional relationships could develop alongside technical discussions. Responses related to collaboration (Figure 8) suggest that participation contributed to the creation and/or strengthening of new connections and partnerships among fishers from the same country or across the region, opening pathways for the sharing of practical experiences. Several participants also noted a greater willingness to engage in joint initiatives, suggesting that trust and a sense of collective purpose were reinforced through the SSF Forum.



Evidence of knowledge dissemination beyond the SSF Forum itself is also apparent. A large share of respondents reported sharing lessons learned with peers, cooperatives, and local communities (Figure 9). 82 percent of the participants shared most of the key takeaways with their community, and an additional 30 percent actively shared all key content through formal means.

While no respondent indicated not having reported within their communities, the findings can inform future programming as less than 20 percent reported a less structured approach, stating they shared a few points informally with few people. This represents an opportunity to enhance dissemination strategies, perhaps through providing participants with standardized, easy-to-use materials or guidance to share to more comprehensive reporting of key takeaways within their communities.



Priority topics for future SSF Forum sessions

The survey asked participants to rank the five most important topics for future sessions. The consolidated results highlight the following top priority areas:

1. SSF organizational capacity and awareness of labor rights
2. Navigating administrative procedures and accessing funding
3. Building livelihood resilience and diversification strategies
4. Interactions between small-scale and recreational fisheries
5. Improving product valorization and access to markets

These priorities point to a strong demand for practical support, oriented at organizational management and socio-economic resilience within fishing communities. Respondents proposed a wide range of additional topics, including reducing overfishing and ensuring a fairer distribution of resources, strengthening marine environmental protection, and increasing institutional and financial support to small-scale fishers. Several contributions highlighted the need to address the impacts of climate change on coastal communities and to enhance the resilience of small-scale fisheries through adaptive strategies and knowledge exchange. Other priorities included tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, improving the effectiveness of fisheries restricted areas (FRAs), and strengthening participatory governance and co-management mechanisms. Finally, there was strong interest in promoting equitable market access, valuing small-scale fisheries products, fostering innovation and the transmission of traditional knowledge, and enhancing the inclusion of women and youth within the sector.

Conclusions

The survey results demonstrate that the SSF Forum has made a meaningful contribution to learning, empowerment, and network-building among participants, confirming its value as a mechanism to support engagement of stakeholders towards more participatory small-scale fisheries management. The SSF Forum consultative format led to an improved understanding of sustainable fishing practices, strengthened professional identity and sense of community, as well as enhanced collaboration and information beyond the SSF Forum sessions. It is therefore widely perceived as a valuable space for peer exchange and practical collective thinking.

Areas for future enhancement

While the outcomes are largely positive, the findings also point to critical areas where future SSF Forum phases can enhance impact and reach, in particular strengthening local dissemination. Future programmes can enhance knowledge transfer by providing participants with standardized, easy-to-use materials or guidance to help transition the informal sharing into more comprehensive community reporting.

A clear roadmap for future sessions

The priority topics identified by participants provide a clear roadmap for the design of future SSF Forum sessions. There is a strong, articulated demand for practical support focused on organizational strengthening, administrative access, and market valorization. Overall, the findings confirm the continued relevance and added value of the SSF Forum as a critical mechanism for empowering and connecting Mediterranean and Black Sea small-scale fishers and fisheries stakeholders.