



GFCM ONLINE FORUM:

Building fisheries and aquaculture resilience post COVID-19

Webinar 3 - The experience of small-scale fisheries in promoting social resilience and economic innovation in the face of the COVID-19 crisis

Co-organized with WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative

Wednesday, 22 July 2020 – 15.00–16.30 CEST – ZOOM

Questions & Answers¹

<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>
<p>The COVID-19 crisis has prompted the small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector to adapt and implement direct sales mechanisms and shorter value chains, practices that are often facilitated by new technologies. Should these new practices be maintained in the future, even under “normal” circumstances?</p>	<p>A variety of direct sales and shorter supply chains existed also before the pandemic crisis; however, the crisis accelerated demand for these practices and prompted the creation of new ones. There are advantages with shorter supply chains in terms of improved traceability, lower hygiene management costs and possible higher returns to fishers and/or lower consumer prices as fewer intermediaries are involved. However, there are also constraints as many small-scale fishers and consumers, in particular in poorer areas, may not have access to the necessary equipment and technologies (storage, transport, delivery, communication, etc.). Fish processing and trade are in many places an area where women are engaged and the shorter supply chains may cut them and other postharvest workers out and at the same time create an additional work burden for fishers who would need to spend time on commercial activities after fishing.</p>

¹ The answers summarize the responses given by panellists during the webinar. Where useful, additional information and resources have been provided.

	<p>Hence, it would appear that direct sales systems should be maintained where appropriate and feasible as an important complement to more conventional sales systems, provided that such systems comply with national regulations and do not support IUU fishing. New technologies are a key ingredient for making these systems work and should be developed – or adapted – together with SSF actors for their needs. Sharing experiences and networking are also key to strengthen the SSF sector. It would appear important for small-scale fishers to pool resources around commercial activities by organizing in producer organizations or cooperatives. For small-scale fishers and fish workers to be organized may also give rise to other advantages with regard to, for example, representation in decision-making, engagement in fisheries management, more efficient data collection, capacity building and access to social services.</p> <p>The changes in value chains may also lead to new local business opportunities in the form of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for preservation and distribution of fish. In Italy, for example, home selling and take away sales were developed during lock down, which helped the sector. As a result, closer relationships between fishers and consumers were established, leading to the valorization of Italian SSF products.</p>
<p>Technology plays an important role not only in supply chains but also in the harvesting sector, e.g. via satellite vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and Radio Frequency Identification Devices (RFID). How important are these technologies for the SSF sector and could their use mitigate some of the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis with regard to IUU and the safety of small-scale fishers?</p>	<p>New technologies are essential for the development of all sectors, including for SSF. A first objective is to ensure the safety of fishers. In many situations, for example in the event of bad weather or engine failure, the services in charge of safety encounter difficulties to locate fishers. These new technologies provide a tool to efficiently locate fishers and to rescue them in better conditions.</p> <p>Another objective lies in the fight against IUU fishing. New technologies ensure improved management and control in locating illegal fishing activities. In a crisis like the one posed by COVID-19, technology can help to compliment the efforts of in-person control activities and can therefore assist in filling gaps when restrictions are in place preventing in-person activities. Of course, there may be constraints to fully take advantage of the strengths of these technologies but having efficient functional and resilient systems and processes in place is a good starting point for mitigating new challenges.</p>
<p>A significant impact stemming from the COVID-19 crisis is an increase in IUU fishing, why did this happen and what has been done to address this situation?</p>	<p>Both the impact and the responses differed from one country to another. In the southern Mediterranean region, the lockdown froze the mobility of those responsible for monitoring, control and surveillance. When it was reported that there had been an upsurge in IUU fishing, the authorities had difficulties taking action. Another question in this context is whether the shorter and more local supply chains that have been triggered by the COVID-19 situation will increase IUU fishing. At least in the short-term, this may be likely. Health, sanitary and legal checks set up through existing institutions, such as established fish and wholesale markets, may be bypassed through direct sales, resulting in potential sanitary or other issues. Frameworks are needed to ensure direct sales can be done safely and legally.</p> <p>The solution could lie in the establishment of a new commercial system adapted to this context and based on strong traceability systems and technologies. COVID-19 has accelerated a digital transformation of the value chain. One</p>

	<p>emerging technology, the block chain concept, has shown promise for high-performance and low-cost traceability systems, addressing some of the barriers posed by conventional systems, which can be expensive and involve complex databases. With a telephone application, a reliable traceability system can be set up that could be accessible to small-scale fishers.</p> <p>On the other hand, digital value chains may create barriers in that they could be out of reach for poorer consumers who do not have access to technology and related financial solutions in the same way as more affluent consumers. It will be important to understand how more digital value chains may affect food security and nutrition among vulnerable population groups.</p>
<p>How is the GFCM supporting the uptake of new technologies and the creation of opportunities for companies, fishers, governments, and funders to work together on this, and if so in what ways?</p>	<p>Technological innovation has a role to play in many aspects of sustainable fisheries management: from facilitating affordable catch recording and data collection, to the digitalization of markets to ensure fishers receive fair prices, to traceability of fishing activity and fisheries products, to improving networking and knowledge sharing among fishers, and much more.</p> <p>The Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF) stresses the importance of advancing on these topics and technological innovation can only play an increasing role. For example, the RPOA-SSF calls for promoting access to new technology for SSF, particularly to improve safety-at-sea (e.g. efficient communication and navigation equipment), to support monitoring, control and surveillance (e.g. through appropriate vessel traceability technologies), and to support the work of women in the sector. To do this, the RPOA-SSF calls on the GFCM and its members to facilitate knowledge sharing and training opportunities for small-scale fishers. In line with these objectives, the GFCM is supporting capacity building and technical assistance, including in close collaboration with a network of partners operating at both the local and regional levels.</p> <p>For more information on the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, see: http://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/small-scale-fisheries/mapping-tool</p>
<p>Social protection has been a primary response to the COVID-19 crisis, but are fishers and fish workers generally covered by social protection programmes?</p>	<p>In general, there is limited social protection coverage for the SSF sector and many social assistance programmes are not adapted to the specificities of the fishing profession. Considering the prevalence of informal workers in the sector, fishers are not always covered by labor laws. They may also face political, legal, financial, administrative and/or geographical barriers to accessing existing programmes. When social protection programmes exist, many small-scale fishers are not aware of their availability to them and awareness-raising initiatives are needed. The Tunisian Association for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries (ATDPA) has been working to do just this among its members, including through the organizations of awareness raising workshops.</p> <p>More information and recommendations on improving access to social protection for small-scale fishers, see the GFCM-FAO publication “Social protection for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean region”</p>

<p>How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact women – including fishers, shellfish harvesters, fish vendors and others – in the SSF sector?</p>	<p>While data are limited on women working in the SSF sector in this region, we know that women play a particularly significant role in the post-harvest sector (e.g. processing, trading, etc.). As such, they may be more acutely affected by fish market closures, in turn, negatively affecting their livelihoods and income. Furthermore, since markets are a place of close contact with potentially limited sanitation and hygiene facilities, fish vendors and post-harvest workers may risk greater exposure to COVID-19.</p> <p>This should be considered in light of the fact that informal employment arrangements are common within this sector, resulting in workers (both men and women alike) being ineligible for, or having limited access to, social protection benefits offered by some governments. In particular, women fishers and gleaners often work informally, providing an important contribution to family incomes, even if not remunerated properly or recognized formally.</p> <p>Over the longer term, the perception of women in fisheries needs to change and their role backed-up by data. Improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data and data on non-vessel based fishing activity is a prerequisite to adequately addressing the issue of undervaluing and underrepresenting of women in fisheries. This integral to reaching the objectives set forth by both the RPOA-SSF and the SSF Guidelines. Collecting gender-disaggregated data will also help evaluate the risks women in fisheries may face during times of crisis, such as the one represented by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<p>Engaging young people in SSF is essential for the future resilience of the sector. How can SSF organizations better engage this group?</p>	<p>Young people have an essential role to play, particularly through SSF organizations. During the lockdown, some SSF organizations in the Mediterranean faced communication issues with some of their members because, without smartphones, they were unable to attend virtual meetings. Young fishers, on the other hand, are often more technologically savvy and are able help other fishers (particularly their family members) to better engage with new technologies. They can therefore use these technological skills to play a role in managing administrative issues, contributing to the overall management of the SSF organization. Young people also tend to be more aware of both of the ecological impact of fishing, as well as the potential dangers of the profession. They are also often more effective in communicating on these topics, as they are more aware and can help disseminate information on sustainable fishing techniques or health and safety requirements. At the same time, there are of course things they can and should learn from their older peers who have longer experience.</p> <p>In the Black Sea, young people are usually encouraged by their families to join the sector, following the example of their relatives who are also small-scale fishers. Nevertheless, to enter the sector, young fishers often need support. Local fisheries organizations can facilitate this. For instance, in Bulgaria, business start-up support for fishers under 40 years old, including women, is available. This support is mainly provided for small-scale fishers and the measures include support for investments in fishing vessels, improvements of health and safety conditions on board, vocational training, and surveillance and security systems.</p>
<p>Obtaining detailed information on SSF, particularly in data poor countries, can</p>	<p>Good reliable data is a prerequisite for effective fisheries management. This is true also for SSF, including those under participatory management arrangements. In a situation of change and potentially increased pressure on fishery</p>

<p>be a challenge. How can the monitoring of SSF be improved and would this be of significant importance for addressing the COVID-19 situation?</p>	<p>resources, it becomes even more important to have good monitoring, but it should be done with the effective engagement of small-scale fishers.</p> <p>In accordance with the RPOA-SSF, fishers should be involved in scientific monitoring activities, taking into account their traditional knowledge and ensuring that they are informed of the results of these studies. Improved data is also strongly supported by the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration, the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), which provide a framework of principles for SSF governance and development.</p> <p>Fisheries organizations are important components of fisheries monitoring and management. For example, in Turkey there are over 500 fisheries cooperatives along the coast. Over half of them are institutions that assist fishers and researchers in obtaining reliable data. However, monitoring is expensive and complex, depending on many different types of data collection methodologies (questionnaires, surveys, face-to-face interviews, etc.), each with different challenges. Fishers need to be given authority and responsibility in data collection and co-management should be promoted. When data are collected and analysed through a partnership between researchers and fishers, better decisions can be made and appropriate policies developed.</p>
<p>In the event of a second wave of COVID-19, what would the GFCM recommend to fishers to tackle the market issues that they might face once again? What strategies could be employed, particularly by isolated fishers with relatively small catches?</p>	<p>The COVID-19 crisis has not ended and a second-wave is indeed likely to occur. The fisheries sector, more specifically the SSF sector, must apply lessons learned from the first wave if they are to be more resilient in the future. We have seen that those small-scale fishers who were well organized among themselves and were able to take collective action were better positioned to weather the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis. SSF organizations therefore have an essential role to play and should be strengthened. Furthermore, there is scope for organizations around the region to learn from each other, sharing innovative approaches to supporting their members, such as through microcredit flexibility, regulating fishing effort and supporting direct selling.</p> <p>In particular, cooperatives can play an essential role in valorizing SSF catches and developing strong linkages with market opportunities, as appropriate to the local context, such as strengthening ties with local restaurants and local distribution channels, facilitating direct-to-consumer selling, and even facilitating links to export markets where appropriate. Considering many consumers are increasingly turning to technology (e.g. phone applications, e-commerce websites, social media, etc.) during the COVID-19 crisis, SSF organizations can explore opportunities to engage with these technological tools to further support connecting fishers with consumers.</p>
<p>How does the GFCM engage with SSF organizations in member countries to support the sector?</p>	<p>SSF organizations have always been important partners in GFCM's technical work, for example, by facilitating data collection initiatives. However, in line with the objectives of the RPOA-SSF, the GFCM is working to further strengthen its engagement with SSF organizations in the region. In early 2020, the GFCM – together with the Friends of SSF platform – launched the SSF University initiative to respond to the recommendation within the RPOA-SSF to “Facilitate education and training opportunities for men and women of the fisheries sector, such as summer</p>

universities, aimed at developing fisheries-specific skills, policy knowledge (fisheries, environment) and, in particular, knowledge and innovative solutions and technology developments”.

The “SSF University” consists of a series of workshops and training courses for SSF stakeholders, focusing on the fishers and fish-workers active in the sector. The structure of each workshop varies and may consist of classroom learning, in the field experience and peer-to-peer exchanges. While unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated postponing these workshops, they are foreseen to be rescheduled at the earliest possible date. For more information about the SSF University initiative, see <http://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/small-scale-fisheries/ssfuniversity>. Interested stakeholders are also encouraged to contact RPOA-SSF@gfcmonline.org to learn more about how to participate.