United Nations



UNITED NATIONS Ocean Conference Nice, France 2025

2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development Nice, 9 June –13 June 2025 Ocean Action Panels Distr.: General 29 April 2025

Original: English

ADVANCE UNEDITED

Ocean Action Panel 5: Fostering sustainable fisheries management including supporting small-scale fishers

Concept paper prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

The present concept paper was prepared pursuant to paragraph 24 of General Assembly resolution 78/128, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development to prepare concept papers on each of the themes of the Ocean Action Panels, taking into account the relevant ocean-related processes of the Assembly and other possible contributions. The present paper relates to Ocean Action Panel 5, entitled "Fostering sustainable fisheries management including supporting small-scale fishers". In the paper, the status, trends, challenges and opportunities for the achievement of relevant targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 are set out, under the overarching theme of the Conference: "Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean".

I. Introduction

- 1. Fisheries are integral to the global food system, providing a vital source of protein and nutrition for billions and playing a crucial role in poverty alleviation and economic development, particularly in coastal communities (SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 8). The growing global population will likely require an increase in sustainable food production, making the responsible management of aquatic resources an important concern. This requires a multifaceted and adaptive approach, acknowledging the wide diversity of fisheries and management systems across the globe. Effective management relies on robust institutional capacities, clearly defined governance frameworks, and efficient operational strategies operating at local, national, regional (through Regional Fisheries Management Bodies/Regional Fishery Bodies), and international levels. These frameworks must be guided by relevant international instruments and agreements, integrating them into national policies for cohesive and effective action. This is directly relevant to SDG 14 (Life Below Water), which aims to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas, and marine resources and contribute also to many other SDGs.
- 2. The complexity of global fisheries demands flexibility and context-specific solutions. Management strategies must be tailored to the unique social, economic, and cultural realities of each fishery and nation. An evidence-based, adaptive and participatory approach is particularly crucial for small-scale fisheries (SSF), which often operate with limited resources and data. Devolution of rights, capacity building, technical assistance, better data, including recognition of local and traditional knowledge, and technology transfer are vital in supporting local communities to adopt sustainable fishing practices and gain fair access to markets. Moreover, strengthening the global dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders, including international organizations and regional fisheries management bodies, is essential for policy harmonization and effective enforcement of regulations.
- 3. However, significant challenges remain that threaten the long-term sustainability of fisheries. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to undermine fisheries management with detrimental consequences for fish stocks and their ecosystems and jeopardizing livelihoods, exacerbating poverty, and increasing food insecurity. Moreover, harmful subsidies often exacerbate overcapacity, leading to unsustainable fishing practices, with negative consequences for both large-scale and SSF. Climate change further complicates the situation, altering ecosystems and impacting fish populations (SDG 13). Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive, collaborative, and adaptive approach. Promoting sustainable practices, ensuring equitable access to resources and markets, and fostering responsible trade are essential steps.
- 4. This includes implementing international and regional governance frameworks, conducting effective control and enforcement mechanisms, promoting innovative technological solutions, enhancing transparency and traceability within supply chains, and strengthening consumer awareness about sustainable seafood choices. By prioritizing sustainable practices, promoting equitable access to resources, and fostering responsible trade, we can enhance the potential of fisheries to increase food security, alleviate poverty, and stimulate sustainable economic growth, contributing significantly to the SDG 14 targets, as well as to other SDGs. The future of fisheries, and the well-being of billions, depends on our collective commitment to responsible and effective management and coordinated global action.

II. Status and trends

5. Marine capture fisheries production reached 78.3 million tonnes in 2023, which together with inland capture production (12.0 million tonnes) represented 48 percent of the world's total

fisheries and aquaculture production of aquatic animals (188.9 million tonnes)¹. With a share of 41 percent, marine capture fisheries remain the major source of global aquatic animal production. Global apparent consumption of aquatic animal foods increased by 3.0 percent on average annually from 1961 to 2021, providing more than 3.2 billion people with at least 20 percent of their average per capita intake of animal protein. Overall, aquatic animal products provide approximately 15 percent of the global population's intake of animal protein. In 2022, 62 million people were directly employed in the capture fisheries and aquaculture primary sector, of which about 16 million people in marine fisheries (FAO, 2024). If subsistence fishing and employment in the postharvest sub-sector are included, 113 million people participate in SSF.

- 6. Small-scale fisheries provide at least 40 percent of global fisheries catches, 68 percent if considering marine capture fisheries only², and 2.3 billion people with, on average, 20 percent of their dietary intake across six key micronutrients essential for human health³. Globally, 492 million people, nearly half of them women, depend partly on SSF, in total generating about 44 percent of the economic value of all fish landed. There is evidence that participatory management (e.g., co-management) is a real solution for the effective management of many SSF⁴. Yet, only 36 percent of the global catch from SSF is associated with the transfer of management rights to fishers⁵. This highlights the importance of promoting policies that put fishers at the center of fisheries management processes, providing benefit to ecosystems and the people depending on them.
- 7. In terms of fish stocks health, the proportion of stocks assessed by FAO categorized as overfished continues to increase since the 1970s, reaching 37.7 percent in 2021. Due to data and technical capacity limitations, only about 50 percent of the global catch comes from scientifically assessed stocks. In fact, 50 percent of FAO Members have identified a lack of information on stock status within their management systems⁶. These numbers are concerning given a strong correlation between scientifically assessed fish stocks and the effectiveness of their management systems in achieving sustainability⁷.
- 8. The proper design and implementation of management plans are most often a prerequisite for effective fisheries management. Management plans were available for 71% and implemented for 68% of the fisheries included in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) questionnaire⁸, suggesting a substantial percentage of fisheries globally that remain formally unmanaged (32 percent global average). In terms of the provisions available within fisheries management plans, the most frequent across Members included prohibition of destructive fishing methods and practices (99 percent), provisions for stakeholder participation in management decisions (97 percent), and the consideration rights of SSF fishers (94 percent). The least frequents were represented by provisions to address fishing capacity under defined economic conditions (72 percent) and the consideration of stock specific target reference points (72 percent)⁹.
- 9.Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains one of the greatest threats to sustainable fisheries and the conservation of marine ecosystems. It undermines national, regional and global efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks and, as a consequence, inhibits progress towards achieving the goals of long-term sustainability. IUU fishing creates unfair competition with fishers that abide by the regulations, threatening the food security and livelihoods of entire

¹ FAO. 2024. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024 – Blue Transformation in action. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0683en

² FAO, Duke University & WorldFish. 2023. Illuminating Hidden Harvests – The Contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development. Rome.

³ <u>https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-08448-z</u>

⁴ <u>https://www.nature.com/articles/nature09689</u>

⁵ FAO, Duke University & WorldFish. 2023. Illuminating Hidden Harvests – The Contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development. Rome.

⁶ https://www.fao.org/3/cc9129en/cc9129en.pdf

⁷ https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1909726116

⁸ https://www.fao.org/3/nn947en/nn947en.pdf

⁹ https://www.fao.org/3/cc9129en/cc9129en.pdf

coastal communities. IUU fishing could also be associated with unsafe and indecent working conditions, labor abuse and slavery.

- 10. A significant share of marine production enters international trade improving the distribution and access to aquatic products through imports and contributing to employment, revenue generation and economic growth, noting though that small-scale fishers do not always have access to international markets. In 2023, exports of all fisheries and aquaculture products totaled USD 194 billion, with an estimated 76 percent from marine products (including aquaculture). However, the precise proportion of marine products within total trade of aquatic products remains an estimate, as some countries report their trade under broad categories of aquatic products without differentiating between marine and freshwater species, or by farmed or wild origin. Informal regional trade, e.g., of small pelagic fish in West Africa, is not always included in statistics although being important to local livelihoods¹⁰.
- 11. Fisheries are vital to South-South trade and global food security, with developing economies leading global exports in processed fish and other aquatic products. In 2023, South-South trade in primary and processed fish was estimated at \$19 billion and \$23 billion, respectively, with growth of 43 percent and 89 percent since 2012¹¹. Leveraging South-South trade platforms such as the Global System of Trade Preferences among developing countries¹² and Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) can help reduce trade barriers and unlock developing countries' potential.
- 12. An estimated USD 22 billion of annual government subsidies are expanding fishing capacity, contributing to overcapacity and overfishing and practices that deplete fish stocks and undermine efforts to achieve sustainable fisheries¹³. The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS), adopted in June 2022, prohibits subsidies to vessels or operators involved in IUU fishing, fishing of overfished stocks, and fishing in the unregulated high seas. Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, WTO members have notified 617 environment-related trade measures to the WTO with the environment-related objective of "Sustainable Fisheries Management".¹⁴ This could increase further with the entry into force of the AFS, reflecting efforts to regulate subsidies that could otherwise distort trade or harm fisheries sustainability.

III.Challenges and Opportunities

- 13. The 2022 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) highlighted challenges and opportunities for ocean sustainability. While progress has been made in several fronts, including on the adoption and implementation of key multilateral instruments relevant to fisheries, the strengthening of national and local fisheries management institutions, and the implementation of effective fisheries management systems, several factors have intensified existing challenges and created new ones, underscoring the urgency of coordinated and transformative action (FAO 2024).
- 14. Strengthening International Fisheries Governance. The global fisheries governance framework, while having made progress, still faces significant hurdles. While the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) has garnered widespread support with adherence of 81 Parties, which are focused on implementing the Agreement and maximizing its effectiveness, further actions are required to strengthen the implementation and/or advance the entry into force of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS), the FAO Compliance Agreement, the Convention 188 (ILO), the Cape Town Agreement (IMO), and the

¹⁰ <u>https://digitalarchive.worldfishcenter.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/60afd44a-0819-4a4d-86b9-d371fc1b1731/content</u>

¹¹ https://unctad.org/publication/south-south-trade-marine-fisheries-and-aquaculture-sectors

¹² https://unctad.org/topic/trade-agreements/global-system-of-trade-preferences

¹³ <u>https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X19303677</u>

¹⁴ WTO Environmental Database: <u>www.wto.org/edb</u>

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement. The FAO CCRF, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines¹⁵), the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, the Blue BioTrade Principles and Criteria, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KGBF), also represent opportunities to address governance gaps in the fisheries sector, including SSF. Their effective integration into national and regional policies and management frameworks and fisheries access arrangements is crucial, requiring additional efforts in capacity building and technical support, particularly for SSF. This lack of comprehensive and consistent implementation weakens the overall effectiveness of the international legal framework, hindering progress towards SDG 14.4 (sustainable fish stocks) and other relevant SDG targets. The lack of coordination and harmonization amongst these different frameworks further complicates the challenge.

- 15. Strengthening regional fisheries governance: The objective of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) is to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of UNCLOS. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) identified regional fishery bodies (RFBs) in particular regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements (RFMO) as the mechanism through which States can fulfil their obligations to conserve and manage fish stocks. RFMOs are among the most important international cooperative mechanisms in fisheries management, as they have the authority to adopt international legally binding conservation and management measures concerning fishing operations and associated activities. They form some of the most effective intergovernmental partnerships currently regulating the high seas and provide a forum for collaboration and implementation of the Convention, UNFSA, and many other international legally binding and non-binding instruments. They also provide opportunities to discuss, evaluate and improve the science on key aspects of ocean governance, particularly for the conservation and management of fisheries resources. Among the most emblematic measures, we can underline the adoption of binding management and conservation measures, regulation on fishing gears and techniques, including ban on certain practices, closed periods, quotas and/or fishing effort stabilization measures, stock assessment through scientific committees, observer programs, MCS measures or management strategies evaluations (MSE). The work of RFMOs remains essential and successes mentioned above must continue. Collaboration among RFMOs continues to be crucial, as it increases efficiency in terms of information sharing, capacity to adopt science-based management measures, technical and financial support, transferring knowledge and technology, and avoiding duplicate costs.
- 16. Strengthening national fisheries governance is essential for the sustainable management of marine resources. At a national level, it is crucial to establish robust political and legal frameworks that facilitate the effective implementation of international policy frameworks, agreements, and best practices. This includes adopting the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), which emphasizes the importance of considering the entire marine ecosystem and its interactions when managing fish stocks. Additionally, participatory decision-making processes are vital for involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including local communities, fishers, scientists, and policymakers. By engaging these groups in the management and governance process, we can foster transparency, build trust, and ensure that various perspectives and expertise inform management decisions. Such inclusive approaches not only enhance the legitimacy of governance structures but also promote social equity and resilience within fishing communities.
- 17. **Overcoming technical, legal, financial and institutional barriers.** Institutional, technical and financial constraints hinder progress in fisheries sustainability through ineffective management.

¹⁵ https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en

In fact, many fisheries lack comprehensive management plans, especially for inland and SSF¹⁶. Even where plans exist, implementation faces significant hurdles (i.e., 32 percent of the fisheries globally lack implementation of management plans¹⁷). This is mostly due limited financial and technical capacities, weak governance and enforcement – including devolution of rights - and a lack of political will. The lack of a systematic framework for evaluating management effectiveness hinders identification of areas needing improvement, as does the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the diverse fisheries management approaches and their suitability for different contexts. Furthermore, the complexity of the fisheries sector, including intricate value chains, requires a multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional approach that is often lacking in many fisheries, particularly in marine and inland SSF. Overcoming these challenges necessitates further targeted financial assistance, capacity building initiatives, and the development of effective governance structures that involve and empower local communities in participatory management (e.g. co-management).

- 18. Improving Data and Information for Decision Making. Data and information are critical for effective, evidence-based fisheries management and policy formulation. However, significant gaps exist, particularly for SSF and multi-species tropical fisheries. Data collection protocols are often inadequate, data management and analytical capacity are weak, and socioeconomic data related to fisheries are scarce. This lack of comprehensive and reliable data limits the effectiveness of stock assessments and other empirical approaches necessary to inform decision-making¹⁸. The need to integrate social, economic, gender, and nutritional considerations into data collection and analysis is particularly critical for SSF¹⁹ as well as considering climate variability and extreme weather events and adaptation measures, and the impacts and risks from pandemics. Improving data and information systems requires investment in technology, capacity building, and fostering international collaboration to standardize data collection and analysis, as well as recognizing and integrating traditional and local knowledge.
- 19. Considering the Multidimensional Aspects of the Fisheries Sector. Fisheries management must go beyond simply focusing on the sustainability of the fishery resources. Value chains need to be viewed as an integral part of the overall food systems, encompassing harvest and post-harvest activities, and acknowledging the complex interplay of environmental, economic, social, and governance factors. Obtaining sufficient multidimensional information about the fisheries sector, and the small-scale sub-sector in particular, and institutionalizing the capacity to analyze and use it to inform fisheries management is necessary but not sufficient to sustain the wide range of benefits from fisheries²⁰. In fact, it will require the evaluation of well-informed trade-offs in multidimensional management objectives and associated policies that reflect the diverse contributions of fisheries to sustainable development²¹. Additionally, effective fisheries management requires a multi-sectoral approach involving all stakeholders governments, industry, research institutions, and civil society to achieve a balanced approach that considers social, economic and ecological sustainability.
- 20. Integrating Climate Change into Fisheries Management: Climate change poses a significant threat to marine ecosystems and fisheries. Rising ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, changes in ocean currents, and extreme weather events are altering fish distribution, abundance, and species composition. At the same time, UNCTAD estimates that global fishing fleets, powered mainly by fossil fuels such as marine diesel, emit between 0.1% to 0.5% of global carbon emissions, or up to 159 million tons annually, according to the latest available data and information²² on local level impacts is limited, and the full range of uncertainty is not adequately understood. Many national and regional fisheries management plans do not explicitly integrate climate change and decarbonization considerations into their planning, policy, and decision-

¹⁶ https://www.fao.org/3/nn947en/nn947en.pdf

¹⁷ https://www.fao.org/3/cc9129en/cc9129en.pdf

¹⁸ SOFIA 2024

¹⁹ <u>https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-08448-z</u>

²⁰ SOFIA 2024

²¹ https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-08448-z

²² <u>https://unctad.org/news/energy-transition-charting-fair-course-fishing-fleets</u>

making. Enhancing understanding of climate change impacts on fisheries at local and species levels and incorporating climate projections into fisheries management and policy are crucial. This necessitates improving climate models and projections at local levels, enhancing local capacity to assess and manage climate risks, integrating climate change considerations into sectoral planning, and fostering international collaboration and data sharing on climate change impacts on marine ecosystems and fisheries.

- 21. Addressing Multisectoral Developments: The increasing focus on a blue economy requires a multisectoral approach to fisheries management. Developments in sectors such as aquaculture, offshore energy, tourism, and shipping can impact fisheries and marine ecosystems, necessitating integrated spatial planning (MSP) and other mechanisms to minimize conflicts and maximize synergies. This involves engaging multiple stakeholders from diverse sectors, developing mechanisms for conflict resolution, ensuring fair and equitable resource allocation, and establishing and enforcing legal frameworks to govern resource use and ecosystem protection.
- 22. Enhancing Sustainable, Equitable and Traceable Trade of aquatic products. Trade can be a powerful driver of sustainable fisheries management but only if managed effectively. Overcoming trade barriers, both tariffs and non-tariff measures (NTMs), is essential, particularly for SSF to access markets globally and increase their incomes and livelihoods. Fisheries related tariffs have the highest average rates of all sectors of the ocean economy, reaching up to 30 to 50 percent in some markets²³. Mutually reducing tariffs and streamlining NTMs would encourage trade, which can promote legality due to the higher scrutiny of many big importers²⁴. Implementing robust traceability systems is essential to ensure legality and sustainability of seafood products, particularly in tackling IUU fishing, which undermines sustainable fisheries management, reduces incomes for SSF and undermines livelihoods ²⁵. Promoting the implementation of international initiatives such as the FAO SSF Guidelines and UNCTAD's Blue BioTrade Principles and Criteria can increase transparency and build trust in seafood supply chains, particularly in high value-low volume SSF value chains.
- 23. Supporting sustainable South-South Trade in marine fisheries products by reducing tariffs and simplifying and harmonizing NTMs, including on fisheries management. South-South trade in these products is hampered by high tariff and non-tariff barriers. MFN tariffs among GSTP members ranged from 12 to 16 per cent for primary products and up to 20 per cent for 'prepared crustaceans, mollusks and other aquatic invertebrates' ²⁶ while some NTMs constitute unnecessary barriers to trade. Complying with NTMs can be burdensome, particularly for SSF²⁷. In addition, SSF face difficulties exporting due to the informality of the sector, limited infrastructure and services, such as transport facilities and cold storage, lack of economies of scale, and lack of knowledge, hardware, or software to introduce effective traceability systems and comply with regulatory requirements. Simplifying and harmonizing NTMs, including those related to fisheries management, might increase the market access of SSF while promoting sustainable trade.
- 24. **Capitalizing on regional fisheries cooperation.** The regional dimension is key to international fisheries management policy and the role of regional RFBs is increasingly recognized. There are over 50 RFBs worldwide, almost half of which are RFMOs which have mandates to adopt legally binding conservation and management measures concerning fishing operations and associated activities. RFMOs utilize scientific advice to establish and implement a range of management tools, including catch and effort limits, spatial and temporal restrictions, and monitoring, control and surveillance rules, and regularly review parties' compliance with their obligations. In 2017,

²³ (UNCTAD, 2021; UNCTAD 2023)

²⁴ (UNCTAD, 2024a).

²⁵ UNCTAD's BioTrade principle 3.2 and 3.3 that "prices must take into account all the costs of value chain activities" and "contribute to sustainable local development, as defined by producers and their local communities".

²⁶ (WITS 2024),

²⁷ (UNCTAD, 2024a).

152 States and regional economic integration organizations were members of one or more RFMOs, with many States being members of more than one RFMO²⁸.

- 25. Shifting Harmful Subsidies. Fisheries subsidies can often exacerbate unsustainable fishing practices leading to overcapacity and overfishing. The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS) establishes an important framework for disciplining harmful fisheries subsidies, aiming to shift subsidies towards sustainable practices, such as supporting effectively managed SSF and reducing capacity-enhancing subsidies. However, the AFS' implementation requires national efforts to develop domestic policies, strengthen capacity and develop institutional frameworks to ensure subsidies' effective management. There's a need to foster greater transparency and accountability in subsidy allocation, disbursement and related data, which the AFS is expected to facilitate once it enters into force. This should include a significant redirection of financial resources to support sustainable practices, particularly within the SSF sector.
- 26. Achieving effective management of all fisheries. The challenges to effective fisheries management aimed at achieving sustainability of the sector have intensified since 2022, as shown for example in the proportion of stocks categorized as overfished²⁹. Addressing these, as indicated in FAO's Blue Transformation roadmap, requires a multi-pronged approach involving strengthening international and national governance, overcoming financial and institutional barriers, improving data and information systems, considering multi-dimensional aspects of the fisheries sector, integrating climate change considerations, engaging with multisectoral developments, promoting sustainable trade, shifting harmful incentives, and fostering international and regional collaboration. Only through coordinated, transformative, and collaborative action can we effectively address these challenges and seize the opportunities for achieving SDG 14 and related targets, contributing to a healthy ocean and sustainable development for all.
- IV.Building on section above, this section will offer action oriented pragmatic solutions to challenges and opportunities. Including spotlights/snapshots of impactful initiatives that can be scaled up and serve as best practice. Only five years away from the 2030, initiatives that have been completed and/or are well on their way to completion should be highlighted alongside a discussion on their impact.
 - 27. Strengthening and enforcing the implementation of international fisheries instruments have become an urgent priority for many nations, particularly in light of the ongoing challenges posed by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as the need for equitable and effective management of marine fishery resources. In this regard, it is critical to increase capacity development in order to place developing countries in a better position to fulfill their port, flag, coastal and market State responsibilities. In 2021, in line with Blue Transformation objective to ensure that all fisheries are under effective management, FAO and partners initiated several regional capacity-building workshops targeting developing states, particularly in the Western Indian Ocean. These workshops provided training on the significance of these agreements and detailed practical steps for implementation. Countries such as Tanzania and Kenya participated actively, resulting in commitments from their governments to take concrete steps towards ratifying these agreements. FAO's Global Capacity Development Programme in support of the PSMA and complimentary instruments has supported over 60 countries. The WTO has also organized eight regional workshops on AFS implementation for its developing and least-

 ²⁸ Terje Løbach, T., Petersson, M., Haberkon, E. & Mannini, P. 2020. Regional fisheries management organizations and advisory bodies. Activities and developments, 2000–2017. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 651. Rome, FAO. <u>https://doi.org/10.4060/ca7843en</u>
²⁹ FAO 2024

developed country Members in 2022-2023 and continues more targeted national and regional workshops at the request of its Members. These training programs have shown promise in not only increasing awareness but also facilitating subsequent policy changes.

- 28. Additionally, the integration of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and the SSF Guidelines into national frameworks is crucial for creating effective governance mechanisms. To date, several countries have developed and currently implement their National Plans of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSFs) as a systemic approach to facilitate implementation of the SSF Guidelines according to national and local priorities, namely Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, the Philippines, Tanzania and Uganda (additional countries in progress). NPOAs-SSF are developed in a participatory manner and include, among other things, reviewing of legal and policy frameworks and sets out country priorities for achieving environmentally, socially and economically sustainable SSF.
- 29. The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) based on the CCRF, focuses on sustainable fisheries management by balancing the ecological and socioeconomic aspects of fisheries. First introduced in 2001 at the Reykjavik Conference, EAF provides a practical framework for managing fisheries effectively. Over the years, FAO and its partners have worked extensively to promote EAF worldwide, with, more than 50 EAF-compliant fisheries management plans have been created, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific region. These efforts have encouraged multi-stakeholder participation and stimulated changes in behavior, showing how sustainable practices can align environmental, social, and economic goals while supporting profitability and job creation. EAF has shown tangible success, with growing adoption by national fisheries administrations and regional fisheries bodies (RFBs). Policies now increasingly reflect EAF principles like participatory decision-making, precautionary approaches, and evidence-based management. Lessons from implementation highlight key areas for transitioning to EAF-compliant management systems, including integrating EAF principles into fisheries planning to improve awareness, accountability, and multi-stakeholder engagement. Addressing challenges like securing consistent funding and maintaining stakeholder involvement is critical for operationalizing plans. Legal and regulatory frameworks also need to support precautionary and participatory management. Raising awareness among managers and policymakers about the benefits of investing in fisheries management is equally important. EAF's progress underscores its potential as a scalable and effective model for sustainable fisheries management.
- 30. The GEF-funded Coastal Fisheries Initiative (CFI) implemented by FAO and partners contributed to overcoming technical, financial, and institutional barriers to achieve effective fisheries management and governance in the participating countries by taking a holistic approach and working in a participatory manner with stakeholders along the value chain, i.e., in harvesting and postharvest. Recognizing the importance of addressing the three pillars of sustainable development-the environmental, social, and economic dimensions-the CFI promoted the implementation of the EAF, the SSF Guidelines, and the gender dimension in three regions. Fishing communities and national and local authorities were supported to develop and/or implement EAF-compatible fisheries management plans and co-management arrangements under data-limited situations. By focusing on community engagement, capacity building, and policy development, the initiative provided countries with essential tools and resources. For example, in Indonesia and Senegal, capacity-building programs have introduced best practices in fish preservation and sustainable fishing techniques, allowing local fishers to improve their catch efficiency while minimizing ecological impact. In Peru, the CFI has facilitated the creation of fishing community-based saving and credit groups, granting fishers and fish workers access to capital for sustainable investments and recovery from economic shocks. Furthermore, the initiative fosters better governance by encouraging local stakeholder participation, women in particular, in decision-making.
- 31. Several action-oriented solutions to improve fishery data and information for effective fisheries management have been implemented by FAO and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. For example, the Illuminating Hidden Harvest Initiative led by FAO, Duke University and WorldFish included more than 800 fishery experts in 58 countries to collate,

analyze and interpret environmental, social, economic, nutrition and gender data aimed at informing SSF policies and governance framework³⁰. The data collection protocol is now being applied at national level in Tanzania and Madagascar aimed at using this information to inform both policy formulation and improve SSF management. Capacity development programs should focus on increasing Members capacity to curate, manage, and analyze good quality data and information rather than focusing only on expensive data collection systems. The use of local ecological knowledge and community-based data collection programs has proven to be a costeffective mechanism to move fisheries from data poor to data rich³¹.

- 32. Fisheries are social-ecological systems that need to be addressed using multidimensional approaches in their management and governance. Such approaches underscore the need for holistic sustainable fisheries management that extends beyond the sustainability of fishery resources in line with FAO's Blue Transformation Roadmap. Developing integrated value chains and crafting policies that balance economic growth, social equity, and ecological integrity are essential. Assessments should aim at identifying inefficiencies and promote sustainable fishing and post-harvest practices. A multi-sectoral and participatory approach that fosters cooperation among government agencies and builds partnerships with research institutions will enhance fisheries management. These collective efforts can secure the ecological health, economic viability, and social equity crucial for communities that depend on these fishery resources. In an effort to strengthen sustainable fisheries production and trade, it is crucial to facilitate capacity building and the sharing of knowledge and technologies with developing states, including through South-South and Triangular cooperation, in the areas of fisheries, mariculture and aquaculture production techniques; marine spatial planning; assessment and strengthening of the National Quality Infrastructure and meeting international standards; development of diversification and export strategies; sustainability enhancement and certification; and other key areas such as negotiating balanced fisheries access agreements. UNCTAD with its global network of Centers of Excellence in fisheries and aquaculture, standards and sustainability is an example of such ongoing technical assistance.
- 33. Integrating climate change adaptation into national and local fisheries management and the use of climate data and information, including results from climate risk assessments and monitoring (REF), in decision-making are a critical element of climate resilient fisheries and ecosystem management. These aspects can be accomplished through mechanisms such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). An FAO analysis of NDCs submitted as of 1 January 2024 indicates that 60% of NDCs with an adaptation component include adaptation actions related to fisheries and aquaculture. These primarily consist of sustainable fisheries practices (29%) and adaptive capture fishing practices and technologies (19%). Regionally, references to adaptation actions in fisheries and aquaculture occur more frequently in NDCs submitted by countries from Sub-Saharan Africa (81%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (67%) than the global average³² (REF). Additionally, UNCTAD research on 606 ocean measures found in SIDS NDCs indicates that, over half of the measures (328) relate to sustainably using the ocean for economic development, while 278 focus on marine and coastal conservation efforts. Most management and conservation measures concern area-based management (121 measures) or ecosystem protection, expansion and restoration (101 measures). Fisheries with 85 measures is one the most targeted ocean economic sectors in SIDS NDCs, particularly for adaptation purposes. In global terms, we can find some examples in Albania's NDC which recognizes developing sectoral adaptation plans, including for the fisheries sector, as a high-priority adaptation measure REF. Other examples include Chile REF, Saint Lucia REF, Senegal REF and the Philippines REF. There is also an increasing recognition of the importance of integrating traditional and local knowledge into climate solutions in the fisheries management cycle, as seen in the Pacific and the Amazon³³.

³⁰ <u>https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4576en</u>

³¹ https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03632415.2017.1383904

³² FAO. (forthcoming). State of Agrifood Systems in Nationally Determined Contributions: Global Analysis

³³ <u>https://cgspace.cgiar.org/items/2ce9de7a-590d-49ba-8652-d7968ee6c51c</u>

- 34. Addressing the multisectoral challenges of the blue economy requires pragmatic solutions that foster collaboration across various sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, and tourism. Implementing Integrated Spatial Planning (MSP) can optimize marine resource use and minimize conflicts but it needs to be implemented in an inclusive manner and in particular SSF may require capacity building and empowerment to be able to participate in an effective way. Establishing multi-stakeholder engagement platforms, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms help maintain balance across competing interests, while robust legal and policy frameworks, like the SSF Guidelines, should be referred to . Scaling up the application of such existing policy frameworks will contribute significantly to sustainable fisheries management, including the resilience of marine ecosystems, and livelihoods and as we approach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals but it requires respecting existing rights and promotion on equitable approaches.
- 35. South-South trade can be a pathway to legal fishing through enhanced monitoring of the origin of fisheries products by both exporters and importers from sea to dish. Members of the GSTP would benefit from negotiating a sectoral-level agreement on reducing tariff and NTMs on marine fisheries products, including the protection of social and environmental standards³⁴. As GSTP members often harvest and trade different species, such an agreement would enable complementarity and create economic, social and environmental benefits, particularly for SSF.
- 36. One of the expected benefits of eliminating harmful subsidies through the operation of the AFS is the unlocking of resources that could be redirected to promote and support sustainable fisheries management and practices by all WTO Members, including developing and LDC Members. The AFS has also established the WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism Trust Fund, known as the WTO Fish Fund, to support developing and least-developed country WTO Members that have deposited their instruments of acceptance to implement the AFS. The Fish Fund will provide financial support for technical assistance and capacity building to assist such Members in making their required notifications, improving their fisheries management capabilities, including data collection and reporting, and developing their relevant institutional capacities, including interagency coordination, to meet the requirements of the AFS. For the Agreement to become operational, and thus deliver its sustainability benefits, two-thirds of WTO Members have to deposit their instruments of acceptance with the WTO. The Agreement is expected to enter into force in 2025.

³⁴ <u>https://unctad.org/topic/trade-agreements/global-system-of-trade-preferences</u>