



Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries

VGSSF

What are the VGSSF?

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF) in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication represent the first international instrument dedicated to the immensely important but often neglected sector – small scale fisheries sector. These guidelines have been developed in support to the overall principles and provisions of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code).

The guidelines complement other international instruments such as *Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food*, as well as *Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests*.

The development of the VGSSF was initiated in 2008 during the First Global Conference on Small-Scale Fisheries in Bangkok, Thailand and it was finally endorsed at the 31st Session of the Committee of Fisheries (COFI) in June 2014. The VGSSF are tools for sustainable development as well as for supporting

food security and nutritional intake, equitable development and poverty eradication, and responsible management of fisheries resources.

The Guidelines are voluntary, global in scope and with a focus on the needs of developing countries.

VGSSF at a Glance

- Developed through a participatory and consultative process, that directly involved more than 4,000 representatives of small-scale fishing communities, civil society organizations (CSOs), governments, regional organizations and other stakeholders from more than 120 countries.
- Endorsed at the 31st Session of Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2014.
- It is emphasized that the Guidelines are voluntary, global in scope and with a focus on the needs of developing countries.
- Emphasize the important role of small-scale fisheries for food security and poverty eradication: a source of nutrition, income and economic growth.

Origin

In 2008 the First Global Conference on Small Scale Fisheries was held where it was reaffirmed that human rights are critical to achieving sustainable development and called for an international instrument on sustainable small-scale fisheries.

The COFI in its 29th session approved the development of guidelines on small-scale fisheries that would draw on existing instruments and complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. The draft was developed through participatory processes from 2011 to 2013. And in 2014, the 31st Session of COFI endorsed the finalized VGSSF Guidelines.

Importance of the VGSSF in the Philippines

Small-scale fisheries play a key role in ensuring food security and eradicating poverty. However, they are one of the poorest of the poor and receive the least support from the government. They face intense pressure from other sectors such as tourism, aquaculture, agriculture, energy, mining, industry, infrastructure developments as well as from commercial fisheries sector. Implementing the VGSSF in the Philippines will help address issues and concerns of the municipal fishers:

- secure tenure rights to resources;
- measures for long-term conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources;
- preferential treatment of vulnerable groups;
- adequate standard of living;
- support for all activities along the value chain; and,
- support to address disaster risk and climate change.

What is the Nature of the VGSSF?

- It is voluntary (Section 2.1)
 - Should apply to small-scale fisheries in all contexts
 - With specific focus on the needs of developing countries
- It is principally focused on capture fisheries (Section 2.2)
 - Relevant to both marine and inland waters
 - Linkage between small scale fisheries and aquaculture are recognized
- It provides guidance for sustainable small-scale fisheries policies (Section 2.3)
 - Addressed to FAO members and non-members at all levels as well as to CSOs and other organizations concerned with fisheries sector
- It recognizes the diversity of small-scale fisheries (Section 2.4)
 - Recognizes that there is no single agreed definition of the subsector
 - Does not prescribe how the guidelines should be applied in the national context.
 - Application should be transparent and guided by consultative processes so that voices of both men and women are heard
- It should be interpreted and applied in accordance with national legal systems (Section 2.5)



(Top) Picturesque Philippine coastal areas belie the poverty of Filipino fishers; (Bottom) Fisherfolk settlements, such as this one in Real, Quezon south of the capital city of Manila, are usually made up of shanties (photos by NFR).

Components of the VGSSF

Governance of Tenure in Small Scale Fisheries and Resource Management

Small-scale fishing communities should have secure tenure rights to resources that form the basis for their social and cultural well-being. States should adopt measure for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources.

Social Development, Employment and Decent Work

Social development of small-scale fishers address issues such as education, health services, financial services, social protection, public infrastructure, as well as issues related to decent work, e.g. occupational health and safety including safety at sea.

Value Chains, Post-Harvest and Trade

Ensure post-harvest actors are part of relevant decision-making

processes; support improvements to facilitate women’s participation in post-harvest; facilitate access to markets.

Gender Equality

States should implement relevant instruments to which they are party, e.g. CEDAW; establish policies and legislations to realize gender equality; encourage development of better technologies appropriate to women’s work in small scale fisheries (SSF).

Disaster Risk and Climate Change

Small-scale fisheries is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. For this, there should be specific policies and plans for climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction and emergency response, alongside addressing matters such as coastal erosion, pollution, destruction of habitats and other issues.

How are the VGSSF organized?

The VGSSF have 98 provisions, covering 11 topics encompassing 3 major themes: (i) Introduction; (ii) Responsible Fisheries and Sustainable Development; and (iii) Ensuring an Enabling Environment and Supporting Implementation.

Part 1, Introduction, specifies the objectives, the nature and scope, the guiding principles by which the VGSSF are to be implemented as well as their relationship with other international instruments.

Part 2, Responsible Fisheries and Sustainable Development, provides guidance for fisheries-specific topics such as responsible governance of tenure and sustainable resource management, but also for crucial inter-sectoral issues: social development, employment and decent work; value chain, post-harvest and trade; gender equality; and disaster risks and climate change.

Part 3, Ensuring an Enabling Environment and Supporting Implementation, provides guidance on how to realize the principles and recommendations of the VGSSF through policy coherence, institutional and supporting implementation; information, research and communication; capacity development; and implementation support and monitoring.

VGSSF Contents

Part	Topic
I. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding Principles • Relationship with other international instruments
II. Responsible Fisheries and Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance of tenure in small-scale fisheries and resource management • Social development, employment and decent work • Value chains, post-harvest and trade • Gender equality • Disaster risks and climate change
III. Ensuring an Enabling Environment and Supporting Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy coherence, institutional coordination and collaboration • Information, research and communication • Capacity development • Implementation support and monitoring

The VGSSF in the context of Philippine Fisheries Laws

The Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998 or RA 8550, amended by RA 10654, is the law that governs all Philippine waters including other waters over which the Philippines has sovereignty and jurisdiction, and the country's 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the continental shelf; all aquatic and fishery resources whether inland, coastal or offshore fishing areas, including, but not limited to, fishponds, fishpens/cages; and all lands devoted to aquaculture, or businesses and activities relating to fishery, whether private or public lands.

The Fisheries Code recognizes food security as the overriding consideration in the utilization, management, development, conservation and protection of fishery resources.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), which is under the Department of Agriculture, is the main government agency that serves as mechanism to implement the Fisheries Code. However, as defined by the Local Government Code or RA 7160 and affirmed by the Fisheries Code, the municipal waters are under the jurisdiction of the local government units.

As defined by the Code, municipal waters are generally 15 kilometers from the shoreline and for the exclusive use of municipal fishers. The municipal fishers, as defined by the Code, are fishers engaged in municipal fishing using fishing vessels of three (3) gross tons or less, or fishing not requiring the use of fishing vessels.

Defining the municipal waters faced stumbling block up to this moment. Supporters of archipelagic principles want that delineation of municipal waters start at the shoreline of the offshore island (for municipalities with offshore islands); however, the commercial fisheries sector wants it

VGSSF & Philippine Fisheries Laws	
Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water Code of 1976 Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998 (RA 8550), amended by RA 10654 Local Government Code of 1991
Sectoral and Tenure Reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 Labor Code of 1974 Executive Order on Community-Based Forest Management, 1995 Magna Carta of Women of 2008 Executive Order on Approval of Philippine Plan for Gender-responsive Development
Natural Resource Protection and Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (RA 8435) Indigenous People's Rights Act of 1997 Forestry Code of 1975 National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992 (RA 7586)
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate Change Act of 2009 (RA 9729) Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 (RA 10121) Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000

to start at the mainland. The case was brought to the Supreme Court and a decision is yet to be promulgated. For the municipalities without offshore islands, Guidelines for Delineation are in effect and yet, delineation is not yet finished due to disagreements among adjacent municipalities.

There is also overlapping jurisdiction on the management of the municipal waters. Fisheries, including aquaculture, are under the jurisdiction of BFAR while management of the fish habitats such as coral reefs, mangroves and sea grass are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Completion of municipal fisherfolk registry is facing problems as well. Most local government units do not have the infrastructure to process the data from the registration and transmit said data to BFAR.

Tenure rights to land in the coastal/waterfront area are critical for ensuring and facilitating access to fishery, for accessory activities (including processing and marketing), and for housing and other livelihood support. Hence it is important that fisherfolk settlement in areas where they will have access to the fishing ground be secured. A National Land Use Act with provision for fisherfolk

settlement can help address this problem.

The health of aquatic ecosystems and associated biodiversity are a fundamental basis for their livelihoods and for the subsector's capacity to contribute to overall well-being. Ecosystem approach to fisheries management is an accepted approach in the Philippines but actual implementation is hampered by lack of coordinated efforts among government agencies. Workable feedback mechanism for better-informed decisions has to be in place:

- between CSOs/fisherfolk organizations and local government;
- internal to the government agencies, e.g. among bureaus of the same agency, as well as national to regional offices;
- among local governments especially those sharing the same fishing grounds; and,
- among local/devolved government agencies and their national level counterparts.

There should also be inter-agency collaboration for holistic approach to the fisheries issues, where each agency contributes efforts based on their respective mandates. There should be delineation and harmonization of roles for more holistic approach to fisheries issues. ■



This briefing document was prepared by the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) and the NGO Fisheries for Reform (NFR) with the view of increasing awareness and understanding of the VGSSF in the context of the Philippines. The photographs and illustrations used in this document are provided by NFR, ANGOC and the Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD).

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