



We, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples' (WFFP), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), La Via Campesina (LVC), members of the **International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty** (IPC), and here representing Regional Advisory Group of the Asia and the Pacific for the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, convened in Colombo, Sri Lanka from the 23rd to the 25th of February 2024 to host the first Women's Forum of Asia and the Pacific.

The regional gathering welcomed Fisherfolks from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri-Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand and CSOs from Italy & Aotearoa, New Zealand to create a space of Unity and Solidarity for women's rights in the Region and to address the specific needs and challenges faced by fisherwomen.

The enduring **historical injustice experienced by Fisher Peoples persists, disproportionately impacting women** who are further marginalised within already disadvantaged communities and in patriarchal systems that fail to acknowledge their role, recognize the important role they play in fisheries and worth in society.

Women's roles continue to be hidden , unacknowledged and silenced although their contributions feed communities, families and protect our mother earth. **Gender discrimination is a reality** however this can change. National governments persist in continuously **neglecting and undervaluing the crucial role and contributions of women** within the small-scale fisheries sectors. This denial deprives women of their rightful entitlements, such as access to fishing grounds, representation in social structures including fisheries cooperatives, ownership of fishing implements, sidelined in social welfare activities including subsidy schemes or relief mechanisms and participation in decision-making processes. **We insist that this is addressed.**

On the occasion of **International Women's Day**, we reiterate the imperative to enhance recognition and visibility in the context of systematic marginalisation, social exclusion and sidelining.

To this end we ask Governments, State Agencies to work together with SSF for establishing a comprehensive and inclusive national-level definition of small-scale fishing. Formally defining small-scale fishers more inclusively, including allied activities such as collecting, processing, marketing, and selling fish, can also enable proper recognition and appreciation of women's significant contributions to the fishing sector.

We call Governments and the relative departments of the governments for **adopting better policies for women in cooperatives**. Small-scale fisheries cooperatives must actively recruit women members, ensure equal representation in leadership positions, conduct gender analyses to identify where women are involved and **promote labour rights such as equal wages**. Cooperatives can also adopt policies that ensure fair payment systems, conduct wage audits, and provide training programs to help women negotiate better wages and working conditions. There should also be a campaign issue for equal wages of women and men in the working place as the women usually get less labour value than the men. It is **essential this work is led by women who are most impacted by these policies**.

We request Governments to enhance policies that support women's participation in small-scale fishers collaborative models (i.e. Cooperatives). By **promoting gender equality and women's empowerment**, small-scale fishers collaborative models can create more equitable and sustainable value chains that benefit all members.

We ask for **creating gender quotas**. Creating a quota system of 50% reservation for equitable gender representation in consultation with the Government can effectively promote gender equality and women's empowerment.





We call for Intergovernmental Institutions providing small-scale fishers' women with skills and capacity-building opportunities. Improve women's skills and knowledge and actively empower them to participate and thrive in the small-scale fisheries sector.

The Regional Advisory Group for Asia and the Pacific is committed to reinforcing regional collaboration on gender issues within Fishers Peoples. Additionally, it commits to the continued development of the **SSF Women Regional Forum**, aiming to mobilise women at both national and regional levels in asserting their rights. This commitment reflects a collective effort to create a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment for women in small-scale fisheries.

We, the RAG of A&P urge all the governments to create national fisheries policies based on the SSF Guidelines and the recommendations of the report of ***People's Centred Assessment of the implementation of SSF Guidelines***.

Finally, RAG and A&P reiterate that women's identities, experiences and access to equitable outcomes can only be achieved when we work together and **value our women and their contributions**. We urge this to be actioned immediately.

