

How to work with us

# RULES OF CONDUCT

for working with small-scale fishers  
and fishworkers to save our ocean

## Introduction and context

As women and men in maritime and inland small-scale fishers (SSF), we make a major contribution to livelihoods, food security, employment, well-being, and revenue, in contrast with our marginalisation in decision-making. We also underscore that our communities associated with coastal fishing are the most numerous ocean users and custodians.

We have detailed the actions needed to support us in sustaining the ocean in our [Call to Action from small-scale fisheries](#),\* which was launched in June 2022 at the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) in Lisbon.

At the end of the UNOC, we made a [declaration](#) in which we stated:

"We have offered our help to save our ocean together. Because who better than us, coastal communities from six continents, understands the ocean and its riches? We live from, and depend on it, we have respected it for thousands of years and have extensive traditional and experiential knowledge about it/ understand its ways.

We are ready to work with you, decision-makers, donors, scientists and NGOs to save our ocean, our common mother.

But to work well together, we need consent, agreement, a definition of what a good partnership is."\*\*

These are the ground rules, or basic rules, we require good partners to follow if they wish to work with us to save the oceans and aquatic environment.

### NOTES

\*Also accessible at the following link: <https://www.cffacape.org/ssf-call-to-action>

\*\* See the full declaration at the following link: <https://caopa.org/en/unoc-2022-final-declaration-of-small-scale-fishers/01/07/2022/news/4539/>

# Principles

Our partnership should be based on respect for our way of life and culture as small-scale fishers and food producers, guided by the principles enshrined in the globally agreed [Voluntary Guidelines to Secure Small-Scale Fisheries](#) (VGSSF). These include human rights and dignity, social justice, respect for our cultures and traditions, non-discrimination, gender equality and equity, equity and equality, transparency and accountability, consultation and participation, rule of law, economic, social and environmental sustainability, applied through holistic and integrated approaches.

Our rules are divided in 4 topics: (1) **our rights** in the context of ocean conservation, (2) **our participation and representation** in decision-making, (3) **our voice** and messaging and, finally, (4) financial and other types of **support**.

## THE RULES

# How to work with us...

## 1. "Always respect and never undermine our rights"

Strengthen and support our demands to access markets and marine resources

We, men, women and youth, in small-scale fisheries, are the primary ocean and coastal stakeholders. We have been guardians of the sea for millennia. Our rights, inclusive forms of governance and shared and truly participative decision-making must be respected, including those of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.

Partners must:

- Back and promote our call to action by supporting ALL the demands contained in it, in summary:
  - Urgently secure our tenure rights, preferential access to fishing resources, and co-management of 100% of coastal areas;
  - Guarantee the participation of women in fisheries and support their role in innovation;
  - Protect us from competing blue economy sectors;
  - Support transparency and accountability in fisheries management; and
  - Build resilient fishing communities to face climate change challenges and offer prospects to youth in the sector.
- Refrain from supporting projects or demands that conflict or are contradictory with the demands from our call to action;
- Communicate transparently the potential impacts of all other projects funded by partners that may have an impact on small-scale fisheries and their communities.

## 2. “Nothing about us without us”

### Guarantee our genuine participation in decisions that concern us

We demand the right for our communities to be informed about and to genuinely participate in the decisions that affect our lives and livelihoods, and the health of the oceans, coasts and aquatic environment which are the source of your and our food. Our communities are diverse and spread across the world, while we may share common overall needs and demands, it is essential that we select our own representatives, locally, regionally and globally.

Partners must:

- Fully respect our ways of discussions and timings based on our cultural and geographically specific contexts;
- Seek to involve the diversity of SSF communities acknowledging that no single representative can speak for us;
- Recognise that fishing communities have legitimate local interests which need to be heard but that at the same time, the wider interests of all SSF formulated as global or sector statements should be used for sector-wide or global calls (as in the Call to Action or the Guidelines);
- Defend and support our rights to organize and represent ourselves;
- Support us in organizing our own meetings rather than organising events “for us”, with particular attention to supporting spaces, organization and capacity for youth and women;
- Strengthen and amplify our voice, but do not speak for us, when there are decisions made about conservation that concern us and we are not involved; support us to fully participate (such as transport, interpretation, and other means).

## 3. “The right to our own voice”

### Strengthen and amplify but never appropriate our messages

Too often, others that are not fishers have spoken on our behalf, or manipulated our messages to their advantages. We do not need anyone, decision-makers, donors, or NGOs, to speak for us or to “open a space” for us. We no longer want anyone to speak for us. We are here and our voice is strong.

Partners must:

- Ensure that the venues and languages selected for making decisions affecting us are suited to us and not the other way around;
- Ensure that Free, Prior and Informed Consent is obtained from the SSF communities or other rights-holders, before using information not previously in the public domain derived from SSF communities;

- Recognize and support our intellectual property rights when using information about us which we possess or help to generate, and ensure that such research results and communications will be fed back to us in a timely and appropriate manner at no cost;
- Recognise and value the information, beliefs, and traditional knowledge of communities in research and communications; support us to ensure that states and authorities also listen;
- Support small-scale fishing communities and build our capacity so that we have the skills and opportunities to tell our own stories, within a framework of transparency that allows us to work together and with respect for each other as equals.

## 4. “Working with us also means funding us”

### Ensure funding reaches where it is really needed

Nobody has more at stake than us in achieving our mutual aims. A good partnership is built on a long-term relationship founded on mutual trust and transparency regarding their different interests.

True partners will ensure that we are fully supported to be equal partners and that our own organizations are empowered and funded proportionately to our work and the issues at stake. Too often funding and resources raised in our name do not reach us in any meaningful proportion, and we have little say in how these resources are used.

Partners must:

- Ensure that a fair proportion of the funds effectively reaches the intended local implementers and beneficiaries;
- Be open and transparent about potential incompatible aims, where the partners may have other, possibly better financed, projects that work against our interests;
- Guarantee that project implementation happens at local level, founded on the principles of co-management in the Call to Action.

## Enforcing these rules

We expect that partners will voluntarily adopt and agree to these rules, as well as the Call to Action, and thereafter abide by them so we can work together in true partnership to save our ocean and our communities. We also encourage fishers and any other stakeholders to hold our partners to these standards in public.

# Sources and Bibliography

- [A good practice guide for ethical and inclusive communications involving small-scale](#) (FAO, 2022)
- [Appeal for a code of conduct for conservation](#) (Bennett, 2017)
- [Free, Prior and Informed Consent](#) (FAO website)
- [LMMA social contract](#) (2000 - 2016)
- The [Bennett Code](#) (n.d.).
- [Voluntary Guidelines to Secure Small-Scale Fisheries](#) (VGSSF, FAO, 2014)

# Signatories



These rules have been drafted by the signatories of the Call to Action from artisanal fisheries was signed by national, regional and inter-regional organisations representing small-scale fisheries around the globe including from Africa, the Pacific, North, central and South America, and Europe during the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022).

[www.cffacape.org/ssf-call-to-action](http://www.cffacape.org/ssf-call-to-action)

Read the call to action

