



WFF and WFFP Statement on the SDGs and the UN's Ocean Conference

4 June 2017

We call upon the UN member-states to work with the small-scale fisher peoples movements towards the implementation of the SSF-guidelines. The SSF-guidelines are the result of a bottom-up participatory development process, where we, as representatives of over 20 million fisher peoples globally, played a key role in their development. The SSF-guidelines are grounded in the international human rights standards and principles and together with the Tenure Guidelines are key tools to ensure the progressive realization of the right to adequate food and related rights; to guarantee the human rights of fishers and fishing communities; and to protect the natural environment. In other words: truly sustainable development. The process of implementing the SSF-guidelines is already underway through the *Global Strategic Framework* (GSF) of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and we call upon governments to focus their efforts on this process.

Partnerships in global governance:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in New York in September 2015. Following up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 17 goals aim to tackle the challenges faced by today's world, such as poverty, inequality and conflict. The goals are therefore all encompassing in content with a 'wish-list' of targets for each specific goal. The key thing that runs throughout these 17 SDGs is the underlying approach to achieve them: 'partnerships' - and indeed goal 17 is explicitly aimed at 'Revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development'. The process of developing the SDGs in the years leading up to their adoption was also through a partnership- approach. For this reason, the SDGs have been heralded for their 'inclusiveness'. But what does the 'inclusiveness' of such partnerships mean for social movements?

The idea of states and international institutions partnering with the private sector has steadily been gaining momentum since the adoption of the Agenda 21 in 1992, which stated that: “Governments, business and industry, including transnational corporations, should strengthen partnerships to implement the principles and criteria for sustainable development.”¹ In 1997, Kofi Annan announced that strengthening of such partnerships would be one of his priorities as secretary-general and in 2000 he followed up on this with the formation of the UN Global Compact². Since then ‘partnerships’ with transnational corporations have become firmly rooted in the way many UN institutions function, including the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (the central UN platform to follow up on the SDGs). At its core, the partnership approach increasingly gives recognition and space for the private sector to inform UN processes and decisions and to allow for significant corporate funding for the functioning of UN institutions and their programs³.

While such ‘partnerships’ for sustainable development may sound benign or even noble, it is important to underline the dramatic shifts in global governance processes that this approach has facilitated. Over the past two and a half decades, there has been a gradual shift away from a human-rights based governance model with the states as duty-bearers who have obligations vis-à-vis human rights holders (i.e. the people), towards a much more vague system based on ‘partnerships’ facilitated through ‘multistakeholder’⁴ dialogues and processes. In this manner, private sector actors have gone from being actors regulated by states, to increasingly being seen as partners of states in solving pressing global issues.

Over the past decade, global governance processes, from the SDGs to the COPs of different UN-agreements and frameworks, have become dominated by a complex of transnational NGOs, corporations, academics etc. This has severe consequences for the

1 Quoted in Sogge, D. 2014 ‘The camel’s nose in the tent of global governance’ p. 18 https://www.tni.org/files/download/state_of_power-6feb14.pdf

2 For more on the Global Compact, see: <http://www.ibfan.org/art/538-2.pdf>

3 As noted in the description of goal 17: “Urgent action is needed to mobilize, redirect and unlock the transformative power of trillions of dollars of private resources to deliver on sustainable development objectives” <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/>

4 For more on ‘multistakeholderism’ in fisheries policy, see: http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SSFG-Human_Rights_vs_Property_Rights-EN.pdf and McKeon, N. (2017) Are Equity and Sustainability a Likely Outcome When Foxes and Chicken Share the Same Coop? Critiquing the Concept of Multistakeholder GOVERNANCE of Food Security, *Globalizations*, 14:3, 379-398

country-led governance on which the UN is founded⁵. Legitimate voices of human-rights holders (i.e. people) are undermined or diluted – through the watering down of the responsibilities of states as duty-bearers and because representative movements and organisations attempting to influence such global governance processes can hardly compete with the well-oiled machinery of corporations and NGOs and are therefore often clouded out. This approach glosses over imbalances in power and fundamentally opposing interests and roles between different societal actors in the interest of bringing together all actors who claim a ‘stake’ in sustainable development.

Consequently, the process of developing the SDGs has, at best, left the global fisher movements and most other social movements organized in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty at the fringe of participation, while providing influential space for the corporate sector and large NGOs to inform the goals throughout the process. As a result, looking through the SDGs, a clear commitment to human rights is missing and human rights such as the right to food, the right to water and sanitation, and women’s rights are notably absent. In this new setting, the states’ role is above all to facilitate private sector actions and at the most daring entice ‘voluntary commitments’ on the road to the elusive ‘sustainable development’.

According to the UN, the implementation of the SDGs is estimated to cost 3 trillion dollars a year.⁶ In an era of ever-dwindling funds for development, this provides yet another opportunity to advance the view that there is need for increased private-sector funding, leading to further capture of the process. The Secretary General of OECD reaffirms this: “Without the private sector, it is not going to happen, we have budgetary constraints in every country”.⁷

The UN Ocean Conference

Goal 14 of the SDGs is formulated as: ‘Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’. A key question in that regard relates to what ‘conserve and sustainable use’ means – with a whole series of following questions including: who should have what rights? To

5 For more on this point, see: http://www.rosalux-nyc.org/wp-content/files_mf/adamssdgsengwebsite.pdf

6 <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/08/u-n-targets-trillions-of-dollars-to-implement-sustainable-development-agenda/>

7 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-development-goals-finance-idUSKCN0RQ0RD20150926>

which natural resources? For how long? For what purpose(s)? And, crucially, who gets to decide? One of the targets for SDG14 is the expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This is despite the controversial nature of marine and coastal conservation approaches, which recently have been characterized as an increasingly “protectionist, authoritarian and violently repressive practice of conservation”⁸.

Specifically addressing the SDG14, the UN Ocean Conference will be held at the UN headquarters in New York from the 5th-9th June. Emblematic of the partnership approach outlined above, the conference is structured around a set of ‘partnership dialogues’ and plenary meetings. The dialogues are facilitated by UN member-states – one from the global north and one from the global south – and consist of panels followed by interventions by participants. Out of a total of 7 dialogue sessions, we, as representatives of fisher peoples’ movements, are only included as panelists in one of these – and this discusses SSF only in the context of Small Island Developing States and Least Developed countries, i.e. not globally. The only other opportunity for participation in this official part of the ocean conference is in the ‘interactive debate’ following the panels. As noted on the conference website, these interventions are to be “succinct, concise and limited to three minutes” and should in any case be focused on “presenting voluntary commitments, partnerships ... [and] policy recommendations to support the implementation of SDG14”⁹.

The outcome of the sessions will be summarized and included in the final report of the conference, in addition to the voluntary commitments that all visitors to the conference website are encouraged to register in order to “be a part of ocean history”. The conference report will then contribute to the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by providing an input to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development.

Aside from this formal aspect of the conference a series of side-events have been organized. As the website details, the side-events – under the banner of contributing to achieving the SDG14 – will discuss issues of: blue growth/economy, blue carbon, MPAs, different large-scale extractive activities in the oceans and investment opportunities for finance capital. The side-event organisers span across the usual complex of actors that gather at global meetings

8 Wolff, M (2015) From sea sharing to sea sparing – Is there a paradigm shift in ocean management? *Ocean & Coastal Management* 116, 58-63

9 See conference website: <https://oceanconference.un.org/about>

on the oceans¹⁰, including international financial institutions (the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Global Environmental Facility), coalitions of transnational corporations (World Economic Forum, International Chamber of Commerce), maritime industry coalitions (World Ocean Council), financial actors (Credit Suisse, Blue Finance), philanthropic foundations (Bloomberg, Rockefeller) and a range of transnational or US-based Environmental NGOs (Conservation International, WWF, EDF, The Nature Conservancy)¹¹.

We will co-host a side-event together with FAO to put forward our solution as expressed below, but the skewed representation of actors speaks for itself. In different publications¹² and statements¹³ we have clarified that what these ‘stakeholders’ propose as solutions in fact lead to what we denounce as ‘ocean grabbing’: the capturing of control by powerful actors over crucial decision-making, including the power to decide how and for what purposes resources are used, conserved and managed. This has led to a situation where powerful actors, whose main concern is contributing to profit accumulation for themselves or others, are steadily gaining control of both these resources and the benefits of their use.

One of the management tools that is being touted as a means to ensure SDG14 and generally advocated by these actors, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), stands to exacerbate these trends. As recently explained by the noted fisheries scholar, Svein Jentoft, “MSP may therefore result in neutralizing rather than empowering the disadvantaged and voiceless actors [... through] facilitating elite capture and creating power imbalances that negatively affect knowledge integration from less powerful stakeholders, like small-scale fishers”¹⁴.

For these reasons, we are highly skeptical towards the SDGs. Rooted in a flawed ‘partnership approach’ that prioritizes the profit-interests of an elite-minority while marginalizing the voices of people on the

10 As also discussed in 2016 Right to Food and Nutrition report, see: http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/Watch_2016_Article_3_eng_Privatization%20and%20Corporate%20Capture%20of%20Global%20Fisheries%20Policy.pdf

11 See the Conference’s website: <https://oceanconference.un.org/programme>

12 See report on The Global Ocean Grab that highlights the negative consequences that many of the proposed solutions have had on SSF across the world: http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/The_Global_Ocean_Grab-EN.pdf

13 See e.g. http://worldfishers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Blue_Carbon_June_2016.pdf

14 Jentoft, S. (2017): Small-scale fisheries within maritime spatial planning: knowledge integration and power, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, p. 8

ground that we represent, they uphold and entrench the existing inequalities and injustices of the world order.

Our solution:

We pledge our support to the United Nations that is firmly rooted in the values that form the basis of the UN Charter: peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity. To uphold these values, each country should draw more consistently from parliaments, sub-national governments, civil society as well as the executive branch of government in democratic country-led governance on which the UN is founded.

The International Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF guidelines¹⁵) were endorsed by the Committee on Fisheries of the FAO in 2014. These SSF guidelines are the result of a bottom-up participatory development process facilitated by the FAO and involving more than 4000 representatives of governments, small-scale fishing communities, WFF and WFFP, and other actors from more than 120 countries globally. Their development resembles a legitimate, democratic country-led process, and the guidelines themselves build on the core UN principles of justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity and international human rights standards and principles. We express our recognition and appreciation of the stewardship of the FAO in the process of developing the SSF Guidelines.

At its 32nd session in July 2016, the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the FAO unanimously adopted the Global Strategic Framework (GSF) to facilitate the implementation of the SSF guidelines. The GSF aims at facilitating interaction between governments and civil society to support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines at all levels, and to promote a common vision and implementation approach, which is based on the principles of the SSF Guidelines themselves.

We remain committed towards working with FAO on the further development of the GSF in order to advance the key principles of the SSF guidelines, with emphasis on the human rights based approach to small-scale fisheries; the recognition and protection of tenure rights of small-scale fishing communities; the rights of small-scale fishing communities to maintain control and ownership of the value chain, including marketing at local and regional levels; and promoting the full and effective participation of small-scale fisheries actors in the SSF guidelines implementation, in particular small-scale fishing communities including women, youth and Indigenous Peoples.

15 For the guidelines, see: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356e.pdf>

We, the representatives of over 20 million fisher peoples globally, will continue our constructive cooperation with national governments and the FAO in pursuit of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and the further development of the GSF. We call upon the UN member states to work with us to ensure the progressive realization of our right to adequate food and related rights, and the protection of the natural environment. This can all be achieved through the development of the GSF and the implementation of the SSF guidelines.