

Mission Statement

ICAN Fisheries Sub-Group

ICAN Fisheries Sub-Group, in consonance with the basic ideals of ICAN, stands and advocates for a fisheries policy that protects the fish resources and the small and marginalised fishing communities' right to use the fish resources in harmony with nature. ICAN dedicates itself to establishing an alternative paradigm for sustainable development with peoples' power and involves itself in transformative politics to bring in the same.

India is gifted with incredible water resources. Great seas on three sides, large number of rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs and ponds not only provide us with water bodies of huge number and bewildering diversity, but also produce large quantity of fish to make India stand second in the world.

Total annual fish produced by both capture and culture fisheries in our country has been nearly 11 million tonnes, of which inland fisheries account for more than 66%. About 6 million workers including fishers, fish farmers, fish processing workers, fish sellers alongwith net and boat makers or repairers earn their livelihood from fisheries. Hence there is a fisheries dependent population of no less than 3 crores (30 million). Inland fisheries account for more than two third of the employment in fisheries.

Fish provides high quality and cheap animal protein together with many beneficial minerals and vitamins. Around 80 crores (800 million) people eat fish in India. Since 1961 per capita consumption of fish has more than trebled. More than 13% of all animal protein consumed by our countrymen comes from fish and fish provides the next largest supply of animal protein after milk.

Thus the fisheries sector plays a very important role in the food security, nutritional status and employment in our country. Also, with more than 50% of the sector's workforce being women, suffice it to mention that it plays a salient role in maintaining gender balance in employment.

Fisheries resources are under tremendous pressure. Indiscriminate encroachments, pollution and consumptive use of water are killing our coastal and inland water bodies and with that the fish resources they harbour. Over and destructive fishing by mechanised boats and trawlers have made the near shore waters of India's 8,000 kilometre long coastlines barren of fish.

The small and traditional fishers and fish farmers are by far the largest non-consumptive primary stakeholders and natural custodians of our water bodies. Good fish needs good water. The small and traditional fishing communities, always and everywhere, strive to protect water bodies and fish resources. It is important to note, in this light, that traditional fishing is nature-friendly and suitable for ecology of the river. It may be remembered that traditional fishers let a new born fish mature and produce progeny so that there is natural stock replacement.

The port led development project christened as **Sagarmala** is designed to push up the destruction of coastal natural resources. Linked up with newly announced 110 **National Waterways**, the tide of destruction is going to sweep through the great rivers like the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Brahmani, Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri, Mandavi and Zuari killing whatever fish resources have been left in them.

Investment driven enhancement of productivity that cares little for environmental or ecological balance and edges out small fishers and fish farmers promoting their replacement by entrepreneurs from outside the sector, or sustainable production with protection and promotion of livelihood of small fishers and fish farmers – the fisheries sector is witnessing a policy conflict. The small and traditional fishing communities are losing ground and with it pressure is building up against sustainability in fisheries. **Blue Revolution** promoted by the Government of India aims to encourage this very process. Most ironically thousands of these small fisher people, who have been struggling to protect their livelihood and the water bodies, are being driven out of the aquatic areas falling within protected areas like wild life sanctuaries and reserves.

ICAN Fisheries Sub-Group, stands and advocates for the following **basic policy directions** –

I. Sustainable development: Protection, maintenance and promotion of fisheries should be in consonance with the ecological principles and aim at building up on ecological services of water and water bodies.

II. Socio-economic upliftment of small scale fish workers: This should be one of the chief policy concerns. Ample caution should be exercised against replacement or pushing out of fishers and fish workers traditionally engaged in work in fishing by new class of entrepreneurs from outside of the sector and against usurpation of government assistance by the latter.

III. Principle of Subsidiarity: Small scale and poor fish workers constitute the bulk of the work force engaged in fisheries. Their wellbeing is inseparably linked with the wellbeing of the fisheries sector. It is to be ensured that access to fish resources together with protection, support and assistance programmes, services and schemes should start from bottom top wards, whereas the regulations and penalties for non-compliance should start from top downwards. This means that the access to fish resources together with assistance programmes, services and schemes for fisheries should be provided for the smaller and poorer fishers by preference, and conversely the regulations and penalties for non-compliance should be harsher for the larger and richer players in the sector.

IV. Participatory Governance: Governance issues in fisheries involve water policy, policy for protection and upkeep of water bodies including rivers, canals, reservoirs, lakes, wetlands and ponds as well as policy for watershed management. The small scale fishers are by far the largest non-consumptive primary stakeholders of our surface water resources. More importantly, they are the natural custodians of our water bodies as good fish needs good water. As such, the small scale fishing communities and their representatives should be provided with mandatory participation right in determining water, water body and watershed management policies and their implementation.

V. Inter-generational Equity: Natural resource bases have to be preserved not only for the present generation but also for future ones. As such resource preservation with continued inter-generational involvement of fishing communities in fisheries should be made one of the chief concerns of the national policy on fisheries.

VI. Gender Justice: Women fish workers constitute more than half of the total workforce in fisheries. In fisheries sector women workers are more marginalised than their male counterparts and are in less favourable condition to address their problems. This calls for gender sensitive policies in resource allocation and access.

VII. Community Based Resilience to Climate Change Impact: Fisheries, in both marine and inland sectors, are being largely impacted by climate change. Efficient monitoring of climate change impacts and effective measures to address the impacts are urgently called for. This can be done only through the participation of fishing communities.

VIII. Precautionary Approach: Fisheries being largely based on natural resource and ecological service, utmost caution has to be exercised in introduction of new social groups, technologies, species, feed etc. in its domain. This requires strict adherence to the precautionary principle which calls for abstention from doing anything whose impact is not fully or sufficiently known.

ICAN Fisheries Sub-Group stands and advocates for the following rights and entitlements of small scale fishing communities –

A. Recognition of the occupational dignity of small scale fishing communities:

- *Each and every fish worker*, including fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors and irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion, should be given government identity card as recognition of their occupational dignity, rights and entitlements.

B. Tenure Rights:

- *Small scale fishers* should have the right to fish in all water bodies like the seas, rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs including in water bodies under protected areas with preferential access to fish resources over large scale fishers.
- *Small scale fishers* should have user right on the land areas they use for pre and post harvest activities.
- *Small scale fish farmers* should have the right to security of tenure (protection against eviction) in water bodies taken on lease;
- *Small scale fish farmers* should enjoy the right of regulation of terms and conditions of lease including fixation and increment of lease rent;
- *Small scale fish farmers* should have farming rights in Government owned water bodies and reservoirs on preferential basis (over non-fish farmer investors) and easy terms (lease rent should be fixed on the basis of present yield and not on the basis of standard yield) with at least 5 years moratorium on increase of lease rent.
- *Small fish vendors* should have the right of protection against eviction from any designated or undesignated market place without his or her consent and adequate rehabilitation;
- *Small fish vendors* selling fish in a market or area must have the right to full accommodation in the event of reconstruction or new construction of fish market.

C. Governance Rights:

- *Small scale fishing communities* should have the right to protect water and fish in all water bodies including the seas, rivers, canals, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs and ponds;
- *Small scale fishing communities* should have the right to participate in and determine marine, river, wetland, reservoir, other water bodies and watershed (catchment and drainage) management including use of the available water resources;
- *Small scale fishing communities* should have the right to control and stop all activities that impact fisheries including destructive fishing and fish farming practices, pollution and encroachment.
- *Small fish vendors* should have the right of participation in the management of fish depots and fish retailing markets;
- *Small fish vendors* should also have the right of participation in the management of collection and transportation of fish from the fish depots and collection points.

D. Right to Economic Empowerment & Finance:

- Small scale fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors should be encouraged and provided with incentives to form and run organisations for economic self-empowerment like Cooperatives, Fish Production Groups, SHGs etc. The terms and conditions for their formation and running should be made easy and transparent.
- Small scale fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors should be protected from exploitation by usurers / money lenders and micro-finance companies and should enjoy priority in government finance including bank linking and bank loans (Kisan Credit facilities are to be extended to small fishers and fish farmers).

E. *Right to information, quality Inputs and technology:*

- Due importance and respect should be given to document traditional knowledge and expertise in fisheries with their appropriate utilisation;
- Small scale fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors should be provided with technology, information, training and assistance regarding development of boats, nets, maintenance of cold chain, weather, tides, release of water from reservoirs, up gradation of pond preparation techniques, hatchery and quality seeds and fingerlings, farming techniques, quality feed and market;
- Small scale fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors should also be provided with technology, information, training and assistance to enhance value addition through procedures like crab fattening and rearing of wild fish as well as manufacturing of different value added products like fish pickles, papads etc. with market access;
- Small scale fish farmers should be provided with technology, information, training and assistance to diversify into gainful enterprises like ornamental fish breeding and rearing.
- There should be public notice regarding Government schemes for fish workers and absolute transparency with procedural regularity in selection of beneficiaries and disbursement of benefits.

F. *Right to Infrastructure:*

Small scale fishers should enjoy the right to have infrastructure support that includes –

- Jetties / constructed landing stages for landing the catch;
- Fish drying platforms and solar driers;
- Light, drinking water, resting place and toilet at the landing centre;
- Roads and means of transport to and from the landing centres.
- Cold storage, fish drying and processing facilities, small ice factories.

Small fish vendors should be provided with –

- Transport facilities (individual, collective or public) to and from fish depots and retail markets;
- Fish depots and retail markets should have basic amenities like drinking water, toilet and resting place;
- Markets should have proper approach roads, built up platforms, adequate storage and selling space with cleaning facilities;

G. *Right to Social Security & Livelihood Support:*

Small scale fish workers should have comprehensive social security cover that includes –

- Housing for all fish workers,;
- Food security cover;
- Life and health insurance cover;
- Measures and equipments for safety in fishing;
- Insurance cover for boats and nets, fish farming and vehicles employed for fish vending;
- Old age and infirm pension;
- Livelihood support during lean season and / or fishing ban period;
- Educational assistance for children.

H. *Women Fish Workers' Rights:*

- The government should have a gender policy in inland fisheries which would be based on gender segregated data on women fish workers' contribution to the work in fisheries.
- Women fish workers should have women fish worker specific schemes and allotments –
 - To make good for the relative exclusion of women fish workers;
 - To access financial, business and technological support;
- Women fish workers should have preferential right to access –
 - Social security schemes meant for fish workers that include housing, life and health cover, old and infirm pension, widow pension, educational support for children;
 - Welfare and benefit schemes meant for fish workers;
 - Organise and run women fish workers' cooperatives, production groups, SHGs;
- Special development measures in sectors dominated by women fish workers like fish vending, canoe based fishing, crab and mussel collection etc.
- Provide for basic amenities like toilet, resting place and crèche for women fish workers at fish markets, fish depots and places where women fish workers gather for work.