

1.1. West Bengal State-Level Training Workshop on the SSF Guidelines

Kolkata, West Bengal

2nd December 2022

Organizers and Resource Persons

- Sasanka Dev, Secretary, DISHA
- Pradip Chatterjee, National Convener, National Platform for Small-Scale Fishworkers
- Milan Das, General Secretary, Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF)

Opening Session

Dev briefly described how small-scale fishworker communities, as the largest primary non-consumptive stakeholders and custodians of the water bodies, try to take care of them as they know from their own experience that good water yields good fish.

Chatterjee gave a brief introduction to the FAO, whose mandate is to ensure food and agricultural security throughout the world. FAO has been entrusted with the formulation of global management policies in food and agriculture in general and with providing assistance to the member states in implementation of such policies.

Chatterjee further discussed the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and the SSF Guidelines. He said that the main purpose of CCRF is to establish an ecosystem approach in fisheries management with a focus on the role of small-scale fisheries, while the SSF Guidelines is from a human rights perspective. In order to implement the SSF guidelines, it is necessary to make the fishing communities aware of the same and link those with the need and implementation areas at the ground level. In this regard, various capacity-building and training workshops are being conducted with the SSF communities in different states of India on issues most important and relevant to them. The present workshop would deal with Marine Fisheries in West Bengal.

Preferential Access of Small-Scale Fishers to Marine Fish Resources

Das spoke about the need for preferential access for small-scale fishers. He said that the primary function of a state is to ensure basic livelihood for all the people. In the current situation, large-scale fishers are getting most of the fish (80%) by using different types of technology that are efficient in terms of catching of fish but are unsustainable because of associated overfishing, destructive fishing and inequitable distribution of income. Usage of bottom trawlers, purse seiners, LED lights or fish finders may ensure profit for their large owners in the short term, but they are detrimental to the upkeep of our great fish resources and thousands of small-scale fishworkers. He pointed out the rampant malpractice of large-scale fishing craft in West Bengal that illegally use trawl nets in place of gill nets. Hence, small-scale fishworkers need preferential access to marine fish resources to protect sustainable fisheries.

A number of measures were suggested to ensure this preferential access:

1. Matching Effort to Available Stock

- a) In view of the situation that our near-shore areas are overfished, there should be a moratorium on registration and/or licensing of new large-scale fishing vessels.
- b) If needed, first reduce the number, capacity and effort of large-scale fishing vessels.
- c) Then, if there is a need to restrict small-scale fishing, then preference should be given to owner operators for continuation of registration and/or licensing.

2. Principle of Scale Subsidiarity Regarding Fishing Ban Period (Stock Regeneration)

- a) Four months fishing ban for large-scale fishing vessels (motorized and mechanized).
- b) Three months fishing ban for small-scale fishing vessels (motorized and non-mechanized).
- c) No fishing ban for small-scale fishing vessels (manual).

3. Extension of Area of Exclusive Fishing Zone for Small-Scale Fishers

In view of depletion of resources in near-shore areas and increase in the capacity of small-scale fishing craft to venture further into marine waters, the exclusive fishing zones for small-scale fisheries indicated in the marine fishing regulation statutes of various maritime states should be extended.

4. Ban on Destructive Fishing Gear

Complete or partial bans should be imposed on fishing gear having potential for destructive fishing, like (i) trawling, especially bottom trawling, (ii) purse seining and (iii) fishing with fish finders, LED light, etc.

5. Small-Scale Fishers Should Get the First Right to Catch

- a) Large-scale sector's catch should be limited to the quantity of sustainable yield minus the potential optimum catch of the small-scale sector.
- b) Controlling the effort of the large-scale sector may be done by controlling the number of vessels, fishing time and the maximum catch per fishing vessel.

6. Strengthening Monitoring, Surveillance and Enforcement (MSE)

- a) All the above prescriptions will come to naught if there is no adequate MSE.
- b) To be robust and effective, MSE should be made participatory with mandatory presence of small-scale fishing communities.

In this context, Chatterjee, added that in the fisheries sector, priority should be given to small-scale fishworkers with respect to government schemes and benefits to facilitate their access to

fish resources. These include finance, infrastructure, market facilities, social security, information and training.

Group Discussion

The participants highlighted the following issues and recommendations to address them:

- Large-scale mechanized fishing craft violate fisheries regulation by not only using unlicensed trawl nets, but also by indulging in trawl fishing within the 12 nautical mile restricted area.
- After the 61-day fishing ban, small-scale fishers get relatively good catch for one or two weeks at the most, but after that, the catch goes down due to overfishing by mechanized craft. They demanded extended ban period for mechanized craft.
- The workers involved in fish drying and net repairing also stated that their livelihood suffers if the small-scale fishers do not get fish since they mostly work around traditional fish landing centres.
- They face many irregularities and corruption in accessing government schemes and benefits. Some of them mentioned the positive results of interventions by the organization in these matters.
- Participants emphasized the need for the strengthening of MSE and strict implementation of restrictions on large-scale mechanized fishing.
- They also underlined the necessity to make impress upon small-scale fishing communities the importance of coming together against the loot of fish resources by large-scale mechanized sector.

2. Climate Crisis and Climate Justice

Chatterjee, in his presentation on climate crisis, mentioned that the adverse impacts of climate change are increasing and affecting huge numbers of communities in more vulnerable geographies. The marine ecosystem and the coast are among the most impacted. Eventually, the coastal communities, especially the fishworkers, are severely impacted by both extreme climate events as well as comparatively slow long-term impacts like change in species composition, decline in fish stock, etc. Recurrent cyclones and inclement weather drastically reduce fishing time and wreak havoc on dry fish business of small-scale fishing communities. Inclement weather also increases the risk of accidents at sea. This has increased the need for effective early warning systems, efficient rescue mechanisms and adequate provisions for relief and rehabilitation, including access to various insurance schemes for life, accident, gear and habitat.

He further pointed out that these multiple climate change impacts are made worse by the combined effects of pollution, encroachment, overfishing and destructive fishing. Overfishing and destructive fishing are also making the climate impact on fisheries more severe and are telling on community resilience. The changes in the species composition of fish stock and in the weather conditions due to climate change are going beyond the capacity of traditional knowledge to anticipate or cope with.

He also presented some of the changes observed in fish species composition and behaviour due to climate change.

The main responsibility for climate change lies with the rich nations and big companies who are the main users and traders in fossil fuels. But the labouring poor like small-scale fishing communities, who are the least responsible for climate crisis, are the most impacted by it. This raises the issue of climate justice. Rich countries or large companies are also now profiting most from the relief, rehabilitation and climate resilience building work either by direct proprietorship or by being the main suppliers of materials. These works are subsidized from the public exchequer and/or paid for by the common beneficiaries.

Chatterjee concluded the presentation with suggested climate actions that the community needs to undertake:

- Demand for climate justice in funding for relief, rehabilitation and climate resilience build-up.
- Promotion of climate resilient livelihood practices and habitat reconstruction.
- Address climate change impacts by informed actions of small-scale fishworkers.
- Take up the challenges related to climate crisis with all urgency and seriousness, and build community capacities through better understanding, stronger policy positions and more effective interventions.
- Build national and international alliances for broader coalitions, with a view to focus the issue of small-scale fisheries in climate negotiations.

Discussion

The presentation was followed by group work regarding the perceptions and needs of the small-scale marine fishing communities in the context of climate change. The outcomes are as follows:

- The climate crisis management initiatives of the government are generally very inadequate and non-participatory.
- There is a need to have climate resilient fish drying systems and houses.
- A climate fund by imposing climate taxes on the companies using major quantities of fossil fuels or trading in the same needs to be created and used in the small-scale fisheries sector for mitigation and adaptation purposes.
- Subsidies on fuel oil used by large-scale fishing craft should be cut off.

Feedback

1. The participants appreciated that the PowerPoint presentations were in Bengali.
2. The participants expressed that the issues and concepts discussed in the workshop need to be taken to the fishing communities at the ground level through more such workshops.

3. The participants acknowledged that small-scale fishers need preferential access to fish resources but it is not possible without restricting large-scale fishing, which in turn is not possible without active government initiative.
4. The participants wished for more time for interactions in order to fully understand the significance of the information shared and how they relate to their realities.
5. Climate resilient livelihood practices are becoming more and more necessary, but the government is not doing anything. The participants agreed on the importance of arriving on a strategy of action.
6. They also pointed out that they should raise their issues through demands and campaigns.