



# National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW)

## National Conference 2022 Organisational Report

### Basic Information on NPSSFW

**Constitution:** September 2016.

### Objective:

1. Raising the voice of Small Scale Fish Workers Nationally and in the States;
2. Development of a United Front of Small Scale Fish Workers;
3. Enhancement of the capacity of Small Scale Fish Workers' Organisations to protect the livelihood of Small Scale Fish Workers and the natural resource base.

**Organisational Character:** Federation of Small Scale Fish Workers' Organisations. Needs to develop into a federation of unions of Small Scale Fish Workers.

**Progress in Organisational Outreach:** About 11 small scale fish worker groups and organisations from 9 states were initially associated. At present about 24 small scale fish worker groups and organisations from 20 states are associated with NPSSFW.

### Activities undertaken –

**A. Policy level interventions:** Policy level interventions in the interest of the small scale fish worker communities have been one of the prime responsibilities of NPSSFW and its affiliates. Addressing policy matters not only raises the concerns of small scale fish workers at national or state levels and make the state reckon with their demands but also goes a long way in exposing the motives of the state and thereby educating the community at large.

NPSSFW made the following policy level interventions in this period –

- i. Amendments to Forest Conservation Act 1980 proposed by the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (November, 2021) - MoEF & CC** proposed amendments to Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 through a consultation paper. A large section of fishing communities live in or around forests and have livelihood interests in the water bodies falling within forest areas. Further, the water bodies and fish resources depend on the wellbeing of the forest and its environment. Therefore, NPSSFW raised its concerns regarding the proposed amendments. In its submission NPSSFW stated that – (A) The Consultation Paper proposing amendments to the Forest Conservation Act 1980 is ill conceived as it goes against the letter and spirit of the Forest Conservation Act, Indian Forest Policy and Supreme Court's judgement and observations in the T N Godavarman case; (B) The Consultation Paper proposing amendments to the Forest Conservation Act 1980 is Undemocratic as it is almost totally inaccessible to the largest primary stakeholders of our



forests - the forest dwellers; (C) The Consultation Paper proposing amendments to the Forest Conservation Act 1980 is Legally Bad as it ignores and by-passes the forest dwellers and the Forest Dwellers Rights Act (FRA 2006); (D) The Consultation Paper sells the false notion that deregulation of private and other forests will encourage tree growers to plant trees for profit with the hidden agenda to open these forest lands to market; (E) The Consultation Paper, without any scientific data certifies technologies like Extended Reach Drilling (ERD) as quite environment-friendly and proposes to keep such technologies outside the purview of FCA 1980.

- ii. **Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021 (2021-22)** – The opposition of NPSSFW to the Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021 continued with sensitising the members of parliament and the governments of coastal states. There have been ground level activities like deputations, dharnas, mass signature campaigns and sending of protest letters. As a result the Government of India could not table the bill in the parliament for four consecutive sessions from June 2021 till date.
- iii. **Supply of Duty Free Fuel for Small Scale Fish Workers (May, 2022)** - The small-scale fishers who, with their motorised non-mechanical boats venture into the sea, rivers and other water bodies to fish for livelihood, have been facing extreme hardship due to the abrupt increase in the cost of fuel. The situation demanded immediate relief. The small-scale fishers need to be provided with duty free fuel. Diesel and Petrol used as fuel for motorised non-mechanical small fishing boats should have no Excise Duty or VAT and Kerosene used as fuel for motorised non-mechanical small fishing boats should be supplied at PDS rate. **National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW)** have written to the Prime Minister as well as to the MIC Finance, MIC Petroleum & Natural Gas alongwith MIC Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying to take immediate steps for supply of duty free fuel to small scale fishers and at the same time opposed fuel subsidies to the mechanized fishing boats who are responsible for destructive fishing and over fishing in marine waters.
- iv. **WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (June, 2022)** - The National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW) criticised the agreement a deal between plunderers of marine fish resources and raised objections to the final agreement on fisheries subsidies reached in the WTO Ministerial Negotiations at Geneva from 12th to 15th June 2022 on the following issues – (A) The Agreement allows the developed countries with large industrial fishing fleet to continue to subsidise the plunder of the marine fish resources without considering the nature of the fleet or fishing capacity; (B) The Agreement allows the developing countries like India to continue to subsidise their large scale fishing sectors even if they indulge in unregulated and unsustainable fishing; (C) The Agreement provides no preferential or favourable treatment regarding subsidies for the small scale sustainable fisheries.
- v. **Supporting Rejection of Government Committee on MSP by SKM (July, 2022)** - The **National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW)**, a member of the **SKM General Body** hailed the rejection of the **Government Committee on MSP** and fully



supported the position taken by SKM on the betrayal of the Government of India. NPSSFW stands with SKM in its struggle to protect the life and livelihood of the farmers of the country.

- vi. Prevention of entry of Indian mechanised fishing boats into Bangladesh (August 2022) -** NPSSFW brought to the notice of Ministry of External Affairs (MoEA) and the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying (MoFAHD) that there have been regular illegal intrusions in Bangladesh waters by the mechanised fishing boats (trawlers and gill netters) sailing from Indian harbours, situated mainly in the district of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. This has serious implications for the security of our country and its relationship with Bangladesh. MoEA and MoFAHD have been requested to initiate immediate and effective measures for – (A) Dissuading the mechanized fishing boats from entering into Bangladesh waters with proper monitoring, warning and punitive measures; (B) Reduce the number of mechanized fishing boats to match the available fish stock in our waters keeping sufficient fish resources for the small scale fishers; (C) Provide the families of Indian fish-workers imprisoned in Bangladesh with livelihood support during their detention.
- vii. Draft Coastal Aquaculture (Amendment) Bill 2022 (August 2022) –** The Department of Fisheries in the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying of the Government of India brought out Draft Coastal Aquaculture (Amendment) Bill 2022. Intensive coastal shrimp aquaculture has been ruining the coastal natural resources and the livelihood of the people dependent on those resources. The Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act 2005 was enacted with the purpose of bypassing the landmark Supreme Court judgement of Justice Kuldeep Nayar that banned all intensive coastal shrimp farms. The present Draft Bill has been proposed to further the interests of shrimp farms.

It has – (1) Serious procedural flaws that stand in the way of participation of coastal communities including small scale fishing communities in preparing the proposed Bill and commenting on the same; (2) Wrong and ill-conceived purpose that makes this bill an instrument to further the destruction of coastal environment, ecology and natural resources with the natural resource based livelihoods including that of the small scale fishing communities; (3) Failure to identify the real and main problems posed by coastal aquaculture including coastal shrimp aquaculture to coastal environment, ecology and natural resource based livelihood of the coastal people together with the ways and means to address those; (4) Many other gross inadequacies.

NPSSFW urged the Department of Fisheries in the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying of the Government of India to – A. Rescind the Draft Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Act, 2022 with immediate effect; B. Accept that the Department's primary responsibility is to protect the coastal ecology and the livelihood of millions of small scale fishers dependent on the coastal fish resources and not to promote the unscrupulous entrepreneurs of intensive shrimp aquaculture linked with corporate business interests; C. Start a process of meaningful consultation with the coastal communities affected by coastal



shrimp aquaculture to understand the nature and scale of violation of law and entailed devastation as well as the gross administrative failure to address those; D. Reinstate and update the basic directions of the Supreme Court of India delivered by Hon'ble Justice Kuldip Singh in the case of S. Jagannath v Union of India; E. Prepare an appropriate legislation with an effective implementation procedure to address the problems of intensive coastal aquaculture and to promote sustainable aquaculture which can be participated and taken forward by the coastal communities including the small scale fishing communities.

- viii. The Draft Indian Ports Bill 2022 (August 2022)** - Draft Guidelines for Regulation of Fishing by Indian Flagged Fishing Vessels have been prepared by the GoI. **NPSSFW resented no recognition of the rights of livelihood of small scale fishing communities in the Draft & criticised the unjust denial of access to the draft Indian Ports Bill 2022 for the common stakeholders.**
- ix. The Draft Guidelines for Regulation of Fishing by Indian Flagged Fishing Vessels (August 2022)** – NPSSFW rejected the ploy to cite protection and promotion of small scale fish workers as a reason to adopt guidelines for deep sea fishing. NPSSFW demanded – (1) a consultative process including the fishing communities and other stakeholders in preparation of the Draft Guidelines, (2) publication of the Draft in Indian languages (especially in the languages of the maritime states) in both printed and soft forms, (3) mechanisms for easy access to the Draft Guidelines by stakeholders to ensure information dissemination and stakeholders review, (4) clear 60 days time for public comments.
- x. Draft Policy on Mitigation and Rehabilitation measures for the people displaced by coastal and River Erosion (August 2022)** – The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has recently invited comments and suggestions on a “Draft Policy on Mitigation and Rehabilitation Measures for the People Displaced by Coastal and River Erosion” from a few experts and NGOs. Though NPSSFW has not been presented with a copy of the Draft Policy it, in consideration of the importance of the issue for fishing communities, urged upon the NDMA to ensure –
- a. Putting up the “Draft Policy on Mitigation and Rehabilitation measures for the people displaced by coastal and River Erosion” in public domain and inviting comments on the same;
  - b. Holding consultations with concerned experts, NGOs and erosion affected people including especially the small scale fishing communities.
- B. NPSSFW Interventions on Issues:** Along with addressing important National and State policies, intervention on major issues affecting the life and livelihood of small scale fishing communities is very important for national activities. Some of those have been –
- i.** Dharna of Fishing Communities of Andaman at Port Blair (November 2021);
  - ii.** Faulty and unjust installation of ONGC and Reliance pipelines in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh (April 2022);



- iii. Denial of livelihood practice of Muslim fishing communities in Gosabara Wetlands in Porbandar, Gujarat (May, 2022);
- iv. Harassment and Punishment of Tribal Fishing Communities in Kawal Tiger Reserve, Telengana (May, 2022);
- v. Government of Kerala urged to Stop Construction of Vizhinjam Port (August 2022) -
- vi. Solidarity for Struggle to save the natural resources and livelihood of fishing communities in Loktak Lake, Manipur (May, 2022);
- vii. Move in Support of fisher union's protest against installation of AHOY Marina on the mouth of Zuari River, Goa (June, 2022);
- viii. Protest Against Open Auction of Public Water Bodies, Andhra Pradesh (September, 2021);
- ix. Protest against sand mining and threats to activists opposing sand mining in Goa.

### **C. Two National Campaigns:**

**D.** Two National Campaigns have been launched to raise the voice of the small and marginalized fishing communities across the country –

- I. **Campaign for Small Scale Fishers and Fish Farmers Right to Sustainable Access to Water Bodies and Fish Resources:** The core concept has been developed and workshops held on the campaign in different parts of the country. Community activists are working on to connect the core concept with their ground level realities and interpret the Right to Water Bodies with reference to problems of eviction and exclusion from water and fish resources faced by them.
- II. **Campaign Against the Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021:** Opposition to the Draft Bill has been very crucial for the Indian Small Scale Marine Fishing Communities as the Bill intends to obliterate the identity of small scale fishers and attempts to further marginalise them in the interest of large scale mechanized fishers. The campaign has been continuing from last year. The tabling of the Bill in Parliament could be stalled for the past four consecutive sessions.

### **E. Interfaces with the Department of Fisheries Government India:**

In recognition of NPSSFW's continuous interventions on major national policy decisions we were invited on three occasions in web meetings with the Department of Fisheries, GoI.

- a. Regarding IMFB 2021;
- b. On general dialogue with fish workers organizations; and
- c. On "World Trade Organization - Fisheries Subsidies Agreement"

### **F. Regional Meetings:**

NPSSFW organized 4 regional meetings in four zones of the country – East Zone (Kolkata, West Bengal), North East Zone (Imphal, Manipur), West Zone (Panaji, Goa), South Zone (Chennai,



Tamil Nadu) and West Zone (Panaji, Goa) with a view to develop more effective interventions in support of small scale fish workers and regional leaderships of NPSSFW.

Many important observations and issues came up in the regional meetings and the scope of broadening the leadership base of NPSSFW was also explored.

It is felt that the regional committees formed through these meetings are yet to develop sufficient functionality and efforts are needed for activation. The partner organizations in respective zones should adopt a practice of regular meetings for taking stock of the situation and take forward their respective strategy for organizational activities. There should be efforts for resource mobilization to support the activities.

#### **G. Meetings with State Partners:**

NPSSFW leadership visited and/or had meetings with state partners in Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. These visits and meetings have helped in development of organizational strategies in respective areas.

**H. Documentation Centre:** The need for a documentation centre to provide back-up support for the activities in the fisheries sector in India can hardly be over emphasized. Information collection, processing, storing and catering is indispensable for capacity building of communities in right based protection and promotion of their livelihood. The concept note and activity plan have been prepared. IFA has provided one time support for infrastructure development for the proposed documentation centre. The Documentation Centre may start functioning on getting the support.

#### **I. Network Connections:**

NPSSFW has been connected and working with the following networks –

- a. National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM);
- b. Indian Community Activist Network (ICAN);
- c. Samyukta Kissan Morcha (SKM);
- d. South Asian People's Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC).

There have been proposals to be part of networks like FoE, India and some others, which NPSSFW may consider.