



NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISHWORKERS

Submission to UN Special Rapporteur on 'The Right to Food and Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries'

1. What are the main human rights challenges facing small-scale fishers and fish workers in your country?

The small-scale fish workers are the largest primary non-consumptive stakeholders of the water bodies. Good fish needs good water. Small-scale fish workers are the natural custodians of the water bodies including the coastal waters, rivers, wetlands, ponds and tanks as well as of the fish resources available in them. But they do not have legal right to -

- a. access water bodies for sustainable fishing or fish farming;
- b. protect water bodies and fish resources;
- c. participate in the management of water bodies and fish resources.

The small-scale fisheries continuously suffer from pollution; diversion of water resources; encroachments on water bodies, coasts and catchment areas; over fishing by large mechanised fishing boats and destructive fishing by trawlers or purse seiners in the marine sector and by fishing with poison, mosquito net, explosives or electric current in the inland sector. Pollution and encroachments by widespread intensive shrimp farming add to the woes of small-scale fisheries. The government policy favours capital intensive aquaculture and large-scale fishing than small-scale capture or culture fisheries.

Shorn of legal rights, the resource starved small-scale fish workers are not being able to protect their livelihood and its natural resource base. As a result, there has been large scale migration of fish workers from small scale fisheries sector.

2. What good practices could be shared from your country that has strengthened the recognition, protection and remedies for small-scale fishers and fish workers?

In India the **National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF)** and the fish workers organisations affiliated to it have been instrumental in continuously raising the voice of small-scale fish workers on national and international policy positions with more than 80 such interventions till date. **Small-scale fishers' and fish farmers' right to water bodies** has been a major campaign launched by NPSSF.

Some of the main campaigns launched were to protect small-scale fisheries from –

- Destructive fishing (West Bengal),
- Mangrove destruction and sand mining (Andhra Pradesh),
- Indian Marine Fisheries Bill (Tamil Nadu),
- Backwater pollution and encroachments (Kerala),
- Project Marina on Zuari river (Goa),
- Eviction from Loktak Lake (Manipur),
- Siltation and tourism in Wular Lake (Kashmir).

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These and other campaigns have resulted not only in the recognition of the community organisations by the authorities but also have been effective in providing substantial relief to the small-scale fish worker communities.

3. To what extent small-scale fisheries, coastal communities, and fishery workers have been included in national and international policy processes related to the fisheries sector?

In India the Government has not been able to identify the small-scale fisheries with a view to protect and promote it. Instead there have been attempts to designate all large-scale fishing boats as part of the small-scale fisheries (Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021).

There has been no recognition of the preferential access rights of small-scale fishers to marine fish resources. There has been no statutory protection for the small-scale river, reservoir or wetland fisheries. There is no policy to ensure access of small-scale fishers or fish farmers to public water bodies for fishing or fish farming. Neither there is any statutory provision to ensure security of lease to the small-scale fish farmers who take privately owned tanks or ponds on rent.

The subsidies and schemes provided by the Government are heavily in favour of the large-scale players in fisheries sector who have direct role in marginalization of small-scale fish workers. The latter are not consulted in determining the subsidies or schemes.

While allowing competing interests to use the natural resource bases of small-scale fisheries, the Government does not consult the small-scale fish workers, let alone taking their informed consent. The same exclusion in decision making operates when any conservation regime is imposed thereby restricting or stopping small-scale fish workers livelihood practices.

The government does not take in the small-scale fish workers in the processes of international policy framing or implementation like FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Small Scale Fisheries (VGSSF) or WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies.

4. What are the main concerns regarding working conditions in the fisheries supply chain?
Which parts of the supply chain are the most dangerous or problematic?

Small-scale fisheries suffer from constraints at every level of the supply chain.

Major concerns are –

i) Lack of access to waterbodies and fish resources - The small-scale fishers' and fish farmers' access to the sea, rivers, wetlands, tanks and ponds is getting reduced.

ii) Lack of financial inclusion – The small-scale fish workers' access to institutional credit with low interest and easy term loans have been very limited.

iii) Lack of information, quality inputs and appropriate technology – The small-scale fish workers are not supported with regular and appropriate information, market opportunities, good quality fishing boats and gears, fish seeds, fish meals etc.

iv) Lack of infrastructure – unavailability of fish landing centers with necessary facilities, fish sorting and drying platforms, cold chain facilities, roads, proper market etc.

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v) Lack of social security cover and livelihood support – poor access to insurance schemes, livelihood support during lean period etc.

vi) Lack of facilities and support for women fish workers – Women fish workers, who have about 50% contribution in the work in fisheries, suffer from inequitable livelihood opportunities, lesser access to resources and government schemes compared to their male counterparts.

The most dangerous and problematic part of the supply chain is that the small-scale fishers and fish farmers have no right on the basic resources, that is the waterbodies and fish resources.

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