

NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISH WORKERS (INLAND)

Holds 2nd Meeting on 29-30 June 2017 at Kolkata

to

***Finalise Primary Recommendations for
National Policy for Inland Fisheries***

and

***Plan Organisational Steps to
Build Up National Network***

SUMMARY:

53 representatives from inland fish workers' groups of 9 states assembled at Kolkata in a meeting convened by the National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland) to discuss and decide upon their recommendations for National Policy on Inland Fisheries and also to draw up the future course of action to strengthen the network and take their issues forward.

The meeting came up with a set of policy recommendations to be forwarded to the Expert Committee appointed by the Government of India in the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

The meeting also drew up future plans regarding both submissions towards National Policy and strengthening of the National Platform.

PROCEEDINGS:

Representatives from inland fish worker groups of 9 states of India assembled at Kolkata on 29th and 30th June 2016 to discuss and decide on the main issues they need to be included in the National Policy on Inland Fisheries. The fish workers' representatives also discussed at length the ways and means to build a strong national network of inland fish workers to carry forward their issues on the national plane and extend support to fish worker groups and movements in different states.

Alongwith a number of experts, social activists and researchers, 53 fish workers' representatives participated in the meeting. The fish workers' representatives hailed from Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and West Bengal.

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), ICAN, DISHA , ActionAid, IFA and Oak Foundation greatly helped in organising the meeting.

Nalini Nayek, veteran activist of fish workers' and women's movements chaired the Inaugural Session.

Sasanka Dev, Secretary DISHA, in welcoming the participants, highlighted the importance of the meeting in raising the voice of small scale fish workers engaged in inland fisheries.

He urged all participants to take part in the proceedings energetically and meaningfully to ensure an effective outcome.

Milan Das, General Secretary DMF, welcomed the participants with information on the efforts taken by DMF in organising the inland fish workers in West Bengal and in raising their issues at the state level. He said that the need to have a national platform for inland fish workers is of prime importance today. He also said that the policy requirements for protection and enhancement of the livelihood of small scale fish workers engaged in inland water bodies should be diligently and comprehensively compiled and presented to the government.

After this the chair requested self introduction of the participants.

Sandeep Chachra, Country Director, ActionAid, in his opening address to the meeting, pointed out that many traditional occupations have become extinct due to changes in the situation pertaining to demand of products, level of production, technology and investment. He said that in the case of small scale fish workers, it is imperative to indicate reasons for continuation of their occupation. Ecological compatibility and sustainability are factors that vindicate the cause of small scale fishing communities, he observed. He welcomed the initiative to build national network for inland fish workers and assured his support to the process.

Pradip Chatterjee, Convener, National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland), in his deliberation to set the context of the meeting described the situation that led to the formation of the National Platform last year and the present meeting. Mentioning the main threats faced by the small scale fish workers around the country he stressed on the urgent need to get involved in the preparatory phase of Draft National Policy on Inland Fisheries initiated by the government of India. He resented that the GoI in the Department of Fisheries has circulated the questionnaire for stakeholders' response in English and has asked for online response, thus practically excluding the fish workers who are the main stakeholders. He also emphasised the need to strengthen the National Platform to carry forward the issues of inland small scale fish workers. Finally, he placed before the house the programme of the meeting and its relation to the dual task of preparing recommendations for the National Policy and strengthening the National Platform for Inland Fish Workers. See attachment "Background of the Meeting"]

Sebastian Mathew from ICSEF, in his Key Note Address "*Inland Fisheries – Addressing Main Problems*" described salient features of freshwater fish production, livelihood and tenure issues in inland fisheries, present status of legislation on inland fisheries. Then he described the process adopted by GoI to prepare the draft policy. He also came up with an analysis of the questionnaire circulated by the Department of Fisheries in the ministry of Agriculture. The need for inclusion of fisheries in the National Water Allocation Policy was stressed by him. He also described the National Water Policy 2012 and pointed out the positive prospects it harbours for fisheries sector. He further mentioned the outstanding issues that should be duly considered in preparation of the draft policy. [See attachment "Inland fisheries - June 2017 - Sebastian Mathew"]

The inaugural session was followed by the session on Building Common Understanding chaired by Suman Singh, Secretary Sakshi.

In the first part of the session representatives from all the fish worker groups presented main issues pertaining to respective groups. The house listened to the ordeals of fisher people of Loktak Lake in Manipur and of Chilika Lake in Odisha, of Bargi dam in Madhya Pradesh and Chandil dam in Jharkhand, of oxbow lakes in Madhubani. They listened to the woes of the riverine fishers of Ganga, Mahanadi, Brahmani and Godavari. They took note of the denial of livelihood rights to fishers in protected areas like Sundarban Tiger Reserve, Bhitarkanika Crocodile Reserve, Nalban bird sanctuary. They heard the annals of small and traditional fish farmers losing lease holdings of ponds and tanks to wealthy investors in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

The second part of the session was devoted to focusing on and finalising the main demands of the inland fish workers so that the expert committee or the government can be urged to make the National Policy amenable to the main demands of the community. Another aim of the exercise had been to acquaint different inland groups working in different areas with each others problems and demands with a view to develop overarching and common demands which were to be taken up by the National Platform and its constituent organisations. Pradip Chatterjee, in presenting a compilation of demands of different categories of fish workers, emphasised that these demands should be considered with the main characteristics of the present situation obtaining in Indian fisheries sector - a change over from subsistence level fisheries based on small and traditional fish workers to commercial level fisheries based on entrepreneurs. He also pointed out that the government policy in fisheries rested on investment driven increase in productivity epitomised by "Blue Revolution". Fishing community representatives responded to the compilation of demands with acceptance and / or suggestions for additions and alterations. Thus a comprehensive compilation of the demands of inland fish workers' was prepared. [See attachment "Our Rights - Our Demands"]

Next was a Panel Discussion on "*Considering Recommendations for National Policy on Inland Fisheries*". The panel was constituted with Dr. U. K. Sarcar, Principal Scientist, CIFRI; Sebastian Mathew, Executive Secretary, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), Suman Singh, Secretary, Sakshi, Bihar; Oinam Rajen Singh, Secretary, All Loktak Lake Areas Fishermen's Union, Manipur. The session was chaired by Nalini Nayek.

Dr. Sarcar stressed on the changing scenario in fisheries and the need to be updated both in information and in capacity to cope with the new challenges. He talked about cage culture and its prospects but cautioned about its shortcomings, particularly its cost and negative impacts of cultured exotic species. He advised to stick to the NFDB guidelines on cage culture. He also talked about pen culture in wetlands. He mentioned the need for enhancing market facilities and restoration of resources. Need to provide identity cards, insurance facilities and tax benefits were also pointed out by him.

Speaking next, Sebastian Mathew analysed the questionnaire circulated by the Government for stakeholders' response as the first step towards framing of National Policy. He stressed the need to develop visibility of Indian fisheries sector. He said that right based approach should be adopted and the inland fisheries policy should correspond to the goals and principles enshrined in the National Water Policy. Small scale fish workers participation in co-management of water bodies as well as in conservation management should be ensured. The fisheries policy should relate to the Sustainable Development Goals professed by the Government of India. He also said that it is very important to assess the contribution of the fisheries sector to food security and nutritional status of our country.

Suman Singh mentioned that in the drive to enhance production exotic species are being introduced without considering food culture and/or impact on indigenous species as well as on the socio-economic status of fisher people. She pointed out that both pollution and encroachment are killers of water bodies and it was urgently necessary to protect water bodies from these menaces. She also stressed on single window service to cater government benefits to fish workers. Financial inclusion is very important to save the fishing communities from money lenders and users she said. She emphasised the need for a strong national network of inland fish workers.

Rajen Singh mentioned the necessity for a separate ministry in the Central Government for better and more sensitive administration in the fisheries sector. He emphasised that if we want to save fish workers, we need to save water bodies. He also stressed upon the need to have a balance between capture and culture fisheries.

The participants in the meeting confronted the panelists with questions and comments on - a) the inappropriateness of seeking stakeholders' response on line through English questionnaires; b) the inappropriateness of introducing cage culture with exotic species without taking into account the negative impacts this might have; c) the denial of fishing rights in water bodies under protected area regime; e) the need to have governance rights for fishers in river and watershed management, etc.

Sandeep Chachra was specially requested by the chair to offer his reflections on the meeting as he was to leave early. Sandeep Chachra, in his very brief speech, congratulated the participants for the very significant meeting and thanked the organisers for inviting him. He said that the meeting is going to be truly significant for the small scale inland fish workers. He observed that a lot of work will have to be taken up to make the small scale fisheries sector visible and to strengthen the network to push through the issues. He pledged full support to the effort on his and ActionAid's behalf.

Nalini Nayek summed up the panel discussion and thanked all for an energetic and meaningful participation.

The house took up organisational issues and future course of action for the National Platform as the next and final item. The session was chaired by Pradip Chatterjee,

Convener of the National Platform. The Preparatory Committee members led the discussions with participation of the members of the house.

First, the Preparatory Committee of the National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland) was extended to accommodate new states and groups. The members of the Preparatory Committee -

- 1. K. S. Deben, (Manipur)**
- 2. Suman Singh, (Bihar)**
- 3. O. P. Rawat (Madhya Pradesh)**
- 4. Munna Barman (Madhya Pradesh)**
- 5. Milan Das (West Bengal)**
- 6. Pratap Chinaray (Odisha)**
- 7. Amulya Kumar Nayek (Odisha)**
- 8. Dharam Pal Minj (Jharkhand)**
- 9. Debasis Pal (Andhra Pradesh)**
- 10. Ashok Kadam (Maharashtra)**
- 11. Arvind Murthy (Uttar Pradesh)**
- 12. Pradip Chatterjee (Convener)**

Second, it was decided that draft letter on recommendations of the National Platform regarding the National Policy on Inland Fisheries will be prepared and delivered to the Expert Committee / Government for necessary action. The draft letter will be finalised and circulated by Pradip Chatterjee among the committee members before delivery.

Third, it was decided that the National Platform will convene a National Consultation in Delhi requesting participation of Expert Committee members and concerned Government officials after issuance of the draft National Policy on Inland Fisheries.

Fourth, A schedule was drawn up for state level meeting as in the following -

	State	Tentative Schedule	Person Responsible
1	Manipur	July 2nd week	K S Deben
2	Assam	July 2nd week (to be finalised)	Byomkesh Kumar

3	Bihar	July last week	Suman Singh
4	Jharkhand	July last week	Nalinikanth
5	Uttar Pradesh	August 1st week	Arvind Murthy
6	Odisha	August 2nd week	Amulya Nayek
7	Madhya Pradesh	August 3rd week	Munna Barman
8	Maharashtra	August 3rd week	Ashok Kadam
9	West Bengal	August 4th week	Milan Das

Before closure of the meeting the participants were asked to offer any suggestion or comment if they considered that to be important.

Adinarayan from Andhra Pradesh suggested that the state constituents of the National Platform should organise state and district level programmes in which the national leaders should participate.

Byomkesh Kumar from ActionAid observed that lot of effort was called for to develop and maintain the network of fishing community organisations. He advised to be both diligent and careful in this.

Braja Ghadai from Chilika said that strong ground level organisation can only stage fitting resistance to the attacks on small scale fishing communities. He urged the National Platform to help develop strong fish workers' organisations.

Ashok Nayak from ActionAid said that the National Platform must have a concept note on its vision and mission and have it shared with widest possible number of fish workers and their organisations. He also mentioned the need for lobbying with the government.

Manasi Bera of Sagar Matsyajibi Forum said that the National Platform is going to write a new chapter in the history of the small scale fish workers' struggle to survive and protect water and fish resources.

During the course of the meeting two documentary films - (1) Floating Life - Life, Livelihood and Resistance of Fisher Women in Loktak Lake, Manipur; and (2) Women Canoe Fishers of Kultali, West Bengal were screened.

At the end Pradip Chatterjee, on behalf of the organisers, moved the vote of thanks.