

**First Ever Consultative Meeting with Civil Society Organisations on
Livelihood Issues of Inland Fishworkers
&
The 3rd National Conference of NPSSF(I)**

A total of 57 participants attended the Civil Society Consultative Meeting held at the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi on 10th of July 2018. They came from fish workers' organisations working in different states and from civil society organisations of different regions. It was unanimously observed that the National Consultative Meeting in Delhi organised by the National Platform on livelihood issues of inland small scale fishworkers has been the first of its kind. The meeting has been fairly successful in highlighting the inland fish workers' issues as well as in primary sensitisation of friendly and responsive organisations on those. Important suggestions for future activities were made with offers for support from different civil society organisations.

At the beginning **Soumen Ray**, Coordinator of the National Platform, welcomed all the participants to the National Consultative meeting and described the backdrop and perspective of the meeting. He mentioned the context of the inception of the National Platform in 2016 and its second meeting in 2017. He also mentioned the purpose for which the National Consultative Meeting in Delhi has been convened and requested the participants to strive together to make it a success.

Neelkanth Mishra was given the responsibility to coordinate the first session of the meeting.

After that there was a brief session on self introduction of the participants. All the participants mentioned their names, respective work areas and organisations in the house.

The **Hindi version** of the National Platform's booklet on policy position "**National Policy on Inland Fisheries: Why We Need it? What do we need in it?**" was released by **Suman Singh** (Bihar), **Munna Barman** (MP), **Sheikh Ghulam Rasool** (Jammu & Kashmir) and **Adinarayana** (Andhra Pradesh).

N. Venugopalan from **International Community in support of Small Scale Fishworkers** (ICSF) delivered the inaugural speech. He quoted Robin Welcome, an inland fisheries expert "Inland fisheries is affected by all other sectors, except inland fisheries" to mention the all pervading interconnection of fisheries harboured in water bodies and courses. He pointed out a few important issues for management and up keeping of inland fisheries like equitable resource access and support for processing and marketing for vulnerable sections of fish workers including women. Mentioning the all important role of policy and legislation in the management of fisheries he exclaimed that the fishers could conserve, protect, restore and co-manage inland water bodies if they had effective tenure rights. He also mentioned the need for policy coherence among the sub-national, national and international sectors. The importance of flood plain wetlands, establishment of an environmental flow regime and policy for inclusive growth for inland fisheries were stressed by him. He also talked about the need for unison between state and national policies on fisheries. He stated that creation of better marketing channels and marketing infrastructure are needed for the whole sector. He concluded the inaugural speech by stating that there should be a paradigm change from revenue generation through the prohibit-and-use model to better social development through co-management means.

Pradip Chatterjee, Convener of the National Platform, made the Key Note Address to the meeting. He first mentioned the vast and varied water bodies of our country that hold enormous quantities of fish. He then mentioned the importance of the sector highlighting the major role Inland Fisheries plays in total fish production, food security and nutritional status of the country as well as the huge workforce employed in the sector. He also mentioned that the potentialities of water resources in production of fish are largely unutilised. Then he went on to indicate the massive threats to our water bodies and fisheries as pollution, encroachment and diversion of water for consumptive use. He repeatedly mentioned the small scale fishers and fish farmers as the **largest primary non-consumptive stakeholders of the water bodies and their natural custodians** because **Good Fish Needs Good Water**. He said that this community is the primary victim of so called development initiatives that cause large scale encroachments and pollution as well as of the official conservation initiatives that evict them from traditional fishing grounds.

In mentioning the policy requirements for inland fisheries he first indicated the livelihood needs of different categories of fish workers like fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors including the women fish workers. He then went on to identify the basic policies and overarching concerns of inland fisheries management. He also stated administrative requirements like a **separate fisheries ministry** in the central government and a **national fisheries commission**.

Pradip Chatterjee also presented the **history of the National Platform** with the context of its establishment. He highlighted its role in the process for preparation of the National Policy on Inland Fisheries and stated the need to keep up the pressure on the Government of India for its final adoption incorporating the policy positions advocated by the National Platform. He concluded his address with an appeal to the civil society to stand by the small scale fishers in their unequal fight with money and political power to save water, save fish and save fisher people.

The house then had an open discussion with the participation of civil society organisations and fish workers' representatives. The session was coordinated by **Soumya Dutta** of Pairovi, **Anil Singh** of SANSAD and **Arti** from FES.

Fish workers' representatives from Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Maharashtra raised their issues and stressed the need for immediate action on those. Speakers from fish workers' organisations included **Suman Singh** from Bihar, **Gobinda Das** and **Swapan Bhowmik** from West Bengal, **Munna Barman** from Madhya Pradesh, **Braja Behera** and **Maguni Jana** from Odisha, **Adinarayan** from Andhra Pradesh and **Ghulam Rasool** from Jammu & Kashmir. Issues raised included devastation of river ecology and fisheries in the name of development, destruction of flood plane wetlands and fisheries, security of tenure for small fishers and fish farmers, market access and facilities for small fish vendors, degradation of fisheries in lakes like Chilika and Wular, transborder management of rivers like Mthabhanga and Churniban on fishing in protected areas like Sundarban and Bhitarkanika.

Ranja Sengupta from TWN, raised the need for awareness on international trade agreements being processed under WTO and RCEP that aim at reducing subsidies to the fisheries sector and opening up of fishing grounds, fish production and fish markets to international companies. She offered to help organise workshops on the issues.

Ashok Sharma from Delhi Forum welcomed the initiative. He spoke about the long association of Delhi Forum with fisheries movement and National Fishworkers' Forum

(NFF). He said that Delhi Forum will definitely support and work with the National Platform for Inland Fishworkers.

Soumya Dutta from Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha & India-Climate-Justice, stressed the need for mapping of fisheries relating to both Himalayan and peninsular river systems with special reference to climate change, encroachments, diversion of water etc. that affect ecology and fisheries. He called for development of understanding and capacity building for identification of problems of pollution. He also suggested that the first users' right on water bodies and fish resources should be claimed by the fishing communities. He offered to help in pollution detection and mapping of fisheries resources and threats in the rivers and flood plain wetlands and said that the process is already underway for Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF).

T Peter, General Secretary of National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), welcomed the initiative to organise the inland fishworkers and raise their issues. He proposed that the National Platform for Small Scale Inland Fishworkers join in NFF and function as an autonomous body within NFF. He said that many National Platform leaders are also in NFF, so it is also organisationally very close to NFF.

Pradip Chatterjee, Convener of the National Platform, welcomed the proposal and said that the National Platform has developed its positions on the basis of the teachings of leaders like Father Thomas Kochery, Harekrishna Debnath and Matanhy Saldanha who, as leaders of NFF, laid down the main principles of small scale fishworkers' struggle. He also said that while the National Platform would definitely fight together with NFF, the proposal for joining NFF would be considered by the National Platform constituents in the earliest.

Dipak Dholakia from ICAN said that the fisheries issues have not been much in discussion in the civil society. It has been a scope for learning for him to be associated with the initiative. He also said that ICAN as an organisation has already resolved to support the small scale fishworkers' cause and many of the leading activists in fisheries are ICAN members.

Anil Singh of SANSAD felt the need for an effective national level organization of small scale fishworkers to work for their issues not only at national or regional level but also at international and sub-continental level. He said that as the Lok Sabha elections and formation of a new government are due in next year, this is the right time to raise the demand for a small scale fish worker friendly national policy for inland fisheries. He also warned the house saying that India is a country which is very good in introducing legislations but very poor in implementing those.

Arti from FES gave an introduction to the supportive role they play for the workers in Unorganized sector. She raised the issue of implementation of Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act 2008 for all the Unorganized Workers including the Small Scale Inland fishworkers. She agreed that the fishworkers should be equipped to move for their rights as per the norms of ILO. She also said that NGOs can't support the movements of the workers but can help them to improve their knowledge and capacity through workshops or seminars.

Neelkantha Mishra summed up the day's proceedings.

Sasanka Dev moved the vote of thanks.

3rd National Conference of NPSSFW(I) : Proceedings & Decisions

The meeting was held at GPF Conference Room on 11th July 2018. Delegates from fish workers' organisations of 10 states and 3 advisers attended the meeting. **Soumen Ray**, Coordinator of NPSSFW(I) welcomed all the delegates and placed the agenda.

The main items were –

1. Organisational reporting from affiliated organisations;
2. Delay in publication of Draft National Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy;
3. General Elections 2019 and tasks of NPSSFW(I);
4. Relation with other organisations;
5. Other organisational decisions.

Organisational reporting from affiliated organisations: Reports were placed by organisations from Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Manipur and West Bengal. Problems and prospects of the fish workers' organisation building were discussed. Requirements for future development were also suggested.

Delay in publication of Draft National Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy: The meeting expressed concern on the inordinate delay in publication of Draft NIFAP and decided to move the Government in the matter as well as issue reminders.

General Elections 2019 and tasks of NPSSFW(I): It was decided that NPSSFW(I) and its constituents should demand recognition from political parties of the small scale fishers' and fish farmers' right to water and water bodies together with other rights and entitlements essential for their livelihood. It was also suggested that NPSSFW(I) assess the election manifestos of the political parties from the small scale fish workers' viewpoint.

Relation with other organisations: Discussions were held regarding the proposals on long term relationship with other fish workers' organisations. It was decided that NPSSFW(I) should be open to and welcome such relationships in the interest of the small scale fish workers' interest. In this due importance should be given to ascertain that the concerned organisation commits itself to uphold the interest of the small scale fish workers and be their organisation in membership and structure.

Other organisational decisions:

- It was decided that NPSSFW(I) should come out with a Mission Statement to present its aims and objectives to the society in general and to fishing communities in particular.
- It was also decided that state level and regional meetings will be organised by NPSSFW(I) to strengthen capacity building and collectivisation of fish workers.
- It was decided that the most preferable organisational form for NPSSFW(I) and its affiliates should be trade union of small scale fish workers. Soumen Ray, Dipak Dholakia and Debasis Pal were entrusted with the task to probe the possibilities of NPSSFW(I) becoming a federation of trade unions of small scale fish workers.
- It was decided that NPSSFW(I) website will have to be strengthened.
- It was decided that Dipak Dholakia will be the Delhi Coordinator of NPSSFW(I) and look after the Delhi Office together with Soumen Ray.
- The Conference Elected a 17 member National Council and Office Bearers.

