

**Report**  
**‘Consultation to Prevent Destructive Fishing Practices’**  
19.12.2023, The Stadel, Kolkata

Destructive and unsustainable fishing by unscrupulous miscreants are one of the most pervasive threats for depletion of fish resources in aquatic ecosystems and livelihood of small-scale fish workers dependent on those resources. Fishing by mosquito net, poison, blasting and electric shock in inland waters and by trawl nets in marine waters is running havoc. While most states of India have policies, rules or regulations to prevent destructive fishing practices, the on-ground implementation of those remain poor and destructive fishing practices continue unabated. The poor and marginalised small-scale fishing communities are engaged in an unequal struggle against the agents of destruction.

Sincere efforts were taken by National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW), Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) and Society for Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA) to involve the Department of Fisheries of the Government of West Bengal along with central fisheries institutes like the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI) and Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE) in a consultation with small scale fishing community representatives on 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2023 at The Stadel Kolkata, to recommend immediate and effective measures for preventing destructive fishing practices.



Panel of Speakers: M Das, S. S. Dev, T. K. Ghoshal, A. K. Das, S. Mondal, P.K.Chatterjee, K. Mondal

The consultation was attended by around 50 fishing community representatives from 12 districts of West Bengal. Pradip Chatterjee, Convener NPSSFW; Sasanka Dev, Secretary DISHA, Debasis Shyamal and Milan Das, respectively the President and General Secretary of DMF moderated the consultation. Dignitaries and experts present were -

- Sri Biplab Roy Chowdhury – Hon'ble Minister of State, Department of Fisheries, Government of West Bengal;
- Dr. Sandip Kumar Mondal – Deputy Director of Fisheries, Directorate of Fisheries, Government of West Bengal;
- Sri Kamalesh Mondal – Private Secretary to the Hon'ble MOS(IC), Department of Fisheries, Government of West Bengal;
- Dr. Archan Kanti Das – Principal Scientist, Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Government of India;
- Dr. T.K. Ghoshal – Principal Scientist, Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Government of India;



Tapasi Dolui, Vice-President, DMF felicitating the Minister-in-Charge Fisheries Sri Biplab Roy Chowdhury

**Debasis Shyamal, President, Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF)** moderated the inaugural session. He introduced the dignitaries to the meeting. He briefly described the need of the consultation and stressed on suggesting the ways and means to stop destructive fishing practices.

**Milan Das, Secretary, Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF)** moderated the interactive session. He requested the participants to self-introduce themselves and facilitated their submissions.

The highlights of the consultative workshop were as follows –

**Submissions from small-scale fishers and fish farmers –**

- i) ***Use of destructive fishing methods*** – Small-scale fishers and fish farmers from the districts of West Bengal such as Hooghly, Nadia, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Murshidabad, Malda and Jalpaiguri described the nature of destructive fishing practices carried out in the sea, rivers, reservoirs, canals, beels, baors etc. in their respective districts. Use of poison, electric shocks, explosives and mosquito nets in different inland water bodies as well as bottom trawling and use of mosquito nets in marine or coastal waters were mentioned as most destructive fishing methods responsible for depletion of natural fish stock.
- ii) ***The miscreants and their influence*** – It were repeatedly mentioned that the people engaged in destructive fishing practices were usually not from traditional fishing communities. More often than not, they were connected with ruling political parties and use their political clout to enjoy immunity from necessary police action. They also complained against the inaction of the district and block fisheries administration.
- iii) ***Economic Constraints*** – It was, however, also stated that in some cases mosquito nets were used by small scale fishers who, due to higher cost of nets with larger mesh size, are compelled to buy cheaper mosquito nets in absence of subsidies for purchasing the former.



Fishing Community Representatives Speaking in the Interactive Session

***Deliberations from Dignitaries and Leaders of Fish Worker Organisations –***

**Hon’ble MIC Fisheries Biplab Roy Chowdhury** expressed his resentment that despite existence of rules to prevent destructive fishing, lack of awareness and on ground implementation are hindering its prevention. He stressed that the greed for quick or immediate gain is destroying our natural resources including that of fisheries. Condemning destructive fishing practices, he particularly mentioned destruction of fish habitats by scraping of the sea floor by bottom trawling. The Honourable Minister stressed the need to implement the legal provisions to prohibit destructive fishing practices. He further added



that awareness campaigns regarding conservation of fish resources and sustainable fishing practices are of utmost importance to prevent destructive fishing practices.



Minister-in-Charge Fisheries Sri Biplab Roy Chowdhury Speaks

**Deputy Director of Fisheries, West Bengal Dr. Sandip Mondal** mentioned that in spite of having provisions in both Inland and Marine Fishing Regulation Acts of West Bengal to prohibit destructive fishing, their implementation has been difficult. He mentioned that destructive fishing has decimated ornamental fish stock in cold water fisheries. He called for active collaboration between fish workers unions and responsible authorities to prevent destructive fishing practices. He urged fish workers to report incidents of destructive fishing to the Fisheries Extension Officers (FEOs) whenever someone is found to be engaged in such practices.

**Principal Scientist, Central Inland Fisheries Institute (CIFRI) Dr. Archan Kanti Das** mentioned the initiatives of seed ranching taken up by CIFRI under the National Mission for Clean Ganga programme to replenish the fish stock. His submissions echoed with other dignitaries on aspect of collaboration and co-management with fish worker unions and responsible authorities to prevent destructive fishing practices. Further, he added that fishers should be provided with alternative less destructive nets at subsidised rates to prevent them from using mosquito nets.

**Principal Scientist and Head, Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE) Dr. Tapas Kumar Ghoshal** suggested two steps for implementation of regulations to prohibit destructive fishing practices – (1) Activating executive authorities to enforce prohibition; and (2) Awareness generation by fish workers organisations. He mentioned that destructive practices are also affecting culture fisheries through use of harmful chemicals and feed.

**National Convener, National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF)**

**Pradip Chaterjee** spoke of Eco-System Based Human Rights and how its violation through destructive fishing practices is having devastating effect on the natural resource base as well as livelihood in fisheries. “When there is scarcity of fish resources in waterbodies, the existence of fish workers and their identity as fish workers is threatened!”, exclaimed Chaterjee, in agony. As part of a presentation, Chaterjee highlighted the irreversible effects on aquatic ecosystems caused by destructive fishing practices and while referring to an ongoing research survey, he pointed out the fish species which have become endangered in the rivers of North Bengal. He urged that concerned authorities including the police administration must be sensitised to take necessary steps to stop and penalise the perpetrators engaged in unsustainable fishing practices.

iv) **Secretary, Society for Direct Initiative for Social & Health Action (DISHA) Sasanka**

**Sekhar Dev** spoke about the importance of research and documentation on specific issues faced by fish workers due to destructive fishing practices in different regions, with a view to assess the multifaceted nature of the problem. He further added that necessary steps for vigilance around waterbodies must be taken by the administration to prevent destructive fishing practices. While pointing out an instance from Jalpaiguri district where the Block Development Officer (BDO) issued an order to prevent destructive fishing, Dev highlighted the importance of administrative support to strengthen small-scale fish workers in their quest to protect and manage the waterbodies on which they depend for livelihood.

**The consultation came up with the following recommendations –**

Destructive fishing practices like fishing by mosquito (fine mesh) net, poison, explosives and electric shock in inland and coastal waters and by trawling in marine waters need to be prohibited to protect the natural fish stock in our sea, rivers, reservoirs and wetlands.

- 1) The Department of Fisheries, GoWB is requested to immediately issue prohibitive orders regarding use of destructive fishing methods and circulate the same to all concerned authorities including the Fisheries, General and Police Administrations at the State, District and Block levels in exercise of the powers conferred by both the Inland and Marine Fisheries Regulation Acts of West Bengal and Notifications delivered under those Acts. Concerned enforcing authorities should be asked to act upon strict implementation of the prohibition.
- 2) Copies of such orders should be shared with fish workers’ and civil society organisations with the request to help the authorities in prohibiting destructive fishing methods through awareness campaigns, surveillance, information and joint action. Fisheries Department should facilitate such activities at State, District and Block levels.

- 3) Awareness materials in the form of leaflets, posters, video clips and media advertisements may be prepared by the Department of Fisheries and shared with departmental authorities and fish workers' or civil society organisations for use in awareness building.
- 4) In specific areas or cases where fishers are compelled to use mosquito nets because of financial constraints, the Department of Fisheries may provide legally approved nets to genuine fishers at subsidised rate.



Consultation Participants in Group