

## **National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland)**

*Formed,*

*Preparatory and Advisory Committees Appointed*

*Road Map Charted*

**September 20-21, 2016** has been the days of immense importance for the **20 million strong small scale fishing communities working on inland fisheries in India. Fish workers' representatives from seven states converged to Kolkata and pledged to fight jointly to end marginalisation and deprivation of the small fishing communities and destruction of the water bodies and fish resources.**

The meeting witnessed **agonies and desperations** of small scale fishing communities working in rivers, lakes, wetlands and ponds as their representatives, one by one, described how the rivers are polluted and dried up by industries and chemical agriculture, how the lakes are shrinking, how the ponds are being filled-up and encroached. The fishing community representatives also described how, with the connivance of the government, the subsistence fishers and fish farmers are being edged out from the sector by moneyed investors.

The meeting also witnessed the **resolve and enthusiasm** of the fishing community representatives to close their ranks and fight the battle for liberation.

**Pradip Chatterjee** welcomed all representatives of fishing communities, resource persons, government officials and other participants on behalf of Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF). He was followed by **Chittaranjan Mondal**, Regional Manager of ActionAid and **Sasanka Dev**, Secretary DISHA, who wished the meeting all the success.

**Sebastian Mathew** of International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) presented the key note address. He narrated the matters of state policy related to inland fisheries, commitments that our country bears to international conventions and stressed on the issues of governance.

**Dr. Saptarshi Biswas**, Deputy Director, Government of West Bengal described the efforts of the government and with their scopes and limitations. He stressed the need for fishing community organisations to come up.

**Dr. Archan Kumar Das**, Principal Scientist, Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI) gave an overall picture of the inland fisheries and dwelt on its problems and prospects.

**Dr. B. K. Mahapatra**, Principal Scientist, Central Institute for Fisheries Education (CIFE) enlightened the participants with a short but significant discourse on the statutory directives on inland fisheries.

**Fourteen (14)** different groups from seven states presented their situation mentioning the problems they are facing and how they think they can overcome those problems. Groups hailed from Loktak Lake in **Manipur**, Madhubani in **Bihar**; Chandil Dam in **Jharkhand**; Chilika, Bhitarkanika, Mahanadi river basin and Brahmani river basin in **Odisha**; Godavari river basin in **Andhra Pradesh**; Bagri Dam and Tikamgarh in **Madhya Pradesh**; pond and river based groups in Hooghly and Howrah districts, Jangal Mahal fishers in Paschim Medinipur and Mangrove Forest fishers in Sundarban of **West Bengal**.

Then the participants were **regrouped on categories of water bodies** like river, lake, pond and reservoir they are attached with. The groups worked to identify chief problems confronting fish workers attached with each kind of water body and explore how the problems could be dealt with. The groups also worked to indicate the government protections and schemes available to them. After the rigorous group work that continued for two hours each group presented their work to the participants.

The group work and its presentation were followed by a **panel discussion** on policy elements for inland fisheries. The panellists were Sebastian Mathew, Nalini Nayek, Suman Singh, Mukut Roy Chaudhury, Neelkanth Mishra and Pradip Chatterjee. It was reiterated that –

1. **The small scale fish workers are by far the largest preimary (non-consumptive) stakeholders and natural custodians of our water bodies;**
2. **The state policy on fisheries should aim at sustainable use of water and fish resources as well as the wellbeing of the small scale fishing communities. It should not take enhancement of productivity or investment in the sector as its primary or overarching goal;**
3. The small scale fishing communities have to be empowered with **Tenure Rights** that include sustainable access and use of water and fish resources; **Governance Rights** to protect water and fish resources from pollution, encroachments and over and destructive fishing; and **Rights to finance, infrastructure, technology, market and social security**. Further, there should be **Residual Rights** to access and utilise the resources for alternative livelihood generation.

The panellists also mentioned the need to connect with important fisheries hubs across the country and incorporate the issues of other categories of fisheries like sewage fed fisheries or cold water fisheries to develop a comprehensive policy recommendation.

It was also decided that while efforts would be taken to connect with fish worker communities in different states that are still not represented, representatives hailing from different states would strive to build up networks with fishing communities in their respective states.

It was further decided that a draft position paper would be prepared and circulated in one month's time and the next meeting of the alliance would take place in six months.

The name of the alliance was decided to be –

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To take the work forward a ten (10) member **Preparatory Committee** was constituted with the following activists –

- 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. Sannyasi Pradhan (Odisha)**
- 7. Amulya Kumar Nayek (Odisha)**
- 8. Dharam Pal Minj (Jharkhand)**
- 9. Debasis Pal (Andhra Pradesh)**
- 10. Pradip Chatterjee (Convener)**

To advise and facilitate the Preparatory Committee an eight member Advisory Committee was constituted with the following members –

- 1. Nalini Nayek;**
- 2. Sebastian Mathew;**
- 3. Mukut Roy Chaudhury;**
- 4. Neelkanth Mishra;**
- 5. Chittaranjan Mondal;**
- 6. Soumen Ray;**
- 7. Neeraj Verma;**
- 8. Viren Lobo.**



**The Participants**



**Group Work**



**Presenting the Group Work**