

The background:

Investment driven productivity enhancement that edge out small fishers and fish farmers and replace them with entrepreneurs, or, sustainable production with protection and augmentation of livelihood of small fishers and fish farmers – the inland fisheries sector is witnessing a policy contradiction. Quite evidently small scale traditional fishers and fish farmers are losing ground, and with it pressure is building up against sustainability in fisheries.

In this backdrop the National Policy on Inland Fisheries under preparation by the Government of India assumes particular significance and calls for raising the voices of small scale inland fish workers to put forward their demands and assert their rights.

Small Scale Inland Fish Workers : Rights and Entitlements

General Rights:

A. Government I-Card:

1. Each and every fish worker, fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion should be given government identity card as recognition of their occupational dignity, rights and entitlements. Utmost caution should be taken not to issue Fish Worker I-Cards to non-fishers.

B. Right to be informed about and access Government Schemes:

1. There should be public notice regarding Government schemes for fish workers and absolute transparency in selection of beneficiaries and disbursement of benefits.

C. Right to Social Security & Livelihood Support:

Small scale fish workers should have comprehensive social security cover that include –

1. Housing for all fish workers,
2. Food security cover;
3. Life and health insurance cover;
4. Insurance cover for boats and nets, fish farming and vehicles employed for fish vending;
5. Old age and infirm pension;
6. Livelihood support during lean season and / or fishing ban period;
7. Educational assistance for children.

Women Fish Workers' Rights:

A. The government should have a gender policy in inland fisheries which would be based on gender segregated data on women fish workers' contribution to the work in fisheries.

B. Right to have women fish worker specific schemes and allotments –

1. To make good for the relative exclusion of women fish workers;
2. To access financial, business and technological support;

C. Preferential right of women fish workers to access –

1. Social security schemes meant for fish workers that include housing, life and health cover, old and infirm pension, widow pension, educational support for children;
2. Welfare and benefit schemes meant for fish workers;
3. Organise and run women fish workers' cooperatives, production groups, SHGs;

D. Special development measures in sectors dominated by women fish workers like fish vending, canoe based fishing, crab and mussel collection etc.

Capture Fisheries

[River, Lake, Wetland etc.]

A. Tenure Rights:

Small scale fishers should have the right

1. To fish in all water bodies like rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs including in water bodies under protected areas.
2. To give informed consent to any conservation measure that fringes upon the small scale fishers right to fish, to be provided with adequate compensation rehabilitation and to participation in the management and implementation of the conservation measure.
3. To habitat including homestead land.

B. Governance Rights:

Fisheries, including protection and enhancement of stock of fish, should be made integral part of management policy for water bodies like rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs as well as of the policy for river, wetland, reservoir, other water bodies and watershed management. Fish stock assessment and replenishment in water bodies should be undertaken regularly by the government in consultation with the fishers.

Small scale fishers should have the right –

1. To protect water and fish in water bodies like rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs and other water bodies;
2. To participate in and determine river, wetland, reservoir, other water bodies and watershed (catchment and drainage) management including use of the water resources available in the water bodies;;
3. To control and stop all activities that impact fisheries including destructive fishing practices, pollution and encroachment.

C. Right to Economic Empowerment & Finance:

1. Small scale fishers should be encouraged and provided with incentives to form and run Cooperatives, Fish Production Groups, SHGs etc. organisations for economic self-empowerment. The terms and conditions for their formation and running should be made easy and transparent. The scope for interventions and favouritism by political parties and other external interest groups should be precluded.
2. Small scale fishers should be protected from exploitation by usurers / money lenders and micro-finance companies and should enjoy priority in government finance including bank linking and bank loans (Kisan Credit facilities are to be extended to small fishers and implemented);

D. Right to Infrastructure:

Small scale fishers should enjoy the right to have necessary infrastructure support that includes –

1. Jetties / constructed landing stages for landing the catch;
2. Light, drinking water, resting place and toilet at the landing centre;
3. Roads and means of transport to and from the landing centres.
4. Cold storage, fish drying and processing facilities, small ice factories.

E. Right to Technology and Information:

1. Due importance and respect should be given to document traditional knowledge and expertise in capture fisheries with their appropriate utilisation;
2. Small scale fishers should be provided with technology, information, training and assistance regarding development of boats, nets, maintenance of cold chain, weather, tides, release of water from reservoirs and market;
3. Small scale fishers should also be provided with technology, information, training and assistance to enhance value addition through procedures like crab fattening and rearing of wild fish as well as manufacturing of different value added products like fish pickles, papads etc. and market access.

Culture Fisheries

[Ponds, Reservoirs (cage) etc.]

A. Tenure Rights:

Small scale fish farmers should have the right to

1. Security of tenure (protection against eviction) in water bodies taken on lease;
2. Regulation of lease regarding terms and conditions including fixation and increment of lease rent;
3. Get farming rights in Government owned water bodies on preferential basis (over non-fish farmer investors) and easy terms (lease rent should be fixed on the basis of present yield and not on the basis of standard yield) with at least 5 years moratorium on increase of lease rent.
4. Farm fish in reservoirs or government water bodies should belong to local traditional fish farmers, no business group or entrepreneurs should be given right to fish farming.

B. Governance Rights:

Small scale fish farmers should have the right –

1. To protect water and fish in ponds, reservoirs etc.;
2. To participate in and determine watershed management (catchment and drainage);
3. To participate in and determine use of the water resources in the water bodies (irrigation, industrial use, navigation, water sports etc.);
4. To control all activities that impact fisheries including pollution and encroachment.
5. To stop all kinds of fish farming, including brackish water intensive prawn aqua-culture, that harms the environment and ecology.

C. Right to Economic Empowerment & Finance:

1. Small scale fish farmers should be encouraged and provided with incentives to form and run organisations for economic self-empowerment like Cooperatives, Fish Production Groups, SHG. The terms and conditions for their formation and running should be made easy and transparent. Condition of having individual titles on water bodies for cooperative membership should be scrapped. The scope for interventions and favouritism by political parties and other external interest groups should be precluded.
2. Small scale fishers should be protected from exploitation by usurers / money lenders and micro-finance companies and should enjoy priority in government finance including bank linking and bank loans (Kisan Credit facilities are to be extended to small fishers and implemented);

D. Right to Technology and Information:

1. Small scale fish farmers should be provided with technology, information, training and assistance regarding up gradation of pond preparation techniques, hatchery and quality seeds and fingerlings, farming techniques, quality feed and market;
2. Small scale fish farmers should be provided with surveillance against and protection from low quality and harmful feed and medicines;
3. Small scale fish farmers should be continuously assisted with knowledge, technique and access in choice and rearing of cultivable species that may bring good return to the farmers.
4. Small scale fish farmers should also be provided with technology, information, training and assistance to diversify into gainful enterprises like ornamental fish breeding and rearing.

E. Right to determine techniques and species for culture:

1. Extreme caution should be adopted in introduction of techniques like cage and pen culture and these should never be introduced without the informed consent of local traditional fishers and fish farmers;
2. No exotic species should be introduced;

Fish Vendors

A. Tenure Rights:

- 1. No fish vendor may be evicted from any designated or undesignated market place without his or her consent and adequate rehabilitation;**
- 2. In the event of reconstruction and / or development of fish markets all small fish vendors selling fish in that market will have to be accommodated and this should be made an indispensable condition for sanctioning the plan of the market.**

B. Governance Rights:

- 1. Small fish vendors should have the right of participation in the management of fish depots and fish retailing markets;**
- 2. Small fish vendors should also have the right of participation in the management of collection and transportation of fish from the fish depots.**

C. Right to Economic Empowerment and Finance:

- 1. Small fish vendors should be encouraged and provided with incentives to form and run organisations for economic self-empowerment like Cooperatives, Fish Production Groups, SHG. The terms and conditions for their formation and running should be made easy and transparent. The scope for interventions and favouritism by political parties and other external interest groups should be precluded.**
- 2. Small fish vendors should be protected from usurers / money lenders and should enjoy priority in government finance including bank linking and bank loans (Kisan Credit facilities are to be extended to small fishers and implemented);**

D. Right to Infrastructure:

- 1. Small fish vendors should be provided with transport facilities (individual, collective or public) to and from fish depots and retail markets.**
- 2. Fish depots and retail markets should have basic amenities like drinking water, toilet and resting place; they should have proper approach roads;**
- 3. Markets should have built up platforms, adequate storage and selling space with cleaning facilities;**