

Union Budget 2020

Desperate attempt to tear open the fisheries sector to promote capital.

Small scale fisheries turned into a sacrificial goat.

[NPSSFW(I) Reviews¹ Union Budget 2020 - Calls for Protest]



Budget is not Trustworthy

Union and state budgets have long been turned into exercises more political than fiscal. Promotion of the interests of the corporate and business houses or of the moneyed people at the cost of the toiling masses is the order of present day society and the purport of the budget has been nothing different. Its speciality rests in annual hoodwinking of the citizens with newer jargons, vocabularies and statistical manoeuvrings so much so that little care is taken even to maintain the authenticity of the figures of both revenue collections and expenditure allotments. Little tinkering with the percentages, slabs, exclusions and inclusions of taxes and taxed items provide it with icings attractive to the middle class. The numbers provided in the budget have become so unreliable that they cannot and should not be trusted to provide an account of how much the government has received and how much it is to spend. The style of false promises profusely mouthed out by politicians has been imported in budgetary exercises crowned by the budget speech of Finance Minister. The exercise has become so reckless that no care has been taken even to mention the promises given in the last year's budget, let alone putting up any report of their implementations. **Thus the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) had an allocation of INR 3,700 crore last year, but it has no mention in this year's budget. It is time to call the bluff.**

Another important factor in the unreliability of budget data has been contributed by preponing of the budget submission by a full month – from the last day to the first day of February. Thus the revenue and expenditure figures of the last quarter of the financial year are fully projected data. The government, under political compulsions, exercises freehand in making wild projections that vary widely from reality.

Small Scale Fisheries Extinction to be Expedited

It is no surprise that there would be very little in favour of small scale fisheries or fish workers in the union budget though it has been the first anniversary of the formation of the Department of Fisheries. The Government of India did not create the Department of Fisheries in the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying with the mandate of protecting and promoting small scale fisheries or fish workers. With the exception of NPSSFW(I) the mandate was also not demanded by organisations that asked for a separate Ministry for Fisheries.

The main thrust of the Government policy in fisheries has been to increase capital investment in fisheries by promoting and protecting the interest of the class of fisheries investors and entrepreneurs against that of the traditional and small scale fishing communities. There is severe decrease in production from inland capture fisheries and production from marine capture fisheries has come down to slow increase, thanks to unbridled pollution, encroachments and overfishing. In this situation the only way that remains to increase fish production to 15 million tonnes by 2015 and to 20 million tonnes by 2022-23, as proposed by the Finance Minister, is by promoting culture fisheries both in the marine and inland sectors. This is planned by pumping in investments and promoting entrepreneurs through Blue Revolution / Economy funds. The draft NFDB Bill has been drawn by the Government as the legal instrument to spruce up NFDB as the chief administrative agent for this design. Government of India does not want to protect our vast natural surface water resources harbouring rich natural fisheries that provide food security and nutrition to crores of our countrymen and employment to millions of small

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scale fish workers. It presides over destruction of our natural fisheries by pollution, encroachments and over-fishing and sponsors investors and entrepreneurs to have a loot of the business in fish enhancing the macabre destitution of millions of traditional fishers and fish workers. The Finance Minister of the Government that swears by Antodaya or Sarbodaya, that declares 'not mass production, but production by the masses' as its policy in fisheries and chants 'Sabko Sath, Sabko Bikash', never ever mentioned the words 'small scale' or 'traditional' fisheries in her budget speech while referring to fisheries.

Fisheries Deptt. Deprived

Though the budget allocations in the fisheries sector are aimed mainly at promoting capital investors and business in fishing, the abject neglect of the fisheries sector in overall budget allocation is too evident to be overlooked. A sector, whose export earnings amount to Rs. 50,000 crores at present and aimed to be increased to Rs. 1 lakh crore by 2024-25, gets only about Rupees 823 crores in budget allocation for running the Fisheries Department with its schemes and other activities. Not only that, budget allocation for many programmes directly related to fisheries has been kept outside the purview of the Fisheries Department.

Fisheries Sector Neglected

Of the extra departmental budget allocations related to fisheries sector the main sources are as in the following –

A. Department of Agricultural Research and Education & Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare:

- An allocation of Rs. 156 crores has been proposed under '**Fisheries Sciences**' to implement research and academic programmes in fisheries and aquaculture. The fund is also for providing technical, training, analytical, advisory support and consultancy services in the field of resources assessment and management, standardization of aquaculture hatchery and grow-out culture technologies, responsible fishing system and species diversification and utilization of inland saline soils for aquaculture, fish health monitoring, etc.
- There has also been a proposed allocation of Rs. 8.34 crores under '**National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)**' that is meant for facilitating the acquisition of managerial and technical skills by Extension Officers, Managers, Scientists and Administrators in all sectors of agricultural economy to enable them to provide most effective support and services to Farmers and Fishermen for practicing Sustainable Agriculture and fishing practices. As such, a part of this fund may also go in the fisheries sector.

The intent of the Government is to promote entrepreneur based investment oriented intensive aquaculture both in inland and marine (mariculture) sectors not only as a substitute for capture fisheries based on natural fish resources but also as a replacement of small scale subsistence fish farming done by millions of traditional fish farmers. The needs of small scale fish farmers to get access to quality fish seeds, fish feed and market have been completely overlooked.

Suffice it to mention that the Government which aim at promoting entrepreneurs and investors is least concerned about the security of tenure of small scale fish farmers. Water bodies, public or private, are to be handed over to the investors so there is no proposal for providing the small scale fishers and fish farmers with community right to water bodies.

B. Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change:

Several programmes under MoEFCC relate to fisheries

- The allocation for **National Coastal Mission [NCM]** which oversees the implementation of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification has been proposed to be Rs. 103 crores, which is much less than the actual expenditure of Rs. 129.55 crore in 2018-19. World Bank funded ICZMP project has been cited as substitution. But with exceedingly slow and dismal implementation of CRZ regulations and their repeated watering down through successive notifications the Government has made clear its intent to open up the coastal land and waters to investment and loot of the corporate and business sectors. Hence the small scale fish workers have nothing to expect from this and everything to apprehend.

- Budget allocation to ‘Conservation of Corals and Mangroves’ programme has been totally withdrawn from 2018-19.
- Budget allocation to ‘Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems’ programme has registered little growth from Rs. 66 crores and Rs. 63.6 crores in allocation and actual expenditure respectively in 2018-19 to Rs. 68.4 crores this year. But with the Government itself promoting and presiding over runaway pollution and encroachments of water bodies, random allocation of waters from water bodies for consumptive use in agriculture and industries, along with projects like Sagarmala, Industrial and Merchant Shipping Corridors, National Waterways along rivers - the budgetary allocation for ‘Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems’ has become a mockery of the term. The Government of India does not make any reference to fisheries or fisher people in the national water policy despite being gifted with one of the richest river systems of the planet with large fish resources.

**Fisheries Sector
Threatened**

Budget allocations under Ministries of Earth Sciences, Shipping, Tourism and Home Affairs that are most likely to affect fisheries:

- **Ministry of Earth Sciences** has a total allocation of Rs. 1414.80 crores for programmes like ‘Oceanographic Survey (ORV and FORV) and Marine Living Resources (MLR)’; ‘Ocean services, Modelling, Application, Resources and Technology (O-SMART)’ and ‘Oceanographic Research’. Allocation under these items will promote research and exploration of marine living and non-living resources resulting in further commercial exploitation of the same, thus affecting fisheries.
- **Ministry of Shipping** has a total allocation of Rs. 439.50 crores under ‘Development of Minor Ports’ and ‘Sagarmala Schemes and Projects’. This allocation is proposed to promote ports and port led developments that are going to further impact fisheries.

Moreover, the Ministry of Shipping has a total allocation of Rs. 678.30 crores for Inland Water Transport of which Rs. 376.50 crores has been earmarked for Inland Waterway Authority of India (IAWAI) projects. This fund will go for enhancing development of inland waterways further endangering river ecosystems and fisheries.

- **Ministry of Tourism** with an allocation of Rs. 2499.83 crores will be instrumental in further installation of tourist hubs on the coasts, rivers and lakes (as these are preferred tourist destinations) and as experienced elsewhere will impact fisheries.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs** has a total allocation of Rs. 6,821.13 crores under ‘Border Infrastructure and Management’ and ‘Coast Guard Organisation’. Commercialisation and economic utilisation of coastal and marine resources calls for having increased security. In future there will be more security installations and activities in coastal and marine areas affecting the marine fishing in general and fishing in near shore areas in particular.

National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland) holds that the Union Budget 2020 is detrimental to the interests of small scale fishers, fish farmers, fish vendors and other allied fish workers. Instead of protecting and promoting the livelihood of small scale fishing communities it aims at further fuelling the process of their eviction and replacement by entrepreneurs and investors. Together with it the policies of Government of India are helping to destroy the aquatic eco-systems of our country and with that the rich natural fish stock and fish habitats in our natural water bodies. NPSSF(I) calls upon all concerned to rise in protest.

SAVE WATER, SAVE FISH, SAVE FISHER PEOPLE