



Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) Annual General Meeting Digha, Purba Medinipur, 13-15 April, 2015

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2015 on 13th to 15th March at Digha in the district of Purba Medinipur.

The AGM was inaugurated on 13th March 2015 by unveiling the portraits of three legendary leaders of the fishing communities Father Thomas Kochery, Harekrishna Debnath and Matanhy Saldanha.



Inaugural song was sung by Shuvendu Joddar, a fishing community leader from Sundarban. Then the delegates from different areas and branches of DMF alongwith the advisers of the organisation and friends from outside were welcomed by Debasis Shyamal, General Secretary of DMF.



Chandrika Sharma

One minute silence was observed by the house in memory of the fish workers who have departed in the last one year. A special reference was made to the memory of Chandrika Sharma, Executive Director of ICSF, a true friend of the small and traditional fisher people, an extraordinarily successful international campaigner for their cause and a very important guide of DMF.



AGM in Session

Pradip Chatterjee, President of DMF, detailed the purpose and programme of the AGM.

After that the friends from outside DMF were introduced to the delegates. Mujibur Haque Munir (Bangladesh Fishworkers' Alliance); Amitava Mitra, Kalyan Sengupta and Rahul Ganguly (NAPM); Sanjeev Kumar and Shefali Saini (both from Delhi Forum), Ishita Sharma and Hegen (both from PSA), Chitta Ranjan Mondal (ActionAid), Sagar Rabari (ICAN,

Gujarat), Viren Lobo (ICAN, Delhi), Usman Goni (MASS, Gujarat), Sailesh Suiani (Verabal, Gujarat) and Dr. Kumaravelu (Vangakadal Union, Tamilnadu) were greeted by the whole house for their presence in the AGM of DMF and their solidarity with the fisher people of West Bengal.

Sri Ramakrishna Sardar, Assistant Director of Fisheries and Sri Arun Kumar Jana, Fisheries Extension Officer were the guests of honour. Sri Sardar, in his speech, dwelt on various problems faced by the small fishing communities including their right to access fish resources and their right on the land used for works related to fishing. He also spoke of the problems faced by small fish vendors and their rights. He pledged to serve the cause of the small fishing communities and participated in a very interactive discussion with the fishing community leaders.



Felicitating ADF Marine, Contai

Then the AGM took up discussions on the following six topics -

1. Community Control Over Natural Resources;
2. Empowerment of Women Fish Workers - Problems and Prospects;
3. Situation of small fish vendors and their organisation;
4. Inland fishing communities and their organisation;
5. Small fishers of Sundarban - their rights and struggles;
6. Small scale marine fishing communities – their problems, organisation and struggle.

Discussions were led by fishing community leaders who had put forward their main problems and the ways and means by which they are going to address those. Main speakers on the topics were Debasis Shyamal, Sagar Rabari, Viren Lobo, Saraswati Maity, Anjali Bar, Ratna Majhi, Sujay Jana, Bidhan De, Ambia Hossain, Gobinda Das, Surajit Maity and Milan Das.



Viren Lobo, Usman Goni & Sagar Rabari on CBNRM

Debasis Shyamal mentioned the relationship between natural fish resources and fishing communities dependent on those resources.

Sagar Rabari and Viren Lobo spoke on Community Control over Natural Resources with special reference to the Land Acquisition Bill and proposed Industrial Corridors. Usman Goni spoke of the devastations perpetrated by Mundra and Adani at Kutch.

Saraswati Maity, Anjali Bar and Ratna Majhi representing respectively canoe based women fishers, women fish vendors and women fish sorters and dryers put forward the problems faced by women fish workers of respective categories and the means to address those.



Women leaders take the floor

Sujay Jana mentioned the main issues of small fish vendors and lay before the house the road map followed to develop fish vendors' union.



Inland Fishworkers' take the floor

DMF leaders alongwith the guests present in the house actively participated in lively and interactive discussions on the topics. Discussions on these overarching topics covered almost all important aspects of the livelihood issues of the small fishing communities and put forward major observations as well as significant conclusions related with policy and organization.

After the discussions on general topics were over Debasis Shyamal, as General Secretary of DMF and Milan Das, as Treasurer of DMF respectively placed the draft **Annual Organisational Report 2014** and the **Audited Accounts for 2013-2014** before the house for acceptance. A **presidium consisting of Sasanka Dev, Soumen Roy and Gobinda Das** was elected to conduct the process and also the election of new



Veteran Leader
Biren Shyamal sings

Executive Committee and Office Bearers.



Leaders from Sundarban

The Audited Accounts reflected the fund generated through membership drive initiated by DMF.

The Annual Organisational Report narrated the **political-organisational situation**, indicated **main problems faced by the fishing communities**, highlighted the **struggles and achievements** and mentioned the **strategies** taken up.

Both the Audited Accounts and Annual Organisational Report were taken up for discussion on the next day, 14th March 2015. While the Audited Accounts were accepted without much comments, there were many suggestions for additions and alterations to the Annual Organisational Report which was finally accepted with proposed amendments.



Leaders from
Fish Vendors' Union



Sailesh Suyani, Veraval

This was followed by the Election of Executive Committee. A **21 member Executive Committee** was unanimously elected. Along with the Executive Committee another **21 were elected as Invitee to the Executive Committee** to maintain the representative character of the EC in the event of absence of any EC Member in an EC meeting.

The new office bearers elected were –

President	: Pradip Chatterjee;
Vice-President	: Gobinda Das;
General Secretary	: Debasis Shyamal;
Assistant Secretary	: Milan Das;
Assistant Secretary	: Bidhan De;
Treasurer	: Sujay Jana.

DMF resolved to initiate a women's cell to connect women fish workers of different categories working in different areas with a view to build up a strong woman leadership in the organization. DMF resolved to fight for the right of small fishing communities to have preferential access to fish resources as against the mechanized fishing sector and also to protect the fish resources from indiscriminate loot by the latter. DMF resolved to oppose introduction of foreign fishing vessels in Indian waters. DMF also resolved to organize a statewide small scale fish worker's agitation culminating in a massive rally at Kolkata the state capital, to make the government pay heed to their demands. DMF also resolved to extend utmost support to the organization and struggle of fish workers, both marine and inland, in other states.

The friends and guests who came from different organizations and places conveyed their solidarity to DMF and gave many useful suggestions. Sanjeev Kumar of Delhi Forum, Chittaranjan Mondal of Action Aid, Dr. Kumaravelu of Vangakadal Union of Tamilnadu, Sailesh Suyani from Veerabal Gujarat, Usman Goni from MASS Kutch, Rahul GAnguly from Lawyers' Network all made important contributions that may serve DMF in future.

In the afternoon of 14th March 2015 a meeting of the West Bengal chapter of NFF Yuva was held. It was participated by NFF Yuba members from other states. 21 young delegates present in the DMF AGM attended the meeting. A 9 member core committee was formed and Debasmita Das was elected as convener of NFF Yuva West Bengal.

The evening of 14th March witnessed a burst of cultural performances by the delegates. The free for all event infused a new level of spirit and solidarity among all present.

Next morning an intimate consultation took place with Muhammad Mujibul Munir who hailed from Fishworkers' Alliance of Bangladesh. The necessity of coordination between the fish workers' collectives in both the countries were unanimously admitted and the ways and means for the same were discussed.



Md. Mujibul Haque Munir from Bangladesh

The AGM 2015 of DMF unequivocally proclaimed that –

- The mechanized fishing sector is responsible for over exploitation of fish resources in near shore waters and the small scale marine fisheries cannot sustain if there is no stringent control and/or restriction on mechanized fishing sector.
- No foreign fishing vessel in Indian waters; Murari Committee recommendations for capacity building of Indian fleet should be implemented.
- The small fishing communities have an inalienable user right over the land used for fishing related works.
- The inland small fish farmers need security of tenure, insurance coverage, fish seed and feed, resource access.
- The small fish vendors need freedom from money lenders, transport and market facilities.
- The small fish processors need self-empowerment through effective utilization of economic self organizations like cooperatives and SHGs.
- The women fishers and fish workers, most neglected of the lot, are in immediate need to assert their rights and demands through their own collectives.
- National Fishworkers' Forum has to be strengthened as the vanguard of small scale fishing communities.

***DMF pledged itself to the
relentless struggle pursued by the fishing communities to protect their
livelihood and save the fish resources.***