

**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust**  
**NATIONAL WORKSHOP:**  
**SSF GUIDELINES**  
**AND WOMEN IN FISHERIES, INDIA**  
**ASHA NIVAS, CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU**  
**8 TO 10 APRIL 2022**

**Session 2: Exchanges between women fishworkers**

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

*Group discussion 1: Discussion on contribution of small-scale artisanal fisheries to food and livelihood security; issues facing traditional livelihoods and knowledge; rights of women to coastal resources*

**KERALA**

*Food Security*

- The participants commented that they were not deeply affected in terms of accessing food during the pandemic, however larger fishing groups struggled.
- The use of smaller mesh sized nets, light fishing and the use of underwater cameras have targeted juvenile fish stock and will negatively affect future resource availability.

*Livelihoods*

- Reduced access to fishing grounds and coastal land due to non-fishing sectors, such as construction, industry and tourism.
- The construction of large new harbours, such as Perumathura in Trivandrum has restricted access to the coast. Furthermore, the fishing community is not consulted in planning and development along the coast.
- Due to these changes, the fishing communities' livelihoods are negatively impacted.
- With the increase of cyclones along the west coast of India, participants feared losing homes, lives, community buildings and fishing crafts and gear during increasing natural hazards.
- There is a lack of market space dedicated for women. Women are being pushed out of market spaces and resort to street vending.

- Existing markets are in poor condition and have not been renovated. The lack of basic facilities such as clean and hygienic bathrooms, potable water, and lighting is a significant barrier.
- They demanded dedicated market spaces with proper supporting infrastructure and facilities for women be established.
- MATSYAFED provides financial support to fishers at 4% interest rates. However, women do not find these schemes to be transparent nor do they reach actual beneficiaries.
- The participants suggested the formation of women specific fisher collectives or co-operations which prioritize women and directly benefit fisherwomen. The criteria to access these funds should be clearly drafted and explained.

#### *Social Security*

- The coverage of state insurance schemes, which cover workplace accidents was sporadic. Furthermore, there is insufficient awareness regarding these schemes and women's eligibility, especially for women vendors.
- Fishing villages are vulnerable to the effects of climate change and increasing number of extreme weather events and natural disasters.
- Fishing villages lack clean and safe drinking water as well as proper drainage facilities.

## MAHARASHTRA AND GOA

#### *Food Security*

- The increase in industry, construction, ports and harbours, power plants and tourism along the coast has resulted in increased pollution. Industries often release untreated wastewater directly into the canals, streams, and oceans. This has led to a fall in the availability of fish, reduced quality of fish, problems with accessing clean drinking water, and increased plastic pollution.
- In Palghar the mangroves are managed and protected by the Forest Department and have increased due to their efforts. As a result, the variety and availability of species has improved and tocks have bounced back to some extent. However, the Forest Dept. doesn't allow fishing to take place in these expanding mangrove forests. The women want to engage in discussion with the Forest Dept. to reach a consensus wherein they can sustainably harvest from the mangrove forests.

- During covid pandemic, migrant workers returned to Maharashtra and began collecting shellfish within the women harvesters fishing grounds. They engaged in destructive practices to collect shellfish. Some men would remove rocks from the seabed, harvest shellfish on the shore and dump the rocks. This damaging and unsustainable practice damages the entire ecosystem and has a long-term impact on the availability and quality of marine resources.

### *Livelihoods*

- In Maharashtra and Goa women struggle with dedicated and sufficient market space. Women vendors are pushed out of existing markets and need to sell on the streets. In Goa, while dedicated market spaces exist and women vendors can access it, they still find it challenging to compete with the street markets which were set up during Covid-19 pandemic. During that period most of the available market spaces were taken over by migrant men who had returned during the pandemic.
- Women vendors then need to compete in street markets where there are no facilities and they are often the victims of police harassment and abuse.
- Women require dedicated community spaces for markets, drying yards, fish processing areas and net mending spaces.
- Construction of new ports and harbours are pushing them out of traditional fishing grounds and community spaces. The Vadavan port construction has pushed women from shellfish fishing grounds and the pollution has affected the ecosystem and the quality of available seafood.

### *Social security*

- Within the initial CRZ notification, all fishing villages were to be mapped, under the provision to protect fishing villages as well as communities working in toddy tapping and salt pans. In Maharashtra a committee was created in 2013 which included representatives from the Fisheries Dept., Urban Development Dept., Revenue Dept, BMC and CMFRI. Their task was to identify and map all traditional coastal communities within the coastal management plan, including fishing villages. However, the mapping is yet to be done and so, other industries have an easier time encroaching upon coastal land. In Mumbai and Palghar they have appealed to the Collector to prepare these maps and recognize and demarcate fishing villages.
- The Tarapur atomic plant has led to an increase in cancer due to the radiation. A larger number of women are dealing with breast, uterine and skin cancers.

- The Mumbai metropolitan area is increasing in size and spreading towards Palghar. Women are worried about this development and the pollution that comes with it. They want to better understand how they'll be affected by this and prepare accordingly.
- In Palghar, fishers don't have pattas to their land and homes, leaving them vulnerable to public and private developers.
- Due to the increase in industry and associated pollutants, drinking water is becoming a challenge in Palghar. Women want industries to treat and release it or reuse the water themselves.
- In Goa, fishers and other traditional coastal communities are not allowed to make any modifications or constructions on their old homes and land. Especially, for colonial Portuguese construction. Despite having proper documentation, including pattas and property cards. Under the CRZ, the state govt disallows construction and places a stay order. However, hotels do not face the same challenges when constructing or renovating.
- Community spaces need proper infrastructure to support working fisherwomen. Including clean and regularly maintained toilets, clean drinking water and community lighting.
- Due to unhygienic and poorly maintained toilets, women suffer from frequent urinary tract infections (UTI). Recurrent infections can lead to more complicated health issues.

## TAMIL NADU

### *Food Security*

- The increase in pollution in local waters by industries has severely affected the quality of fish and other marine resources. The participants called for polluters to be fined heavily to dissuade polluting activities and encourage proper treatment before discharge.

### *Livelihoods*

- The price of fish is currently determined by the merchants. Women want to collectivize and gain the right to determine the rate at which they sell.
- The compensation received during the ban period is meagre and insufficient to meet the needs of a household. Furthermore, women do not receive any compensation during the ban period. This further exacerbates economic stressors for women headed households.

- Women have received training on processing value added products. However, they lack the training and support to market these products.
- Seaweed collectors haven't grown economically despite the boom in the seaweed industry. With GST inclusion the rate at which merchants purchase dried seaweed has fallen from Rs. 20/kg to Rs. 15/kg, which makes it extremely unfeasible for women collectors.
- A representative from the fisheries department commented on the development of a dedicated seaweed policy which will protect women collectors.
- Women need safety and support while working. Currently they face discrimination and harassment from bus conductors, drivers and auctioneers. They are verbally humiliated and refused entry aboard public transport because of the smell and face sexual harassment at markets.
- Women need dedicated market spaces which have basic infrastructure and facilities such as clean and hygienic toilets, potable water and lighting.
- In Chennai (Neelangarai) women were removed from their market spaces for a road widening project. While they were promised the establishment of an alternative dedicated market space. That is yet to materialize despite several appeals.

#### *Social Security*

- Access to formal credit is challenging. Women are turned away from banks, despite multiple attempts and appeals.
- Women and men above 59 years of age are removed from fishery co-operatives and can no longer access associated benefits and schemes; despite the fact that they continue to work in fisheries.
- Women with children face several barriers to avail pension schemes. They need to obtain a separate ration card, without their children on it - which involves significant red-tapism at the Village Administrative Office and often women need to bribe relevant officials.
- Widows find it extremely challenging to avail widow pension schemes.

## WEST BENGAL

#### *Food security*

- Fishing communities across the state faced a loss of fishing and working days due to the Covid-19 lockdown and preventive measures and consequent reductions in their incomes. During the lockdown, access of vulnerable fishing communities in remote areas to food rations was a concern.
- Participants agreed the diets and nutrition of fishing communities generally improved during the pandemic lockdowns. As families were at home and expenses beyond food were minimal.
- During the initial months of the pandemic, small scale fishers were allowed to fish, while larger boats were disallowed. As a result, fishing communities could supply the local market and support the household's food security.

#### *Livelihoods*

- Fishing communities in the Sundarbans face harassment from forest department officials. The Forest Department issues a small number of Boat License Certificates (BLC) and permits collection of honey. However only 923 BLCs have been issued and thousands of practicing fishers go unrecognized.
- The victims of tiger and crocodile attacks receive no compensation if they do not have a BLC. This is especially traumatic for Tiger Widows.
- In Soula (Contai, East Midnapur) beach tourism has pushed women and men from fishing communities out from their community commons. This occasionally leads to conflicts.
- Simultaneously, the increased demand for quality fish from the hospitality industry, usually at higher prices, has supported fishers and vendors in the area.
- In markets, male fish agents and wholesalers, harass and push women out from market spaces. Women have demanded a dedicated market space, separate lines and exclusive transport services to market their fish.

#### *Social security*

- Due to the increase of pollutants and plastics in the water, women fish seed collectors in East Midnapur and South 24 Parganas have faced increasing cases of skin diseases.
- Most adults in fishing communities have received two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. ASHA workers provided these shots in the villages during vaccine drives and raised awareness, highlighting the devastating impacts of the first and second wave.

- West Bengal's 'Swasthya Sathi' scheme cards, introduced in December 2016, offers basic health cover for secondary and tertiary care for up to Rs 5 lakh per annum per family. A smartcard is issued, in the name of the woman of the family, which allows for cashless treatment, paid for by the government. Private hospitals are required to charge subsidized rates for treatment under the scheme.
- Safe and clean drinking water is not easily available. In the Sundarbans one tube well often serves an entire village and is not always functional. They depend on the tube well for drinking water and use pond water, which is muddy and salty for other purposes. In East Midnapur, some villages have access to piped water and other villages depend on a few tube wells.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, support from the govt was limited. There were no fisheries schemes, and a few universal schemes such as PDS expansion and universalization, and monetary support were available. However, the state has a few existing welfare schemes that have benefited fisherwomen.
- The 'Lakshmi Bhandar' scheme provides basic income support to the female heads of households (Monthly INR 500 for general category; INR 1000 for SC/ST), directly to women's bank accounts. Many fisherwomen have availed this scheme.
- Children's social development and mental health was badly affected by the pandemic. Child marriage has increased in some instances.
- Several fishers have availed the Kanyashree scheme for girls' higher education, introduced in 2015. It provides an annual scholarship of INR 750 and a one-time grant of INR 25,000.
- DMF is a strong and well-established organization, women can easily approach their leaders for support when needed.

### **Session 3: Biodiversity, climate change and sustainable fisheries**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

#### ***Group Discussion 2: Addressing fishing communities' vulnerabilities to natural disasters, pollution, climate change impacts and loss of coastal commons***

- 1) How are your communities affected by environmental issues in your state/ district? And how do they address it through their organizations?
- 2) Are these issues taken up by your local panchayat? If not, why and what provisions/ strategies exist to take these up?
- 3) Do you see women in decision making processes at the local, state and national levels? How can women's participation in these processes be improved?

#### **KERALA**

*How are your communities affected by environmental issues in your state/ district? And how do they address it through their organizations?*

- With climate change, there is an increase in the number and intensity of climate disasters such as cyclones and floods affecting the fishing community. Women fear the loss of lives, injury, loss of homes and property.
- Unsustainable fishing practices, such as juvenile fishing and the use of illegal small mesh nets creates conflicts between different fishing groups. Different fishing groups are often supported by different churches in the region. This is also occasionally cause for conflict between fishers.
- Pollution and the lack of waste disposal services in public areas such as markets and housing areas negatively affects the health of community.
- This is even more problematic after natural disasters, where excess water remains stagnant for long durations and leaves them more vulnerable to diseases.
- These issues are not taken up collectively. Individuals from the community have raised demands which have gone unaddressed. They also sometimes face backlash or isolation from within the fishing community.

*Are these issues taken up by your local panchayat? If not, why and what provisions/ strategies exist to take these up?*

- Panchayats were crucial in providing services such as community kitchen, quarantine facilities and ambulance services during the pandemic and during times of disaster rehabilitation.
- A plan for collective rainwater harvesting for regenerating water tables and segregating degradable and bio-degradable waste has been planned and approved for the last three years but has not been implemented.
- The “Haritha Sena” is an initiative started by the Panchayats, this green squad works on sanitation and waste disposal in different coastal districts.
- Churches in the region have also supported rehabilitation and disaster relief activities.
- The participants were partially satisfied with the panchayat’s performance during times of vulnerability. However, they weren’t satisfied with the panchayats work supporting fishing communities - especially fisherwomen.
- They panchayats aren’t considered effective in supporting women or providing them platforms or forums for discussion.
- The participants suggested strategies to address this lacuna include unionizing local women to take up issues of their interest and to encourage active participation of women in all Gram Sabha meetings.

*Do you see women in decision making processes at the local, state and national levels? How can women’s participation in these processes be improved?*

- Participants do not see women represented within decision making processes. While some women are members in the development committees, they do not raise the concerns of fisherwomen.
- Women are not consulted prior to setting of Gram Sabha meetings. The meetings themselves are not usually forums of discussion but focusses more on compiling individual grievances.
- To address the situation and improve women’ participation, the participants suggested strengthening ground level mobilization of fisherwomen through regular meetings. This could be operationalized by strengthening union activities and addressing the issues in a collective manner.
- They demanded the Gram Sabha be made an interactive space where women can raise issues. Women should also be consulted prior to setting the date of the

meeting and in creating an agenda for the meeting and for the Gram Sabha to take action on.

- Development committees in coastal districts should have women representatives from fishing communities.

## MAHARASHTRA AND GOA

*How are your communities affected by environmental issues in your state/district? And how do they address it through their organization? For example, conflict between fisher groups, pollution, cyclones and floods.*

- Over the last few years, the west coast has been affected by four cyclones – Nisarg, Tauktae, Maha and Kyarr. The west coast wasn't previously as affected by cyclones, the increase in dangerous weather events has damaged property and taken lives.
- Due to rising sea levels, coastal erosion and erratic weather patterns, the fishing community has been facing several problems. During high tides, water ingresses and floods households in fishing villages. Common areas for drying and processing fish are also affected by this flooding as well as by unseasonal rains. The drying fish is ruined and women do not receive any compensation for the losses incurred.
- Stronger waves, changing ocean temperature, rising sea levels, strong wind patterns, cyclones and pollution has resulted in a significant fall in the availability of shellfish along the shoreline.
- In some fish species, women have noticed changes in fish breeding. They shared the example of pomfrets, where smaller perhaps juvenile fish have fish roe. The women do not understand what is happening or why and requested more information on this phenomenon.
- There is a marked increase in jellyfish blooms which prevent fishers from fishing. Even when they take the risk and go fishing, they have to deal with injuries and skin problems due to the jellyfish.
- With the increase in mining operation, oil drilling and processing as well as other industries which release effluents in the water; fishing communities have to deal with tar balls which affect water quality, species availability and permanently

damages the marine environment. Plastic pollution is also a major challenge, especially in areas which support tourism.

- Oil spills from existing oil rigs are extremely destructive. ONGC and other oil corporations conduct seismic surveys to locate untapped oil reserves. It is impossible to fish around these areas, up to 500 meters of water around it does not support marine life. During the peak fishing months of December – March, oil companies conduct dredging activities and disrupt the entire fishery. Fishers do not receive any compensation for these losses. In some cases, the contractor might offer a one-time compensation to placate the fishers. It is neither enough, nor sustainable.
- The increase in LED fishing has been problematic as is very bright and emits significant heat. This leads not only to overfishing and juvenile fishing but the heat also harms the marine ecosystem.

*Are these issues taken up by your local panchayat? If no, why not, and what provisions strategies exist to take these up?*

- At the gram panchayat level, a biodiversity committee exists and funds are allocated for its use. However, the funds are not properly budgeted for and are thus either unutilized or misused; essentially rendering the committee as non-functional. In a similar vein, the disaster management committee is another institution which is in place but is also not functioning. In these committees, 30% of the seats are reserved for women. However, many of the women are wives of male leaders and are only on the committee in name and do not participate.
- There is no provision to compensate the women for losses which are incurred due to the issues enumerated above. The revenue department is supposed to conduct assessments on these losses; however, they do not fulfil this responsibility. The participants stressed that fishers should receive compensation, in the same way that farmers do during times of crop failure due to climate change.
- To protect the coastline from erosion, some villages have a protective sea wall. However due to rising sea levels, these are often insufficient. The women suggested that sea walls be built where there are none and the height of existing sea walls be increased.
- Women representatives pointed out that there are a variety of different activities that women do in fisheries, yet they are all placed under the vague umbrella of 'allied activities. They would like for more categories of women workers to be recognized.

- The e-shram card which women workers can register for, has been helpful. However, the fact that it needs to be linked to their Aadhar card and the registered number has been a challenge for the women to access e-shram cards.
- They pointed out that within the 14 and 15 financial commission, fisheries is one of the 29 identified activities. The issue is that neither is there enough awareness about this, nor are the existing committees proactive enough to demand the allocation and disbursement of compensatory funds. The women suggested that this be further examined and within fisheries, specific issues be allocated funds accordingly.
- After the cyclones, boat owners received compensation from the government. Only after women pushed and agitated for compensation, did the fisheries dept announce a scheme. Women vendors did not receive direct compensation, instead they were offered a scheme with conditions. Women vendors needed to purchase an insulated icebox for INR 6000, then provide their receipts and GST certificates to the fishing society of which they are members. On proof of purchase, women received the funds in their bank accounts. The women severely criticized this scheme, pointing out that the men received compensation without any conditions or complications. They were not consulted at all before the fisheries dept. implemented this scheme. The govt took a unilateral decision and promoted iceboxes that no women vendors had asked for. The scheme was poorly administered as well. The fishing society was held responsible for providing all the proof of purchase, but funds were directly transferred to women's bank accounts. A number of women used those funds, not to purchase the ice box but for their survival during the pandemic. This resulted in the society struggling to furnish the paperwork for the funds. In response the government blacklisted these societies. It is through these societies that other subsidies, benefits and govt programs are accessed. The implementation of the scheme, led to the creation of rifts within the members of the society and made the situation more difficult in the long run. A number of supportive societies had to deal with the fallout of being blacklisted and ultimately the fishing community suffered. Furthermore, in Mumbai only women with licenses could access this scheme, as only about 40% of the women vendors have licenses, this scheme left out most of the women vendors. It also left out women who work in fishing, harvesting, processing, drying, smoking etc.

*Do you see women in decision making processes at the local, state and national levels? How can women's participation in such processes be improved?*

- The representatives from Maharashtra and Goa includes the Sarpanch from Nerul, NFF Secretary and several activists working at the village, district and state levels. They have a number of women involved in decision making processes but stressed the need for more women to be mobilized.
- Currently while there are a handful of strong women representatives who participate in these processes, they are often not listened to and dismissed. On many occasions, men actively try to shut them down. More women need to mobilize and engage in order for their collective perspectives and voices to be heard.
- To improve women's participation in these processes they stressed the need for capacity building facilitated by the fisherwomen themselves. Where vocal and well-informed women could work with women from other parts of the state and strengthen their work. For example, the women from Mumbai are well organized and engage in decision making processes, they can work with women from other parts of Maharashtra and support them.

## TAMIL NADU

*How are your communities affected by environmental issues in your state/district? And how do they address it through their organization? For example, conflict between fisher groups, pollution, cyclones and floods.*

- In the recent past, especially since the tsunami in 2004, the weather has become increasingly unpredictable and harsh. Fishers who rely on traditional knowledge have suffered as they now struggle to predict weather, water and species patterns. Multi-day fishing trips have also reduced due to this issue.
- In case of dangerous weather conditions, government authorities give an early warning a day in advance. However, if fishers do go to sea after the announcement of this warning, neither the government nor the village authorities take responsibility for any mishaps. Women questioned the safety of their men at sea. Despite vessels having several instruments of communication onboard, they often fail to work beyond 10 nautical miles; leaving fishers rather vulnerable.
- Plastic pollution in coastal and open waters is a significant problem for fishers. The pollution has an impact on the quality and availability of species. Large amounts of plastics dumped in the water, often changes the color of the water. This is a significant challenge for fishers using traditional knowledge and they struggle to predict water quality and shoals based on the color of the ocean. The nets now need to be cleaned of plastic on a daily basis; on average men and

women spend 3-4 hours a day doing this, however with increasing plastic pollution, cleaning nets can sometimes take up to a day.

- In Pudukuppam, Cuddalore district the construction of a thermal power plant and jetty has been negatively affecting the local fishing community. Coal dust and pollutants have affected fishing households and community spaces such as the beach, processing and drying areas and markets. This affects the quality of life enjoyed by the local fishing communities. The construction of a jetty without consultation had negatively impacted the natural movement of sand and is creating issues of accretion and erosion.
- Women from Pichavaram stated that tourism has impacted their livelihood. They are now being denied entry into the mangrove forests that have been their fishing grounds for generations. The authorities have not considered employing people from the fisher families in the Pichavaram forest for tourism either.
- The increase in the number of aquaculture farms in coastal lands pose a number of problems for fishers. The release of effluents, pesticides, fertilizers and other additives into local waters affects wild species. These pollutants also filter into ground water and along with increased salination, the availability of clean and safe drinking water has become a challenge.

*Are these issues taken up by your local panchayat? If no, why not, and what provisions strategies exist to take these up?*

- Women usually reach out to the local panchayat's sarpanch when they have an issue or request. However, they are not given due attention and often no action is taken. Furthermore, the changes in the sarpanch and panchayat makes it difficult to hold people accountable.
- Some women have approached MLAs, BDOs and area councilors. If they get an audience, these leaders often pacify them in the moment but rarely take any constructive action.

*Do you see women in decision making processes at the local, state and national levels? How can women's participation in such processes be improved?*

- In Tamil Nadu, women are unofficially disallowed from participating in Panchayats. Any issue women want to raise, needs to be brought through their husbands, sons or other men in their families. Women who do engage in the panchayat are socially sanctioned and thus many women fear engaging with the panchayat.

- Due to this, women face problems at home as well. Their men do not take their concerns seriously and try to silence them to avoid social ostracism themselves. The participants insisted on the need to raise awareness amongst their men such that they receive support from familial men to push for their rights as women and fishers.
- The sharing of information, good practices and experiences through forums such as the women's platform and WhatsApp groups is very helpful.

## WEST BENGAL

*How are your communities affected by environmental issues in your state/district? And how do they address it through their organizations? For example, conflict between fisher group, pollution, cyclones, floods.*

- Pollution of coastal and inshore waters have led to declining catches across the state.
- Fishing communities have been displaced by issues of coastal degradation, dredging and other development projects such as ports, harbours and non-fishery related industries.
- In East Midnapur water has ingressed into coastal areas, resulting in the loss of community coastal spaces, landing sites where fish is dried and processed as well as homes and villages of fishing communities.
- The women reported conflicts between small fishers and trawlers in 24 Parganas; in Haldia, accidents of fishing boats when they go past big ships that leave from the port.
- During the pandemic, the women reported that fish stocks and diversity had revived due to reduced pollution and fishing pressure during pandemic

*Are these issues taken up by your local panchayat? If no, why not, and what provisions/strategies exist to take these up?*

- Conflicts between small scale fishers and other gear and boat groups are taken up by DMF. They represent the small fisher and negotiate with trawler owners or boat owners' associations.
- Local self-governments like panchayats play no role in fisheries within coastal fishing communities. Even in cases where the panchayat comprises entirely of members from fishing communities.

- Comparatively, panchayats in inland areas are more active in the management of fisheries activities such as leasing of water bodies as well as in the provision of nets and other fishing implements.
- Across the state, panchayats are responsible for communicating warnings for storms and moving coastal communities to shelters, which are constructed by the district administration.
- As a part of DMF, more women have joined deputations to local and state authorities to address their collective problems.
- Women in West Bengal need to work with different agencies based on the concern at hand. They approach the fisheries department for matters related to their fishery, equipment and amenities for women vendors and processors. They approach local Block Development Officers and the district administration for other environmental and welfare issues. To process Boat License Certificates to work within the Sundarbans, fisherwomen approach the Forest Department.

*Do you see women in decision making processes at the local, state and national levels? How can women's participation in these processes be improved?*

- Over the last few years, women membership in DMF has vastly increased because of the efforts of the leadership.
- Women are mainly active in SHGs (with membership fees of 100 per month; women access NREGA and welfare schemes; loans for livelihood enhancement, for example for tribal groups) formed with the help of DMF, however their say in decision making is still limited.
- At the panchayat and block level, especially in Sundarbans, South 24 Parganas, women take up their issues directly with local panchayats and block development officers.
- The women leaders of DMF deal directly with ministers and fisheries department officials. In other areas such as Digha and Contai, the organizational committees of DMF are strong, so women go through their leaders.
- Through SHGs in inland areas, women have got leases to water bodies (in Jhargham and other areas) along with schemes for nets, ice boxes.
- Within the Sundarbans, women are comparatively more alone and unorganized. There are about 20 SHGs in the region with approximately 10 members in each group.



*Session 7: Group Discussion to identify action points at the state and national level*  
**Date: 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

## **KERALA**

### *National action points*

- Strict regulation is needed for fishing vessels and gears in order to curtail unsustainable fishing practices. This needs to be supported with appropriate action to enforce regulations.
- Social security schemes available between men and women from fishing communities is not equitable. This gendered gap in the provision of social security nets needs to be rectified.
- There needs to be a provision to ensure compensation to fisher women who lose work due to climate change and erratic weather conditions.
- The process and compensation received for governmental acquisition of coastal land needs to be readdressed. 10 Lakh per household is an insufficient amount for fishing communities, furthermore the government needs to allocate alternate land which is close to the shore and the rehabilitation doesn't negatively impact their livelihoods.
- Women harvesters, gleaners and fishers need to be recognized as full-time fishworkers at a national level and treated accordingly.
- A larger gender disaggregated budget allocation is needed for women in small-scale fisheries.

### *State action points*

- Public market spaces need to be renovated to provide safe and hygienic conditions for women, including clean public toilets, running and potable water and community lighting.
- Market committees and harbour management committees need to have women representatives from fishing communities.
- The acute drinking water shortage in fishing villages due to pollution, waste, aquaculture and contamination of water needs to be addressed

- Women migrant workers in Kerala who work in fish processing units need to have safe and decent living and working conditions. They should also be granted the same rights as local fisherwomen.

## MAHARASHTRA AND GOA

### *National action points*

- Fisherwomen need to be documented and recognized as workers, including-processors, dryers, harvesters, fishers, gatherers. As workers they should be entitled to the same compensation, benefits and social security nets as male workers.
- Women workers and their activities and roles need to be clearly separated and defined. Currently most fisherwomen are placed under the umbrella term of “allied activities’ which invisibilises the women and the diversity of work they do in the sector.
- Policy drafting committees should have representatives from the SSF community and specifically women representatives. The policies need to have a separate and clearly defined budget allocation for women.
- A census of women in fisheries is needed. Data on individual fisherwomen needs to be collected at the village level, then aggregated at block, district, state and national levels.
- A separate department of fisheries needs to be established across all districts. As it has been separated from the departments of animal husbandry and dairying at the state and national levels.

### *State action points*

- The rapid expansion of the Mumbai Metropolitan Area towards Palghar is worrying for fishing communities as well as the increase in coastal road and sea link projects. Fishing communities need to be engaged with in this development plan and ensured the safety and security of their livelihoods and way of life.
- In Goa, fishing communities face high levels of red tapism while trying to make renovations or new constructions on their properties as these are classified as heritage areas. At the same time, the tourism industry doesn’t face the same challenges. Heritage committees in Goa, need to have representatives from fishing communities and special leave should be allowed for fishing villages.

- In Goa, floating jetty plans were approved by the government and the fishing community. Following that, the adjacent land was purchased by a private party who is not providing an NOC for the jetty to be constructed. This conflict needs to be addressed and a precedent need to be set for the future.

## TAMIL NADU

### *National action points*

- Following natural disasters, the compensation received by the fishing community should be a more substantial amount which can realistically cover the costs of damage and rebuilding. Further women should receive a dedicated compensation package.
- Fishing communities right to coastal lands needs to be strengthened. Currently conditional pattas leave fishing communities vulnerable to government evacuation and resettlement. A permanent patta without such clauses needs to be created and issued to fishing communities to secure their rights.
- Women in small-scale fisheries require upskilling, training and support to compete in rapidly changing markets for the sale of fish and value-added fisheries products. Especially on the use of technology for marketing, such as online, app and WhatsApp sales.
- Women should be provided compensation when injured during fisheries related activities, in the same way that men are. They should also receive compensation for losses incurred due to erratic weather conditions and events such as cyclones, floods etc.

### *State action points*

- Dedicated seaweed drying yards need to be established in Ramanathapuram for seaweed collectors.
- An increasing number of women from fishing communities in Tamil Nadu, have graduate level education. However, there are no commensurate opportunities for employment available to them in their local areas and they often need to resort to fish vending. Women participants demanded that the fisheries department should employ educated women from the fishing community.

- Climate mitigation plans in Tamil Nadu need to be more holistic and inclusive of women from the fishing communities. Women participants rejected the state government's proposed plan for building stone and concrete sea walls. They want the government to invest in sustainable options such as bio-shields which can arrest coastal erosion and protect the shore.
- Public market spaces need to have basic facilities of toilets, clean running water and potable water. Market spaces should also be secure and safe for women to use and with lockers to safeguard their property. The participants suggested a single such market space for several fishing villages which will support women who travel significant distances to sell their fish.

## WEST BENGAL

### *National action points*

- A national day should be selected and declared for women in small scale fisheries.
- A national policy for women in small-scale fisheries is needed, which includes separate budget allocations for fisherwomen.
- Natural disaster relief and compensation should include a separate budget component especially for women.

### *State action points*

- Women working in small-scale fisheries and Tiger Widows should be formally recognized.
- A formal dispute resolution mechanism should be created between the forest department, police and fishing communities.
- The women participants demand that the Sundarbans be brought under the aegis of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the FRA be properly implemented.
- The tenure rights of fishing communities in the Sundarbans needs to be recognized and formalized. Participants suggested that a special pass can be created and issued to protect the SSF community and their rights.

- Fishing community's rights to use commons such as beaches for fisheries related activities such as drying, processing, net mending and beaching crafts needs to be established and protected.
- A broad-based holistic insurance-cum-compensation-pension scheme for Tiger Widows in the Sundarbans should be created and implemented.
- Markets and fishing villages need to have basic infrastructure facilities such as clean drinking water and safe and hygienic toilets.
- A creche for babies and toddlers should be created in public market spaces.