

2.3 Gujarat State-Level Training Workshop on the SSF Guidelines

Bharuch, Gujarat

12 March 2023

Organizers and Facilitators:

- Kamlesh S. Madhiwala, President, Samast Bharuch Jilla Machimaar Samaj (SBJMS)
- Hiral Dhimmarr, Vice President, SBJMS
- H. V. Mehta, Superintendent of Fisheries
- Ayub Manjaliya, President, Sagar Khedu Trust, Bhadresar
- Siddik Jasraya, Salaya Sahkari Machimaar Mandli
- Rizwan Mirza

Introduction

The Gujarat state-level training workshop on the SSF Guidelines was held in Bharuch, Gujarat on 12 March 2023. The workshop was jointly organized by ICSF and SBJMS. The 24 participants in the workshop included representatives of the SSF community, CSOs and NGOs working with fishermen, coastal communities and government officials.

The objective of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of small-scale fishworkers' organizations to take forward the issues of the fisher community and to strengthen policies, legislation and livelihoods of the SSF community. The workshop was held in Gujarati and Hindi, with Mirza facilitating.

Welcome

In his welcome address, Madhiwala provided an overview of how fisheries are a part of everyone's daily life and its contribution to the national GDP as well as food security, both nationally and internationally. He added that there is an urgent need to strengthen the small-scale fishers' community.

Madhiwala remarked that government policies and legislation are not really benefitting the fishing community. Therefore, the implementation of the SSF Guidelines is necessary to strengthen the community. He also expressed his concern that every year the Government of India, as well as the Government of Gujarat, publishes data regarding fish catch quantity, but this data also includes inland and aquaculture fishing. Therefore, data from the fish catch by the marine small-scale fishing community is camouflaged. He also expressed his dissent on the various projects being implemented near the sea without proper consultation with the affected communities, which is a serious concern and threat to the fishing community.

Overview of the SSF Guidelines

Mirza presented the key highlights of the SSF Guidelines translated into Gujarati and projected as a slideshow. He also presented data regarding fish catch, fishermen population in Gujarat, small-scale fishermen in Gujarat, fish catch by small-scale fishermen and their

contribution to the national as well as state revenue. He also pointed out various problems faced by the fishing community in Gujarat, such as the Jakhau Port demolition, Navadra Port demolition, issues of subsidies on diesel, etc., insurance schemes and land rights of fishermen.

He too stressed on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. In view of the problems in Gujarat, these Guidelines will be helpful for the welfare of the fishing community. He also pointed out the crucial role of women in the entire fishing chain, from catch to sales. He stressed that the fish catch has been decreasing day by day due to the pollution caused by giant companies located at the shore of the Gujarat Coast, starting from Kutch to Valsad. Due to this, fishermen's livelihoods suffer. Due to increasing pollution, fishermen do not get enough fish catch as they did in the past and hence fall into a debt trap. He also stressed about the living conditions of small-scale fishers as well as issues regarding health and education.

Problems of Bharuch District

Dhimmar addressed the various problems of Bharuch district. He pointed out the major issue of the Bhadbhut Barrage project. In Bharuch, around 25,000 fishermen sustain their livelihood from the Narmada River. Bharuch is a significant exporter of the hilsa fish in Gujarat. However, after the Bhadbhut Barrage project is implemented, the entire fishing community of Bharuch will be affected with no alternative option of livelihood available to them. The mouth of the Narmada will be closed, shortening the fishing grounds deep inside the river. The ecological impacts of the dam are of grave concern.

Manjaliya, who led the session, pointed out that although there are many schemes available in the Fisheries Department for fishermen, these schemes are not implemented properly. In Kutch, various companies have taken over the shore, closing the route for fishermen to reach the sea and often do not allow fishermen to go to sea using their route. Fishers in Kutch also face the threat of eviction from fishing areas in the name of illegal encroachment by the district administration. He emphasized the importance of making the SSF Guidelines mandatory instead of voluntary.

A representative of the administration, Mehta conceded that he had heard of various problems faced by the fishing community. He also mentioned that there are many schemes available for the community—such as for cage culture and inland fishing—and provided a brief overview of the process of accessing the various welfare schemes. However, due to a lack of human resources, the Fisheries Department is unable to execute these schemes appropriately, he said. He assured the participants that he would implement the schemes to the best of his capacity and emphasized the importance of small-scale fishing and its impact on the economy.

Discussion

The group then held a general discussion on the issues faced by fisherpeople in all coastal landing centres and fishing villages. The fishers pointed out the absence of the Prime Minister Awas Yojna (PMAY) scheme for those living on the coast for fishing purposes.

They suggested that the benefits of the PMMSY could be included with PMAY and that the government should link these two schemes for fishers in Gujarat.

The fishers also discussed the increasing pollution in creeks and the sea, which is affecting fish breeding and fish stock. They emphasized the need to stop pollution from power plants, chemical estates and other industrial activities. They also highlighted the health and education-related problems affecting the children of small-scale fishing communities.

Recommendations

- Land and tenure rights, as suggested in the SSF Guidelines, should be given to fishers for habitat, fish drying places, small fishing infrastructure, fishing places on the coast and all other fishing activities.
- Proper water, sanitation and electricity facilities should be provided in the fishworkers' areas.
- The government should make proper policies and legislation to penalize big companies in Gujarat for the pollution they cause, affecting the fishers' livelihood.
- Proper arrangements for fish markets should be made so that women can sell fish at specific places.
- The subsidies provided by the government should be increased to meet the needs of the fishers.
- Schemes and subsidies should be designed for small-scale fishers and policies should be made to support them.
- The contribution of small-scale fishworkers should be highlighted at the national and state level.

The state government should take steps to reduce discrimination against the fishing community, who are poor and illiterate and heavily reliant on fishing activities as their primary livelihood, with limited alternatives available.