

2.4 Karnataka State-Level Workshop on the SSF Guidelines

Honnavara, Karnataka

3 March 2023

Organizers and Resource Persons

- Narasimha Hegde, Snehakunja Trust
- Ramachandra Bhatta, President, Snehakunja Trust
- Chandrakanth Kochrekar, President, National Association of Fishermen, Karnataka
- Sivaja Nair, Programme Executive, ICSF
- Ravindra Talekar, Deputy Director of Fisheries, Karawara
- V.M. Naik (Facilitator)
- Mahabaleshwar Hegde
- Vinod Patagar
- Prakash Mestha

Introduction

The Maharashtra state-level workshop on the SSF Guidelines was organized jointly by ICSF and Snehakunja Trust, Honnavara on 3 March 2023. The workshop was attended by 52 participants. The focus was on ‘Governmental Programmes for Small and Traditional Fishers, and the Access Rights to Coastal Resources Available to Them’.

Following Hegde’s welcome address, Kochrekar remarked that the country’s fisheries policymaking is in a dilemma and traditional coastal fisheries are under threat. He expressed concern over the poor governance of the sector as well as displacement of traditional fishers to make way for new ports. Even when there are programmes for small-scale fishers, they face severe limitations in budgetary allocations.

Nair, introducing the series of state-level workshops, said that there is still a lag in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines in India.

Bhatta noted that though small-scale fishers form 60% of Karnataka’s coastal fishing fleet, they harvest only about 20% of the state’s marine fish harvests in a given year. This used to be the opposite in the 1980s. Besides, most of the fish catch harvested by traditional fishers is utilized for direct human consumption in local and regional markets, unlike the industrial fishing sector where much of the catch is diverted either for exports or for production of fishmeal and fish oil. Traditional fisheries, hence, make a great contribution to local and regional food security. Therefore, it is of vital importance to support the small-scale fishers of Karnataka and safeguard their interests. There are also additional challenges introduced by increasing occurrence of extreme climate events. Moreover, the Goal #14 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal is concerned with fisheries.

Session One: Governmental Programmes for Small and Traditional Fishers

Resource Person: Ravindra Talekar; Moderator: V.M. Naik

Talekar spoke about the schemes available to fishers under district-sector, state-sector and centrally sponsored (60% Centre and 40% state) programmes. He said that compared to 10–15 years ago, annual budgetary allocation for the Department of Fisheries, Karnataka (DoFK) had increased tremendously in the last 4–5 years. The department manages the rights to fish production in public freshwater bodies such as gram panchayat tanks, irrigation tanks, etc. In coastal waters, the department is tasked with issuing licence to fishing craft, their registration, and providing basic fishing requisites to them. The department has district-sector schemes promoting aquaculture and fish marketing, though there are budgetary limitations on these schemes.

He spoke about PMMSY, a centrally sponsored scheme that encompasses various programmes aimed at development of fisheries and aquaculture in the country. This is a flexible scheme in which state governments can tailor the different programmes to suit their respective fisheries. Aquaculture programmes involve facilitation of cage aquaculture, bivalve farming, seaweed farming, recirculatory aquaculture system, biofloc technology, etc. For small-scale capture fisheries, PMMSY provides subsidies on bicycles, two-wheelers, three-wheelers and insulated vehicles for fish marketing. He also said that cage aquaculture needs to be developed with utmost caution as it is likely to congest the estuaries and coastal waters if not controlled properly. A separate Mariculture Policy of Karnataka is being proposed that would define the spatial and other limits for setting up cages in open waters.

The participants of the workshop raised several concerns about the schemes being implemented by the DoFK. These included threat to livelihoods of traditional fishers due to programmes such as the Sagarmala that evict fishers from their homes, ineffective communication about the availability of governmental programmes—resulting in traditional fishers being kept out of welfare schemes, concerns about estuarine ranching, problems of inter-state fisheries, poor monetary support to small-scale fishers compared to that provided to larger fishers, especially in welfare schemes, and delays in implementation of schemes. They also expressed their concern about new craft not being permitted under PMMSY as well as the poor quality and insufficient numbers of life jackets provided, adding that saving lives should be prioritized by the government instead of issuing life insurance money to the family of dead fishers.

Naik added that these problems had been around for many years. Delay is a common feature of most governmental programmes. The problems perpetuate because fishers do not organize to seek remedies. He recommended that the CRZ No Development Zone limit should not be reduced to 50 metres from the existing 200 metres since that would further erode the space available to fishers. He briefly described the advantages of collectivizing fishers in the form of companies and said that the fishers should be educated about their rights and powers. He spoke about the programme initiated by the Karnataka Department of Forest which aims to offer alternative livelihoods to small-scale fishers and to conserve marine organisms. The Department of Forest has also proposed to buy old/damaged fishing nets directly from fishers offering better prices so that such nets do not become the cause of ghost fishing. Farming of various species is under trial in this programme. Cage aquaculture should be taken up by small-scale fishers who operate in those waters. Farming of the mud crab has immense

potential as it has a lucrative market in Singapore. However, local fishers are not benefiting much as middlemen capture much of the profit margin. Collectivization of farmers and fishers can increase their bargaining power.

Concluding the session, Bhatta noted that there are thousands of fisherwomen who are engaged in production and marketing of dried fish, but they are not considered in any governmental programmes.

Session Two: Traditional and Small-Scale Fishers and the Access Rights to Coastal Resources Available to Them

Resource Persons: Mahabaleshwar Hegde and Vinod Patagar; Moderator: Prakash Mestha

Hegde said that the Government of Karnataka uses older laws for land acquisition rather than the 2013 Land Acquisition Act mainly for two reasons: the 2013 Act stipulates that at least 70% of land owners in the area should consent when acquiring land for public-private partnership enterprises and social impact assessment is mandatory. He noted that there are three key legal issues that are of interest to small-scale fishers. These include: (i) demarcation of Exclusive Economic Zones and international waters, (ii) CRZ provisions and violations and (iii) fisheries regulations including the Marine Fisheries Regulation Act of Karnataka.

Patagar made a detailed presentation on the CRZ Notification and said that there are many beneficial provisions made for fishers and it is important that all fishers understand these. CRZ does not intend to constrain traditional fishers, but if fishers are not aware of CRZ provisions they are likely to be misguided by vested interests. Fish harvesting, docking of craft and nets, net mending, fish marketing, fish curing and drying, and other such traditionally performed fishing activities are allowed under CRZ without the need for clearance. Construction activity by fishers or those who have resided there before 1991 are allowed.

Hegde explained issues surrounding the Karnataka Marine Fisheries Regulation Act (MFRA). The MFRA was implemented in 1986 to protect traditional fishers, resolve the conflicts between traditional and mechanized fishers, control harmful fishing practices, and control fishing efforts that affect fish populations and marine environment. The MFRA stipulates that the fishing craft needs to be registered and then a license must be obtained for the fishing craft engine. Mesh size of fishing nets is regulated. Hegde also explained the various provisions under the MFRA.

Discussion

Participants spoke about the extensive violations of the CRZ notification and asked what the remedial measures were. An option is to report to the District-Level Coastal Committee headed by the district collector which would forward complaints to the Karnataka State Coastal Zone Management Authority. To a point raised by a participant regarding creating private enclosures along the river bank by cutting mangroves, the moderator said that a similar violation was reported from Udupi which was taken up by the National Green

Tribunal (NGT). The NGT ruled that the place shall be restored back to its original condition and also levied heavy fine on the perpetrator.

Mestha added that many fishers are residing and using coastal commons without proper documentation of ownership (*patta bhoomi*). Hegde noted that such changes can be brought about through amendments to the revenue acts and survey acts, though bringing such changes is not easy as it has to be done at the central government level.

Participants complained that the coast guard in Karnataka does not control fishing by craft from outside the state. Hegde replied that the coast guard is not authorized legally to control such fishing activities, but that it is the duty of the DoFK. Participants also spoke about higher impacts on small-scale fishers during fish famines, conflicting directions from various government departments regarding coastal commons, and construction of roads in the CRZ.

Recommendations

1. Policymakers must stop their neglectful treatment of traditional fishers, who form the largest category of fishers in Karnataka. Their immense contribution in supporting livelihood and in contributing to food security should be recognized and reflected in governmental programmes.
2. Traditional fishing practices should be considered as ‘low-carbon fisheries’ that cause least damage to the environment.
3. The CRZ notification should be strictly adhered to when implementing any developmental programme in the coast. Safeguarding the interests of traditional fishers must come first when designing and implementing such developmental programmes. Along the same lines, the reckless depositing of rocks/boulders on the beach in the pretext of controlling seafront erosion should stop. Such activities should be preceded by detailed ex-ante ecological and socio-economic impact assessments.
4. Welfare programmes that are specially designed for the traditional fisher community need to be introduced. Budgetary allocations for these programmes must be made in accordance with the number of traditional fishers operating in each taluk. This will avoid disproportionate budgetary allocations being given to mechanized fishing at the expense of traditional fishers. Some such possible welfare schemes include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a) Distribution of ice boxes/plastic crates to fishers should be resumed with sufficient budgetary allocations under PMMSY.
 - b) Fish drying should be included for promotion under the post-harvest management programmes of PMMSY. Distribution of tools required for fish salting and drying should be taken up under PMMSY. These tools include cisterns/tanks, tarpaulins, weighing machines, plastic crates, packaging materials and subsidized crystal salt.
 - c) Fish drying yards must be set up in fishing villages and landing centres where traditional fishers are given preferential lease agreements to take up fish curing and drying activities.
 - d) In the PMMSY guidelines, individual schemes must be made flexible to accommodate the needs of small-scale/traditional fishers. For example, instead of 200-box-capacity insulated vehicles, the guidelines should include 50-box- or 100-

box-capacity insulated vehicles. District-level officers must be delegated the power to modify the guidelines to suit the needs of the district's fishers.

- e) All beach landing points must be provided with necessary facilities such as sheds to keep traditional craft, mechanical winches to haul craft from the water onto the beach, sheds for fishers to take rest, drinking water facilities, sufficient lighting and washrooms.
 - f) Include traditional fishing gear such as the Rampani for support under the PMMSY.
 - g) Distribution of life jackets to all traditional fishers.
 - h) Raising the monetary assistance under the saving-cum-relief programme to Rs 10,000 per month.
5. Welfare of traditional fishers can be better achieved through forming and strengthening their collectives.
 6. Setting up new forms of collectives of traditional fishers must be encouraged, such as fisher producer organizations.
 7. Existing collectives, especially those not endowed with income-generating resources, such as diesel bunks, need to be given a fresh lease of life through a one-time grant of Rs 25 lakh.
 8. Service provision from the DoFK needs to be vastly improved (for example, through better integration of technology, upgrading the Seva Sindhu portal, etc.). Money owed to fishers under programmes such as the Savings Cum Relief Scheme should be deposited directly to the bank accounts of the fishers. Similarly, insurance claims should be settled quickly.

Feedback

- The participants expressed that traditional fishers have been ignored for long in policymaking and such workshops should be organized more often to raise awareness about the injustices meted out to such a vulnerable community.
- The participants felt that the workshop would have been more successful had there been proper representation from the DoFK and requested that the discussion points from the workshop be sent to all concerned authorities.