

National TOT Workshop on the SSF Guidelines

WORKSHOP REPORT

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International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust

NATIONAL TRAINING OF TRAINERS (TOT) WORKSHOP ON THE SSF GUIDELINES (INLAND FISHERIES)

Seva Kendra, Kolkata,
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Introduction

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) were endorsed by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) at its Thirty-first Session in June 2014. The implementation of the SSF Guidelines is identified as a significant step for enhancing the contribution of small-scale fisheries to nutrition and food security. As part of the implementation process, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust organized a National Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshop (Inland Fisheries) at Seva Kendra, Kolkata, from 22 to 24 December 2022. Key fishworker representatives from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha and West Bengal, attended the workshop.

DAY 1

Welcome and Introductory Remarks

In his introductory remarks, Sebastian Mathew, executive trustee, ICSF Trust, drew attention to the salient aspects of the SSF Guidelines such as the importance of conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources and the promotion of a human rights-based approach. The 2014 SSF Guidelines instrument complements the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), he said, developed within the framework of an ecosystem approach to fisheries. The 2014 instrument is to benefit both men and women, especially to protect tenure rights, and the right to social protection, including the occupational safety and health of fishers and fishworkers. Further, the instrument highlights the need to deter and prevent illegal and destructive fishing gear and practices, both in marine and inland waters. The instrument recognizes that most fish produced in inland fisheries is for direct human consumption. Although marine fisheries were more dominant until the 1980s, inland fisheries, both capture and culture, have grown over time to contribute a greater share of fish production and employment in India.

ICSF held two workshops in the year 2019 where there was a request for a TOT for the marine and inland sectors. A TOT Workshop was held in Chennai in October 2022 for the marine sector. During the inland fisheries TOT Workshop, the participants are expected to go back and impart training to local fishers in their respective areas, especially to apply the SSF Guidelines to better understand local issues and possible solutions, and to explain the national and state-level schemes and legislation.

Another objective of the workshop is to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries, he said. The participants were to receive inputs on resource management and to be educated on the right to development and the right to social security which are constitutionally guaranteed. Mathew then welcomed all participants and introduced the resource persons.

SESSION 1

a. Tenure, Fishing Rights, Institutions and Governance

Dr VV. Sugunan, Assistant Director-General, ICAR (Retd.)

“Mainstreaming SSF Guidelines into the national policy framework is important”, said Dr Sugunan in his talk on Tenure, Fishing Rights, Institutions and Governance. He defined tenure in simple terms, elaborating on its vitality and clarified how the ability to access resources is the most relevant aspect of tenure in inland fisheries. Vulnerable and

marginalized groups will stay out of the radar of social development, he warned, if tenure governance is not heeded properly,

There are well-defined parameters of tenure in other agriculture-related sectors, while it is still an emerging concept in fisheries, he said, and enumerated the complexities of tenure and the need to put tenure rights into a legal framework. Tenure is not a standalone process and cannot be viewed in isolation, and needs to be considered within the broader context of land and livelihoods.

Explaining granting of leases, and fishing rights through open access, auctions and licenses, he discussed how issues that arise from a flawed governance of tenure could lead to insecure access to resources. He further explained the matter by giving an example of the Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department not permitting access of local communities to water bodies for fishing in wildlife sanctuaries. The protection of small-scale fishers and fish farmers, and providing them with benefits that are enjoyed by their agriculture counterparts is vital, he said.

Tenure rights are associated with the institutional environment that require strong community platforms. The fish stocks should be owned by the community, he said, and reservoir fisheries should be recognized as a community activity. The national and state policies need to focus on open-water fisheries and its contribution to livelihood security. Dr Sugunan emphasized the need for a paradigm shift in approach at both national and state levels to reduce the role of government and to increase the role of the community.

b. Access Rights to Inland Fisheries Resources: Legal and Institutional Aspects

Dr Ganesh Chandra, Senior Scientist, ICAR- Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, Barrackpore, West Bengal, India

The inland fisheries legislation and policies were presented by Dr. Ganesh Chandra, Senior Scientist, ICAR-CIFRI. He introduced the 'public trust doctrine' concept and mentioned how the inland fisheries sector in West Bengal, until 2014, was completely welfare-based, and became revenue-based later to extract rent. In most states, the lease period, is for five to 10 years, whereas it is for a period of one to three years in others. Speaking of Assam, Dr. Chandra said the state has the best fisheries legislation, and explained the organization of ownership, control and transfer of fishing rights in the state to benefit fishing communities. Introducing Bihar, he spoke about how the fisheries sector has transformed in the last 20 years. The *Panidaar* (water lord) system that started during the reign of Akbar in Bihar continued until 1990. Now, all the water bodies are owned by the government and are leased out to fishers. He spoke about the formation of cooperatives at the block level in Bihar and the conflicts that arose at the community level. In Uttar Pradesh, both revenue and welfare-based models are visible, he said.

Citing the example of Gujarat, Dr. Chandra spoke how fisheries regulations can be regressive in situations where water bodies dry up too soon. Although the tribal fishers made annual lease payment, the water bodies prematurely dried up making the requirement to pay annual lease amount regressive in nature. In Andhra Pradesh, the government has complete hold over the leasing system and no open access is permitted, he said

West Bengal Sundarbans and its Small-scale Fishing Community

Dr Santanu Chacraverti, President, Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA), Kolkata, India

From the etymology of *Sundarbans* to the impact of climate change on the mangroves due to rising sea level and subsidence of the Bengal delta, Dr Chcraverti's session painted a complete picture of the Sundarbans. With maps showing Bhatir Desh, referred to as the 'land of tides', he explained areas that are accessible, and areas that are not, to vulnerable and marginalized fishers. The fishers put themselves at great risk, he said, becoming a part of the food chain in the wilderness, often becoming the prey in pursuit of the hunt. The forests are uninhabited by humans, except for poachers. The outskirts of the forests, which were once part of the jungle have human settlements since colonialization to house fishers and others. Sundarbans today consists of 102 islands, 48 of which are forested and 52 inhabited. These figures are meaningless due to the geomorphology changing every day, he said. There had been colonial recognition of the rights of fishers in the Sundarbans waters. The Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and 1973 and declaration of the Sundarbans Tiger Reserves recognize these rights, he claimed.

After covering the history of Sunderbans in brief, Dr Chacraverti said conservation measures are now negatively impacting the livelihood of fishers. As a result, illegal fishing, regardless of hazards, has become a necessity for subsistence, he said. In the discussion that followed, the importance of consultation with and participation of local fishers in decision-making with respect to forest conservation was highlighted. There was an overarching view that fishers be given the right to fish in the buffer areas of Sunderbans.

DAY 2

The day started with the participants introducing themselves, affiliated organizations and their area of work. Dr Ananthan, Principal Scientist, Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), steered an interactive activity

Several issues such as access rights, coupled with the right to rotate access to resources, were discussed, along with measures that the government could adopt: (i) to make juvenile fishing effectively illegal; (ii) to introduce insurance; (iii) to issue identity cards; (iv) to provide police protection; (v) to fix reasonable tenure fee; and (vi) to create artificial water bodies for inland fisheries.

The Odisha trainees expressed concern about 'outsiders', more than locals, gaining greater access to the Chilika Lake and how they have been cultivating prawns that leads to negative impacts on small-scale fishing. Concerns were expressed about pollution from the mining industry in Hirakud, and indiscriminate water abstraction leading to lower water levels in rivers for fishing. Chilika is connected to the sea at two places and the lagoon mouths have been closed. The Lake has both sweet and saline water regimes; the endemic fish species are specific and an effort should be made to improve such fish stocks, it was observed.

The West Bengal trainees raised the issue of soil erosion, Assam faced issues related to flooding, on the one hand, and decreasing flow, on the other hand, in the river Brahmaputra. The trainees from Manipur brought attention to decreasing biological diversity in local water bodies. Rajasthan trainees raised problems from marketing

bottlenecks, especially due to exploitation by local traders. It was proposed that fishers' *gram sabhas* had to function for real empowerment of fishers.

Governance of Indian River-Floodplain Capture Fisheries: Access, Rights, Entitlements, and Responsibilities

Dr Nachiket Kelkar, Programme Lead, Riverine Ecosystems and Livelihoods, Wildlife Conservation Trust, India

Briefly introducing the history of fisheries from the colonial period, Dr Kelkar talked about colonial hydrology and the fisher identity, and proceeded to explain the attributes of riverine capture fisheries in India.

Drawing upon paragraphs 5.5 to 5.13 of the SSF Guidelines, mainly dealing with tenure rights of small-scale fishers, Dr Kelkar explained the objectives of sustainability, food security, equity, conservation and their inter-relationship in the context of inland capture fisheries of Bihar in river Ganges.

The institutionally-governed rights of fishers were illuminated and situations where the rights are misused, especially by those from outside, were explained. Caste, tradition and other social factors can be constraints, he said, for granting access and rights to resources. He further urged a rethink of the overfishing paradigm and mesh size regulations in light of riverine stock specificities.

SESSION 2

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) and Public Expenditure in Inland Fisheries

Dr Ananthan PS, Principal Scientist, Social Sciences Division, ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE), Mumbai, India

Introducing the concept of Budget estimates and schemes, Dr Ananthan's session focused mainly on sub-schemes under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) and their benefits to inland small-scale fishing communities. The differences between capital and revenue expenditure, and the difference between Central Sector Schemes (CS), Centrally-sponsored Schemes (CSS), and State schemes were explained in terms of their implementation methods in the context of inland fisheries. The PMMSY (2020-21 to 2024-25) aims at generating income of fishers, he said, to enhance production and to generate employment. The outlay and the share of the central government, state government and beneficiaries in funding the Rs. 20,050 Crore (Rs. 200.50 billion) scheme were presented.

PMMSY also aims to enhance the productivity of fisheries, improving and establishing a post-harvest and cold-chain infrastructure by constructing cold storage, markets and marketing infrastructure, and taking actions concerning fisheries management and regulatory framework. The utilization of PMMSY funds by states were presented. It was noted that the south Indian states have utilized the scheme more, compared to the rest of the country. The performance of Chhattisgarh was noted to be appreciable in the inland fisheries context.

State-specific schemes from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Odisha, West Bengal, and Maharashtra were compared and contrasted with each other in

terms of expenditure. Schemes like Matsya Mitra and Sagar Mitra and programmes like the Majuli development in Assam (an island district in river Brahmaputra, Assam) were discussed. Inland resources per fisher were calculated for different states. Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu were found to show better performance than other states. The spending of the state per fisher was also discussed.

In the discussion that followed, Dr. Ananthan was asked about state and national schemes that have been developed in consultation with fishing communities. Dr. Ananthan clarified he is unaware of any such schemes, but concurred it would be a good practice to adopt.

Fisheries schemes provided by the state governments- case studies of Odisha, Assam, Bihar, and West Bengal

Dr Arun Pandit, Principal Scientist, ICAR-Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Focusing on the states of Odisha, Assam, Bihar and West Bengal, Dr. Pandit listed the basic characteristics of small-scale fishers, inland resources, production estimates, government schemes, key activities and general recommendations.

Matsya Jagran, seed bank programme, Majuli development programme, Jal dharo Jal Bharo scheme of West Bengal, Atmnirbhar Bihar scheme, Machha Chasa Pain Nua Pokhari Khola Yojana of Odisha, etc., were some of the schemes that Dr. Pandit brought attention to at the state level.

Several recommendations were made by the speaker such as developing comprehensive insurance, strict enforcement of punishment against destructive fishing practices, and the necessity of schemes to supplement the income of fishers,

DAY 3

SESSION 3

Case Study--Community Rights over Hadagarh Reservoir in Keonjhar, Odisha

Ms Puspanjali Satpathy, Independent social worker, Odisha

Ms Satpathy presented a detailed case study of how the Forest Rights Act, 2006, (FRA) was used to benefit the fishworkers in Hadagarh reservoir, Odisha. When the Hadagarh sanctuary was declared, it was forbidden to fish in the reservoir. In 2010, the *sarpanch* and several other people prepared a report that 18 villages were dependent on the reservoir for their livelihood based on fishing. They approached the district collectorate several times as the fisheries and revenue departments seemed unaware of fishing rights under FRA.

Hadagarh is a small case study but it is an important one as it is an example to demonstrate that rights can be asserted and acquired under FRA. FRA is not a legislation only for tribals, said Ms. Satpathy, that it is also for local communities, and for anyone displaced from forests due to development projects of the government or private sector. Ms Satpathy gave another example of the river Derjang project where the people availed their rights under the FRA four years ago. The case of Hadagarh where the FRA was instrumental in granting fishing rights needs to be replicated everywhere, she observed.

Along with rights, the FRA also prescribes many duties such as the protection of the forest, wildlife and biodiversity, said Ms. Satpathy. She said the duties ought to be paid as much attention as rights.

The trainees expressed reservation about the state of implementation of inland fisheries regulations such as the restrictions on the use of mosquito nets (e.g., Sundarbans, West Bengal). Ms. Satpathy was of the view that the state will be more responsible and accountable if the fishing communities are better organized.

The negative impact of white-legged shrimp culture in Odisha, the impact of mangrove in Maharashtra and issues of access in Dimbhe dam of Pune were also raising during the discussion.

Inland Fisheries, Aquaculture and the National Fisheries Policy

Dr Dilip Kumar, Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector Planning and Policy Adviser, (FAO) (Retired), India

The SSF Guidelines were further elaborated by Dr Dilip Kumar. Dr Kumar mentioned the goals of SDGs, and how SSF can contribute substantially to achieving them. Compared to commercial fish farming, small fishers have a major contribution and place in the Indian context, he observed. The very existence of the farming and fishing sector in India owes a lot to the small-scale producers, he said.

The SSF Guidelines complement the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to support overall principles and provisions from a human rights-based approach. The process of preparing the SSF Guidelines was participatory and consultative, he pointed out.

Dr Kumar concurred that India needed production by masses and not mass production by a few individuals. Development that is not equitable is not sustainable, he said. National-level policy needs to be broad enough to guide the states to develop their fisheries and aquaculture policies in a need-based manner.

Dr. Kumar drew attention to the national fisheries policy which is currently under development. and was of the view that the needs of SSFs are to be heard and heeded in the policy. He was concerned that the fishing communities were still not organized and continue to be economically weak. Collective decision-making, planning and action are necessary, he said.

Ensuring ecological wellbeing and maintaining the flow of river at healthy levels are issues that the state must pay attention to. There needs to be greater coherence between fisheries, forest and water resource policies, he advised. Alternative activities to support fishers should be identified to decrease fishing pressure.

In conclusion, Dr Kumar said the National Fisheries Policy has to be supportive of SSF, adopt an ecosystem approach and strengthen the rights of access and the use of resources.

Reflections of Participants

In the group discussion that followed the morning session on topics dealt with during the TOT Workshop, a trainee from Maharashtra made a few suggestions to address problems

such as leasing involving non-uniform payments; poor seed quality in culture-based fish production systems; location of housing away from their fishing grounds/reservoirs; and extending diesel subsidies currently provided to marine fishers also to the inland fishing sector.

A trainee from Assam spoke about how traditional fishers have not been recognized, and how catches in Brahmaputra have reduced due to a decrease in water flow due to upstream development projects. Further, awareness programmes are to be held about national policies, and welfare schemes, he said, as the system leans singularly on revenue collection. Funding from the central government needs to be enhanced, and rampant corruption in the fisheries department needs to be addressed, he said.

The trainee from Jammu and Kashmir noted that tourism be made mindful of the carrying capacity of the region. Another trainee from Odisha raised the need to pay more attention to the issue of migration of fishers from fishing and a trainee from Bihar spoke about promoting fraternity between researchers and fishing communities.

A trainee from West Bengal sought to look into fisheries cooperatives in the inland context, especially focusing on how to improve them, based on state-level workshops. The trainees from the states like Assam and Mizoram said TOT workshops like the Kolkata one should be held in other states too.

Dr Dilip Kumar delivered the closing remarks, Dr Ganesh Chandra, Dr Nachiket Kelkar and Dr Santanu Chacraverti also spoke. Dr Kumar said that he learned about many issues and different perspectives to look at them which expanded worldviews. Although problems in a globalized world are rarely local, finding reflections of local problems at the global level was always possible, he said. Documenting issues raised during the Workshop and further discussion was necessary, said Dr Chandra. It was necessary to provide solutions to the issues raised, said Dr Kelkar, and he was keen to see how far the institution of cooperatives could help in the process. Dr Chacraverti said paying attention to the impact of agricultural pollution on inland water bodies was necessary. Preferential access to small-scale fishing communities need to go together with preferential treatment of nature and the environment to deal with climate change impacts, he concluded.

Mr Venugopalan. N, Programme Manager, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust delivered a vote of thanks.