

Social Development and Sustainable Fisheries: West Bengal



Prepared by:

Dr Shilpa Nandy



International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

2023



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Front Cover

Group of small scale fishers and fishworkers involved in village meeting discussing their challenges

Front Inside

Fisherwomen in net mending and Weaving at Kakdwip Shivkalinagar area, West Bengal

Back Inside

Fisherwomen catching fish in Gadiara

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Preface

West Bengal is endowed with rich natural resources and huge water bodies—ponds, rivers, estuaries, brackish water, the sea, canals and reservoirs. Fishing in the state takes place in all kinds of water bodies. Most of the people engaged in fishing activities are traditional and small-scale fisherfolk. Today, every nation aims for sustainable development, economic growth, the protection of its environment and natural resources, employment generation, per capita increase, improved livelihoods, food security and social development. In 2015, FAO introduced the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The sixth chapter of these guidelines specifies social development and decent work towards empowering small-scale fishing communities and to enable them to enjoy their human rights.

Considering this guideline, the present study focuses on the social development of fishing communities and sustainable fisheries in West Bengal, with special reference to small-scale and traditional fishers. The state ranks second in fish production in India and immensely contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Fishing is the second largest occupation in West Bengal, coming in right after farming. Despite their significant contribution to the national economy and foreign exchange, fishing communities are socially, economically and culturally neglected. On top of this, Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns, as well as the super cyclones Bulbul, Fani and Amphan, severely impacted fisherfolk.

This study examines and explores the different aspects of fisheries and how sustainable development can improve the social development of fishing communities in West Bengal. It aims to find viable answers to 13 specific challenge areas that they face, including their access (or lack of) to health, education, housing, sanitation, potable water and energy.

Chapter 1, the introduction, provides a conceptual framework for the purpose, methods adopted and scope of the study. Chapter 2 elaborately examines the 13 parameters and tries to identify the social and economic status of fishing communities and how Covid-19 has affected their lives and livelihoods. Chapter 3 puts forward recommendations for rethinking and revising the policies and schemes that will cater to the needs of fisherfolk. Chapter 4, the conclusion, addresses the major challenges of West Bengal's fishing communities, especially during the pandemic.

List of Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| BPL | Below Poverty Line |
| CCRF | Code of Conduct of Responsible Fisheries |
| COFI | Committee on Fisheries |
| CMFRI | Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute |
| DDAY | Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana |
| DMF | Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum |
| EWS | Economically Weaker Section |
| FAO | Food and Agricultural Organization |
| FLC | Fish Landing Centre |
| FS | Fisheries Statistics |
| FY | Financial Year |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GOI | Government of India |
| GOWB | Government of West Bengal |
| GPS | Global Positioning System |
| ICDS | Integrated Child Development Scheme |
| MDWS | Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation |
| MFRA | Marine Fishing Regulation Act |
| MNREGA | Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act |
| MPAs | Marine Protected Areas |
| NDP | Net Domestic Product |
| NFDB | National Fisheries Development Board |
| NGOs | Non-Government Organizations |
| NIFAP | National Policy on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture |
| NLM | National Livelihood Mission |
| NMPS | National Mission for Protein Supplements |
| NPMF | National Policy on Marine Fisheries |
| PHED | Public Health and Engineering Department |
| PMGSY | Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana |
| PMAY | Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana |
| PMGKY | Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana |
| PMMSY | Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana |
| PMUY | Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana |
| RKVY | Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojana |
| RTE | Right to Education |
| SAP | Social Assistance Programme |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SDP | Skill Development Programme |
| SHGs | Self Help Groups |
| VGSSF | Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries |
| WBDWSIP | West Bengal Drinking Water Sector Improvement Project |
| WBMFRA | West Bengal Marine Fisheries Regulation Act |

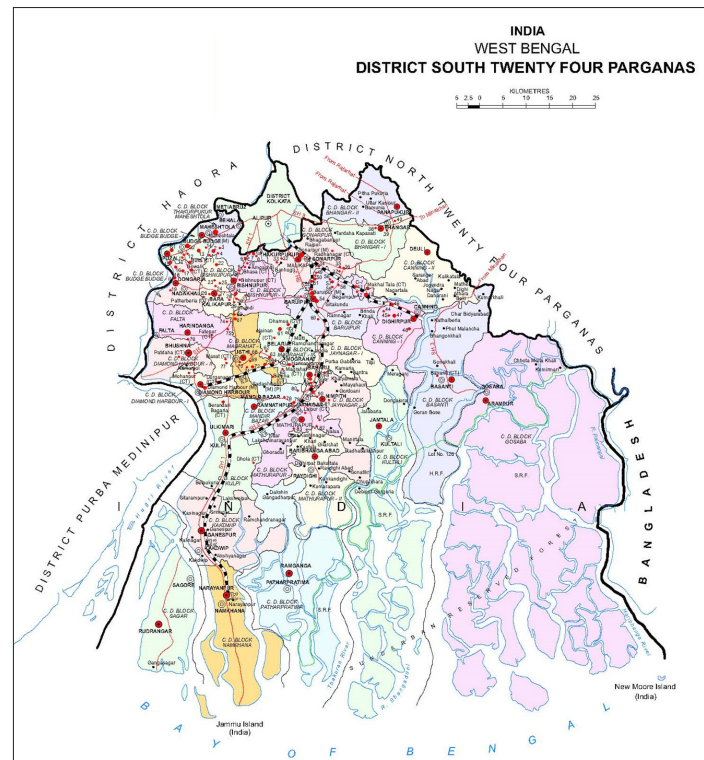
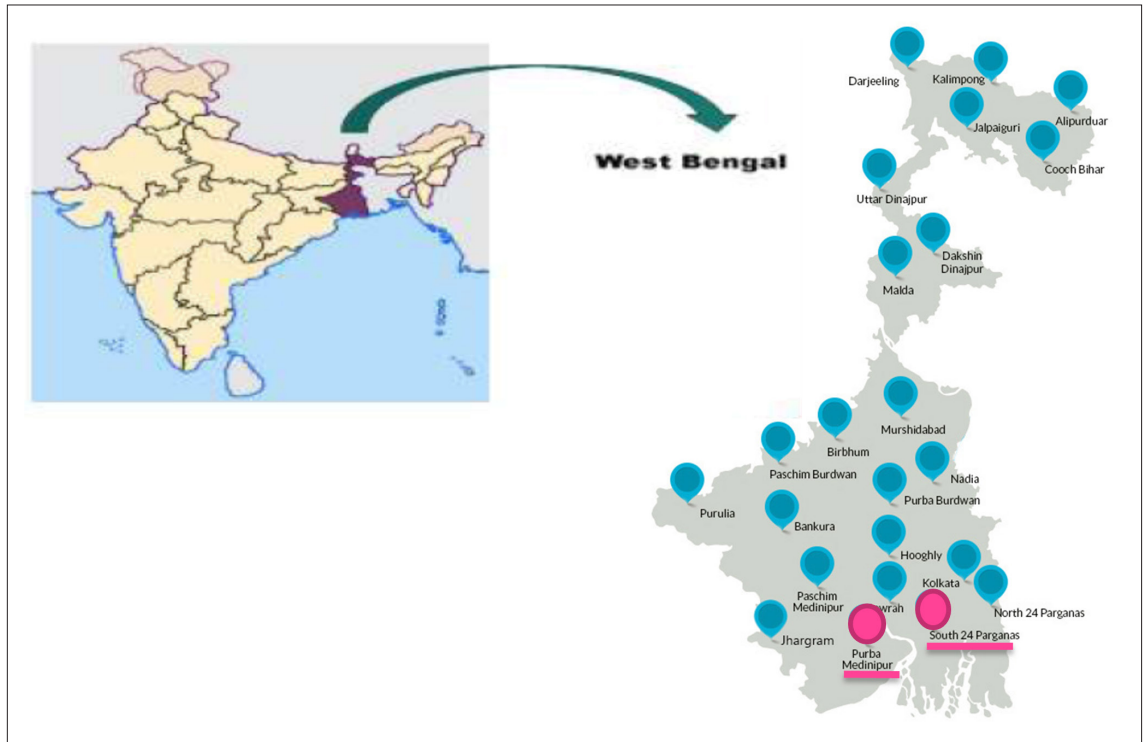
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Map of West Bengal¹



¹ Map Sources: Adapted from Map of West Bengal: <https://wb.gov.in/government-district-and-localgovt.aspx>; Map of Purba Medinipur: <https://purbamedinipur.gov.in/district-administrative-map/> and South 24 Parganas – extracted from 2011 Census of India District Handbook for South 24 Parganas

Snapshot of fisheries and fish workers in West Bengal

The following session details the profile of fisheries and fishworkers in the state of West Bengal as an

Fishery Resources in West Bengal

| | |
|---|---|
| Marine | |
| Length of coastline (km) | 158 |
| Coordinates | 21 05' N and 2405' N and 860 E and 890 E |
| Continental shelf ('000 sq km) | 17 |
| Number of fish landing centres | 66 |
| Number of fishing villages | 188 |
| Number of fisherfolk families | 76,981 |
| Fisherfolk population | 3,80,138 |
| Total fishworkers | 0.4 million |
| Total fish production | 30 percent |
| Inland | |
| Total inland water bodies (lakh ha) | 5.45 |
| Rivers and canals (km) | 2,526 |
| Reservoirs (lakh ha) | 0.17 |
| Tanks and ponds (lakh ha) | 2.76 |
| Flood plain lakes/derelict waters (lakh ha) | 0.42 |
| Brackish water (lakh ha) | 2.10 |
| Total fishworkers | 2 million |
| Total fish production | 16.5 percent of total. |
| Total fish seed production | 62 percent of national production |

Source: DMF Office, 2020

District-wise Fisher Population in West Bengal

| District (coastal) | Total | District (non-coastal) | Total |
|--------------------|----------|------------------------|------------------|
| North 24 Parganas | 4,82,252 | Howrah | 99,289 |
| South 24 Parganas | 2,54,484 | Hooghly | 78,875 |
| Purba Medinipur | 1,12,203 | Nadia | 2,56,000 |
| Paschim Medinipur | | Murshidabad | 2,22,050 |
| | | Bardhaman | 1,40,000 |
| | | Bankura | 1,14,302 |
| | | Birbhum | 2,00,747 |
| | | Purulia | 56,157 |
| | | Malda | 35,829 |
| | | Dakshin Dinajpur | 34,712 |
| | | Uttar Dinajpur | 70,100 |
| | | Jalpaiguri | 81,030 |
| | | Darjeeling | 2,559 |
| | | Cooch Behar | 1,36,309 |
| Total | | | 23,76,898 |

Source: DMF Office, 2020

Fish Production in West Bengal: 2004–2018

| Year | Inland | | Marine | | Total | | Fish seeds produced |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | Inland ('000 tonnes) | Growth rate (percent) | Marine ('000 tonnes) | Growth rate (percent) | Production ('000 tonnes) | Growth rate (percent) | In million fry |
| 2004–05 | 1035.50 | 4.81 | 179.50 | 1.16 | 1215.00 | 3.88 | 12200.00 |
| 2005–06 | 1090.00 | 5.36 | 160.00 | 10.86 | 1250.00 | 2.88 | 12200.33 |
| 2006–07 | 1181.01 | 8.35 | 178.10 | 11.31 | 1359.10 | 8.73 | 13200.00 |
| 2007–08 | 1264.53 | 7.07 | 182.74 | 2.61 | 1447.26 | 6.49 | 13572.00 |
| 2008–09 | 1294.71 | 2.39 | 189.29 | 3.58 | 1484.00 | 2.54 | 14181.00 |
| 2009–10 | 1338.00 | 3.34 | 179.00 | 5.44 | 1517.01 | 2.22 | 12566.00 |
| 2010–11 | 1246.15 | 6.86 | 197.11 | 10.12 | 1443.26 | 4.86 | 13453.00 |
| 2011–12 | 1290.03 | 3.52 | 182.02 | 7.65 | 1472.05 | 1.99 | 13826.00 |
| 2012–13 | 1337.66 | 3.69 | 152.35 | 16.30 | 1490.02 | 1.22 | 15002.00 |
| 2013–14 | 1392.40 | 4.09 | 188.24 | 23.55 | 1580.65 | 6.08 | 15890.00 |
| 2014–15 | 1438.46 | 6.17 | 178.85 | 6.17 | 1617.31 | 2.31 | 16687.00 |
| 2015–16 | 1493.22 | 3.80 | 178.20 | 0.36 | 1671.42 | 3.34 | 17521.00 |
| 2016–17 | 1525.29 | 2.14 | 176.53 | 0.93 | 1701.82 | 1.81 | 19284.00 |
| 2017–18 | 1556.61 | | 185.48 | | 1742.09 | | 12455.00 |

Source: Handbook of Fisheries Statistics, 2018

Fishing Crafts in West Bengal fisheries

| Type of Craft | Mechanised | | | | | | | | | Motorized | | Total |
|---------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------|--------------|--------|---------------------|---------|----------|--------------------|------------------|-------|
| | Trawlers | Gillnetters | Dolnetters/ Bagnetters | Liners | Ring Seiners | Others | Total Mechanised | Inboard | Outboard | Total motorized | Non Motorized | |
| Number | 2004 | 1764 | 191 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 4014 | 6564 | 0 | 6564 | 476 | 11054 |

(Source: CMFRI Marine Fisheries Census, 2016)

Fishery Infrastructure

| | Boat Yards | Cold Stor- ages | Ice Facto- ries | Freez- ing Plants | Pro- cess- ing Plants | Curing Yards | Peel- ing Sheds | Ex- traction Plants | Fish Meal Plants |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| West Bengal | 35 | 17 | 191 | 1 | 1 | 78 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

(Source: CMFRI Marine Fisheries Census, 2016)

Important fish landing centres of two major coastal districts in West Bengal: Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas

| Purba Medinipur FLC | South 24 Parganas FLC |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| DadanPatrabar, Ramnagar Block | Diamond Harbour |
| Sankarpur | Kakdwip |
| Chandaneswar | Namkhan Raidighi |
| Digha Mohanpur (Biggest) | Fresargunj |
| Junput | Sagar Jambu Island |
| Saulaghat | Petuaghat Dariapur |

Fisher population

| Fishermen Population and their Percentage: 2019-20 | Number of Districts | | | Fishermen Population | | | Whole Population | | | Fishermen Population per District | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------|--------|--------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|---|--------|---------|
| | 23 | | | 32,36,261 | | | 9,96,09,303 | | | 1,40,707 | | |
| Gender-wise Fishermen Population : 2019-20 | Inland Fishermen Population | | | | | | Marine Fishermen Population | | | | | |
| | Male | | | Female | | | Male | | | Female | | |
| | 1,629,481 | | | 1,204,093 | | | 246,225 | | | 156,462 | | |
| Number of Fishermen Population engaged in Fisheries activities, 2017 | Full time | | | Part time | | | Occasional | | | Total | | |
| | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| | 709908 | 122994 | 832902 | 631374 | 292157 | 923531 | 310510 | 177666 | 488176 | 1651792 | 592817 | 2244609 |

Sources: Handbook on Fisheries Statistics 2020 and Handbook on Fisheries Statistics 2018

Socio-economic status of fishing communities in West Bengal

The fishing castes are mostly Schedules Castes, including Bor, Rajbanshi, Jhalo, Mal, Halo and Jalia Kaibarta.

- The average number of people per household is 6–7.
- 90 percent of the population is engaged in direct fishing.
- 67 percent of households are involved in marine fishing.
- 63 percent of households have up to 1 acre of land.
- Children below 12 account for 35 percent of the fisherfolk population.
- 54 percent are illiterate, 25 percent are below the primary school level, and 12 percent have attended primary school.
- Fishing is a hereditary occupation for 74 percent of fisherfolk.
- 34 percent of fisherfolk households own a non-motorized boat and 6 percent own a motorized boat.
- 7 percent of the households are in debt.
- More than 50 percent are below the poverty line, with a low per capita income per month

Distribution of households by income in fishing communities in West Bengal¹

| Distribution of households by income category (rupees per capita per month) | Percentage of households |
|---|--------------------------|
| Less than 250 | 8.11 |
| 250–500 | 45.05 |
| 500–750 | 33.33 |
| 750–1000 | 1.35 |
| 1000–1250 | 6.76 |
| 1250–1500 | 3.15 |
| Above 1500 | 2.25 |

1 Pal, Baidyanath, et al. "Income and nutritional status of the fishing community residing in coastal Bay of Bengal: a case study." *Anthropologischer Anzeiger* (2011): 195-208.

1 Introduction

Fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in India due to poor occupational safety and unhealthy working conditions. In both the marine and the inland sector, fishing communities have to work for long hours without proper infrastructure. Violence, exploitation, child labour, sexual abuse, discriminations of wages between male and female fishworkers, forced labour and poor security at sea increase the vulnerability of these fishing communities, especially small-scale fishers. About 90 percent of this sector belongs to the category of small-scale fishing communities, mainly fishers, fish farmers and fishworkers. Despite their significant contribution to the GDP and to foreign exchange, they are socially, economically and culturally marginalized. The worst among them are the fisherwomen who are single or widowed and their children. West Bengal fishing communities are not an exception to this situation. They lack access to basic social amenities, like housing, drinking water, sanitation, health and education. In West Bengal, women are engaged in low-income areas of fishing activities and men dominate the sector.

According to the Fisheries Statistics of India, 2018, around 1,60,96,975 fisher families, including 1,05,26,758 million males and 55,70,217 million females, are engaged directly and indirectly in fishing activities. The share of the fisheries sector in India's overall GDP is about 1.03 percent as of 2017–18, and it contributed ₹1.75 trillion during 2017–18. It accounts for about 6.58 percent of India's agricultural GDP.

Most fishworkers in this sector are informal, and their job is often based on season. They have limited access to government schemes, due in part to their illiteracy. Their per capita income is so low that they find it difficult to join social security schemes that require paying a monthly fee. With this aim and objective, the SSF Guidelines call for the social and economic development of small-scale fishing communities so they can enjoy their human rights. Governments are called upon to ensure that international standards are included into national legislation. This includes the right to an adequate standard of living, decent work and ensuring that health, education and other essential needs are met.

Chapter 6 of the SSF Guidelines clearly focuses on social development, employment and decent work. The guidelines discuss the social and human development of small-scale fishers in terms of their social security, their access to credit and insurance schemes, laws regulating safety at sea and their access to trainings and safety equipment. The spread of Covid-19 came as a heavy blow to the small-scale and traditional fishers, who tried to protect themselves from imminent threats of displacement and defend their livelihood rights. The impacts could be seen across the sector for both marine and inland fisheries, on fishers, fish vendors, suppliers and transport workers, because of disruptions in fish supply chains. Already there were difficulties and challenges, like environmental degradation, climatic uncertainties and major development projects, which were jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of India's fishing communities. This was further exacerbated with Covid-19. The extension of the lockdown and the wide spread of the pandemic increased the sharp decline in the value chain of marine capture fisheries in West Bengal. Women fishworkers are the worst affected, as in West Bengal they are mostly engaged as vendors, sorters dryers. The closure of markets and landing centres posed a serious threat to their survival.

West Bengal went on to face Cyclone Amphan on 20 May 2020. The fisherfolk of two major coastal districts in particular, South 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur, were severely impacted. They witnessed the loss of lives, shelter and livelihoods.

The Government of India introduced the Draft National Fisheries Policy of 2020, which clearly showed a preference for exports, production and capital investments that will strip small scale-fishers of their rights of access to commons, and also damage the environment in the long run. In addition, the policy also overlooked the needs of women and was silent on the existing inequalities of caste and class.

Therefore, in light of the SSF Guidelines and the Draft National Fisheries Policy of 2020, this research study is relevant as it tries to focus on the social development and decent work empowering small-scale fishing communities, particularly in West Bengal. The study also analyses how the SSF Guidelines will contribute to poverty eradication and food security for sustainable small-scale fisheries.

1.1. Objective of the Study

The study aims to focus on the following key areas:

- To provide a report on the socio-economic status of the fishing community, especially the small-scale fishers, of West Bengal, India, considering the points put forward by the 2015 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).
- To analyse the different national- and state-level policies, schemes and legislations available and recently introduced for the social development and upliftment of fishing communities, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and Cyclone Amphan.
- To identify and address the different problems women fisherfolk have to face in West Bengal, especially due to the impact of Covid-19 and climate change, and what measures are being adopted for their welfare and development by state and non-state participants.
- To examine the significant role played by NGOs, civil societies and voluntary associations, especially the significant role played by Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (fisherfolk's organization), in mobilizing the community to form cooperatives and SHGs and organize training and capacity-building programmes.
- To elucidate how the above-mentioned policies contribute to better conservation and the sustainable use of freshwater, brackish water and marine and coastal biodiversity, as well how they help small-scale fisheries with sustainability.

1.2. Methodology

This research study is primarily based on secondary data. The following processes were adopted for data collection due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic:

- Review of the existing literature, including government documents, policies, statistical handbooks, global reports, books on fisheries and articles.
- Digital interviews through structured questionnaires (referring to 13 specific questions as provided by ICSF), through telephonic conversation, Google Meet, WhatsApp and emails.
- Visits to Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum's and Disha's offices to collect documents, important photos, etc.

1.3. Scope of the Study

In the context of the SSF Guidelines, this study tries to identify and analyse the position and status, including socio-economic, of the fishing sector and its population. It aims to develop an overview of sustainable fisheries (resources and management) in West Bengal. The findings and viable recommendations put forward in this study are expected to contribute towards poverty eradication and food security in sustainable small-scale fisheries, as well as towards the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biodiversity.

Small-scale fishing communities are a deprived, vulnerable and neglected section of society. Their basic needs, like housing, drinking water and decent work conditions, are being overlooked by society. Policies and schemes must be revised by the framers and thinkers of our country, especially in these challenging times. The needs of women fisherfolk should be addressed with sensitivity and care by legislators.

2. Socio-Economic Development of fishing Communities and Sustainable Fisheries in West Bengal

West Bengal is the only state in India where fish has been cultivated in every kind of water body—brackish water, sweet water, sewage water and marine water.

To improve the social and economic development of fishing communities, it is necessary to develop a sound National Fisheries Policy (NFP) framework, which should be based on the cardinal principles of equity and equality and adopt a people-centric and participatory approach. Besides the socio-economic development of small-scale fishers and the sustainable running of fisheries, the rights of these fisherfolk should be addressed in major policies. With all these objectives, this study would like to focus on the socio-economic development and sustainability of fisheries in West Bengal, particularly the struggle these communities have to face in the wake of the pandemic and Cyclone Amphan, which occurred in May, 2020.

2.1. Impact of Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan

2.2.1. Poverty eradication policies and programmes in fisheries and for fisherfolk communities in West Bengal, with special reference to the period of Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan

'Extreme poverty anywhere is a threat to human security everywhere.'—Kofi Annan, seventh secretary-general of the United Nations

India's primary goal is to eradicate poverty at large and have inclusive and sustainable development for all. The Government of India's mission to make a 'New India' by 2022 includes eradicating poverty and giving everyone a home. Poverty will be tackled by strengthening sectors like electricity, drinking water, health, education, etc. in villages. Special attention will be given to economic and social development.

The fisheries sector in India has a significant contribution towards the country's economic development, food security, nutritional security and foreign exchange. The sector contributed ₹1, 75,573 crore to the GDP (at current prices) during FY 2017–18 (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2020). According to the Handbook on Fisheries Statistics–2018, published by the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, India's fish production was pegged at 12.6 million tonnes in 2017–18.

Table 2.1: Top five states in fisheries production

| State/UTs | 2015-16 | | 2016-17 | | 2017-18 | | 2018-19 | | 2019-20 | |
|----------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| | Inland | Marine | Inland | Marine | Inland | Marine | Inland | Marine | Inland | Marine |
| Andhra Pradesh | 18.32 | 5.2 | 21.86 | 5.8 | 28.45 | 6.05 | 33.91 | 6 | 36.1 | 5.64 |
| Gujarat | 1.12 | 6.97 | 1.17 | 6.99 | 1.38 | 7.01 | 1.42 | 6.99 | 1.58 | 7.01 |
| Kerala | 2.11 | 5.17 | 1.61 | 4.31 | 1.89 | 4.84 | 1.92 | 6.09 | 2.05 | 4.75 |
| Tamil Nadu | 2.43 | 4.67 | 1.97 | 4.72 | 1.85 | 4.97 | 1.7 | 5.2 | 1.74 | 5.83 |
| West Bengal | 14.93 | 1.78 | 15.25 | 1.77 | 15.57 | 1.85 | 16.19 | 1.63 | 16.19 | 1.63 |

Source: Handbook of Fisheries Statistics, 2020

Table 2.2: Trend of Export of Fish and Fish Products: 2019-20

| Year | Quantity (Tonnes) | Value (₹ Crore) | US Dollar (\$: Million) | Unit value (Rs. / Tonnes) | Unit Value Index | Annual Growth Rate % | |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------|
| | | | | | | Quantity | Value |
| 2010-11 | 8,13,090.85 | 1,29,01.47 | 2,856.92 | 1,58,671.89 | 6,367.92 | 19.85 | 28.39 |
| 2011-12 | 8,62,021.41 | 1,65,97.23 | 3,508.45 | 1,92,538.46 | 7,727.08 | 6.02 | 28.65 |
| 2012-13 | 9,28,214.67 | 18,856.26 | 3,511.67 | 2,03,145.42 | 8,152.76 | 7.68 | 13.61 |
| 2013-14 | 9,83,755.56 | 30,213.26 | 5,007.70 | 3,07,121.60 | 12,325.60 | 5.98 | 60.23 |
| 2014-15 | 10,51,243.49 | 33,441.61 | 5,511.12 | 3,18,114.75 | 12,766.79 | 6.86 | 10.69 |
| 2015-16 | 9,45,891.90 | 30,420.83 | 4,687.94 | 3,21,609.99 | 12,907.06 | -10.02 | -9.03 |
| 2016-17 | 11,34,948.09 | 37,870.90 | 5,777.61 | 3,33,679.62 | 13,391.45 | 19.99 | 24.49 |
| 2017-18 | 13,77,243.70 | 45,106.89 | 7,081.55 | 3,27,515.69 | 13,144.07 | 21.35 | 19.11 |
| 2018-19 | 13,92,558.89 | 46,589.37 | 6,728.50 | 3,34,559.46 | 13,426.76 | 1.11 | 3.29 |
| 2019-20 | 12,89,650.90 | 46,662.85 | 6,678.69 | 3,61,825.42 | 14,521.01 | -7.39 | 0.16 |

Source: Marine Products Export Development Authority, Kochi; Handbook of Fisheries Statistics, 2020

About 3,80,138 people (as per the 2010 census) are directly or indirectly involved in fisheries or fishery activities in West Bengal, and around 50 percent are below the poverty line (as per the Marine Census Report, 2010). Th.

e various schemes and programmes being implemented by the central and state government for the socio-economic development of fisherfolk in West Bengal have been categorized during this study into two: i) general schemes, policies and programmes that are benefitting the community and ii) special schemes and relief measures carried out during the Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan period. They have been stated in the table below

Table 2.3: General schemes available for the fishing communities of West Bengal

| Sl. No | Schemes | Sponsoring authority | Nature of support | Community benefit |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | Jago (General scheme) | State government | ₹5000 crore to 10 lakh SHGs | The scheme is to support 10 lakh SHGs, as each SHG is composed of 10 women. West Bengal has around 9.69 lakh SHGs. |
| 2 | Savings cum relief | State government | ----- ----- | Was active till 2015 but presently this scheme is not working. |

Table 2.4: Schemes and policies introduced and implemented during Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan for fisherfolk in West Bengal

| Sl. No | Scheme | Sponsoring authority | Nature of support | Community benefit |
|--------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Khadya Surakha Scheme (Food Security) | Central government | Free supply of food grains | 5 kg rice, wheat per head, 1 kg pulses per head |
| 2 | Khadya Surakha Scheme (Food Security) | State government | Free supply of food grains | 2 kg rice, wheat per head |

| Sl. No | Scheme | Sponsoring authority | Nature of support | Community benefit |
|--------|--|----------------------|--|---|
| 3 | Amphan Cyclone Relief Operations | Central government | 1000 crores | Infrastructural and rehabilitation work |
| 4 | Amphan Cyclone Relief Operations | State government | 6250 Crore | Kin of anyone killed in the cyclone received ₹2.5 lakh, the badly injured got ₹50,000 and those with minor injuries, ₹25,000. |
| 5 | Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) | Central government | Free refill of LPG gas cylinder for three months during the pandemic (April–June 2020) for Ujjwala card holders | 78.47 lakh beneficiaries received 14.2 kg LPG cylinders |
| 6 | Women Jan Dhan Yojana | Central government | ₹500 was provided for three months (April–June 2020) to women Jan Dhan account holders | Direct benefit transfer |
| 7 | Joy Johar Bandhu Prakash Scheme (for SC/ST categories) | State government | ₹1000 per head | Incentives will be provided to SCs and STs, including fisherfolk, during Covid-19 |
| 8 | POSHAN Abhiyan | Central government | Planting of nutrition gardens | In a few districts of West Bengal, nutrition gardens were set up with the mission of reducing malnutrition in children and women. |
| 9 | Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) | Central government | Free grocery distribution for migrant workers who returned from other states, under the Public Distribution System | 5 kg rice and 1 kg pulses, along with a few other grocery items, were provided to migrants, including migrant fish workers. |

2.1.2. Employment policies and programmes in fisheries and for fisherfolk communities in West Bengal, with special reference to the period of Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan

Employment in the fishing community in West Bengal ranges from the capture and culture of fish from the sea and inland waters to backyard pond management, fabrication of fishing gear, breeding, processing, marketing, and export and import of fish. However, with the changes brought on by Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan, a tide of unemployment has emerged. The worst affected are women fishworkers, especially those who are single or widowed.

Though some general employment policies were implemented by the central and state government, no fisherfolk-specific policies were introduced. The policies that are in existence are given below.

Table 2.5: Employment policies for fishing communities by the central and state government

| Sl.No | Scheme | Sponsoring authority | Nature of support | Status of scheme |
|-------|--|----------------------|---|---|
| 1 | MGNREGA | Central government | 100 days work | Fisherfolk are engaged in this programme in many districts. Currently, the wage per day is ₹204. |
| 2 | Karma Sathi Prakaalpa during Covid | State government | ₹2 lakh each | Unemployed youth will be given ₹2 lakh per head for any project-based work. The registration process is currently underway. |
| 3 | Prochesta Prokolpo during Covid | State government | Providing MGNREGA cards | All migrant labourers are being registered and given MGNREGA cards. |
| 4 | Sneher Paras during lockdown and Covid | State government | | |
| 5 | Krishak Bandhu | State government | If a farmer has land, he/she will be given a maximum of ₹5000 and a minimum of ₹2000 at a time. | This policy is newly declared and yet to begin. Fish farmers are also opting for this scheme. |
| 6 | Unorganized Workers Social Security Scheme | State government | | This policy has been declared but not yet implemented. |

2.1.3. Policies on decent work, focusing on working conditions in fishing and fish-processing activities, marine and inland, to benefit all workers, including migrants, and policies being adapted to address the impact of Covid-19

Fishing communities are among the most neglected and marginalized in our society. They work extremely hazardous circumstances. For example, the fisherfolk of the Sundarbans work in dense forests, where they are often attacked by tigers or crocodiles. During Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, the number of fishermen who died due to tiger attacks went up. Besides selling fish in the market, on open streets and without shade, a lack of toilet facilities and unhygienic working environments are common for fishworkers. The working conditions for women fishworkers are even more challenging. There are no policies that specifically address the working conditions of fisherfolk. However, the table below includes a few infrastructural developments that have taken place in West Bengal after several demands and struggles by fishing communities, as well as some social welfare schemes and policies available for fisherfolk, with special reference to Covid-19.

Table 2.6: Policies on decent work conditions

| Sl. No | Policy | Facilities provided/to be provided | Sponsoring authority | Status |
|--------|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 1 | Marine Fishing Regulation Act | Safety measure kits, including life jackets, radios and mobiles | Department of Fisheries, state government | Not uniformly provided |
| 2 | Social Welfare Schemes | Community toilets in fish landing centres, solar lights, drinking water facilities | Department of Fisheries, state government | Available in almost all 66 landing centres |
| 3 | Social Welfare Schemes | Provision of shade in markets | Department of Fisheries, state government | Not covered in all fish markets |
| 4 | Social Welfare Measures | Distribution of fishing nets, handis and ice boxes | Department of Fisheries, state government | As of 2019, only eight women have received |

Table 2.7: Social insurance and security-related policies

| Sl. No | Policy | Nature of support | Sponsoring authority | Status |
|--------|--|--|----------------------|--|
| 1 | West Bengal Accident Insurance (mainly in seas or forests) | ₹2 lakhs | State government | Was available but has not been active for the last four months. |
| 2 | Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana | ₹12 annually | Central government | Accident coverage up to ₹2 lakhs |
| 3 | Asangathit Shramikder | ₹25 was the beneficiary contribution and ₹30 was contributed by the state. | State government | During Covid-19, the entire ₹55 rupees was provided by the government. |

2.1.4. Social inclusion policies for men, women, children and youth, indigenous peoples and their communities, civil society, fishing communities, and migrant fishers and fishworkers and policies preventing discrimination during Covid-19

Apart from capital exclusion, fishing communities in India and across the world are socially excluded. In West Bengal, another important factor that dominates the fishing community is the caste system. In northern Bengal fishing areas, this is not as prevalent, but in southern Bengal, the domination of lower castes by higher castes is very evident. The important fishing castes in southern Bengal include Bor, Jalia Kaibarta, Chasi Kaibarta and Mahishya Kaibarta. Around 70 % of the population is Hindu and 30 percent is Muslim.

Recently, many important policies have been drafted, like the NIFAP and NPMF, but they fail to address the social and economic benefits for small-scale fishing communities. The rights of fisherwomen and children are also not very clearly addressed. During Covid-19, West Bengal has seen no clear and specific policies for the social upliftment of fishing communities. They have received all the benefits and social support that have been declared in general for those below the poverty line.

The following social welfare schemes were available in the past few years but are currently unavailable due to Covid-19.

Table 2.8: Social welfare schemes

| Scheme | Nature and benefits | Status | Remarks |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Old Age Pension | Monthly pension of ₹300 | Not available to fishers due to panchayat favouritism | Old fishers should be enlisted. |
| Accident Insurance Coverage | Full: ₹30,000 from block Administration and ₹50,000 from beneficiaries Partial: ₹15,000–25,000 | Not effective | The mechanism should be made easily operable and effective. |
| Relief cum Savings | ₹600 per year from beneficiary and ₹600 per year from the government. Total return ₹1200 per year. Presently, 7,000 beneficiaries in East Medinipur and 3,000 in South 24 Parganas avail of this scheme. | Inadequate | Both extension in number and enhancement in amount is needed. |
| Medical Assistance | First aid kits, bleaching powder, halogen tablets, phenyl, ORS | Very inadequate | More local Primary Health Centres, ambulance services and female medical attendants are needed. |
| Medical Insurance | Provision of medical treatment | Does not exist | This is needed. |

| Scheme | Nature and benefits | Status | Remarks |
|--|--|---|--|
| Plantation/ Social Forestry | For income generation and environmental protection | Yet to be made available to fishers in general | It is up to the Forest Dept. to take up the matter. |
| Government-Supported Marine Fishing Cooperatives for Women Fisherfolk | Subsidies for boats, fish seeds and nets | Does not exist. The co-operatives that do exist are either run by NGOs or are SHGs. | Government co-operatives should also exist. |
| Provision of Working Capital | Protection from putting-out system | Yet to be made available | The government should arrange this with banks through khoti (fish landing centre) committees. |
| Crèche and Education Schemes | Crèche needed for children of working fisherwomen. Schools needed for children of fisher families. | No crèches. The children of fishworkers who have to be taken with their parents during the full fishing period miss out on schooling. A school temporarily functioned, from 2001–2007, but closed due to the government not paying the teachers their salaries on time. | The issue of crèches and schools should be taken up seriously by the government, NGOs and local government institutions. |

In view of the above-mentioned policies and their availability or lack thereof, fishworkers organizations are demanding a separate scheme from the government that will be exclusively for them. Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum in West Bengal and their women's wing have already asked for their demands to be met by the minister in charge, Chandranath Sinha, in early 2020. The women fishworkers demanded a special package named Matsyakanya.

2.1.5. Policies on occupational health and safety and sexual and reproductive health of fishing communities, indigenous peoples, local communities and migrant fishers and policies of assistance during Covid-19

Fishworkers are covered under general health policies that are either introduced or implemented by central and state governments. Despite several meetings with the government by fishworkers organizations, no special health schemes and policies exist for them. The health scheme that is available is given below.

Table 2.9: Health schemes available for fishing communities

| Sl. No | Policy | Nature of support | Sponsoring authority | Status |
|--------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1 | Swastha Sathi Card | ₹5 lakh coverage | State government | There was earlier a provision of ₹2 lakhs. During Covid-19, the amount of coverage has been increased, as declared by the state government. Registration is ongoing. |

2.1.6. Literacy and education policies for fishing communities in West Bengal

Education is an important tool for social development. Low literacy rates and educational disadvantages in traditional fishing communities are barriers to many aspects of development in West Bengal. As per the statistical report of a research committee literacy rates among the population over seven years of age sat at 78 percent, with women's literacy rates (79.6 percent) being higher than those of men (76.6 percent). Community values, marginalization, economic vulnerability, migration, child labour in fishing activities and domestic responsibilities often hinder literacy in fishing communities. However, there are a few policies and schemes on education and children's right to education that are being adopted and implemented by the government.

Table 2.10: Policies and schemes on education and children's right to education

| Sl. No | Policy | Nature of support | Sponsoring authority | Status |
|--------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Kanyashree | ₹25,000 for a one-time grant under K2 and ₹750 and ₹1000 under K1. | Government of West Bengal | A popular women's empowerment policy for the education of girls, accepted by the United Nations. |
| 2 | Shikhashree | Book grant and maintenance grant | State government | The objective of the scheme is to provide financial assistance to SC students of classes V to VIII to improve their participation in pre-matric stages and minimize the incidence of drop-out, especially that of girls. |
| 3 | Sabooj Sathi | Distribution of bicycles to school students | State government | In 2015–2016, a scheme was announced for the distribution of bicycles to an estimated 40 lakh students of classes IX to XII in government and government-aided schools and madrasahs in the state. |
| 4 | Cooked Mid-Day Meal Project | Cooked meal served to primary and secondary school students | Central and state government | This is a flagship programme of the state. Children in fishing communities are also getting the cooked mid-day meal, and this service was continued during lockdown, by having the food delivered to the children's homes. |

| Sl. No | Policy | Nature of support | Sponsoring authority | Status |
|--------|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| 5 | Schools in Fish Landing Centres | Schools established in the name of the late Harekrishna Debnath | Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum | These schools, found in Sagar Block, Diamond Harbour, are especially for the free education of children from fishing communities. |
| 6 | Child Sponsorship Project | Providing free books and materials for art, music and dance education to children from fishing communities | Action Aid and DMF, West Bengal | Around 850 children are enrolled in this project in Purba Medinipur. |

Source: Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum

2.1.7. Housing policies in West Bengal targeting fishing communities

With a view to providing free shelter to the poor, the Housing Department of the Government of West Bengal, under the schemes Gitanjali and Amar Thikana, aimed to construct houses. This scheme is being implemented in rural areas and non-municipal urban areas in coordination with seven other government departments.

- a) Fisheries Department
- b) Backward Classes Welfare Department
- c) Minority Affairs and Madrasah Education Department
- d) Forest Department
- e) Sundarban Affairs Department
- f) Paschimanchal Unnayan Affairs Department

₹1.23 lakh is to be given to fisherfolk residing in non-coastal areas by the Department of Fisheries, but fisherfolk have not been availing this scheme for the past few years. Another important scheme available under the housing policy is Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, which was introduced in 2016 and was implemented jointly by the central and state government. This scheme is only for the economically weaker sections of society. PMAY gives preference to women who are heads of the family to be the owner or co-owner of the house. It is estimated that around 300 fishing families in different districts of West Bengal have successfully used this scheme.

2.1.8. Sanitation, drinking water and energy policies available for fishing communities in West Bengal

The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS), Government of India, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), supported the Government of West Bengal in improving drinking water in its arsenic- and fluoride-affected districts, under its National Drinking Water Development Program. Parallely, the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED) of West Bengal requested financing support from ADB to achieve its Vision 2020 of 'providing safe, reliable and adequate drinking water to all its citizens'. This West Bengal Drinking Water Sector Improvement Project (WBDWSIP) aims to provide safe, reliable and continuous drinking water as per the Government of India's standard to about 6 million people in the arsenic-, fluoride- and salinity-affected areas of North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur and Bankura.

Table 2.11: Scheduled Tribes population in West Bengal Drinking Water Sector Improvement Project districts

| District | Scheduled Tribe population | Total population | (%) |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------|------|
| West Bengal | 5,296,953 | 91,347,736 | 5.8 |
| North 24 Parganas | 264,597 | 5,019,553 | 5.3 |
| South 24 Parganas | 96,976 | 7,054,540 | 1.4 |
| Bankura | 368,690 | 3,362,420 | 11.0 |
| Purba Medinipur | 27,952 | 4,649,436 | 0.6 |

Source: 2011 Census of India

Fishing community families are also included under this project. Though a lack of acceptable sanitation still exists in the state, there are now drinking water facilities and solar lamps in all the fish landing centres in West Bengal.

2.1.9. Climate change policies for inland and marine fisheries

West Bengal is the most climatically vulnerable and cyclone-prone Indian state. The most devastation took place with three consecutive cyclones that struck the Bay of Bengal region and drastically altered the coast—Fani in 2019, Bulbul in 2019 and Amphan in 2020. The lives and livelihoods of both marine and inland fishing communities have been severely affected. There are no specific schemes or policies for the fishers and fishworkers to cope with these disasters. Along with this, the tourism projects continuing on the coast and the construction of hotels are also responsible for environmental degradation and climatic changes in West Bengal.

2.1.10. Role of cooperatives, trade unions and other institutions working for the welfare of fishing communities, especially during Covid-19

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum, a registered trade union body, plays an active role in mobilizing the fishing community at large. In this endeavour, there are a few important NGOs, civil societies, trusts and voluntary associations that have played an important role in the socio-economic development and welfare of fishing communities. They include Action Aid, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers, Oak Foundation, Disha, Medinipur Chhatrasamaj and Midnapore.in.

During Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan, all the above-mentioned organizations actively supported poor, homeless or workless fisherfolk by distributing grocery items, tarpaulins (tirpal), sanitation kits and masks, and ice boxes, providing fingerlings and chicks as an alternative support for livelihood, and giving cash to SHGs in different blocks of fishing communities so they could start new businesses.

One major initiative taken by most of the NGOs and civil society bodies is protecting fisherwomen, especially those who are old, single or widowed, who rely on themselves for income. Food and groceries were provided to them, along with basic welfare schemes announced by the government. Another noteworthy activity of DMF was supporting the widows of those who had been killed by tigers and providing compensation of ₹2 lakhs from the government.

In West Bengal there are not many cooperatives run by fishing communities. There are a few fish vendor cooperatives in Purba Medinipur, but they are not particularly strong or active. This is due to exploitation by moneylenders and a lack of financial support from the government. One cooperative that does run is the fisherwomen-led Maa Sarada Mahila Marine Fisherwomen Cooperative, established in 1991, which has roughly 400 members. In two major coastal districts—Purba Medinipur and South 24 Parganas—there are many fisherwomen-run SHGs.

Each SHG consists of 10 members. They are very active and are working for the welfare of fishing communities, creating small livelihood ventures like fish farming in small ponds by taking leases and rearing livestock.

In India, cooperatives have been successfully implemented in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra. However, they are mainly run by male fisherfolk. In West Bengal, the performance of cooperatives, SHGs and associations of fisherfolk is poor.

2.1.11. Gender empowerment and gender justice

The contribution of women fishworkers in India's fisheries sector has been equal to, if not more than, that of men. Fishing, fish farming, fish vending, fish drying and sorting, net making and repairing—women are involved in almost every stage. In West Bengal a large section of small-scale fishers is made up of women. Yet they are often socially and economically disadvantaged, neglected and discriminated against. They have either limited or no access to justice and are always confined within their community, dominated and subdued by their male counterparts. In West Bengal women fishworkers are less vocal and aware of their rights. They are highly discriminated against when it comes to receiving benefits or opportunities at the local, state or central level.

Table 2.12: Occupation profile of fishing communities in West Bengal

| Marketing | | Making / repairing nets | | Curing/ processing | | Peeling | | Labour | | Fishers | | Others* | |
|-----------|------|-------------------------|--------|--------------------|-------|---------|------|--------|-------|---------|---|---------|----|
| M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 4,745 | 3075 | 5,241 | 13,178 | 420 | 2,123 | 478 | 1054 | 12,789 | 3,388 | | | 700 | 85 |

*Includes persons engaged in auctioning, ice breaking, collection of bivalves, collection of other shells, collection of seaweed, collection of ornamental fish, etc.

Source: Marine Census Report of India, 2010

2.1.12. Role of Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum Women's Wing

For Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), organizing women fishworkers and building up their leadership in the organization has been a difficult task. It was suggested that a separate platform be formed for women fishworkers to discuss their problems, draw up their demands and develop leadership. DMF held three workshops to materialize this suggestion. The first, in March 2016, was to draw up the demands of different categories of women fishworkers. The second, organized in April 2017, addressed the necessity of women fishworkers' organizations and their leadership development. June 2017 saw the third and final workshop, held to finalize demands, identify the leadership, form a collective and decide upon a road map for the future.

DMF Women's Wing drew up a charter of demands and has already moved the government with two demands to the Fisheries Minister of West Bengal. The demand for compensation to and rehabilitation of tiger widows was raised in particular. The Minister accepted the demands on principle and promised to meet them gradually, with at least 20 percent in the beginning. However, virtually nothing has been done. DMF Women's Wing held a press conference at the Kolkata Press Club to highlight the plight of tiger widows and joined their male counterparts in a roadblock and demands to the Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine), Diamond Harbour. Efforts are being taken to collectivize women fishworkers in areas where they have a majority. The following activities have been carried out by the women's wing of DMF:

- Put forward the demands to the Minister in Charge, Fisheries Department
- Submitted several demands at block level

- Developing block-level committees and making women fishworkers aware of their rights and identities
- Participating in different national and international workshops, like one organized by ICSF in Chennai that focused on mainstreaming gender in fisheries
- Actively mobilizing women Fishworkers

Demands

The women fisherfolk of West Bengal are asking for the following demands to be met by the government:

- Preparing a gender-segregated database to evaluate the role of women fishworkers
- Applying the principle of gender equity to protect and assess women's and men's work in fisheries
- Preparing and implementing women-specific schemes for fishworkers
- Providing preference to women fishworkers in all general programmes and schemes for fishworkers

Apart from the above, DMF puts forward specific demands on behalf of women fishworkers in general and by category, presented in Table 2.13.

Support and assistance provided by different organizations and associations during Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan

During Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan, organizations like Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum, Disha, Oak Foundation, Action Aid, ICSF, Medinipur Chhatrasamaj and Midnapore.in played remarkable roles in relief and welfare work for fisherfolk communities in West Bengal. The following relief measures were undertaken in different blocks of the fishing community, like Howrah, Purba and Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, South and North 24 Parganas, the Sundarbans area and Murshidabad.

1. Groceries and ration items were given to fisherwomen residing in the above-mentioned areas. Around 2000–2500 fisherfolk families received this relief grant. Around 50 percent who benefitted from this grant were women.
2. ₹4000 were distributed to around 150 individuals or SHGs each to revive their livelihoods or for fish farming or purchasing chicks.
3. In the above-mentioned areas, 5 kg of fish or chicks were also given to around 700 fisherfolk to support their livelihoods. Of these 700, 300 were women.
4. Ice boxes and nets were provided to those in need.
5. Sanitizer, masks and soap were provided to most of the fisherfolk in all the districts.
6. Two tiger widows received ₹1 lakh each as compensation from the government.
7. Due to Amphan, many houses were destroyed. In an around 7 khotis (fish landing centres) 500 tarpaulins (tirpals) were distributed.

Table 2.13: Demands of women fisherfolk in West Bengal

| S. No. | General women fishworkers are to be provided with | Women fish vendors are to be provided with | Women fishers are to be provided with | Women net makers and repairers are to be provided with | Women fish farmers are to be provided with | Women fish sorters and dryers are to be provided with |
|--------|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| 1 | Fisher's identity cards in recognition of their occupational dignity | Bank loans at low interest to free them from being fleeced by money lenders and fish depot owners | Priority in issuing boat registrations and licenses | Financial assistance for self-employment in net making and repairing | Financial support for fish farming | Financial assistance for self-employment in fish sorting and drying |
| 2 | Priority access to housing schemes for fisherfolk | Ladies toilets and drinking water at whole-sale markets and fish landing centres | Financial support for catching crabs and fish | Provision for independent business opportunities through cooperatives, SHGs or production groups | Priority to get government water bodies on lease with relaxation in lease rents and terms | Provision for independent business opportunities through cooperatives, SHGs or production groups |
| 3 | Health and life insurance coverage | Transport facilities from whole-sale markets and fish landing centres to fish markets vending areas | Financial assistance for boats and nets | Yarn and machines for net making at subsidised rates | Security of lease and insurance coverage of water bodies | Cemented platforms for fish sorting and drying, storeroom and office space |
| 4 | Old age and infirm pension | Insulated boxes | The right to protect natural fisheries and to fish in all natural waters, including in protected areas | Shaded platforms with drinking water, toilets, storage and office space for net making and repairing | Support for pond cleaning, quality seeds and feed in fish farming | Modern solar fish drying machines with electrical alternatives |
| 5 | Maternity and childcare support | Modern weighing machines | Insulated boxes | | | Light, rest room, crèche, drinking water and toilets at fish landing centres |

| S. No. | General women fishworkers are to be provided with | Women fish vendors are to be provided with | Women fishers are to be provided with | Women net makers and repairers are to be provided with | Women fish farmers are to be provided with | Women fish sorters and dryers are to be provided with |
|--------|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| 6 | Childcare centres in the workplace | Markets with all facilities like concrete platform, shade, light, drinking water, ladies and general toilets, drainage, sufficient space for fish selling, storing and passage. | Arrangements to sell their catch at fair prices with proper market linkage | | | Technical and other assistance for making and selling different products through fish processing |
| 7 | Education support for children of women fishworkers | Priority to have space for vending fish in markets | | | | |
| 8 | Savings cum relief scheme along with adequate livelihood support during the fishing ban period | Protection from extortionists and money lenders | | | | |
| 9 | Assistance to form and run cooperative societies of women fishworkers | | | | | |
| 10 | Pension for all fishing community widows, including tiger widows | | | | | |

1. Fisherwomen whose homes were destroyed by Amphan were also financially supported to repair their houses.
2. Around 23 women received tirpals and grocery items through Tangrachar Matsyajibi Forum, a part of DMF.
3. Medinipur Chhatrasamaj and the DMF women's wing distributed tirpals and amla saplings to the fisherwomen in Medinipur and Jhargram.
4. With the help of Midnapore.in, 12 widows were given rice, dal, soyabeans, oil, potatoes, onions and a few other grocery items.
5. 34 fish vendors were given chicks to revive their alternative livelihoods in Contai, Purba Medinipur. Ice boxes were also provided to a few women fish vendors.

The contribution of women is crucial to the management and sustainability of the sector. With this aim, India's 2017 National Policy on Marine Fisheries (NPMF) and 2018 Draft National Policy on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture (NIFAP) provide guidance for mainstreaming gender equity in inland and marine fisheries and aquaculture value chains. The policies advocate for increasing the participation of women in decision-making, strengthening women's associations and cooperatives, providing financial support schemes for women, improving working conditions for women along the fisheries value chain, and enhancing women's leadership capacities. However, the tools adopted to empower women fishworkers as important stakeholders in fisheries management and their tenure rights, trade and adaptation to climate change are still being neglected in most Indian states. In West Bengal the gender discrimination against fisherwomen is strongly visible in the following areas:

- Inadequate infrastructure is provided in the landing centres as well as in the market. For example, no clean vending spaces are allotted for female vendors.
- Wage discrimination is high between male and female fishworkers.
- Fisherwomen face exploitation by moneylenders as they have to repay loans with high interest rates and, therefore, are in huge debt.
- Women harvesting crabs and other species have no rights to work in the protected areas of the Sundarbans. They also face harassment and abuse when fishing in these areas.
- There are no specific women-centric policies by the government at the central or state levels, so women fish vendors are unable to compete with their male counterparts. For example, the women vendors in Medinipur have to travel alongside men while collecting fish from landing centres and are often harassed.

Since most of the women in West Bengal in this sector are in small-scale fisheries, the SSF Guidelines, which believe in the principle of gender equality and equity, need to be enacted.

2.1.13. Legislations and schemes for Fishers and Fishworkers in West Bengal with special reference to Covid -19 period.

'Manage, protect, enhance and develop fisheries and aquaculture in the State and generate employment and improve livelihood, nutritional, socio-economic status, safety and welfare of the fishers through viable and sustainable eco-friendly strategies and programmes.'—West Bengal Fisheries Policy, 2015

Fisheries is a state subject. Therefore, the primary responsibility of developing this sector lies with the state government. This sector is known as the sunrise sector of the country. Fisheries not only contribute to economic development and foreign exchange but also provide livelihoods and food security to millions of people. The Government of India has taken several important initiatives for

the overall economic development of the country, but they have failed to cater to the social and economic development of fishing communities. With the aim of enhancing food and nutrition security, tripling foreign exports by 2020, with a focus on benefits flow to fishers and fish farmers, the Integrated National Fisheries Action Plan 2016 was drawn up. The central and state policies and legislations that are being framed for the fisherfolk community in India and specifically for West Bengal are discussed below.

The Blue Revolution, or the Neel Kranti Mission, emerged as an umbrella scheme of the West Bengal Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries. It was established by restructuring all the existing schemes. The restructured scheme focuses on the development and management of fisheries, covering inland fisheries, aquaculture, marine fisheries including deep sea fishing, mariculture and all activities undertaken by the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB).

Another goal was to increase the share of Indian fisheries in the export area, doubling the income of fishers and fish farmers with inclusive participation of the socio-economically weaker sections and ensuring environmental sustainability.

- i) The National Fisheries Policy 2020:** This was drafted merging three existing policies, namely:
- a. National Policy on Marine Fisheries, 2017 (NPMF)
 - b. Draft National Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy (NIFAP)
 - c. Draft National Mariculture Policy (NMP)

Post-harvest elements have also been integrated into the draft policy. The vision of the National Fisheries Policy 2020 is to develop an ecologically healthy, economically viable and socially inclusive fisheries sector. It also aims to provide food and nutritional security to the country in a sustainable manner. The policy's mission is to develop, manage, regulate and conserve fisheries resources. It will ensure productive integration with other economic sectors, such as agriculture, coastal area development and eco-tourism, to meet the SDGs.

- ii) Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) under Atmanirbhar Bharat Covid-19 Relief Package:** This scheme by the Government of India will provide financial assistance for traditional fishers, including fish workers, for various activities, including livelihood and nutritional support for socio-economically backward active traditional fishers' families during the fishing ban/lean period.
- iii) Scheme for production of big-sized fish in large water bodies under NMPS:** The State of West Bengal is enriched with beel fisheries, sewage-fed fisheries having variable sizes that are mostly under the administrative control of the state government. These water bodies offer immense scope for the cultivation of big-sized fish. As per the Rastriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) guideline, the National Mission for Protein Supplements (NMPS) aims to produce big fish with the application of partial-formulated artificial feed. This will involve fisherfolk cooperatives, SHGs and fish production groups as beneficiaries, uplifting their economic condition and effectively demonstrating the improved technology for production in the sector.
- iv) National Scheme of Welfare of Fishermen:** This is a centrally sponsored scheme created for all fisherfolk who are registered with the state or UT government. They will receive ₹50,000 worth of insurance on death or permanent disability. An additional ₹25,000 is also allocated in case of partial disability. This scheme also aims to provide financial assistance to fishers for the construction of homes, a community hall for recreation and a common place to work and the installation of tube-wells for drinking water. There is a savings cum relief component for assistance during the lean period.

The West Bengal State Fisheries Department has also introduced several welfare measure schemes for poor, deprived and marginalized fisherfolk in general, but no specific schemes have been introduced for women fisherfolk. The important schemes are:

- i) **Old age pension scheme:** This scheme is for old and infirm fisherfolk. As of 2018–19, 8500 fishermen have been enrolled under this scheme and are getting a pension of ₹1,000 per month.
- ii) **Accident insurance:** This scheme is under the Fishermen's Group Personal Insurance Scheme, where financial assistance of ₹2 lakh is provided to the family members of deceased or untraceable fishermen, and ₹1 lakh to those of permanently disabled fishermen. As of 2017–2018, about 2.17 lakh fishermen have been covered.
- iii) **Identity facilitation:** Biometric identity cards are being issued by the government to marine fisherfolk; about 2.47 lakh identity cards have already been issued. Marine fishing vessels are being registered under the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 (for mechanized boats) and the West Bengal Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1993 (for non-mechanized boats).
- iv) **Infrastructural facilities in fish landing centres:** There are 66 khotis, or fish landing centres, in West Bengal. These khotis are mainly located in Contai, Purba Medinipur, and the Diamond Harbour area of South 24 Parganas. The financial assistance provided by the state government to maintain the khotis covers wages for khoti attendants and sweepers, the development of khuti infrastructure like link roads, submersible pumps, solar lights, fish-drying platforms and bamboo structures, the supply of hygienic materials and small equipment, and the repair of tube-wells.
- v) **Distress alert:** For the safety and security of fisherfolk, the government has taken up a programme for the free distribution of distress alert transmitters (DAT) to be fitted on vessels. A total of 3656 DATs have been distributed till now.
- vi) **Brackish water fishery:** The government provides substantial aid to increase the production of fish in regions of brackish water, mainly found in the Sundarbans delta.
- vii) **Fish vendors welfare schemes:** In 2018, 2230 jal-hundis were distributed to inland and marine fisherfolk, as well as among fisherfolk cooperative societies. Bicycles fitted with insulated boxes were given to 2168 fisherfolk.

Table 2.14: Fisheries Schemes in West Bengal

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Neel Kranti Mission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of inland fisheries and aquaculture Development of marine fisheries infrastructure and post-harvest operations Strengthening of database in fisheries Institutional arrangement for fisheries sector Monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) | <p>Inland Fisheries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of fingerlings Development of small fish markets Construction of eco and portable hatcheries Development of reservoir fisheries, sewage-fed fisheries and air breathing fish culture Development of harbours |
|--|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana:</p> <p>Launched by the National Development Council (NDC) on 29 May 2007, this scheme was formulated for agricultural development.</p> | <p>Marine Fisheries:</p> <p>Development of marine fisheries, infrastructure and post-harvest operation</p> <p>Development of fish processing, preservation and marketing</p> <p>Focus on fisherfolk safety</p> |
| <p>National Cooperative Development Corporation:</p> <p>It is engaged in the promotion and development of cooperatives in agricultural and rural activities.</p> | <p>Other Programmes:</p> <p>Training for fish farmers and unemployed fishers</p> <p>Managerial subsidy grants for fisherfolk cooperatives</p> <p>Rural electrification work in fishing villages</p> <p>Strengthening of database</p> |
| <p>National Fisheries Development Board:</p> <p>It was established in 2006 to enhance fish production and productivity in the country and to coordinate fishery development in a holistic manner.</p> | |

It is clear that all these policies and schemes are meant for the welfare and upliftment of fisheries and the fishing community. However, very few actually receive benefits and allowances. Many of the benefits end up being reaped by non-fishing communities. There are no effective institutions for the poor to access justice. There are state human rights commissions and women's commissions, but they are passive in their role in resolving grievances for this sector. Poor fisherfolk can only raise complaints at khoti committee meetings or at the block-level meetings conducted by their trade union organizations. The traditional rights of fishing communities and traditional institutions need to be recognized in this context to improve the legitimacy of governance institutions.

3. Findings and Recommendations

West Bengal is endowed with rich natural resources, with a wide variety of water bodies in which both capture and culture fishing takes place. Around 6 million workers, including fishers, fish vendors, fish farmers, fish processing workers, boat and net repair workers, sorters and dryers, are engaged in pre- and post-harvest fisheries in the state. In this workforce, around 50 percent are women fishers whose livelihoods are dependent on fisheries. Since 1961, India's per capita fish consumption has more than trebled. Presently, around 60 percent of India's population consumes fish. Fisheries' contribution to the GDP is around ₹1,18,000 crores. Fish production jumped in the last six decades from 0.75 million tonnes in 1950–51 to 10.16 million tonnes in 2014–15. The annual per capita consumption of fish for the entire population is estimated at 5–6 kg, whereas for the fish-eating population it is found to be 8–9 kg, a poor 50 percent of global rates. Today, India is the second-largest fish producer in the world, with a production of 13.7 million metric tonnes in 2018–19. West Bengal fisheries play an important role in making India achieve this position in the global market. Due to over-exploitative, destructive and mechanized fishing practices, the state's resources are under tremendous pressure. Indiscriminate encroachment, pollution and the excessive use of water are killing our coastal and inland water bodies. Good fish needs good water. Small-scale and traditional fishing communities are the primary stakeholders who are the custodians of these natural water bodies, and they strive to maintain, protect and conserve the water bodies and fish resources. As Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu said, environmentally friendly aquaculture can serve as a vehicle for rural development and food security for the rural masses, considering the substantial contribution aquaculture makes towards socio-economic development.

Unfortunately, small, traditional and impoverished fishers and fish farmers are witnessing policy conflicts. Thousands of these fisherfolk have been struggling to protect their livelihoods and water bodies, and are being driven out of lands falling within protected areas, like wildlife sanctuaries and reserves in West Bengal.

The key recommendations put forward by fisherfolk communities, especially small-scale fishers, in West Bengal are described in Table 3.1.

Further, the fishing sector in West Bengal and the huge resources of water bodies are under severe stress. Rivers are poisoned with high levels of pollution. The diversion of water from rivers is harming their ecological flow. Wetlands, lakes and ponds are being encroached upon and filled up by industries and housing. Poor watershed management in catchment areas is cutting down the sources of water for rivers, lakes and wetlands. Natural storm water drainage is obstructed by the construction of roads, railway tracks and real estate, thus subjecting several ponds to intermittent overflow. Run-off from chemical agriculture is destroying the fish resources of wetlands and paddy fields. Thus, thousands of fishworkers along with the tiger widows of West Bengal put forward a 21-point charter of demands, which was led by DMF. The 21-point charter included a number of demands as given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.1: Key recommendations

| Sl. No. | Category | Recommendations | Activities undertaken in West Bengal |
|---------|---|---|---|
| 1 | Small and traditional fishing communities' control over resources like land, water, forests, fish, commons and livelihoods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation of Forest Rights Act in the Sundarbans <input type="checkbox"/> Right to fish in Sundarbans waters for forest-dependent fishers <input type="checkbox"/> Right to collect wild honey for forest-dependent honey collectors <input type="checkbox"/> Right to protect the fish and ecological resources of the Sundarbans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness campaign <input type="checkbox"/> Signature campaign <input type="checkbox"/> Community appeals <input type="checkbox"/> Consultation on legal scope <input type="checkbox"/> Citizen interface <input type="checkbox"/> Government interface <input type="checkbox"/> Display of IEC posters <input type="checkbox"/> Formation of fisher collectives <input type="checkbox"/> I-cards and boat registrations |
| 2 | Preferential access of small fishers to fish resources and their right to protect fish resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strict implementation of WBMFRA <input type="checkbox"/> Enactment of matching CMFRA <input type="checkbox"/> Extension of exclusive fishing zone for small fishers <input type="checkbox"/> Restriction on large fishing boats on number of crafts, amount of catch and effort <input type="checkbox"/> Stopping destructive fishing methods <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation of SSF Guidelines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness campaign <input type="checkbox"/> Interface with state government <input type="checkbox"/> National policy workshop on CMFRA <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation and submission of community appeals <input type="checkbox"/> Formation of fisher collectives <input type="checkbox"/> I-cards and boat registrations |
| 3 | Land rights for coastal fishing communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identifying and marking community land use and unauthorized/ illegal encroachments <input type="checkbox"/> Land schedules for 43 FLCs collected. Verification ongoing. <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitisation of government authorities to confer community user right of land to the fishing community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> GPS mapping for land use in 10 fish landing centres <input type="checkbox"/> Collected land use data provided by fisherfolk organizations to the government |

| Sl. No. | Category | Recommendations | Activities undertaken in West Bengal |
|---------|---|--|---|
| 4 | National Policy on Inland Fisheries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address the need of a National Policy on Inland Fisheries and necessity of national guidelines towards tenure, security, input quality, farming and marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop on National Policy on Inland Fisheries with representatives of inland fish workers and other stakeholders from different areas <input type="checkbox"/> Ascertaining policy requirements according to the needs of inland fisheries <input type="checkbox"/> Networking with other national and internal organizations |
| 5 | Establishing small fish vendors' rights and entitlements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Development of small fish vendors' awareness and motivation to know and seek their rights and entitlements <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitization of government authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Market-based awareness campaign <input type="checkbox"/> Community and government interface in three districts <input type="checkbox"/> Formation of fish vendors' collectives <input type="checkbox"/> I-cards |
| 6 | Formation/ continuation of fish workers' collectives at the gram panchayat, block, district and state levels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Issuance of government identity cards and boat registration certificates <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership training <input type="checkbox"/> Community capacity building for taking legal and quasi-legal redressal steps <input type="checkbox"/> Identification and communication of needs for block-, district- and state-level collectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 3000 new members to be enrolled <input type="checkbox"/> About 1500 fisher I-cards and 250 boat registrations to be procured <input type="checkbox"/> Three training programmes of three days each for 15 trainees <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness generation on legal redressal <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation of area-specific demands with general demands and their submission to concerned PRI, state and central government authorities |
| 7 | Development and strengthening of fish workers' cooperatives as a step to democratizing society and economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Equipping fishworker cooperatives with sound knowledge of business opportunities and requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Rejuvenating existing non-operational cooperatives to create examples <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing new cooperatives to demonstrate cooperative formation in practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Business prospect survey <input type="checkbox"/> Development/ rejuvenation of two existing cooperatives |

| Sl. No. | Category | Recommendations | Activities undertaken in West Bengal |
|---------|--|--|---|
| 8 | Awareness building among women fish workers, facilitating women fish workers' group formation and assertion of women fish workers' rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make them claim their rights and entitlements <input type="checkbox"/> Stop the early marriage of girls <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the socio-economic and political status of women fishworkers <input type="checkbox"/> Identify gender gaps/ discrimination <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the socio-economic status of tiger/ crocodile widows and advocate for their survival with dignity <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitize government and PRI institutions and authorities on women's issues in fish working <input type="checkbox"/> Engineer institutional policy changes needed for gender equity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Study of women fishworkers in a few blocks in West Bengal <input type="checkbox"/> Survey of tiger/crocodile widows <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop on women fishworkers' rights <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy on rights of tiger/crocodile widows <input type="checkbox"/> Formation and development of women fishworkers' groups <input type="checkbox"/> 'Beti Zindabad' campaign <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness generation of women's rights |
| 9 | Awareness building on child issues and establishment of child centres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make parents, children, teachers and society at large aware of child rights <input type="checkbox"/> Assess and insist on the implementation of RTE <input type="checkbox"/> Stop child marriage, child abuse and child labour <input type="checkbox"/> Enhance awareness of child nutrition and hygiene <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitize panchayat and block-level authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Status survey on RTE in CSP area <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness campaign on child nutrition and hygiene, with health check-ups <input type="checkbox"/> Interface with panchayat and block-level authorities <input type="checkbox"/> Development of 13 child centres with activities like drawing, games, audio-visual shows and awareness of children's issues |

| Sl. No. | Category | Recommendations | Activities undertaken in West Bengal |
|---------|--|---|---|
| 10 | Need for rights and policy directions | <p>□ Different categories of small-scale fish workers, like fishers, fish farmers and fish vendors, need their right to livelihood and social security through tenure rights, right to the sustainable use of fish resources and water bodies, and right to access finance, infrastructure and social security measures. Gender equity and the rights of women fishworkers are also very important issues, as women constitute a substantial part of the total work force in fisheries.</p> | <p>□ Awareness campaigns are being undertaken by DMF relating to basic policy directions, like sustainable development, socio-economic upliftment and gender justice.</p> |

Table 3.2: Demands

1. Right to Water – He who wields the net has the right to water body;
2. Right to Land – Hand over lands used at fish landing centres to fish workers collectives;
3. Registration of Fishing Boats;
4. Small Scale Fishers of Sunderbans should have the right to fish in the rivers and creeks of Sunderbans;
5. Restore without delay fishing communities rights to drying fish in Jambudwip;
6. Stop auction of government water bodies – stop auctioning of fishing communities' livelihood;
7. Close fishing harbours and fishing jetties of West Bengal to trawlers
8. Immediate effective steps to protect small scale fishers from attacks and damages by mechanized boats and trawlers in Saptamukhi and Hooghly rivers;
9. Stop illegal intensive prawn farming and disposal of prawn from waste water in sea and river waters;
10. Immediate release dues of Savings cum Relief Scheme and implement the scheme for all small scale fishworkers irrespective of APL or BPL;
11. Permanent arrangement to issue fish workers' identity cards round the year;
12. All small scale fish vendors to be provided with cycle, cold box, digital weighing machines as fish markets with modern facilities;
13. Comprehensive package scheme "Matsyakanya" to provide finance, infrastructure and social security for all women fish workers and fishers;
14. Constitution of a special commission to identify the Tiger Widows of Sunderbans and to provide them with a monthly allowance of Rs 3000 to each of them;

15. Immediate steps to provide old age pension to every old and infirm fish workers;
16. Constitute Tribal Fish Worker Cooperatives Societies in different parts of Sunderbans;
17. Scrap the condition of Panchayat Samitis approval in formation of fish worker's cooperatives societies;
18. Managerial subsidy for fish workers' cooperatives should be minimum Rs 48,000 per annum and the amount is to be paid regularly;
19. Khoti employees should be made permanent and they should get remuneration for 12 months a year;
20. FEOs should not be used for any other administrative works other than fisheries.
21. For quick disposal of grievances of fishing communities, special committees should be constituted from block to state levels with government officials, peoples representatives and fish workers' union.

4. Conclusion

Many poor people—tribals, migrants, minorities and other vulnerable groups—depend on estuarine and marine fisheries in West Bengal. Fishing communities draw on a diverse range of natural resources and activities, which generate a living but very little surplus. Access to fisheries resources is heavily infringed upon by larger players. Land use for various fishing related works is under continuous threat of encroachment. Market access and linkages remain very weak, so value realisation for fish is low, while losses are high. MPAs reduce access to resources, making conservation seem like a threat to livelihoods. Social protection measures are inadequate. Small-scale fishworkers, including small fishers and fish farmers, are the largest stakeholders of water bodies and their natural custodians as well. These workers, along with ancillary workers like fish vendors, are not only economically poor but also deprived of their livelihood rights. Degradation of water bodies due to pollution, encroachment and overuse impact small-scale fishers and fish farmers the most. Moreover, a new class of entrepreneurs, with support from the government and financial institutions, are subjecting these small-scale fishers and fish farmers to unequal competition and eventually evicting them from their water bodies. Even official conservation measures for protected areas impose blanket bans on fishing.

This study tried to examine and explore different central- and state-level policies, schemes, legislations and reports for the protection of human rights in small-scale fisheries in West Bengal, with special reference to women, children and indigenous communities. The study also focused on how social development of fishing communities in West Bengal, especially of small-scale fishers, contributes to the effective conservation and sustainable use of marine, coastal, freshwater and brackish water biodiversity. Small-scale fishers are vulnerable and marginalized due to less accessibility to resources and weak processing and marketing facilities. They are more exposed to natural disasters. The existing policy provisions are inadequate and badly implemented.

This study also tried to cover the social development of fishing communities in West Bengal from the perspectives of full-time vs part-time work, informal vs formal, migrant vs resident, and women vs men, as well as looking at health, education, housing, sanitation, potable water and energy. Fishworkers' standard of living was noted, as were the aspects of violence against women and access to justice. The connection between economic development, social development and environmental protection is recognized by the 1995 World Summit on Social Development, but when it comes to fisheries, the emphasis is on economic and environmental issues and less on the social development of fishers and fishing communities.

The following figure enumerates some of the important struggles faced by traditional and poor fishing communities in West Bengal.

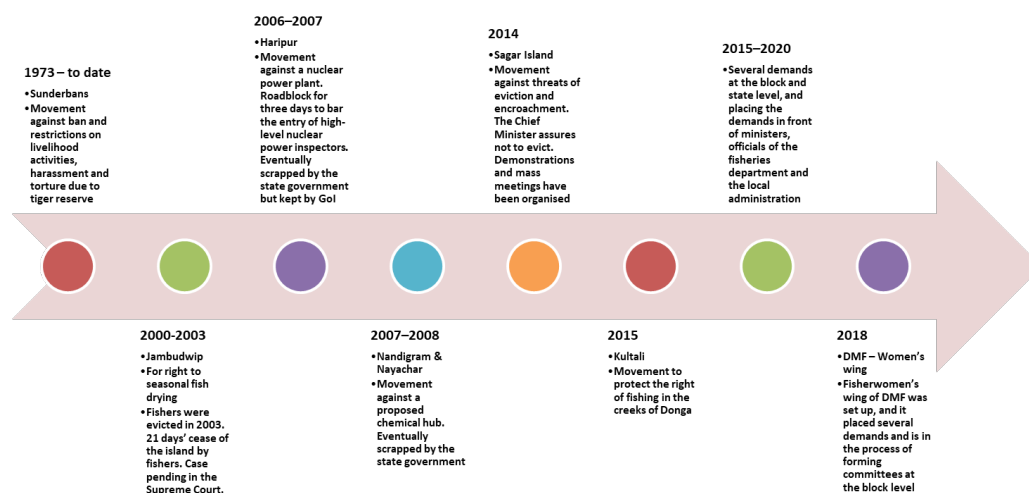


Figure 4.1: A timeline of fisheries struggles in West Bengal

To summarise, the fishing communities of West Bengal, especially small-scale fishing communities, rank very low in terms of social development, owing to their isolation and inaccessibility and denial of rights. Their access to the most basic needs—transport and communication, education, healthcare, energy, water and housing—remains very weak to non-existent. Several social protection programmes exist, but their coverage, scope and effectiveness remain inadequate. Insurance coverage is extremely poor, and even the families of those who die or are maimed in tiger/shark/crocodile attacks receive patchy or no compensation. Pensions for the weaker sections of society (older people, single women and widows) are inadequate and cover only a small proportion of their needs. These existing issues were exacerbated due to Covid-19 and Cyclone Amphan. The challenges and issues of different categories of fishing communities are given in the table below.

Table 4.1: Main challenges and issues I: Tenure and Governance

| Fish Workers | Tenure | Governance |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Fishers (marine) | Water: Access and sustainably use fish resources Land: Community user right of land in use | Fish resources: Right to protect fish resources from over and destructive fishing Environment: Right to stop pollution and encroachment on coast |
| Fishers (inland) | Water: Access natural water bodies and sustainably use fish resources Land: Right to access water bodies | Fish resources: Right to protect fish resources from poisoning and non-fisheries water use; release of reservoir water; replenishment of fish stock Environment: Right to stop pollution and encroachment on rivers and banks |
| Fish farmers | Water: Security of lease for ponds; availability of government water bodies | Arrangements for quality inputs: Fish seed, feed, expertise/training, treatment Environment: Right to stop pollution, filling up/ encroachment of ponds, extortions |
| Fish dryers/ sorters | Land: Community user right of land in use | Arrangements for sufficient and quality inputs: Raw fish Environment: Right to stop pollution and encroachment on coast |
| Fish vendors | Right to space in markets | Right to participate in governance of landing centres and markets, and conduct vending peacefully without extortions |
| Women Fishworkers | Gender equity in tenure rights | Gender equity in right to governance of workplaces and activities |

Table 4.2: Main challenges and issues – II: Finance, Infrastructure and Social Security

| Fishworkers | Finance | Infrastructure | Social security |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Fishers (marine) | Freedom from the clutch of money lenders and fish depot owners Formation and conduction of economic self-organizations, like cooperatives and SHGs Accessing bank loans | Basic infrastructure for fish landing centres: offices, rest rooms, storage, fish drying platforms, community halls, drinking water, toilets, lights, cyclone shelters, ice factories | Comprehensive social security cover: housing, old age pension, life and health insurance, support for children's education, insurance of boats and nets, insurance of fish ponds |
| Fishers (inland) | | River approach roads, jetties, market transportation, ice factories | |
| Fish farmers | | Pond side shelters | |
| Fish dryers/ sorters | | Drying platforms, shelters, crèches, toilets, restrooms | |
| Fish vendors | | Cycles, motorcycles, pick-up vans, markets with facilities, cold chain and storage | |
| Women fishworkers | | Gender equity in accessing finance | |

To summarize, fishing communities and other coastal-dependent communities are socially, economically and culturally at risk. They face social and political marginalization, and poverty and poor-working conditions are widespread. The livelihoods of coastal and inland fishing communities are further endangered by the depletion of fish stocks, caused by overfishing. Other vulnerabilities include the degradation of aquatic environments and natural disasters. Since the 1990s, coastal communities in India have been raising their voice under the National Fishworkers Forum. States have their own organizations to create awareness of fishing rights and welfare schemes available to fishworkers from the government, mobilizing them under one umbrella and ensuring their participation in different national and international workshops and training programmes. In West Bengal, the leading fisherfolk organization, DMF, is also keeping no stone unturned in the social and economic development of fishworkers. Regular demonstrations, rallies, demands and block meetings are put forward.

Currently, most of the global organizations related to fisheries are demanding social protection and sustainability. With this objective, this study tried to focus on the social and economic status of the fishing community, particularly in West Bengal, and how the sustainable use of resources can contribute to their overall development. The study also tried to give an overview of the activities of small-scale fishers and the challenges they face while they march ahead, with the support of fishworker organizations, for their survival.

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Social Development and Sustainable Fisheries: West Bengal

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The study is a part of a series of original research on social development and sustainable fisheries undertaken by ICSF in eight countries. The study documented the status of social development and decent work programmes, schemes, policies, legislation and institutional support (including community-based initiatives) to demonstrate how they strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development. With a detailed review and analysis of schemes, legislation and reports for the protection of human rights in small-scale fisheries, the study demonstrates the contextual reality on social development of small-scale fishing communities in the country context and stresses on the need for concerted effort to improve social development indicators to ensure sustainable development.



ICSF (www.icsf.net) is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's special list of Non-Governmental Organizations. It also has Liaison status with the FAO. ICSF works towards the establishment of equitable, gender-just, self-reliant and sustainable fisheries, particularly in the small-scale, artisanal sector.

ICSF draws its mandate from the historic International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters (ICFWS), held in Rome in 1984, parallel to the World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.