

Save the River, Save the Fish, Save the Fishers Preserving Livelihoods: Disha (West Bengal)

India has a vast 8000 km coastline, encompassing 2.02 million square km of special economic zones in the marine sector. This doesn't even begin to include the 196,000 km stretch of rivers and canals. With the vast array of water bodies, there are unsurprisingly, many millions involved in the fishing industry. 6 million to be exact with 4 million fish workers inland and 2 million marine workers. With 4 to 5 dependents per worker, that translates to **24-30 million people who depend on the fisheries for survival**. Due to their dependence on the water, these traditional communities have a deep organic relationship with the water and truly are the primary custodians of maintaining these water bodies. After all, good fish require good water! However large-scale industrial fishing policies threaten to destroy their livelihood and have a detrimental impact on the environment.

Examples of these destructive policies are: --

- Ecological destruction of water sources through removal and conversion of mangrove forests to various agricultural, aquacultural, and tourism alternatives and needless urbanization. Mangroves are essential to stem the ocean waves, prevent intrusion of salt water, hold the soil together and contain polluting sources to maintain the quality and quantity of fish
- Fish Conservation. Ironically, these policies restrict fishing for months at a time, leaving the fisher people destitute and the waters uncared for.
- Blocking access to fishing under the guise of sanctuaries and conservation. Both designations require unnecessary and often corrupt bureaucratic license requirements.

DISHA is an NGO that has been working in West Bengal for over 25 years. IFA has been supporting DISHA in its programs in fisheries to help develop self-empowerment of the small and marginalized fishing communities through community capacity building. Activities are undertaken in collaboration with the existing national network - National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW) and its affiliates with a focus on the small-scale fish workers organizations in West Bengal, namely Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) and Uttarbanga Matsyajibi Forum (UMF).

2022 Update **Policy level interventions**

Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021 (2021-22) – The opposition of NPSSFW to the this bill continued with deputations, dharnas, mass signature campaigns and sending of protest letters. As a result the Government of India could not table the bill in the parliament for four consecutive sessions from June 2021 till date.

WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (June, 2022) - NPSSFW called the agreement a deal between plunderers of marine fish resources and rejected the final agreement on fisheries subsidies reached in the WTO Ministerial Negotiations at Geneva in June 2022.

Prevention of entry of Indian mechanized fishing boats into Bangladesh (August 2022) - NPSSFW brought to the notice of the concerned ministries that there have been regular illegal intrusions in Bangladesh waters by the large mechanized fishing boats, sailing from Indian harbors in West Bengal. These boats are responsible for overfishing and destructive fishing resulting in severe depletion of fish resources in Indian waters. Now they are resorting to the same illegal ventures in Bangladesh violating the IMBL (International Maritime Boundary Line). This has serious implications for our security and our relationship with Bangladesh. The concerned ministries have been requested to initiate immediate and effective measures.

Draft Coastal Aquaculture (Amendment) Bill 2022 (August 2022) – The Platform protested this to point out that this would promote intensive coastal shrimp aquaculture, which would be detrimental for biodiversity and environment.

Issue based Interventions

Dharna of Fishing Communities of Andaman at Port Blair (November 2021) – NPSSFW brought to the notice of the Director of Fisheries in Port Blair some of the long-standing demands of small-scale fishers of South Andaman and requested the administration to take immediate action.

Government of Kerala was urged to Stop Construction of Vizhinjam Port (August 2022) due to the ecological disaster, widespread erosion and resulting destruction of livelihood of the coastal communities.

Faulty and unjust installation of ONGC and Reliance pipelines in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh (April 2022) – As a result the sub-aqueous sand dunes were altered resulting in unnatural disposition of sand at the mouth of the Gaderu Canal, thereby blocking the passage. NPSSFW supported the agitating fish workers and pushed for the opening of the passage by dredging about 3kms of the mouth of Gaderu Canal.



Supported Struggle to save the natural resources and livelihood of fishers in Loktak Lake, Manipur (May, 2022)

Support to the fisher union's protest against installation of AHOY Marina on the mouth of Zuari River, Goa (June, 2022)

-As a result the project has been scrapped by the National Green Tribunal.

National Campaigns

Campaign for Small Scale Fishers and Fish Farmers Right to Sustainable Access to Water Bodies and Fish Resources: The core concept has been developed and workshops held on the campaign in different parts of the country.

Campaign continued Against the Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021

Organizational Activities

Outreach: There have been significant outreach to new areas in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Manipur, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Regular networking continues with organization in Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Kerala, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Kashmir, A&N.

Networking: National Council Web Meeting (October 2021), East Zone Regional Meeting (22-23 October 2021 in Kolkata), North-East Regional Meeting (18-19 December 2021 in Imphal, Manipur), South Zone Regional Meeting (7-9 June 2022 in Chennai), West Zone Regional Meeting (21 and 22 July, 2022 in Goa). National Council Meeting (November, 2021), National Council of NPSSFW on 19 - 20 November 2021 in New Delhi.



Participation in the People's Summit at Glasgow CoP-26 Climate Conference (November, 2021) - Alongside the official COP26 event, a People's Summit was held in the city of Glasgow. NPSSFW attended the Climate Strike, as well as the People's Summit, including an event to represent fish workers from India at a panel on the 8th of November.

Documentation Centre: DISHA's Delhi office has been renovated by the landlord very recently. Valuable support from IFA towards the infrastructure has been received. Two tables, one laptop and the internet connection have been setup. More materials will be purchased and / or installed within a short period. Resources for engaging personnel for running the documentation Centre in Delhi are being sought. ActionAid has verbally agreed to provide some funds for the personnel. Hopefully the Centre will start functioning from January 2023.

State Highlights

Andhra Pradesh and Manipur

More than 500 acres of mangroves are being cut down in Godavari River estuary near Gogulmattam in the district of East Godavari ostensibly for construction of hatcheries or food processing units. The Democratic Traditional Fishers Workers Forum (DTFWF) of Andhra Pradesh is protesting this destruction of the fishing ground and the ecology of the region.

Loktak lake, a recognized Ramsar site and a wetland of international importance, is already threatened by a Hydel Project and Ichthai Dam. The state government was going to introduce water sports and cage culture fisheries. All Loktak Lake Area Fishers Union of Manipur (ALLAFUM) raised vehement protest and moved the High Court. **The High Court's order of 25th February 2022 prohibited all development/construction works in and around Loktak Lake without permission of the Court**



Tamil Nadu

The coastal panchayat level opposition to the Indian Marine Fishing Bill 2021 continued. The campaign even influenced the state government to oppose the Bill. On the behest of NPSSFW a number of groups in Tamil Nadu came together to form a Tamil Nadu platform of small-scale fishing communities affiliated to NPSSFW.

Kerala

The small-scale fishers' organization, Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation, joined the struggle against the Vizhinjam port owned by Adani throughout Kerala. SMTF also launched campaign against IMFB 2021 and the state government opposed the Bill.



West Bengal

DMF added 2381 new members while UMF added 600 in the last one year. Union activities have spread to new areas like Balagarh in Hooghly district, Kaliaganj-II & III in Malda district, and in Alipurduar district. The year saw a wide range of activities relating to Cooperatives, SHGs, Occupational Trainings, Leadership Trainings, Provision for Substitute livelihood, Compensation to the families of tiger victims of Sundarban, Fishing rights in forests and border areas, rejuvenation of rivers etc.

DMF gets NGT orders for dismantling of Amlamethi Resort: In a landmark judgement passed on 23.12.2021 in the case filed by DMF in the matter of illegal and ecocidal construction of a tourist resort at Amlamethi in Sundarban, the NGT ordered stoppage of all construction, derided the District Magistrate as incompetent and irresponsible and asked the police authorities to take action.

[HTTPS://WWW.NEWSCLICK.IN/MAMATA-BANERJEE-GOVT-IDENTIFYING-OWNER-ILLEGAL-RESORT-SUNDERBANS](https://www.newsclick.in/mamata-banerjee-govt-identifying-owner-illegal-resort-sunderbans)

Protest on sinking of fly ash laden ships: Frequent capsizes of ships with hazardous fly ash badly hit the ecology of Hooghly River estuary including Sundarban affecting the livelihood of thousands of fishers. On November 3, 2021, a fly ash laden ship MV Banglar Shakti toppled 300 meters from Ghoramara island near Sagar Island. About 700 tons of fly ash was submerged in the Hooghly River. DMF approached all concerned authorities, requesting them to take out the submerged as quickly as possible. A deputation was organized to the Haldia Port Authorities.



Interventions to Facilitate Access to Credit: DMF and UMF successfully lobbied for the extension of KCC (Kisan Credit Card) facilities (low interest loan of up to Rs. 2 lakhs) for fishers and worked to facilitate access of small-scale fish workers to the same.

Enforcement of 61 Day Marine Fishing Ban: DMF protested Government inaction against unscrupulous fishers found fishing in the ban period and also demanded livelihood support of Rs. 5,000/- per month for every fish worker during the ban period.

Accident Insurance for fishers (April 2022): After a struggle of more than four years by DMF the Government of West Bengal has restarted the accident insurance scheme for marine fishers. DMF is demanding its extension for all fishers.

Supported Ramsai fishers fight against pollution of River Jaldhaka: More than 150 fishermen in Ramsai of Maynaguri block of Jalpaiguri district are fighting against contamination by the waste water of Jadavpur Tea estate.

Opposed construction of Check dam on River Atrayee at Balurghat, Dakshin Dinajpur (January, 2022): UMF opposed the construction of the Check dam as it would severely affect the fish stock of the river.

Demand for proper market facilities at Maynaguri: UMF and Maynaguri Bajar Samabay Samiti jointly placed their demands to the Jalpaiguri Zilla Parishad to develop the Maynaguri Market for proper accommodation of Fish and other vendors.

An Estimate of Fishers' Access to Govt Schemes:

Registered their Aadhar card with the WB Fisheries Department: **More than 5000**

Applied new inland I-card: **2280**

Received the cards: **1726**

Boat registration forms submitted: **1080**

Registrations done: **115**

Boat license renewed: **745**

KCC applications submitted: **240**

MJCC applications submitted: **2100**

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