

A New Road Map

A national platform of fishers met to assert the inalienable right of fishers and fishworkers to access water bodies, campaign for climate justice, and become a federation of unions through a new constitution

The national council meeting of the National Platform for Small-Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW) was held in Kolkata, India, on November 6-7, 2023. The main objectives of the first day of the meeting were to discuss the issues and challenges faced by small-scale fishworkers in the country and to strengthen the organization's efforts to address them. The primary objective of the second day of the meeting was to adopt the constitution of NPSSFW so as to provide a clear definition of small-scale fishworkers and indicate how the organization should operate at the state and national levels, with defined objectives and mechanisms to achieve the same.

At the meeting, Pradip Chatterjee, NPSSFW convener, placed the report on organizational progress before the national council. Representatives from small-scale fishworker organizations of 12 states and Union Territories reported on the situation of fisheries in their respective areas and the status of their struggle for livelihood. N. Venugopalan of ICSF made a presentation on titled 'Climate Crisis Impact on Fisheries and Fishing Communities', also speaking to the ways and means needed to address the problem.

Nandkumar Pawar and Sunil Dubey, along with Ramanand Wangkheirakpam, placed reports on the work of the ports and wetland committees, respectively. Pradip Chatterjee and Siddharth Chakravarty placed the draft constitution of NPSSFW. There were also in-depth discussions on the situation of women fishworkers, their demands and participation in the organization and the movement. Several decisions taken at the meeting will set the course of the movement. Five are worth mentioning.

Right to Water Campaign:

The national council reiterated the observation of NPSSFW that the small-scale fishworkers in both marine and inland sectors need legally recognized right to access the basic natural resources of their livelihood, that is, water bodies and fish resources. Neither do they have any legal right to protect the water bodies or fish resources. This has been a universal deprivation and the root cause of the sufferings of the small-scale fishers and fish farmers. It was resolved that NPSSFW will strengthen the 'Right to Water' campaign by connecting it with the specific conditions prevailing in every fishing community area, on the one hand, and by connecting the demands raised under specific area conditions into a national campaign, on the other.

Climate Justice: The council observed that the small-scale fishworkers as a community are least responsible for the climate change, yet they suffer the worst on account of it. The actors that reaped huge profits from fossil fuels have been the most responsible for precipitating the climate crisis. Meanwhile, government policy does little to address these actors. NPSSFW demands that the fossil fuel producing and using companies must pay for the damages of the climate crisis. Climate-resilient livelihood practices must be promoted. Pollution and encroachment of water bodies and destructive overfishing must be stopped to enhance the capacity of small-scale fishworkers to cope with the climate crisis. This discussion iterated the position of NPSSFW and to strengthen relations with other natural resource-based communities at international climate negotiations.

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Group Photo at the National Council Meeting of NPSSFW. A road map for proceeding with the constitution was agreed upon and a committee was appointed to oversee the process

Ensuing General Elections: The council observed that NPSSFW is duty-bound to undertake the following:

Protect the interests of the members of NPSSFW and make the political parties sensitive to the united voice of the small-scale fishworkers; submit a charter of demands on the main points to the political parties and present them time lines to implement them; prepare a manifesto for fishworkers to be published in Indian news outlets and social media; and undertake a continuous ground-level movement at all levels to carry forward the demands.

Women's inclusion and empowerment: Women fishers face barriers in entering the fishworkers' organizations due to societal norms, both at the community level, as well as the organizational level. To strengthen women's participation, these obstacles must be tackled through representation of women at all levels of the organization, as well as mobilizing them on women's issues at all levels of governance. Women fishworkers, who shoulder the responsibility of reproduction of life within households, also bear the burden of fishworkers' issues not only at work but also in their household tasks. Most often, only the livelihood space issues are addressed but not the mechanisms that affect the household. Women fish vendors play a crucial role in the supply of fresh fish to households. Society overlooks this critical role in providing nutrition. There are caste-based exclusions in

accessing water bodies. Women fishers bear the burden disproportionately. As part of their empowerment, women fishworkers need to develop their organizations and lead them as an integral part of the larger fishworkers' organizations. The addressing of these matters was taken up affirmatively in the drafting of the constitution with the view of building an inclusive and representative federation of unions.

Adoption of the constitution: The organizational expansion, increasingly covering new areas and categories of fishworkers in both marine and inland sectors, called for adoption of a democratic constitution for it as a federation of trade unions. The meeting discussed the main text of the constitution with its members. They made several suggestions for strengthening the organization's constitution. A road map for proceeding with the constitution was agreed upon and a committee was appointed to oversee the process. ❧

For more

National Platform for Small-Scale Fishworkers (NPSSFW)

<https://smallscalefishworkers.org/small-scale-fish-worker-organisations/national-platform-for-small-scale-fish-workers-inland/>