

**Society for Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action  
Twenty Fourth Annual General Meeting**

**16<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

**20/4 Sil Lane, Kolkata 700 015**

**Annual Organisational Report, 2018-2019**

**Respected President and Friends,**

Thank you for attending the twenty fourth Annual General Meeting. I am glad to welcome you all to celebrate 25<sup>th</sup> year of our foundation – as one calls *Silver Jubilee*. Following is the draft summary report of the up to date activities since last annual general meeting for your perusal, modification and confirmation. Since February last one year, DISHA has been active on various environmental and social issues, especially fishers' rights issues, forest rights issues, protection of coast, save river campaign, protection of water bodies and wetlands, management of municipal and E-waste, livelihood of economically deprived section, human rights, civil rights, women rights and child rights issues. DISHA, assisted by activists, friends and sympathisers, has been able to mark some progress in various fields during this period. The organisation has been able to achieve improvement both in terms of accomplishments of activities and human resources in comparison to last year.

***In Memory of***

**Meher Engineer**

We lost our long standing senior friend, Prof. Meher Engineer on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019. He was a scholar, scientist and an activist. His last professional attachment was with Basu Biggan Mandir as Acting Director. He was associated with several movements and activities with a pro-people stand. He was associated with DISHA for a long time especially on anti-nuke move and climate change issues.

**Arjun Mondal**

We lost Arjun Mondal – one of our best activists in fisher rights and forest rights issues and also in conservation and livelihood programme. He was a fisherman of Sundarban. On 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019, while fishing with two other fishermen in the forest, he was attacked by a tiger. His body could not be traced. Arjun was associated with DISHA since 2011 and later became very active in DMF. He was also Secretary of Sundarban Rural Development Society, a community based organization in Lahiripur of Gosaba Block in Sundarban. He was engaged in organizing fisher people, especially tiger widows of Sundarban. At the same time he was pioneer in conservation programme conducted by DISHA, especially mangrove plantation in Sundarban.

## ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2019

### I. DOCUMENTATION

We maintain the **documentation** section with a view to support researchers, activists and our own publications. The section procures and preserves news items from different newspapers on environment, social health, fisheries and right to information. All the documents are now being preserved in soft copies. These help us in occasional programmes on specific issues.

The documentation centre has no external financial support but somehow, we have been able to continue it from our own resources.

### II. PUBLICATIONS

DISHA's numerous engagements prevent it from publishing regularly or systematically. Nor does it have a proper distribution network or requisite organizational infrastructure. However, its three publications that came out during the Kolkata Book Fair 2019 have received some recognition in concerned quarters.

This year, during Kolkata Book Fair 2020, we have brought out one important Bengali publication on climate crisis - the *Jalabayu Badaler Ki o Kyano* (The What and Why of Climate Change), written by Pradip Dutta, one of our Governing Body members and noted science writer in West Bengal. The book has evoked quick interest and has earned even a brief mention in the Anandabazar Patrika's *Pustak Parichay*.

Like every year we took part in Kolkata Book Fair 2020. Our small book stall has earned some recognition as a hub of books and journals exclusively on environment.

### III. WEBSITE

Statutory information like organizational report, financial audit report, and donors' list are regularly updated. Announcements of current activities are also being put up. But many more activities, which are regularly carried on, are not being reflected in the website. Many more materials and activity reports should be put up to update it. The look of the website should also be changed. The Managing Committee has repeatedly discussed for up-gradation of the website. But the same has not been done. One reason may be continuous pressure of activities. Another reason is that the due priority is not being given. AGM may discuss how the problem can be solved.

#### IV. OFFICE SPACE

We have been able to procure a property - an office space right at the side of our registered office. Now the Documentation Centre is functioning there. Several sections will be shifted to the new office.

Apart from these two adjacent offices, we have been running another office in Tangra (child message and waste management sections), Kanthi office in Purba Medinipur, Diamond Harbour office in South 24 Parganas, Waste management project office in Dhulagarh, Howrah. We have discontinued office in North 24 Parganas in absence of regular activist. Our Delhi office is also being maintained for conducting activities of the National Platform of Small Scale Fish Workers.

Another infrastructure has been rented in Sandeshkhali to run the training institute on agriculture and livelihood.

#### V. NETWORKING

During the year, our network activities with **Dakshin Banga Matsyajibi Forum** are continuing in full swing. In Northern districts of West Bengal, support is being provided to the newly formed **Uttarbanga Matsyajibi Forum**. In comparison to South Bengal, our progress in North Bengal in fisheries sector is very slow. For last four years we have been extending extensive support to the nationwide activism for the protection of interest of small fish workers. DISHA has been supporting **National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland)** since its birth in 2016. We are also active in coordination of small scale marine fish workers. In fisheries sector networking is continued with many organizations mentioned in Fisheries chapter.

We are continuing close network with **Sabuj Mancha**, a platform active on environmental issues constituted by individuals and organisations in West Bengal. DISHA is playing a major role in it. Advocacy and watch dog functioning on many issues like sound pollution, air pollution, conservation of wetlands and water bodies, conservation of river, protection of greens etc. are undertaken through this network. We are also part of **National Alliance for Peoples Movement** in West Bengal. We are in regular relation with many groups in different parts of West Bengal. The significant among these are Nagarik Mancha, Manabadhiar Suraksha Mancha, Shramajibi Hospital, Mrittika Prayas, Soceo, Purba Kolkata Paribesh Samikshan, DRCSC, Srma Mahila Samiti, Chakdaha Biggan O Sanskritik Sangstha, Siliguri Poriesh Banchao Committee etc. We have been actively associated with **West Bengal Right to Education Forum** since last two years. In Sundarban we are keeping close ties with *Sundarban Rural Development Society in Lahiripur, Sundarban Pragatishil Parishad in Hingalganj.*

At national level, we are associated with Indian Community Activist Network (ICAN), Alliance of Waste Pickers (AIW) and newly formed South Asian Peoples' Action on Climate Crisis (SAPACC).

At international level we are active partner in Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) and International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN).

## VI. ACTIVITIES ON MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

We have been propagating the provision of Municipal Waste Management Rules, 2016, which specifically gives direction for source segregation, composting, recycling and inclusion of waste pickers in waste management.

In spite of these Rules, it is experienced that municipalities and panchayets in West Bengal are not following the norms. Source segregation and processing of waste both have not been introduced by any of them. The state government and the municipalities tend to spend more on expensive machines like compactors which are detrimental to proper waste management and obstruct segregation at source. Also they are far behind to accept the idea of inclusion of waste pickers.

Recently we have opened a dialogue with the state Environment Department. We have presented our plan to take up waste management in middle level municipalities. The Department has primarily agreed to the plan and is looking for municipalities which will agree to execute the plans. We have presented our plan to the authorities of Chakdaha Municipality in Nadia district. They are to take up with the Environment Department for financial support and land for processing unit. We are contacting with few other municipalities also if they show interest to implement the plan.

We are continuing our intervention in 2 panchayets – Jogeshganj and Gobindakati in North 24 Parganas with the support of a local organization Sudarban Progotishil Porishod. In those areas, use of one time plastic has been reduced and peoples' behavior on littering waste has considerably changed.

We have been supporting the organization of waste pickers in Kolkata. They were demanding ownership of waste, protesting use of compactors, asking for identity cards. Though the Welfare department has recognized them as **unorganized worker**, involving them in waste management by the corporation and the municipalities, recognition as waste collector for source segregation, issuing of identity card and designation of working area are all pending. The organization is also not functioning regularly.

In August 2016 we started a CSR project on waste management in Dhulgarh Truck Terminal in Howrah district. Ongoing activities of this project include campaign on developing of civic behavior and practice of personal hygiene among the truckers coming from various states of India, street sweeping, door to door collection from the shops, source segregation, composting, gardening etc. Unfortunately Apollo Tyres, after going through a process of detailed joint planning for 2018-19 suddenly stopped supporting the project since April 2018. We still continued the project by our own resource. However we could access a small fund for continuing the project for another year since April 2019. This year we have been able to construct a shade of 2000 Sq. ft for a composting unit. There is a huge vegetable market adjacent to the truck terminal. We have been using the resource for preparation of composting. However this project is still uncertain as continuation of the support is not yet confirmed. We are in search of the same.

In collaboration with a Bangaluru based organization Hassiru Dala Innovations, DISHA has been involved third time to organize waste management of the second Marathon conducted by Tata Steel held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019. This event hosted more than 15000 people for few hours. A huge amount of waste was generated throughout the 25 Km long marathon track. We engaged more than 400 waste pickers, supervisors and other workers for environment friendly waste management of this huge event. This year it was more challenging because source segregation had to be done meticulously. All bio-degradable waste was sent to our Dhulagarh unit. Dry waste was handed over to a representative of recycler. Preparatory work was to be conducted since 7<sup>th</sup> December and was closed on 23<sup>rd</sup> December. This time we had to handle a large amount of flex waste. It was decided to distribute all the flex banners to villagers of Bamnia island of North 24 Parganas where roofs of huts of many of the villagers were damaged due to the cyclone Bubul.

## VII. ACTIVITIES ON E-WASTE

As such we are not conducting any project on E-waste management now. But we are providing hand holding support to P U Steel & Electroprocess, the dismantling unit in North 24 Parganas, which we promoted. This is the one of the only two dismantling units functioning in West Bengal. WBPCB is monitoring the activities of the unit. There were some shortcomings in fulfilling the criteria in terms of maintenance and documentation. Our support helped the unit to continue its proper functioning.

## VIII. PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT

Several campaigns were conducted in this year on banning of disposable plastic items and reduction of plastic waste. In Kolkata the campaign was conducted with

civil society groups including Sabuj Mancha, Nagarik Mancha, Concern for Calcutta, Lions' Club etc.

In recent months, DISHA has supported a number of groups in South Kolkata in organizing local environment awareness activities – including undertaking plastics campaigns in markets and submitting a memorandum on plastics and waste issues in general to the Minister of Environment.

In Hingalganj a strong campaign has been launched for proper waste management, banning of disposable plastic items etc. With our local partner Sundarban Progotishil Parishad, we have opened dialogue with three panchayets – Jogeshganj, Gobindakati and Kalitala. Apart from panchayets, market committees have been involved in the dialogues. Several meetings have taken place.

In another collaborative move with Nagarik Mancha, a large number of jute bags have been sold at Rs. 10 by holding campaigns at different market places.

#### IX. ACTION ON SAVE RIVERS, WETLANDS AND WATER BODIES

This year special emphasis was given on the issue of rejuvenation of rivers of India highlighting the NGT orders of September 18 and April 19 for rejuvenation of 351 river stretches.

A joint meeting was organized by NPSSF(I) and DISHA in Delhi on 18<sup>th</sup> July to sensitize the state representatives from 15 states regarding the NGT order and resolution was taken to act for implementation of the order in the respective states.

In West Bengal, several campaigns were organized by fishers' organisations as well as local environmental organizations. Campaigns were organised on rivers like Vidyadhari, Mathabhanga, Churni, Ichamati, Buriganga, Jamuna, Atreyee, Karola, Teesta and large water bodies in Murshidabad and Nadia. A considerable achievement was to involve the civil society. It has been raised by the concerned people that fishers are the non-consumptive users of water bodies. They need good water for good fish. So their rights on water need to be recognized. DISHA helped Sabuj Mancha and Siliguri Poribesh Banchao Mancha to organize a North Bengal meet on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 19 at Siliguri. Around 40 active groups and other individuals representing all the districts of North Bengal took part and showed their concern for saving the river.

In case of Vidyadhari we took special effort. Responding to the rejuvenation plan we opened dialogue with WBPCB. We involved Minakhan Panchayet Samiti and other panchayet authorities adjacent to the river. Experts have also been involved to assess the rejuvenation plan made by WBPCB.

DISHA's participation and success in wetlands protection is well-known. In 2012, its legal activism led to the creation of the High Power Committee on Wetlands, resulting in the protection of numerous small water bodies. DISHA continues to help an assortment of initiatives to protect the East Kolkata Wetlands and create a rich information database for the same, and support local groups in their efforts to protect local wetlands. DISHA's support has been vital in protecting one wetland in Shahidnagar, the rejuvenation of another in the same area, and water bodies in the Uttarpara area.

## X. GREEN ISSUES

In addition to the wide range of green issues that DISHA has been involved with through its active participation in the Sabuj Mancha, DISHA has been continuously involved in supporting an assortment of local initiatives. In addition, DISHA has been active in resisting tree felling and greenery-hostile road and pavement planning and senseless expansion of concrete surface in Kolkata.

An important awareness campaign in recent times in which DISHA actively participated was the Climate March in Kolkata on 27 September 2019. This March was a striking success, with a huge participation of students from different schools all over Kolkata.

## XI. ACTIVITIES IN FISHERIES SECTOR

### **Introduction:**

DISHA acts in the small scale fisheries sector comprising of fishers, fish farmers, fish vendors, fish sorters and dryers and other ancillary workers. DISHA assists in awareness and capacity building of the Small Scale Fish Workers (SSF) communities in different areas of 18 states at different levels.

The activities comprised of both building up ground level community organizations and intervening on policy level exercises along with attending to a host of necessary intermediary tasks that included local, block, district, state and national level issues as required and made possible with available capacity.

DISHA is involved in developing ground level initiatives and connect the same with policy level interventions more in the Southern part of West Bengal and in some areas of its Northern part. In other states DISHA's involvement mainly rests with policy orientation and training that, in its turn promotes capacity of SSF collectives for both ground level works and policy level interventions.

Nationally DISHA supports and acts with the National Platform of Small Scale Fish Workers (Inland) and its constituent organisations or groups. In West Bengal,

DISHA works with Dakshin Banga Matsyajibi Forum and Uttar Banga Matsyajibi Forum.

DISHA, in its work on fisheries, has collaborated with organisations like ICSF, Sneha, Dakshin Foundation, TWN and Focus on Global South as well as many institutions and individuals.

**National Network:** In 2019 efforts were successful in developing connection with SSF organisations/groups in 18 states of the country through *NPSSFW(I)* network. Stress has been given on strengthening of the network by developing regular communication and regional centres together with promoting ground level collectives.

The *NPSSFW(I)* network has spread to 18 states of the country namely - Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, West Bengal.

**National Conference:** 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference of small scale fish workers was held on 16-17 July in Delhi. It was attended by delegates from 15 states. The Conference was attended by Sri Pratap Chandra Sarengi, Minister of State in Charge of Fisheries. The Conference -

- Adopted the Mission Statement of *NPSSFW(I)*.
- Took resolutions on Fishers' and Fish Farmers' Right to Water, Draft NIFAP, Climate Crisis & Fisheries, Social Media Use and Organisational Structure of *NPSSFW(I)*.
- Elected a National Council with three office bearers and proposed advisers.

**National Council Meeting:** The National Council of *NPSSFW(I)* met on September 8, 2019 in Kolkata. 23 National Council Members from 12 states, 5 Advisors and 2 Observers attended the National Council Meeting. Decisions were taken regarding activities on -

*Foreign Trade Agreements, Organisational developments in the North East, Right to Water, NGT Directions on River Rejuvenation, Taking up important fisheries issues of the states, Sensitisation on fisheries issues at GoI and Central Legislature, Fish Workers Rights and Entitlements as Unorganised Workers, Further propagation of fisheries issues in social media and among peoples' representatives.*

**N-E Regional Meeting:** Around 40 (Forty) activists and leaders of the fish-workers from Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura alongwith 6 from *NPSSFW(I)* central team participated in the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019 at Guwahati. The meeting considered the problems of fish workers in the North-Eastern states of India and the ways and means to address them, suggested form of organisation, national-state-local coordination, resource pulling, tasks with respective state level conferences with datelines, identifying responsible persons for each state.

**Delhi Office:** Regular liaison with Central Government including ministers and officials; connecting with legislators (MPs) and as a support to state organisations

necessitated the office. Though we have a good support from the office, these activities based on the office are yet to be regularised.

### **Policy Interventions**

**Press Conference on National Election:** NPSSFW(I) held Press Conference on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019 in Delhi Press Club to highlight small scale fishers' and fish farmers' Right to Water and urge all political parties to include the small scale fish workers' demands in their election manifestoes.

**Assessment of Election Manifestoes:** NPSSFW(I) made a pre-election analysis of the election manifestoes of two largest political parties BJP and Congress from the point of view of small scale fish workers to press for inclusion of fish workers' demands.

**NIFAP:** Two reminders were sent for publication of draft NIFAP (National Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy). After its publication submissions on draft NIFAP were made. NPSSFW(I) participated in ICSF Workshop on implementation of NIFAP.

**National Workshop:** A national workshop was held on some key issues of Fisheries on 18-19 December 2019. Items taken up were –

- Trade and Fisheries, Fisheries in FTAs, Fisheries and WTO agreement, Action Strategies on WTO and FTAs;
- Preferential Access of Small Scale Fishers to Marine Fish Resources;
- National Marine Fisheries (Regulation & Management) Bill 2019;
- Right to Information Act - A Tool for Community Empowerment;

**RCEP:** NPSSFW(I) welcomed India's withdrawal from RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) and demanded transparency in trade negotiations as well as informed consent of affected people on such negotiations.

**NGT Directions on River Rejuvenation:** NPSSFW(I) held a consultation on NGT directions regarding River Rejuvenation, indicated action points to its constituents on 18<sup>th</sup> July 19.

**Recycling of Ships Act, 2019:** NPSSFW(I) reviewed the Act, asked for scrapping it.

**Draft National Mariculture Policy 2019:** Reviewed the draft. Asked for scrapping it and go for wider consultations.

**Draft "National Marine Fisheries (Regulation & Management) Bill, 2019":** Submissions were made on the Draft "National Marine Fisheries (Regulation & Management) Bill, 2019", suggestions were given to improve the draft to serve the interest of small scale fish workers.

**Draft Social Security Code 2019:** Reviewed the draft code. Suggested changes in favour of small scale fish workers.

**Draft NFDB Bill 2019:** NPSSFW(I) reviewed the Draft NFDB Bill 2019 and made submissions on the same and wrote to all Chief Ministers to protest.

**Union Budget 2020:** Reviewed. Exposed the directions of the budget and allocations therein that hurt small scale fisheries and fish workers.

**State Level Activities:**

**Tripura -**

**Tripura State meeting:** Fishing community representatives from three districts of Tripura namely Gomati, Sipahijala and South Tripura came together in a meeting at Birchandra Manu of Gomati District on 23 October 2020 to discuss the problems facing small scale fisheries in Tripura and form Tripura Matsyajibi Forum.

The organisation is now engaged in developing organisational centres in different districts and membership collection to form a union.

**Manipur -**

All Loktak Area Fishers Union of Manipur has taken effort to unionise fish workers from areas of Manipur other than Loktak. The union has been fighting against hydel project and Ithcai dam. Protest against Bird Sanctuary and proposed Water Way in Loktak Lake have been issues currently taken up.

**Goa -**

Small scale estuarine fishers have taken an initiative to form a union to protect their access to water and coastal land. Main issues have been - Trawler and Purse-Seine fishing boats trespassing into the exclusive fishing zones of small scale fishers; National waterways and carriage of coal and minerals through rivers; installation of harbours and resorts for rich peoples' yachts by encroaching upon the land of small scale fishers etc. The union is in the process of registration.

**Maharashtra -**

Efforts have been on to organise reservoir based fishing communities in Pune region in union. Right over the water and fish resources as well as freedom from contractor system have been the main issues.

**Rajasthan -**

Efforts are on to organise the fishing tribal communities in union. Chief issues are Right to Water and Fish Resources as well as abolition of the contractor system.

**Kerala -**

Kerala State Women Fish Worker Convention was attended by 112 delegates from 5 districts of Kerala. It was held at Thiruvalla on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019. The delegates raised the problems of inland small scale fisheries in Kerala and adopted some important resolutions and demands. It also elected a state committee. A women state body was formed and decisions taken regarding policies, campaigns and organisation building.

SMTF, the union of inland small scale fish workers of Kerala has applied for registration of union.

**Andhra Pradesh -**

Several programmes have been taken up by DTFWF. Most important among those is organisation of relief work for Fani affected fishers of Puri district of Odisha; efforts taken for release of hostage vessel crew fish workers from both Bangladesh and

Pakistan; movements against encroachments by shrimp farms, ONGC and sand mining etc. The union initiated protests led to cancellation of official CMZ hearings in 8 of the 9 coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. 12,000 protest letters were sent to MoEF against CRZ 2019.

**Gujarat** - A women fish worker cooperative has been organised at Verabal. There has been no appreciable development regarding union formation. Efforts are on to connect with other sectors of the state.

**Jharkhand** -

Effort is on to develop connection among different fish workers' groups of Jharkhand to organise a fish workers' union for defending the livelihood of small scale fish workers. A meeting was done in Palamou, some other meetings are being planned.

**Bihar** -

There has been little headway in development of organisation though there was a good meeting at Patna 2 years back. New connections are being explored.

**Odisha** -

There has been no appreciable development in 2019 other than the excavation of Pachughisa river channel in Baleswar district and removal of shrimp farming gheris (Pens) from Chilika. A reorganisation is being planned.

**West Bengal** -

In West Bengal DMF has been active in 9 districts of South Bengal with various degrees of capacity and activism. Main issues addressed have been Preferential access of small scale coastal fishing communities to marine fish resources; Right over coastal land under community use; River rejuvenation movements; Security of tenure of small scale fish farmers, Rights of fish vendors, Rights of fishers in Sundarban, Rights of women fish workers, Corruption in fisheries schemes etc. Special effort has been given to develop collectives of Tiger Widows and push forward their demands.

It is important to note that in South Bengal there have been a number of deputations, rallies and campaigns in 2019-20. There has been appreciable growth in membership as well. In many areas of South Bengal DMF has become the mainstay of fishing communities to claim their rights and entitlements.

DMF and DISHA have taken initiative to develop the capacity of fish workers in North Bengal to claim their rights and entitlements. Significant breakthrough has been made in Mainaguri region. Efforts are on to spread the effort in other districts and build up Uttarbanga Matsyajibi Forum as the counterpart of DMF in North Bengal.

An important initiative has been taken last year on rights of forest dwellers by DISHA. The initiative has strengthened the efforts of forest dwelling fishers and fish workers in having their rights over water bodies and fish resources in the forest areas of Western West Bengal and Sundarban.

**J&K, UP, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and MP are at various levels of organising that needs more time to getting a perceptible shape.**

**ISSUES that deserve attention -**

1. Development of Regular networking, monitoring, information dissemination and support system for the National Network of Small Scale Fish Workers that will be linked with state organizations and efforts;
2. More intensive interactions with the authorities both at centre and states;
3. Strengthening of Delhi Office.
4. Development of a database on fisheries issues linked with other available resources;
5. Development of research capacity on issues pertaining to fisheries and allied subjects;
6. Arrangement for adequate material and human resources.

**XII. SUPPORTING ECOLOGICALLY-ORIENTED RURAL LIVELIHOODS**

**CMSA:** As mentioned in the previous AGM, DISHA had been associated with the government in its implementation of the state's chapter of the National Rural Livelihood Mission in 2017. The formal association has come to an end. However, the CMSA teams prepared by DISHA continue to function in several districts and there continues to be exchange of information between the teams. The main attitude characterizing the teams organized by DISHA is the commitment to nature-friendly organic cultivation. This is largely in line with the CMSA orientation of the NRLM, although the authorities in West Bengal seem to have shifted gears regarding implementation urgency and methods.

*100% success in PMK creation:* An interesting programme under CMSA is the creation of *Progressive Mahila Kisans (PMKs)*, who are meant to extend the work undertaken by the CRPs to the neighbouring villages. DISHA's CMSA team in Purba Medinipur has been particularly successful in training PMKs from the Ramnagar I block. It trained 17 PMKs for work in that block. All of them passed the evaluation at the district level with flying colours and have been engaged as PMKs.

**XIII. KNOWLEDGE HUB FOR AGRICULTURE**

DISHA teams trained in Purba Medinipur act as a knowledge hub not only in the course of their formal duties but informally. Social media, particularly the WhatsApp and mobile phone in general acts as a powerful tool for sharing information between agricultural activists and knowledge disseminators. Moreover, DISHA's publications in this area act as important modes of disseminating knowledge.

#### XIV. KNOWLEDGE CENTRE IN THE SUNDARBANS

DISHA, in collaboration with *Soceo* and with the support of *Shöck Familien Stiftung* and *ChildFund Germany*, has assisted the *Mrittika Prayas* Trust in the development of a community-based livelihood knowledge centre in Dhuchnikhali Mouza of Korakati GP in Sandeshkhali-II Block of North 24 Parganas. The three-year project has come to an end in December 2019 with inspiring successes in experimenting with environmentally oriented, scientifically guided and indigenously rooted agricultural techniques, creating a repository of indigenous rice varieties, knowledge-empowerment of women farmers in highly saline areas and orienting women towards agriculture-based entrepreneurship. The project is very likely to be extended on and from April 2020. However, whether DISHA will be organizationally involved with it remains to be seen.

#### XV. INITIATIVE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREST RIGHTS

Since 2009, we have been trying to support the forest dependent fishers of Sundarban to achieve community rights on forest resources and to continue their traditional livelihood as ensured by the Act, its interpretations and related Rules. In case of western districts also, very few and inconsistent interventions have been made to ensure implementation of the Act. We provided support to the villagers of Ayodhha hills in Purulia to stop a hydel project in Turga as the project did not care for taking permission of Gram Sabha which is mandatory according to Forest Rights Act.

We organised a meeting with Sabuj Mancha and NAPM on 13<sup>th</sup> July 19 to protest the Supreme Court Order directing the state governments to evict all the families whose claims have been rejected. More than 500 signatures were collected and sent to the Chief Minister requesting to move to the Supreme Court to withdraw this order.

Very recently, a humble initiative has been launched, in **two forest villages** in the district of Jhargram, to support the villagers to form Gram Sabha as per the Act and the Rules. Forest Rights Committees in both the villages, **Kolmapukhuria Paschim** in Nayagram Block and **Joypur** in Binpur II Block, have been formed by the Gram Sabhas. They have submitted intimation to the Sub Divisional Level Committee on forest rights, along with the resolutions with recommendations of respective Gram Panchayet authorities. They have sought help of the SDLC in mapping the areas for preparation of both individual and community claims. Simultaneously they have started process of preparation of the claims.

Inspired by their initiative, villagers of the adjacent villages also have become interested to initiate the process in their respective villages. At this juncture, they

need support from all corners to develop their capacity and awareness level. Activists in other western districts also feel the need of awareness, training as well as sharing of their experiences and assessing the status of implementation in the respective districts. Several civil society groups are also keen to support the process of implementation. We have organised a workshop on 5-6 Feb to provide awareness and training to the activists. The effort will be continued.

#### **XVI. ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD OF PEOPLE DEPENDENT ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

We have been supporting some community based livelihood activities in Sundarban using local resources so that pressure upon natural resources reduces. Such activities were conducted in Lairipur in Sundarban and in Sabang in Paschim Medinipur. In Lahiripur in Gosaba, our local partner Sundarban Rural Development Society was very active. But Arjun Mondal was chief orgniaser of these activities. His demise has created great vaccuum. However, his associates in SRDS are nurturing the Sndari plants which were planted in last year under his superision.

A campaign on keeping the forest clean and banning of disposable bags and plates is also being conducted under this initiative. 12 widows of tiger victim families are supported to conduct the cleaning and campaign activities.

Some women groups are supported for rearing fish, chicken, duck etc. We have planned to develop a community centre in Lahiripur in the name of Arjun Mondal. A group of tiger widows will be engaged to work there. Livelihood activities like goat rearing, poultry, fish farming will be conducted there. The centre will also be used for organising tiger widows.

#### **XVII. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

We are also supporting several fish workers' cooperative so that the fish workers develop their capacity and skill to orrganise income generation activities of their own and for others. The following cooperatives have been formed and being run with our direct and indirect support in South 24 Parganas district -

Sagar Samudrik Mahila Matsyajibi Samabay Samiti in Ramkarchak, Sagar Block, Tangra Char Samudrik Matsyajibi Samabay Samiti in Kulpi Block and Chandanpiri Samudrik Matsyajibi Samabay Samiti in Namkhana Block.

#### **XVIII. CHILD SPONSORSHIP PROJECT**

Since 2015, we have been engaged in a completely new area of activity in connection with a project on fishers' right. Work is continued in selected 13 areas in 2 GPs in 2 blocks in coastal area of Purba Medinipur. More than 750 children were enrolled.

Another 75 children have been added in the list during the year. The children are of ages between 6 to 10 years. Our objective is to see that these children are growing in a healthy environment, there is no drop out from schools, early marriage is not taking place, child labour is not there, mid-day meal is served, and right to education is implemented. For another two years we shall keep track of these children to ensure that they grow up with adequate opportunity that a child should have in the country. We are running 13 child centres where children assemble once or twice in a week and get involved in dancing, yoga, playing, recitation, physical training, drawing and painting. They are engaged in extra-curricular activities. The villagers, especially the parents of these children are very happy to be part of this activity. Last year, on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2019, the fourth Child Development Festival was organized in Rania in collaboration with villagers. More than 600 children along with their guardians participated and gave a colorful appearance. Writing, drawing, recitation, dance and sports competitions were held.

Activities associated with child sponsorship project have created a very good impact. The schools in the villages of the sponsorship area are now taking up extra-curricular activities for development of the children. As such schools in villages usually do not have this custom. Through this project, awareness for mother and child health is also being developed.

## **XIX. RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

West Bengal Right to Education Forum was formed in 2010. Since 2018 it has become very active. DISHA has joined the Forum. Effort is being made to keep the villagers updated regarding right to free and quality education in the sponsorship area. The Forum is demanding quality education to all children and proper running of the government schools. DISHA has conducted a survey on status of students' rights in 30 primary schools in Purba Medinipur. WBRtE Forum is engaged in dialogue with State level Committee for Protection of Children and has proposed amendment of Rules so that School Management Committee is formed in every primary school.

## **XX. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

DISHA has been trying to develop women leadership in the fishing community. Efforts are being made to develop women's organizations, cooperatives and SHGs. A sustained effort has been taken so that women may form their own coordination within the fish workers' organization. An evaluator has been engaged to specifically help on this. She is evaluating the status of women's participation in leadership of the fisheries activities with respect to time. A few women fish workers have earned leadership qualities. Delegation of women fish workers representatives met the minister of fisheries but result is not very encouraging.

Apart from the livelihood issues, we have also been involved in social empowerment of the women. Awareness generation programmes have been conducted with adolescent girls in child sponsorship area with the slogan "Beti Zindabad". Two active groups of adolescent girls have been formed.

## **XXI. A BRIEF SUBMISSION ON ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS**

During last year DISHA has been supported by few donors like ActionAid, OAK Foundation, India Friends Association, Fund for Global Human Rights, Green Grants Fund and Child Fund. Programme support was received from FES and TWN.

Considering the limited resource of the organisation, one can say that last year DISHA performed beyond its capacity. Lots of issues have been addressed and some policy intervention could be possible. Yet the demand of the situation is more and we are not being able to cope up with this demand. I request all the members and supporters to give more efforts, take more responsibilities and try to make some real change. They are requested to create their own areas of involvement and connect DISHA with those. Some of such initiatives are already there but that may be increased.

As per last year's decision a Managing Committee consisting President, Vice-President, Secretary, Asst Secretary and Treasurer has been functioning to monitor and plan some of the activities. Meetings of the Managing Committee were held almost in every month. Important decisions to run the organization have been taken. Of course the running activities deserve more participation and input.

As such Governing Body meeting is to be held in every three months. We planned to hold extended GB meetings with participation of GB members as well as other members available in Kolkata. However we could not hold such meetings due to pressure of work.

There are more than 80 activists are now attached in DISHA's pay roll. Most of them are paid minimum amount as temporary staff. Among them 18 activists and office staffs are relatively better paid and are given regular appointment on contract for one year. Of course they have a reasonable increase in pay after every year. Health insurance and portion of PPF are provided to them. Members are mostly honorary except few who are paid for their regular time input and expenses borne for the activities.

We are miserably failing to attract young volunteers to consistently involve in environmental activities. In some actions like climate change, marathon, plastic

campaign etc., young volunteers take part but consistent attachment with organization is absent.

## XXII. CELEBRATING 25TH YEAR

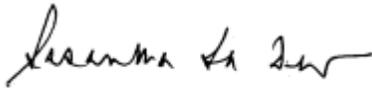
It is proposed that the 25<sup>th</sup> year of DISHA will be celebrated through various programmes during 2020.

- (a) The first one is today's meet. Let all of us utter a few words about DISHA – how do we see its role – what are its shortcomings – what are the expectations from it – should it exist? Who will carry forward?
- (b) A small gathering of close friends and supporters' of DISHA
- (c) A whole-day meeting on Climate Crisis
- (d) A cultural meet with participation of sponsored children and other community performers.

I would like to conclude with the belief that DISHA will be able to achieve more and better in the days to come through the combined efforts of all its members, staff, friends and well-wishers.

Regretting any errors and omissions and with heartiest congratulations,

Yours sincerely



Sasanka Dev  
SECRETARY