**Workshop: Migrant Fishermen from Andhra Pradesh in the Gujarat Marine Fishing Industry**

Place: Press Club, 7 Roads Junction, Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh  
Date: 14 March, 2016

**Introduction**  
The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust is a non-governmental organization that works towards the establishment of equitable, gender-just, self-reliant and sustainable fisheries, particularly in the small-scale, artisanal sector.

Between May-July 2016, I conducted a study on behalf of ICSF documenting the living and working conditions of migrants from Andhra Pradesh’s Srikakulam district in the fishing industry in Veraval, Gujarat. The study documented the living and working conditions of migrant fishers in Veraval; the reasons for migration from their home state; and the socio-economic effects of migration on the families of the fishers.

As a follow up to the study, ICSF conducted this workshop in Srikakulam, to share the findings of the report with all stakeholders, including fisher families, fisheries associations and welfare organisations, and government officials.

The ICSF workshop was organised with the support of the local fishing community in Srikakulam, in particular Jaganadha Rao and M Phalgunaraju, of the District Fishermen’s Welfare Association and Human Rights Forum. I thank Arjilli Dasu, executive secretary of the District Fishermen’s Youth Welfare Association, Vishakhapatnam, for his help in organising the workshop and moderating the discussions. I thank the Fisheries Department of Srikakulam for their participation in the workshop and their inputs during the research for the report. The deputy director of fisheries, Varanasi Krishnamurti, provided helpful feedback on the recommendations in the study and responded to the queries from fishers at the workshop. I also thank the assistant director of fisheries, Nirmala Kumari, and the fisheries development officer, Y Satyanarayana, for their participation. Finally, I thank all the other organisations and local fishers for their participation and support for such a workshop to discuss the livelihoods of migrant fishermen, who are often overlooked in the discourse on fisheries management. My thanks also to the former deputy director of fisheries, Yakub Basha, and Srikakulam collector, Dr PL Narasimham, who gave me valuable inputs for the study.

The workshop was attended by nearly 40 people, ten of who were women- some working in fish marketing in Srikakulam and Vishakhapatnam, and others were families of migrating fishermen.

The overall objective of the workshop was:

- To disseminate the findings of the ICSF field report on the living and working conditions of migrant fishers and discuss the recommendations with the community and all stakeholders.
- To get the feedback from the community, who contributed time, energy and information for the study.
To provide a space for dialogue between fishing communities and the local administration and to explore possibilities for further action.

Each year, over 25,000 fishers from Andhra Pradesh’s coastal districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Vishakhapatnam travel to Veraval and Porbandar in Gujarat to work on marine fishing boats. They spend eight months away from their homes, going on long fishing trips- between 15 and 22 days at a time – travelling as far as Karnataka and Kerala down the western coast of India. The numbers are anecdotal estimates because the government has no measure of the number of men who migrate. Despite the economic gains they make by migrating, the workers are almost invisible, never present in their home states to be counted among the local fishers, and socially and linguistically cut off from the community in the labour receiving state. Consequently, their concerns remain neglected, as they live and work in conditions that are often exploitative.

A point that came up repeatedly during the workshop was the need for proper documentation of migration by the governments of labour sending and receiving states. This will help in framing policies directed at migrant workers and also provide families with a channel for redress in cases where fishers go missing or are hurt while working away from home.

It’d be useful to thematically discuss the points raised in the workshop; the themes are framed as problems highlighted by the community, the recommendations in the report and finally the response from the administration.

1) **Infrastructure:** As had been pointed out by the migrating fishermen in the study, one of the factors triggering the movement of fishers to Gujarat is the lack of opportunities for marine fishing in Andhra Pradesh, particularly Srikakulam, where fishing infrastructure is underdeveloped. Unlike Gujarat, which has several fishing harbours and many landing centres for bigger, mechanised vessels, Andhra Pradesh has only Visakhapatnam, which, too, has a lower capacity to house boats compared to Veraval. Private investment in boats and equipment is also low because the government outlay for subsidies to fishermen is much lower than in Gujarat. As a result, fishing operations in Srikakulam is on a much smaller scale, on smaller, non-mechanised boats and the earnings are far less. Most migrants see no alternative but to travel to Gujarat or Kerala, where the operations are much bigger. The participants at the workshop expressed the same sentiment- that they needed more support from the government.

Narasimha Rao, president of the District Fisheries Cooperative Society, said that at present only 30% of capital inputs- boats, engines, nets and equipment, is covered by government subsidies. He said that the fishers demand the government share be raised to 75%.

Arjilli Dasu, executive secretary of the District Fishermen’s Youth Welfare Association, said that the government had not looked into the infrastructure needs of local fishers, especially port storage for fish. He said that fish being a perishable commodity, cold storages are very important. There were almost none in the district, except on the highway to Vishakhapatnam, he said. Chintapalli Suryanarayana, a fishermen’s leader, claimed that little of the National Fisheries Development Board’s sizable budget is utilized for small fishermen.
The deputy director of fisheries, V Krishnamurty, raised several points in response to the fishers’ demands for better infrastructure. He acknowledged the district’s lack of harbours and landing centres but said that harbours are expensive, costing over Rs 250 crore and that the department’s funds were limited. One new development was that the district collector, Dr PL Narasimham, had recently held a meeting with coastal village panchayats in Srikakulam and promised to build two new harbours: in Bavanapadu and Etcherla. The Fisheries Department is also planning to build fish landing centres in two spots: in Manchnellapeta and Rallapeta. The estimated cost of each is roughly Rs 30 cr and the department is waiting for the feasibility study report for the same. Mr Krishnamurty also discussed the possibility of raising the budget for fishing craft subsidies. This year, he said, subsidies of 25 boats has been sanctioned, which he acknowledged in not enough.

Another problem is the delays in issuing biometric cards for identification for the fishers. In the villages visited for the study, only about 20 percent of the fishermen had cards, which would have allowed them to fish in any part of the country. The lack of identification is a nagging problem especially for the migrants in Gujarat, where concerns about security are much more serious. The fishers reported being routinely pulled up by the coast guard for not having proper ID. They now have to approach the fisheries department every year to get temporary licenses issued. Fishermen with over two decades of experience didn’t have biometric cards. They claimed that data had been collected for many of them but they’d waited over two years and the cards hadn’t arrived.

The Fisheries Department acknowledged that this is a problem. Mr Krishnamurty said that the department had invited tenders from tech companies for the data collection and the issue of biometric cards but the response was very poor. Even after contracts had been signed, there have been disagreements and the contracts have either fallen through or there have been several errors in data collection and in the technology.

2) **Accidents at sea**: In the study both fishers who migrate and those who stay behind spoke of the poor response from the state and boat owners in case of accidents at sea. The fishers said that accident insurance amounts only arrive for fatal accidents and never for serious injuries. Another major complaint was that the bodies of the dead were almost never sent back to the villages, though the seths claim otherwise. The fishers who stay behind cite this as a major reason for not migrating, though the dangers at sea are the same even in their home state. Some fishers also demanded compensation from both labour sending and receiving states for deaths at sea.

In the workshop, participants expressed the need for better documentation of migrating fishermen and of accident cases. They demanded that the government ensure that insurance amounts be paid and the government also provide compensation to fishermen’s families. At present, both the Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh governments have insurance schemes promising Rs 2 lakh to fishers for accidental deaths, but all participants agreed that the insurance was rarely paid. Boat owners must be made to strictly adhere to guidelines for reporting of accidents and properly documenting such cases for insurance claims. Language is a major barrier, with post mortems and police inquests filed in Gujarati. It was pointed out that in several cases of heart attacks while fishing, families had been denied insurance.
because heart disease was cited as a natural cause and such cases couldn’t be counted as accidental deaths. The participants also demanded that the AP government pay the families compensation in cases of deaths.

Mr Krishnamurty said that the department will discuss the possibility of all documentation being made in English with the district administration and their counterparts in Gujarat.

3) **Contracts:** Contracts must be made mandatory between boat owners and crew members stipulating terms, working and rest hours, remuneration and minimum wage requirements, and safety regulations. The Interstate Migrant Workers Act already requires such contracts. The participants at the workshop all agreed that such contracts are a must so as to ensure fishers have more bargaining powers. Several speakers said that the lack of awareness about rights was a problem among fishers, many of whom were middle- and high-school dropouts.

4) **Caste status:** Most fishers in the study were from the Vadabalaji caste; about 60 percent of Andhra Pradesh’s fishers are Vadabalajis. The fisher castes have historically been counted in the Backward Classes but their demand to be counted in the ST category has repeatedly come up, especially during election time in the state. The ST status, according to the fishers, will give them access to government jobs and educational institutions. While most participants agreed that this is a legitimate demand, they were more muted than the fishers interviewed for the study. They acknowledged that their demands were up against several legal and constitutional hurdles, as well as the political realities of the state. Mr Krishnamurty, too, pointed out that this is a political issue that the department can do nothing about.

5) **Training for migrating fishermen:** A persistent problem observed during the study was how difficult it is for the government or NGOs to reach out to the migrating fishers because they were both away from home and rarely on the shore in Gujarat. Most government awareness drives were only attended by local fishermen or boat owners and the migrants were left out. Several speakers at the workshop raised this point and stressed on the need for special training programs from the Andhra Pradesh Fisheries Department directed at migrants, with a focus on health and safety issues, minimum wage and other labour regulations. M Ramarao, a local fisher and member of the Human Rights Forum, and Surada Raja Rao, general secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Sampradaya Machikara Sangam, asked for an information centre, either under the Fisheries or Labour Departments, to oversee all migration and asked that the district appoint one official for migrant welfare. Mr Krishnamurty promised that the Fisheries Department will conduct training programs which will include components on migration.

6) **Effects of migration on women and families:** In Srikakulam, changing economic circumstances in the coastal villages has led to a social churn whose effects can be seen both in the occupational choices of the younger generation and the lifestyles of families. Among the migrating fisher families, where traditionally the labour of fishing was divided between men and women, now, women are either not working outside of their homes or are engaged in other trades: selling agricultural produce in urban centres, starting small businesses, etc. Most of the youth interviewed in the study also expressed no interest in fishing. Those who were college educated aspired to move into other jobs; many young men had found jobs on
merchant shipping vessels and some women were training to be teachers. At the workshop, all the women said their children didn’t want to work in the fishing industry.

Mr Krishnamurty, the deputy director of fisheries, also spoke about the social effects of migration: on one hand families were separated but living conditions in the villages had improved because of higher earnings. But, in villages where several men had left traditional fishing to migrate to other states, women couldn’t find consistent work for the 8 months that men were absent.

Several speakers spoke about how the men were more careless with their health because of the harsh work and travel schedules. Dietary habits had changed and the men also neglected occupational health problems like allergies and infections.

The testimonies of the women at the workshop illuminated several vulnerabilities that the men hadn’t discussed during interviews for the study. V Gannama, the wife of a migrant, told us her husband had been missing for three years. He worked as a crew member on a Veraval boat but she had no news from the boat owners or his fellow fishers on his whereabouts. Gannamma has three children, all girls over 16 years, and the financial strain was tremendous. She has temporarily found NREGA work. Satyavathi, also the wife of a migrant fisher, is a fish vendor in Srikakulam. Her husband has been working in Veraval for ten years and she said they were comfortable and their combined earnings helped them build a house and educate their two children. Her brother, also a fisherman in Gujarat, had had a different experience- he’d been arrested by the Pakistan marine police and jailed for nearly three years and then released but he continued to travel to Gujarat.

Lakshmi, a coordinator with the NGO SWEEP in Srikakulam, spoke at the workshop about health problems common among fishers and particularly about cases of child labour among migrating fishers. In 2015, her NGO had worked closely with the district administration to rescue over 60 boys travelling to Gujarat to work on boats. The NGO now oversaw the education of these boys and also counseled the migrant fishers’ families on health and education.

7) **Pollution and Encroachment of Fishing Grounds by Industry:** An issue that the study was not able to delve into in detail but came up repeatedly in the workshop was the fishers’ concerns about the entry of several industries into coastal Andhra Pradesh, particularly in Srikakulam district. Chintapally Suryanarayana, a fishers’ leader, pointed out how several big ports, power plants and pharmaceutical factories were blocking off fishers’ access to the sea and the surrounding coastline. Sand mining, rampant on the Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu coast to fuel the booming construction sector, had also led to the degradation of coastal habitats, soil erosion and the loss of mangroves. The fishers felt their discharge into the sea had also led to a reduction in fish catch over the last decade. Madan Mohan, an agricultural scientist, and Kona Ramu, a member of HRF, were of the belief that the declining fish catch and the resulting loss of earnings for local fishers was the main reason for migration. The fishers demanded that pollution by these industries be kept in check through tighter government regulations and also that the fishers be offered employment as they slowly move out of marine fishing occupations.
Conclusion
The ICSF workshop on Andhra Pradesh’s migrant fishermen served as a fruitful space for dialogue between the fishing community and the local administration. With the help of the ICSF study and the recommendations from the workshop, the Fisheries Department aims to now initiate a plan for migrant welfare along with the district administration and their counterparts in Veraval and look into the possibilities for further action. A first step could be to launch the migration information and facilitation centre under the collectorate, which had been announced in 2015. As had been discussed in the study as well as the workshop, there is a serious lack of credible information on migration, both numbers and the modalities of recruitment, work and remuneration for migrating fishermen.
## ANNEX I

### AGENDA

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>10:30 – 11:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 – 11:30</td>
<td><strong>Welcome</strong>&lt;br&gt;Manas Roshan, Research Consultant, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)&lt;br&gt;M Phalgunaraju, President, District Fishers Welfare Association, Srikakulam</td>
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<td><strong>Introduction to Workshop and Share Details of Field Report</strong>&lt;br&gt;Manas Roshan, Research Consultant, ICSF</td>
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<td>11:30 – 12:00</td>
<td><strong>Address</strong>&lt;br&gt;Vranasi Krishnamurty, Deputy Director, Department of Fisheries, Srikakulam</td>
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<td>12:00 – 12:15</td>
<td>Tea-break</td>
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<td>12:15 – 12:30</td>
<td><strong>Address – Migration and Problems of AP Fishers</strong>&lt;br&gt;Speaker: Arjilli Dasu, Executive Secretary&lt;br&gt;<strong>District Fishermens Youth Welfare Association, Vishakhapatnam</strong></td>
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<td>12:30 – 13:00</td>
<td><strong>Discussion – Securing Livelihoods of AP Fishers</strong>&lt;br&gt;Speakers: Chintapalli Suryanarayana, Fishermen’s Leader, Srikakulam&lt;br&gt;Narasimha Rao, President, District Fisheries Cooperative Society, Srikakulam&lt;br&gt;Surada Raja Rao, General Secretary, Andhra Pradesh Sampradaya Machikara Sangam</td>
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<td>13:00 – 13:30</td>
<td><strong>Discussion – Women’s Experience of Migration and Fisheries Management</strong>&lt;br&gt;Speakers: V Gannamma and Satyavathi (Families of migrant fishers)&lt;br&gt;Lakshmi, Coordinator, Society for Welfare Education and Environmental Protection, Srikakulam</td>
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<td>13:30 – 14:00</td>
<td><strong>Group Discussion</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Vote of Thanks</strong>&lt;br&gt;Jagannadha Rao, Vice-President, Human Rights Forum&lt;br&gt;Manas Roshan</td>
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<td>14:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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