

Rural Women in Aquaculture: Bangladesh

How to improve her family's health through more nutritious food and increase her family's meager income were only two of Mrs. Nur Banu's problems for the past years. She and countless other farmers' housewives belong to the more than 60% of Bangladesh's population who live in poverty, with no purchasing power, and who suffer from malnutrition due to low protein intake.

This year, Mrs. Banu became the example for more than a hundred men and women in Rampur Union of Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh District. In three months, she earned Tk807 (US\$1= Tk35.59) using integrated small-scale aquaculture-agriculture technology on her 160-m² backyard pond which had been idle for years.



Mrs. Banu sells her fish catch.

In Bangladesh, seasonal waters in the form of ditches, ponds, roadside canals, borrow pits, etc., abound. Left idle or underutilized, they could pose health hazards as they could be breeding grounds for mosquitoes. The Fisheries Research Institute (FRI) with the assistance of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the technical guidance of an aquaculture specialist from the International Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM), saw the potential of these water resources. Simple

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Idle ponds like this, covered with obnoxious water hyacinth, could be food and income resources.

technologies were developed to put these water areas to good use. Needing very low inputs and labor, they could be implemented by women, without diverting the efforts of men which could be in agriculture.

It is this technology which Mrs. Banu adopted. With the assistance of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) which transfers the technologies to rural farmers, she was introduced to aquaculture and was even assisted in raising 20 broiler chickens and a homestead vegetable garden.

On her 160-m² pond, she applied 3 kg of lime on 20 April 1990 and stocked 250 ten-

gram fingerlings (15,625/ha) of *Puntius gonionotus* on 24 April 1990. She fed the fish daily with rice bran, an agricultural by-product readily available from her house. She collected daily the manure of the chickens, which she applied weekly, half the amount in her pond, and half on her garden. In three months she harvested 22 kg of fish with an average weight of 100 g, which sold briskly at Tk50/kg. Deducting her operating costs of Tk293 (for lime, fingerlings, rice bran and labor for harvesting), her net profit was Tk807. This translates to Tk 50,437/ha/3 months. This does not include yet her revenue from her chicken and garden.

Clearly, integrated aquaculture-agriculture on idle ponds/ditches brings benefits to farmers' families in the rural areas of Bangladesh and enhances the role of women in improving the quality of their families' lives. These are the benefits that the researchers hope to bring to the rest of the farmers' families, through the women, in the different parts of the country. 6

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Mrs. Banu shares her experience on integrated farming with her neighbors, mostly women.