



FACTSHEET Enhanced Coastal Fisheries (ECOFISH^{BD}) Project in Bangladesh



Background

Hilsa shad (*Tenualosa ilisha*) is the national fish of Bangladesh. Popular in the countries within the Bay of Bengal region due to its flavor, hilsa is rich in micronutrients and omega-3 fatty acids.

Formerly, hilsa was abundant in about 100 rivers of Bangladesh. However, populations have declined sharply due to overfishing, siltation, pollution from urban and industrial effluents, the effects of agro-chemicals, and a changing climate. This decline ultimately threatens the livelihoods of the people dependent upon the hilsa fishery. Improved management of hilsa fisheries can increase the abundance of hilsa and other aquatic species.

The Government of Bangladesh has instituted a Hilsa Fisheries Management Action Plan and established five sanctuaries along the Padma-Meghna river-estuarine ecosystem. The plan promotes seasonal fishing bans during the hilsa spawning period and general fishing bans on juvenile hilsa, known as jatka (<25 centimeters). However, this plan has not resulted in the expected successful conservation of hilsa due to a lack of technical skills and resources to implement the plan.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Enhanced Coastal Fisheries (ECOFISH^{BD}) project seeks to improve the resilience of the hilsa fishery in the Padma-Meghna river-ecosystem and the livelihoods that depend upon it. ECOFISH^{BD} is a 5-year initiative, implemented by WorldFish in partnership with the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh, and other stakeholders.

Approach

The ECOFISH^{BD} project utilizes an innovative “research in development” approach to address the development challenges prioritized by local, national and regional stakeholders. In close collaboration with partners, the project aims to support the use of science-based decision-making in fisheries management, enhance the resilience of hilsa populations through improved co-management of the fishery, and build the capacity of partners and fishing communities to improve enforcement in fish sanctuaries. In addition, the project aims to support the improved livelihoods of fishers, especially women.

The project will utilize participatory action research methods that enable fishers to work alongside researchers to identify problems and use their skills and local resources to find solutions. Participatory research empowers communities and strengthens their capacities, provides access to new knowledge, and links them effectively with other stakeholders.



Key Facts

- **Project name:** Enhanced Coastal Fisheries (ECOFISH^{BD})
- **Donor:** USAID
- **CGIAR research program:** Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS)
- **Project duration:** June 2014–May 2019
- **Geographies:** Padma-Meghna river-estuarine areas in Barisal, Bhola, Barguna, Jhalokati, Pirojpur, Patuakhali, Laxmipur, Chandpur and Shariatpur districts
- **ECOFISH^{BD} partners:** Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island; International Institute for Environment and Development; Wildlife Conservation Society; International Union for Conservation of Nature; International Development Enterprises; Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute; Community Development Centre; Center for Natural Resource Studies, and Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust
- **Contact person:** Dr. Abdul Wahab
Team Leader, ECOFISH^{BD}
A.Wahab@cgiar.org



ECOFISH^{BD} activities

The project's key activities to be addressed include the following:

- Conduct a scientific hilsa stock assessment.
- Assess the biodiversity in the Padma-Meghna river-estuarine ecosystems.
- Promote adaptive co-management strategies.
- Support hilsa stock enhancement.
- Build the adaptive capacity of fishers in response to climate change and other shocks and stresses.
- Promote increased access of women in the fish value chain.
- Diversify livelihood options and increase access to finance for women to participate in alternative income-generating activities.
- Promote a multistakeholder-endorsed fishery policy.
- Support the development and implementation of fisher-friendly enforcement of fishing laws.
- Update the Hilsa Fisheries Management Action Plan, including an improved co-management model.

ECOFISH^{BD} outcomes

- Improved science-based fisheries management
- Enhanced fisheries adaptive co-management
- Improved social-ecological resilience of the hilsa fishery and fishers
- Improved policy, power and incentives

Anticipated benefits

By reducing overexploitation of the hilsa fishery in the Meghna River, ECOFISH^{BD} will provide the following:

- A sustainable supply of hilsa, which is a nutritious, animal-source food that is affordable to the resource-poor;
- Improved nutrition, income and quality of life for small-scale fishing communities;
- Healthy coastal and marine ecosystems that support essential ecosystem services.



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