



## Teaching the Adivasi to fish for a lifetime of benefit in Bangladesh



### Outcome Story

For the ethnic minority Adivasi communities of Bangladesh, the enduring effects of the Adivasi Fisheries Project (AFP) are still being felt, three years after the project ended. During the project, fish production increased five-fold, fish consumption nearly quadrupled and the average household income for members of this vulnerable population improved significantly, far outstripping project expectations. Many of the nearly 3600 households that participated in the project are still using the aquaculture techniques that they learned, and others in the community have also adopted the practices.

Despite its fertile floodplains, numerous communities in Bangladesh are beset by poverty and malnutrition. This is especially true for the Adivasi, Bangladesh's marginalized Indigenous population comprised of more than 45 distinct cultural groups. In 2007, the European Union funded WorldFish, in collaboration with Caritas Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Forum (BFRF), to work with Adivasi communities in five districts in the North and Northwest of the country. The aim was to assist households in establishing fish ponds and other aquaculture enterprises that would help them to meet the challenges of dwindling native fish resources and limited landholding that threaten the health and wellbeing of the Adivasi peoples.

Over two thirds of Adivasi households in selected communities of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Joypurhat, Sherpur and Netrokona districts participated in the project. Local Farmer Field Schools (FFS) in 120 communities were established to deliver training in a range of aquaculture and community-based fisheries management practices to suit small-scale landholders as well as the landless. Through regular FFS meetings, the Adivasi learned about pond-fish culture, integrated rice-fish culture and cage fingerling production. For the landless, especially women, training in fingerling production, community-based fisheries management, and fish trading was provided. Landless men learned about

providing fish harvesting services to fish pond owners. The FFS approach enabled participants to take part in planning, implementing and monitoring the aquaculture interventions in their community.

A survey of participating households in 2009 found that one of the key benefits was an increase in household income, from an average of USD 350 in 2007 to USD 570 in 2009. The flow-on effects of greater income were substantial. Savings increased from 9% of household income in 2007 to 25% in 2009, and ownership of land and assets also increased. Improvements in household nutrition indicators were also observed, with fish-based meals consumed per month increasing to a range of 16–26 across groups in 2009, compared with just 8–12 per month in 2007.

At the 'National Fish Week' celebrations in 2009, two thirds of the aquaculture awards went to Adivasi households, a tribute to the resounding success of the project. The participatory approach used in AFP has also become a cornerstone of aquaculture programs in the region, run by partner organizations Caritas and BFRF, as well as the Bangladeshi Department of Fisheries (DoF). The Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP), the Natural Resource Management Project (NRMP-II), and the Women Empowerment through Livelihoods and Right Promotion Project, have all incorporated aspects of AFP in their design.

The Adivasi people are still reaping the rewards since the project officially ended in 2009. A study on sustainability in 2012 found that the AFP had successfully improved the livelihoods for the Adivasi. The majority of Adivasi visited were continuing with the activities they had adopted during the project period, and some had even expanded their operations. Others in the community had also adopted the new aquaculture practices. In the case of the Adivasi, it seems that the adage that teaching a community to fish will indeed feed the community for a lifetime.



## *With communities, changing lives*

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