

Livelihood Innovation of Rural Women

Written by: P. Jayasankar, B.B. Sahoo, H. K. De, P. N. Ananth, Rajesh N., A. K. Dash, Nirupama Panda, Utkal Laxmi Mohanty, P. R. Sahoo, S. Behara, D. P. Rath
Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Let us present here the success story of a group of women belonging to families with poor economic status. They have defied dogmas of the community and came out of shell with drive and determination to turn around things. In 1999, 13 motivated rural poor women formed a Women Self-help Group (WSHG) called "Pragati" in the village Jaipur of Satyabadi block in Puri district of Odisha state in India. The women were so poor that they had started savings a fistful of rice every day from each of their households. At the end of every month, they used to sell the rice @ Rs. 10/- per kg. As a result, Rs. 130/- in total was saved monthly by this group. Consequently, the group savings increased and now the corpus fund is in lakhs.

There is a community pond named 'Nalita' of 1.5 ha area in this village. The pond belonged to the village Panchayat which was infested with aquatic weeds. The pond was used by the villagers for multiple purposes like bathing, cleaning their livestock, washing clothes and utensils, and sometimes even for drinking water from it. The village women were suffering from several gynaecological problems. One day, Laxmi Sethi, President of Pragati Mahila Mandal of this village came forward and has played a leading role for motivating the women for cleaning and de-weeding the pond despite the protests raised by their male counterparts. The then male Sarpanch was also strongly opposing. But the women members ignored the protests from the male counterparts, worked hard and cleaned the pond using long bamboos and banana stems. Not even the snake bites deterred them from cleaning the pond, and continued to ignore the sarcastic remarks and criticisms of other people.

In 2008, the pond was leased for five years with leasing value of Rs.1800/- per year and fish culture operation was started. They got a profit of Rs.100 thousand in 2009. In 2010, the pond was damaged by flood, resulting in crop loss. In 2011, the pond was renovated through NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme). Now the Group is actively participated in fish farming through intervention of Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (CIFA), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

Base line survey was done in the village to assess the socio-economic status of the members before CIFA's intervention. CIFA's intervention in supplying Indian major carp seeds in the ratio 1:2:1 (catla:rohu:mrigal) for stocking in the community pond enabled the women to take initiatives in grow out fish production. Pond preparation including liming and weed removal were done by the WSHG members. On farm demonstration and hands on training on pond preparation, de-weeding of pond, fertilizer application, feed broadcasting, etc. were carried out for the members of the WSHGs. Locally available materials like cow dung, GNO, mineral mixture, SSP and Potash were used to fertilize the ponds.



After 7 days, excellent plankton growth was achieved. A total of five harvests were done till the month of June, 2013 with 6.75 quintal of carps including 1.5 quintal of trash fish. The size of carps varied from 500 g to 2 kg and total fish were sold at Rs. 50,000/-. After deducting the labour charge and other expenses like liming and feeding of Rs. 22,000/-, the net income was Rs. 28,000/-, which was saved in the group's account. Thus, the members of the group were economically empowered and as a result, their socio-economic status is being improved due to CIFA's intervention in terms of technology and input supply. While interacting with the members of the group, the President expressed the unavailability of appropriate marketing opportunities for selling the harvested fish. Selling fish to the local vendors did not fetch substantial margin. This is one of the issues which need our prioritized attention.

There are various schemes for promoting agriculture and rural industries with innovative ideas and innovations, such as those financed directly by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which should be availed the members of the groups. These schemes are valid for individuals or institutions that show proof of uniqueness in the activities or production either by saving cost or reducing time or procedure apart from maintaining or improving quality. CIFA is always in the forefront of offering helping hand to the poor and marginal farmers not only through enabling technologies in freshwater aquaculture, but also linking them to other agencies and institutions for holistic and sustainable development.

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