

Water Farming for more Resilience

The Inequality Challenge. Innovative Solutions for a Global Issue

The Challenge

Many people live in agrarian marginal communities close to the floodplains of the major rivers Ganga, Brahmaputra and Padma in South Asian countries India and Bangladesh. They have been facing recurring floods and environmental hazards over centuries that have also changed the geomorphology of the arable land area, which is now highly vulnerable to inundation and erosion.

Every year, more than one third of the land is completely submerged and about a quarter of it remains partially submerged by floodwaters for five to seven months. In Majuli River Island alone, 77% of agrarian land is flooded, which forced two thirds of the indigenous marginal community to migrate temporarily. This renders to livelihood vulnerability, social distress and poverty owe to the scarcity of food, employment and social security. The inhabitants have no alternatives for survival, no opportunities to combat the impacts of climate change and succumb to societal disintegration.

Affected people are in crucial need of an alternative flood resilient farming practice for food and social security that constitutes the present challenge.

The Objective

The main objective of the project is to...

- Train farmers in hydroponic farming and aquaculture as an integrated climate adaptive agricultural practice (ICAAP) for promoting flood resilience.
- Ensure sustainable livelihood and food security for marginal farmers and raise awareness about community level disaster preparedness.

Project title	Water Farming for Climate Resilient Agriculture and Disaster Preparedness in India & Bangladesh
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Country	India & Bangladesh
Implementing Organisation	South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE)
Partner Organisations	ICAR & NABARD (India), BARCIK (Bangladesh)
Duration	July 2018 – September 2019

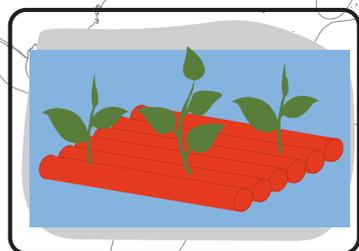
- Promote inclusive growth through financial inclusion and develop market linkage of young farmer's groups (Joint Liability Groups).

The Target Group

The target group in India comprises of marginal communities in the east of Majuli River Island of Assam, 63% of them are agrarian farmers or fishers, 16% are labourers and 21% are non-workers. The populace comprises of nine indigenous communities and two displaced hill tribes, who are still excluded from mainstream development. These communities are highly vulnerable to natural disaster. About 85% of the inhabitants survive below poverty line and mostly consist of indigenous groups like Mishing and Aapatani tribes.

The other location in East Saharsa district in Bihar bordering Nepal is known for severe flood devastations, the tribal communities living in the area, like Musahar and Madhesi, survive in acute poverty.

The community in Bangladesh is based in Shyamnagar, Satkhira district of Khulna division, which is often inundated by sea storms and losing its habitat to rising sea level in the face of climate tragedies. In the sub-district Shyamnagar upzila, people mainly live on agriculture, however only one third of them engage in subsistence agriculture. The others do not have fixed occupations, which makes them even more vulnerable to climate and societal risks.



Contact person

Dr Dipayan Dey
chair@safeinch.org
drdipayandey@gmail.com



The Approach

In order to provide a local sustainable solution, the project introduces flood resilient hydroponic farming practice in connection with aquaculture of fish through capacity building and technology transfer. Moreover, local institutions are strengthened by forming community groups called 'Joint Liability Groups' who work collectively and have a common banking account for earned revenues.

Float farming originally comes from the deltaic districts of Bangladesh, wherein the float bed of rotten biomass is loaded with soil for farming. The project improves this concept, making innovative changes in the design, material, size and capacity of each float, to place it as a livelihood unit for the indigenous farming households. The project uses hydro-foam and sponge for the hydroponic circulation of water and builds the flood resilient structure from locally available non-timber forest products. The farming medium comprised of proportionate amount of vermicompost, coco peat, biochar and sand.

The project team trains young and motivated rural farmers and fisher folk in raft making, cultivation techniques, weed and pest management and post-harvest management of the rafts. The crop cycle planning is a participatory process, wherein the beneficiaries decide which crops are to be planted. The farmers are also introduced to fish cage and pen culture along with disseminating small hatchery management techniques.

An integrated placement of rafts and fish cages substantially augments the flood mitigation potentials and disaster preparedness of the community. A sustainable and circular economic paradigm of conserving the habitat and agro-biodiversity could thus ensure food security, social assurance and economic wellbeing.

The Milestones

So far, the project has achieved the following milestones:

- It identified and sensitised nearly 200 households in ten villages in the target areas of India and Bangladesh. Therefore building awareness on alternative farming and integrated farming practices for adopting float farming and aquaculture techniques.
- The project team organised stakeholder meetings with agricultural and fisheries experts, local administrators, policy makers, civil society organisations as well as community representatives. In those meetings, participants agreed on initiating the project interventions, identified the detailed sites of implementation and formed Joint Liability Groups with the direct beneficiaries.
- The team could already create an infrastructure for one hectare of model floating farms in each site of intervention in India and Bangladesh, setting up workshop and training units and imparting the basic level training on integrated farming to the first batch of beneficiaries for start-ups.

About the Inequality Challenge

The Inequality Challenge supports innovative approaches that tackle inequality and the 'leave no one behind' principle of the 2030 Agenda with the ultimate goal to integrate and upscale those approaches into German Development Cooperation's portfolio. Initiated by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), it supports ten projects in India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mongolia, Jordan, Serbia, Nigeria, Mauritania, Brazil and Mexico with up to 100,000 EUR.

GIZ manages the Inequality Challenge. For further information, please visit www.inequality-challenge.com or contact Tiffany Sacher, fundmanagement@giz.de.

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Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Sector Project 'Reducing Poverty and Inequality' as part of the 2030 Agenda
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 36 + 40
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 44 60 0
F +49 228 44 60-80

fundmanagement@giz.de
www.giz.de
www.inequality-challenge.com

Author Sangram Mandal

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