

Project Update: October 2015

Apart from developing community mangrove forests our other major activity since the last few months has also been the restoration of aquatic eco systems. Our target is to restore five such systems and develop community ponds, for crab and fish culture. These include two ponds in Patharpara, one each in the villages of Chargheri, Annpur and Vidyasagar Road.

Of this one pond in Patharpara and another in Chargheri have been made ready. The pond at Patharpara measures about 3500 sq. feet in area with a depth of about 3 feet. According to villagers, this pond is being used for the culture of Giant Mud crabs/ King Crab/ Mangrove crabs (*Scylla serrata*). Twenty families from the village have been made direct beneficiaries.



Crabs take about 90 days to reach full size and sell in the market @ Rs. 500- Rs. 700 per kilo. Each harvest of crab culture will yield about 30- 35 kilos. So, it will emerge as a substantial source of income. We are waiting for the first collection of crabs in the month of November.

The pond at Chargheri is bigger measuring about 7500 sq. km in area. Apart from crabs, the villagers with their traditional knowledge of fishing have selected fingerlings of species which can develop favourably in these ponds. They include *Bhetki* also known as Bararamundi Asian seabass (*Lates calcarifer*) besides species of prawns as *Bagda* or Tiger prawns (*Penaeus monodon*), *Galda* or Giant River Prawn (*Macrobrachium Rosenbergii*), *Horina Chingri* or Brown shrimp (*Metapenaeus monoceros*).

The location of the two ponds near river banks outside villages provide the ideal mix of brackish water during high tides when there is incursion of tidal river water. Crabs and varieties of prawns/ shrimp thrive in such saline water.

Like crabs, the maturity period of prawns is also between 90- 100 days. We are expecting our first harvest of prawns also in November. Prawn fetch an average price of about Rs. 500 – Rs. 520. About 26- 30 kgs of prawns, besides about 30- 35 kgs of crabs, are expected to be raised in the first harvest. However, brown shrimps which take about 15- 20 days to mature are already being harvested. Selling at about Rs. 150-Rs. 200 per kg, 10- 12 kgs are being raised every fortnight. *Bhetki* would offer a price of Rs. 400 – Rs. 410 per kg. The first harvest expected around February next year, is likely to yield about 30 kgs. The species takes about 10- 11 months for full growth.

Ducks are also reared on these ponds by the villagers. The droppings of ducks will also serve as food for the fish besides aerating the water while swimming. However, most importantly, these ponds are also encouraging the villagers to try and grow coarse paddy in certain select plots in the village. For instance, coarse rice is grown in the vicinity of community pond in Chargheri village in about 1 bigha of land in the vicinity of pond. The benefits are being shared by three families having land in the village. *Bigha and Kattha are local units of measurement of land in West- Bengal) 1 Katha = 720 sq. feet. 1 bigha = 20 katha.*



Certain homes are trying to cultivate fruits and vegetables as bananas, potato, various varieties of gourds, etc. This cannot only supplement their day to day family needs but also enable them to sell the surplus in the market.

According to villagers, it is enough to water their vegetable plots (spread across 4 *katthas* – 5 *katthas*) twice in a week for about 20 minutes. Hence, this water for irrigation is easily obtained from the community ponds.

It is a sheer delight to watch our first lot of baby plantations gradually develop into tracts of mangrove wilderness in the once vacant land outside villages. We have covered about 12 hectares (ha) of land in the five villages of Annpur, Patharpara, Duttagram, Parasmani and Tipligheri. The species of mangrove planted include – Sundari – (*Heritiera fomes*) ,Goran (*Ceriops decandra*), Dhundul (*Xylocarpus Granatum*), Byne (*Avicennia Officinalis*), Peara Byne- (*Avicennia Marina*), Keora (*Sonneratia Apetala*), Kankra (*Bruguiera Gymnorrhiza*), Pasur (*Xylocarpus Mekongensis*), Motgoran (*Ceriops Tagal*), Genwa (*Excoecaria Agallocha*) etc.



Apart from this plantation has also been started in the villages of Hamilton Mouza and Rajatjubilee. The growing saplings are however very attractive to cattle. Our Mangrove guards from Sunderban Wildlife Rural Development Society (SWRDS) are maintaining vigil to keep away the cattle. Simultaneously, our tiger widows are nurturing the sites by keeping it clean and removing garbage that block the soil. While the forests are still growing, these aquaculture systems within or adjacent to them in the target villages are emerging as sustainable sources of livelihood.



Folk Dispensary

We are trying to develop folk dispensary in Hamilton Mouza. Our traditional folk healer has begun his work on a small scale with the available raw materials from the developing community mangrove forests.

