
Bangladesh: ICLARM Helps Women Earn a Living in Aquaculture

Operating Unit: USAID/Bangladesh

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Related Strategic Objectives:

SO 3: Improved Representation of Interests of Women and the Rural Poor

SO 6: Improved Management of Open Water and Tropical Forest Resources (a continuation of phased our SO2, Management of Aquatic Ecosystems Through Community Husbandry (MACH))

If we think about the most underprivileged group in Bangladesh, it's probably rural women. Fortunately, this is the group that has benefited most from the USAID- funded aquaculture program being implemented by the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM) in Bangladesh. There are many success stories, of which the following two perhaps best illustrate the impact of the program on women's access to income generation and the ability to care for themselves and their family.

Jehanara, a woman from the northern part of the Bangladesh was left on her own by her husband soon after the wedding at a very early age. Bearing a social stigma of a divorcee, she tried to earn a meager living by raising chickens and doing small crafts for many years. After attending a few meetings arranged by ICLARM through some NGOs, she was encouraged to stock fish in a small unused pond on her property as an alternative source of income. After trying several different techniques, which proved to be too expensive, she switched to a simpler, low feed method developed by ICLARM. Jehanara was a bit skeptical like anyone, as she did not believe that her fish would grow merely on grass and duckweed. But her effort and trust in the new techniques introduced by ICLARM proved that her abandoned pond was a gold mine. They allowed her to reduce costs from her earlier efforts and make her first profits from fish farming. She even developed techniques on her own that enabled her to catch fish most efficiently.

Through USAID's assistance and ICLARM's research program, Jehanara now has the control to sustain her life. She not only has access to a nutritional meal each day through the fish she produces, but she also now owns a newly completed house and has extra time to develop her skills in small crafts. Most importantly she leads small groups of women in her village to assist them with the management of their own ponds.

Another woman, Jubaydha Begum, has also benefited from ICLARM's aquaculture program. When Jubaydha's husband died suddenly, she was left with the burden to manage her family of four children completely on her own. Jubaydha joined a women's group who used funds provided by ICLARM's associate NGO PROSHIKA to lease an abandoned pond for aquaculture development. This group of women proved that aquaculture could be very cost-effective and lucrative business. The group has already made profits by selling fish in the market after supplementing their dietary needs. Jubaydha now has enough cash saved to invest in another pond to keep their new business going. She says that her dreams, which seemed impossible a few years ago now are finally coming true.