

**Node: Suite Summary<sup>1,2</sup>****India: Policy process for pro-poor rural services****Context**

Some of the poorest people in India live in the upland Eastern Plateau region located in the states of Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. The majority are tribal people; others belong to scheduled castes. Both groups are poor, socially disadvantaged and marginalised. They farm small areas of upland which, at best, provide food for households of 5-6 persons for three months of the year. Faced with acute food insecurity, many households rely on poorly paid local labouring for better-endowed farmers. Such work is highly seasonal and gives rise to high and socially disruptive rates of migration. Men or whole families migrate in pursuit of other labouring jobs. While they may find work with higher pay rates than agricultural labour, exploitation and underpayment of migrant labourers can occur.

Since the early nineteen nineties, with the support of various donor agencies, projects involving both government and non-government organisations have focused on the development of these deprived areas. One such example is the DFID-supported Eastern Indian Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP) that was implemented during the 1990's. A major activity of EIRFP was to promote and support the building of social capital amongst poor men and women farmers towards assisting them to improve their livelihoods. The formation of self help groups (SHGs) was central to this endeavour for which an organisation that was a partner in the project, the Krishak Bharati Co-operative Ltd (KRIBHCO), took a leading role. The development of village-based livelihood enterprises was emphasised with the aim of overcoming the necessity for migration and its adverse social consequences.

One feature of the Eastern Plateau is the frequent occurrence of relatively small natural or artificially developed ponds (tanks). Water levels in these tanks fluctuate over time, linked with the seasonality of rainfall, and many contain water for only part of the year (some 5-9 months). This feature contrasts sharply with tanks in lowland areas that commonly are large and well supplied with water throughout the year (i.e., perennial tanks). In spite of the seasonal nature of the upland tanks, a consultancy input to EIRFP in the early 1990's recommended that they could be used for fish culture. Several features of eastern India added weight to this recommendation:

- Fish is an important part of people's diets and ready markets exist for fresh fish.
- Because fish is a preferred food, fishing is a familiar livelihood activity for many people and so local knowledge is available that can provide a basis for adopting new fish culture techniques.
- Livelihood activities that involve food production are attractive because they can improve household food security as well as being a source of income.

Although several factors favoured fish culture as a livelihood enterprise, a serious obstacle to its adoption by poor people in the EIRFP target area was that the extension services, and also

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<sup>1</sup> This document summarises NRSP's work in one of its Uptake Promotion Node: suites. For further details and links to project and project documents see <http://www.nrsp.org.uk/6.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> This document presents research funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

the research that technically supported these services, were geared to fish culture in perennial tanks. Whereas seasonal tanks have multiple uses, perennial tanks are used solely for fish culture. A capital intensive poly-culture system is used to exploit all depths of the water body. Such a system was not readily transferable to seasonal tanks, nor was the system a feasible option for poor people in the area covered by the EIRFP.

This situation of definite potential that could not readily be pursued because of the combination of certain technical knowledge gaps and people's circumstances was the rationale for the first project in this suite. The others then logically followed.

### **Research Topics**

- What fish culture system is workable for seasonal tanks and for relatively remote communities of poor people?
- How can participatory research, conducted with poor people, make best use of existing local community institutional arrangements (SHGs in this case)?
- What are the key requirements for planning and implementing a communication strategy for aquaculture that focuses on the rural poor?
- What methods are appropriate for: (a) enabling poor people who are recipients of policy and services to recommend policy changes, and (b) building consensus for policy change amongst policy-makers and implementers?
- What procedures for participatory M&E can best enable a range of stakeholders concerned with rural services to understand the quality of their performance in pro-poor service delivery and the requirements for providing pro-poor services?
- Is there potential for use of point of sale technology to track information access by the poor at grassroots level and are the data so obtained useful for developing pro-poor information services?
- What are the essential features of a participatory and inclusive process for producing communication products that addresses a multi-stakeholder, multi-country situation for communication planning, plan implementation and monitoring and evaluation of product uptake and subsequent outcomes and impact?

### **Projects**

Four projects comprise this Node: Suite (see below for project links). R6759 (Integration of aquaculture into the farming systems in the Eastern Plateau of India, 1996-2000); R8100 (Investigating improved policy on aquaculture service provision to poor people, 2002-2003); R8334 (Promoting the pro-poor policy lessons of R8100 with key policy actors in India, 2003-2005); R8363 (Enhancing development impact of process tools piloted in Eastern India, 2004-2005).

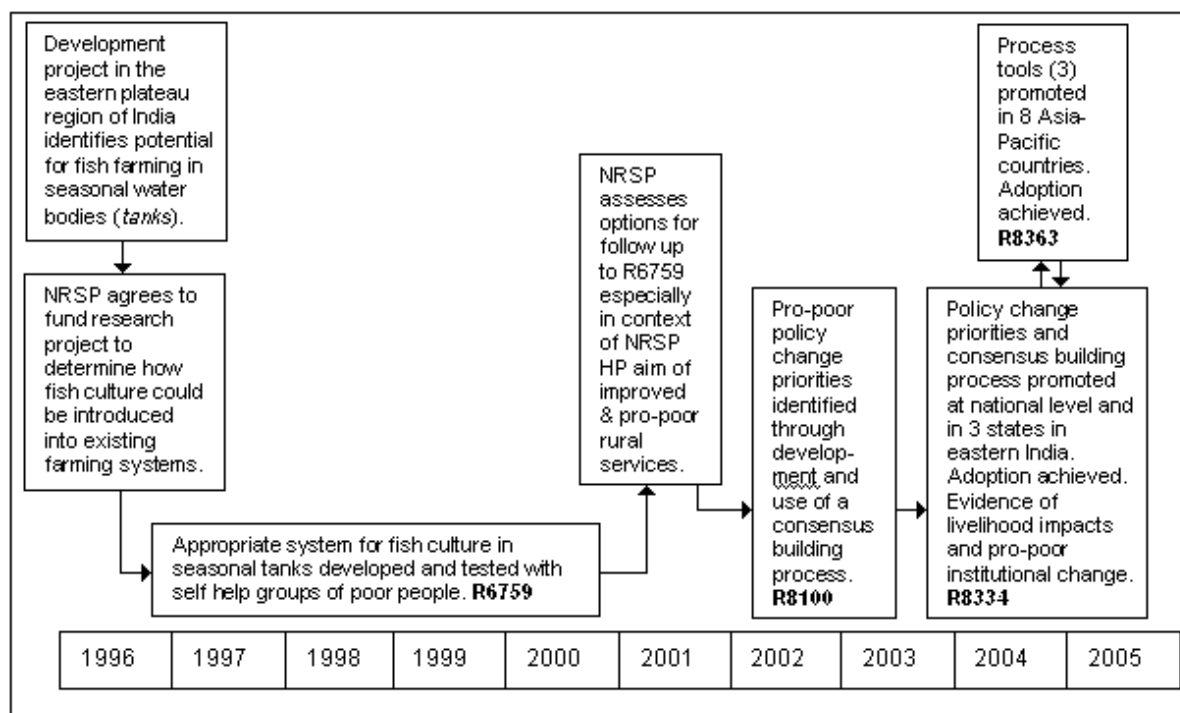
R6759 was a research input to the development project, EIRFP. It linked with those SHGs that KRIBHCO had formed that wanted to undertake fish culture. Participatory fish culture trials and other technical work focused on developing a fish culture system using seasonal tanks. Two other research areas were integrated with the technical research: (a) the social context in which poor people could undertake fish culture was characterised and the findings were taken into account in the technical research through participatory project planning; (b) communication materials suited to local circumstances (e.g., generally low levels of literacy) were developed and evaluated using participatory methods.

R8100 focused on the major institutional constraint to sustaining the wider adoption of R6759's findings – namely that fisheries policy pertaining to aquaculture, and the support services linked with this policy, addressed only the system used for perennial tanks. R8100 sought to improve the understanding of policy-makers and policy implementers of the context in which poor people in eastern India were undertaking aquaculture and endeavouring to access needed services. Building on this understanding, it stimulated representatives of relevant national and state organisations to debate what aquaculture policy changes would better support aquaculture as a livelihood enterprise of poor people and achieved consensus amongst key policy makers on a suite of pro-poor priorities for policy changes.

R8334 focused on promoting the findings and products of R8100 with national and state level stakeholders, especially in the government sector. Through this work, it aimed to: (a) stimulate action on the policy change recommendations for aquaculture (that arose from R8100); (b) achieve greater awareness of the process (a consensus building process, CBP) that R8100 had developed as a tool for pro-poor policy planning; and (c) achieve some measure of pro-poor institutional change that would best assure sustained attention to pro-poor policies and services over the longer term. Even though senior level staff changes weakened the carry over from R8100 of supportive stakeholder engagement, well planned interaction with stakeholders, as well as response to additional promotional opportunities when and where they arose, enabled R8334 largely to achieve its aims.

R8363 was a regional uptake promotion project. It was implemented in response to a demand from the governing council of the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia Pacific (NACA) for methods and processes that would assist service providers in Asia-Pacific to undertake pro-poor work. The CBP of R8100 and tools for building social capital and surveying information access developed by R6759 were relevant to addressing this demand. Eight countries (Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam) participated. The project was coordinated from the headquarters of NACA-STREAM (Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management) in Thailand with links to the managers of STREAM's communication hubs based in each participating country. These managers acted as country-based coordinators for both the development and promotion of the three process tools. An iterative participatory process (largely internet-based but with some face-to-face in-country stakeholder consultation) was used for developing a common regional understanding of the project and for pursuing its objectives.

## Project links for India Suite 1: 1996-2005



## Outputs

### Findings

**R6759:** Through participatory fish culture research that was undertaken with SHGs, combined with the use of relevant local and national technical knowledge, fish culture in seasonal tanks was demonstrated to be an attainable livelihood enterprise for poor people that could fit with the availability of water resources and people's livelihood systems. A modular production system where different production stages could be undertaken in different locations (tanks) and by different SHGs was developed. Within any one cluster of villages, the modules could operate as one coordinated network. Common interest groups formed from SHGs engaged in aquaculture in clusters of neighbouring villages were effective in developing community ownership of the research. Use of a street play and video for raising village-level awareness of aquaculture, including how it offered an alternative to migration, were tested but not fully evaluated.

**R8100:** A range of media – videos, slide shows, a village drama – were found to be effective for communicating the findings of case studies on aquaculture in the Eastern Plateau region to lower and higher level policy-makers and service providers. Stakeholders engaged with the information and messages contained in the case studies and this served as a basis for proposing recommendations for changes in policy and service provision that took good account of those most affected by policy (poor rural fishers and farmers). The project then demonstrated that a semi-anonymous process could be used for building consensus amongst policy-related administrators at national and state levels on the highest priorities for policy and service changes out of the original longer list of recommendations.

**R8334:** As an uptake promotion project, findings centred on experiences, and associated learning, on factors affecting promotional work including those that made significant

contributions to the actual achievement of uptake by key national and state level stakeholders. Stakeholder commitment to a participatory M&E system for gathering information to enable tracking and analysis of change (outcomes and impact) was developed and applied. In tandem with this, the collection of stories (stakeholder and beneficiary statements) on 'Most Significant Change' showed potential for capturing unanticipated changes that both complemented and enriched the findings of the structured M&E system. The modalities of setting up point of sale technology for monitoring information access were determined. The evaluation of its performance will be reported post-project, after operating for a 12 month period.

R8363: An enabling institutional structure – the STREAM network (in this case) – was crucial for operating the participatory and inclusive process for uptake promotion that this regional project had planned and then did successfully use. Having developed a common understanding of the purpose of the three process tools, two styles (genres) of communication products (policy briefs [PBs] and better practice guidelines [BPGs]) were agreed to and products in these genres in the language(s) and context of each participating country were produced. Both the participating fisheries service agencies, and also a sample of farmers and fishers, recognised the generic suitability of the genres for communication work. The method for project communication – a combination of digital and face-to-face stakeholder contact – was found to be an asset for uptake promotion. It maintained a broad-based awareness of the progress of product development and thus brought a core of intended users to a state of readiness to use the products when they were available. The participatory process also engendered understanding and commitment to M&E to determine outcomes and livelihood impacts associated with improved service provision.

### *Research messages*

- Time invested in ensuring the transparent participation of intended beneficiaries in planning, undertaking, and evaluating adaptive research is an asset to sustaining the adoption and further development of a particular production system (both its technical and institutional features) after project exit.
- Proven feasibility of a production system does not necessarily justify progressing directly to scaling-out. Creation of a supportive policy environment (if it clearly is lacking), which can enable the promotion of a system and sustain its adoption, is a better option for achieving enduring pro-poor livelihood outcomes and impact.
- In circumstances where social hierarchies may be disruptive for information interchange, debate and assertion of opinions, communication methods that bridge discourse gaps can be effective for: (a) bringing forward the views of those who are most socially disadvantaged; (b) avoiding hierarchical decision-making and (c) developing a consensus. All are relevant to pro-poor policy processes.
- No matter how well uptake promotion (UP) is conducted by those on the supply-side, achieving uptake relies on the capacity, opportunity and willingness of intended users to take advantage of what is available. Given this circumstance, some conditions that can best support UP work are: (a) sufficient time to nurture potential users towards uptake; (b) scope for flexibility in UP plans to enable responsiveness to UP opportunities as they arise.
- Participatory methods that sustain the involvement of intended users of products in their development, and in planning their promotion are major assets to achieving uptake. Digital communication can be an advantage because it enables regular updates on progress and engenders familiarity with the product.

### *Key research products*

- Working papers from DFID NRSP Research Project R6759: Integration of Aquaculture into the farming systems of the eastern plateau of India. (1997-2000). [www.streaminitiative.org/Library/India/india.html#Integrated](http://www.streaminitiative.org/Library/India/india.html#Integrated)
- Felsing, M., Haylor, G.S., Lawrence, A. and Norrish, P. 2000. Reaching the rural poor: Developing a strategy for the promotion and dissemination of participatory aquaculture research: A case study. *Journal of Extension Systems*, 16: 82-106.
- Haylor, G. and Savage, W. 2003. Investigating improved policy on aquaculture service provision to poor people. Final Technical Report for project R8100. Bangkok, Thailand: STREAM Initiative.
- Haylor, G. and Savage, W. 2003. Research learning and new thinking. Annex XII to Final Technical Report. Bangkok, Thailand: STREAM Initiative.
- Haylor, G. 2005. Promoting the pro-poor policy lessons of R8100 with key policy actors in India. Scientific report. Annex A of the Final Technical Report for project R8334. Bangkok, Thailand: STREAM. 65 pp.
- Haylor, G. 2005. Enhancing developmental impact of process tools piloted in Eastern India. Scientific report. Annex A of the Final Technical Report for project R8363. Bangkok, Thailand: STREAM. 43 pp.
- Haylor, G. (ed) 2005. Building consensus. Policy Brief No. 1, 2 pp. (In Bahasa, Bengali, English, Hindi, Ilonggo, Khmer, Myanmar, Nepali, Oriya, Sinhala, Urdu, Vietnamese). [www.streaminitiative.org/Library/PolicyBrief/index.html](http://www.streaminitiative.org/Library/PolicyBrief/index.html)
- Copley, K., Haylor, G. and Savage, W. (eds) 2005. Better Practice Guidelines Numbers 1-3, covering respectively: Self Help Groups; Consensus-Building Process; Information Access Survey. Each 4 pp. (In same languages as Haylor 2005, above). [www.streaminitiative.org/Library/bpg/index.html](http://www.streaminitiative.org/Library/bpg/index.html)

### **Impacts**

- Prior to R6759, no fish culture was practised in the 231 villages in which EIRFP worked. When EIRFP ended in 2000 it was established in 57% of these villages.
- In 2003, agreement was reached amongst key policy-related state and national level stakeholders in India on 13 pro-poor recommendations for aquaculture policy changes covering planning, support, information, training, and inputs.
- Onwards from mid-2003, the same stakeholders began to take action on the policy change recommendations. By late 2005, six of the 13 recommendations had been variously implemented in each of the three participating states in India. Funds (where required) were not from NRSP project sources.
- In response to the recommendation for 'single point under-one-roof service provision', various organisations have set up One-stop Aqua Shops (OASs) (Jharkhand [1]; Orissa [4]; West Bengal [2]). These have become focal points for implementing other recommendations (e.g., information services, fingerling supply, financial services for access to government schemes and bank loans).
- In India, in 2003, two research projects that specified use of the CBP (of R8100) in their designs were awarded government funds for their implementation.
- By mid-2005, policy briefs and better practice guidelines were available in 11 languages and fisheries line agencies in four of the participating STREAM member countries in Asia-Pacific had already begun to use the BPGs in their work. Linked

with stakeholder acceptance of the genres, some countries developed additional PBs and BPGs including some co-authored by fish farmers.

- Capacity to undertake M&E in relation to pro-poor service provision was built in participating fisheries line agencies in India and seven other Asia-Pacific countries. This included the use of point of sale technology by one community-based organisation in West Bengal, India.
- In eastern India, there is evidence of favourable livelihood impacts for poor men and women in villages that participated in the projects and more widely in non-target villages. SHGs, families and individuals have improved their incomes and the necessity for migration has markedly reduced. The ethos of group working has developed people's confidence and empowered hitherto disadvantaged people. In one village, a federation of aquaculture SHGs took their own action on service provision by establishing their own (village-based) OAS. Already this is drawing in the services that they need and other villages are copying this model.

### **Further work**

Except for the first project, all projects in this suite were led by NACA-STREAM (Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia Pacific – Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management). STREAM will continue to promote their findings and products and will document outcomes and impact in the NACA region through continued use of the M&E system developed during R8334 and R8363.