ICAR-CIFA partners with WWF to Develop Farmers’ Collective with Fish Farming Entrepreneurship

A participatory livelihoods development through farmers’ collective was initiated at Kumirmari, Gosaba, South 24 Pargana, Sundarbans, West Bengal. ICAR-CIFA, Bhubaneswar as technical partner joins with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and a local NGO i.e., Bali Nature Life Society for this novel initiative. Discovery Inc. is providing funding support for the work. This intends to benefit 50 scheduled caste women representing 5 Self Help Groups namely Annadata, Bagna, Golap, Priyajan and Shristi. The Sundarbans is a vast forest and estuarine region and is considered as one of the natural wonders of the world. Now it has been declared as a Ramsar site too. The mangrove forest covers an area of about 10,000 sq. km in India and 6,000 sq. km in Bangladesh. Farming is the main source of livelihood of the people living in this delta, however, salinity level of soils does not allow intensive cultivation of agricultural crops. As a consequence, people depend on river, forest and non timber forest products (crab collection, honey collection, fish farming etc.) to earn livelihood. At times they have to put their lives to risk and fall prey to Royal Bengal tiger and also crocodiles. The struggle for life vs. livelihoods continues.

In order to provide an alternative source of income for such community whose livelihood can be best described as ‘struggling’ scientific fish farming in freshwater ponds was initiated in April this year informs Dr S K Swain, Director, ICAR-CIFA, Bhubaneswar. The project would enhance pond productivity through better management practices for fish production; build capacities of fifty women on fish seed rearing, grow out culture and development of carp brood stock in the island. Benchmark survey and focus group discussions were carried out by multidisciplinary team of scientists. All the adopted ponds were stocked with 15 kg Indian Major Carp advance fingerings and beneficiaries are trained on post stocking management measures. Application of lime and pellet feed was also demonstrated by a team of scientists led by Dr P P Chakraborty, Principal Scientist. Fish attained an average growth of about 55-65 gm in 2 months, as revealed by sampling. A portable FRP carp hatchery is being installed in order to create a self sufficiency of fish seed production. Dr S Adhikari and Dr H K De, Principal Scientists of the institute are also associated with this project.

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