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Women's Economic Empowerment through Prawn Cultivation

a mini case study

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Women's Economic Empowerment through Prawn Cultivation



In 2010, almost 65% of the agricultural labour force in Bangladesh were women. Female farmers play an important role in the country's rural economy and have a significant impact on the national macro-economic performance in poverty alleviation, human resources development and food security. Rural women gain new opportunities when moving away from unpaid labor and piecework and, instead, work as entrepreneurs or farmers. When women take the lead in income-generating activities, they make decisions about investment and spending. This empowers them economically within their respective households and communities.

Building on this potential, Katalyst's Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) sector designed an intervention to provide training in modern prawn cultivation techniques and input and create linkages between feed and aqua-chemical companies with women prawn farmers of the Jessore-Khulna-Bagerhat-Satkhira-Narail belt. Through this intervention, 22,170 women farmers have improved access to quality inputs and relevant know-how. Prawn production cycles

have been reduced to nine months and women's profits have almost doubled, which has had a positive impact on their economic empowerment levels.

Challenges in the market

In the last two decades, prawn and shrimp cultivation has emerged as a popular cash crop among homestead farmers in Bangladesh as demand for these crops in export and local markets

The Project

The Agri-business for Trade Competitiveness Project, branded as Katalyst, is one of the largest market development initiatives in Bangladesh. Working together with various market actors, the project generates new income opportunities for small and poor farmers across the country.

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has been increasing continuously. But prawn farmers in Bangladesh in general produce 17% less in comparison with yields in China, Norway, Vietnam or other countries that follow modern cultivation techniques. A major reason for this is that many homestead farmers, especially those living in rural areas, know little about modern prawn cultivation.

Traditionally, women are pre-dominant in homestead production in Bangladesh. A Katalyst study on women's participation in homestead prawn production reflects that around 60% of the tasks in producing the crop is performed by female household members.

But socio-economic and cultural barriers confine women from having direct access to quality aqua-chemicals, feed, seed, fingerlings, season-specific financial services as well as information on modern cultivation techniques. This results in poor production



yields and many women also face losses in their businesses.

Moreover, many private input companies do not consider female farmers as core customers as they primarily target large commercial farmers. They expend most of their resources in building their distribution networks across them, leaving very little room to invest amongst small farmers.

In that case, demonstrating the profit making possibilities to input companies will promote their vision to expand among homestead females as potential customers.

Through this intervention, the Katalyst team provided training on modern prawn cultivation techniques to homestead women prawn farmers. In addition, it also established linkages with relevant market players such as prawn feed and aqua-chemical companies, nurseries and micro-finance institutions (MFIs).





The Story of Momena Khatun

"We cultivate prawn in the hope of getting a good profit, which we invest in my children's education, health and nutrition, and saving for rainy days."

Momena Khatun is a homestead prawn farmer from Shayamnagar, Satkhira- a poverty-stricken region.

Katalyst Facilitated NGO partners and input companies to provide training on modern prawn cultivation to Momena and other women farmers. The latter learned basic technical knowledge and were introduced to better quality feed and aqua chemicals. As a result of better inputs and information, homestead women farmers achieved an average additional income of BDT 20,060.

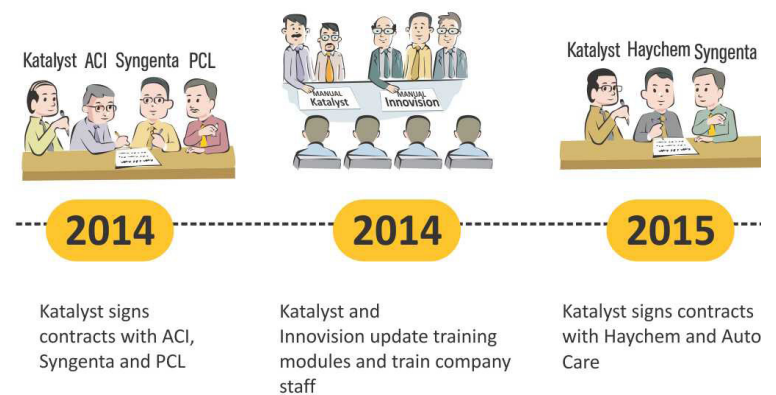
Bringing about change

In 2015, the Katalyst team triggered change in homestead farming by raising awareness on modern prawn cultivation among women farmers, and sensitizing the private sector on the possibilities to expand their markets to small farmers. The intervention was implemented in Jessore, Khulna, Bagerhat, Narail, and in the remote outskirts of Satkhira.

In order to enable feasible finance models to women farmers, Katalyst decided to work directly with MFIs, i.e. Rural Reconstruction Foundation, Nowbenki Gonomukhi Foundation and UDAYAN-Bangladesh. The project team facilitated linkage of these MFIs to private input companies such as First Care Agro Limited, an aqua-chemical company, and Pranti Aquaculture Limited, a prawn feed distributor, distributor. Through this partnership, they disseminated knowledge on up-to-date prawn cultivation methods and promote their products among thousands of small farmers.

Since the mentioned MFIs are prominent in rural areas, the project utilized their existing customer groups to select and sensitize homestead prawn farming clusters on the benefits of using these

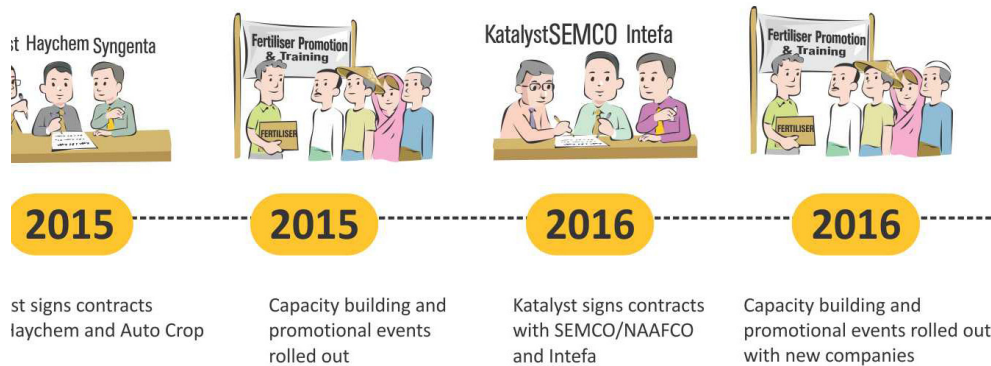
modern techniques through courtyard meetings and vocational training. MFIs developed and distributed user-friendly training modules



among training participants. Simultaneously, they facilitated the establishment of demonstration plots. Women lead farmers, who acted as opinion leaders, were trained to spread information within the women clusters. Lead farmers also established demonstration plots in their backyard ponds. This helped stimulate trust between the female lead farmers and their peers to learn more on cultivation methods .

Lead or demo farmers were responsible for further sensitizing village households on modern prawn cultivation techniques and served as initial

farmers to quality fingerling sources. In turn, demo farmers shared their sources with the clusters they were responsible for. Within just a year into the intervention, approximately 22,170 women prawn farmers have been trained and linked with MFIs, and input companies used this intervention model.



points of delivering feed and aqua chemical inputs to the clusters. Once private input companies had gained momentum and recognition in this untapped market, they provided value added services such as free water quality testing and prescribing the safe use of their products to farmers. When the project realized that women farmers had difficulties in the access to reliable prawn fingerlings, the Katalyst team linked demo farm-

ers to quality fingerling sources. Before the intervention, farmers produced their crops in two years time.

Traditionally, women farmers used to feed the prawns once a day. As a result of the intervention, women farmers started to split the same amount of feed into two or three servings, which improved prawn and pond health overall. Simple but useful information such as these have led to

Evidence of impact

In a year's time, women farmers have not only got easier access to reliable know-how on modern prawn cultivation methods, quality prawn feed and aqua-chemicals, but have also successfully started harvesting the crop within nine





changes in production practices which have doubled profits. According to impact assessments, 8,068 women farmers have benefited from the intervention at an average income increase of 20,060 BDT annually.

In addition, the intervention had essential impact on changes at the community level. Poverty-stricken remote areas of Satkhira in particular have benefited more than other regions despite limited income generating opportunities and markets for selling their production in comparison to other, financially more vibrant rural areas. The reason for this was that women clusters of rural Satkhira regions shared information more proactively, hoping to alleviate poverty through community empowerment.

When MFIs observed that information travels more efficiently in remote areas, they designed a special loan program for women prawn farming clusters beyond project activities. This program has been providing higher loan brackets and flexibility in loan recovery period for women farmers.

One of the most important community level changes observed in the intervention area was the understanding of men that women and men both need to contribute to income-generating

activities to bring about financial stability in their households. As a result, men started listening to the newly learnt information women brought home from reliable sources and helped implement them further at the production level or to purchase new brands of inputs. This contributed to strengthening women's decision making authority within their households. Aside from that, women's extra income helped their families afford more nutritious meals, consider better education for their children, and save for a rainy day.

The way forward

Small-scale women farmers in the prawn sector have a selective disadvantage in comparison to large ones because they mostly produce small quantities of yield in limited pond sizes. Prawn production in small quantities weakens their bargaining power in the market. The intervention activities therefore need to be

continued further in order to optimize the yield and improve produce quality within prawn farming communities. This will not only strengthen their bargaining power in the market but also create sustainable distribution channels in the future.

Therefore, scaling up this intervention model can bring about promising results in women's economic empowerment and an income increase from prawn cultivation, especially in remote coastal regions. Another observation was that many private input companies are still unaware of the tools and benefits of working with rural MFIs to target small-scale women farmers. By partnering with MFIs, private input companies benefit in reaching out to farmers more effectively. MFIs, on the other hand, actively seek for value-added service opportunities among their beneficiary clusters which will reduce loan repayment risks.

The intervention brought valuable findings to light about the positive cultural acceptability of rural house-

holds when strengthening homestead women prawn farmers. There is a large supply-demand gap in this sector and buyers are actively looking for suppliers of quality prawn and shrimps in the market. Since women farmers contribute essentially to prawn cultivation at the homestead level, the intervention results show that developing women's capacities can bring positive changes not only regarding their economic empowerment but also their productivity. Ultimately, this contributes to the economic advancement of the country in general.

