

Fisheries & adaptive learning

August 2004

Brief # 4

Recent happenings:

This is now the fourth in this series of project briefs. We hope that you are finding them both interesting and informative. If you have any comments on the briefs or the Project please contact us at the addresses overleaf. We are always keen to hear your views and experiences! Since the last brief (April—04) several activities have been undertaken:

- The most significant development has been the creation and implementation of a learning strategy in the rice-fish systems in West Bengal (see below and overleaf for more details). This strategy was built on the results of the rapid appraisal that had been conducted earlier in the year, which helped to create a common understanding amongst stakeholders. Fish stocking and rice planting in accordance with the strategy has now begun in the 11 project sites.
- Work has been continuing on the revision of the existing adaptive learning guidelines and these are nearing completion.
- Work has also continued on promoting the approach and the guidelines. As part of these efforts work has begun on the development of a project website where relevant information will be available as well as links to other useful resources. More on this soon!!
- Researchers involved in the project recently attended a workshop in Cambodia that was held to develop guidelines on information sharing arrangements in fisheries co-management. This workshop, arranged by another DFID funded FMSP project, was an opportunity to share experiences and to discuss issues in adaptive co-management with a number of researchers and practitioners from Africa and South and Southeast Asia.

What is the project doing?

1. Developing the existing adaptive learning guidelines to improve both usefulness and readability
2. Communicating with relevant people in a way they find useful and accessible.
3. Implementing the adaptive learning approach in rice-fish systems in India and reservoirs in the Mekong Basin to learn more about the process.

Implementing adaptive learning in India: creating a common understanding of the rice-fish systems.

A crucial first step in a learning approach is establishing what is currently known, who knows it, what needs to be known and who needs to know it. Part of this has been achieved by undertaking a rapid appraisal of the resource systems to get an understanding of the resources and the people reliant upon them.

As we mentioned in the last brief, staff from CIFRI, together with the departments of Fisheries and Agriculture, visited a number of rice-fish systems in West Bengal and collected information. A variety of methods were used including semi-structured interviews and resource mapping. This was analysed and combined with information from a variety of secondary sources which gave a

more complete picture of the systems and of the needs and priorities of those that depend on them.

The analysis was not only conducted



Staff from CIFRI and the West Bengal Department of Fisheries discuss the results of the rapid appraisal.

by researchers at CIFRI but also by the district and block level staff who had helped collect it. The results were discussed by the district staff and compared with their experiences. They were then presented and discussed with the villagers at each of the sites.

By creating this shared understanding of the resource systems, it was possible to identify not only what was already known but where there were opportunities to share existing knowledge between the different groups. In addition, this understanding was the basis for identifying what new information it would be useful to find out (see overleaf).

INDIA: Developing a learning strategy

Following the process detailed on pages 20 to 23 in the adaptive learning guidelines, a learning strategy was selected that reflected user needs and priorities.

The rapid appraisal had identified a number of management uncertainties. These included: the trade-off between stocking larger fish seed as opposed to a larger number of smaller fish; the trade off between high value and high growth rate species; optimum species composition of the mix stocked; ideal feeding regime; disease control methods; and 'best' rice varieties to plant.

These uncertainties were classified as to whether the information needed to address them already existed and simply needed to be shared effectively—as was the case with feeding regimes, or whether it needed to be generated. It was decided that information regarding the trade off between the stocking of high value and high growth rate species should be generated through

experimentation. In order to do this, an experiment was designed that involved stocking some ponds with high growth species and other waterbodies with high value species.

Farmers at the Midnapore site have been experimenting with paddy rice varieties. They found that crossing the improved paddy rice variety 'Jaya' with a traditionally planted variety produced a paddy rice variety with good pest resistance. This 'Jaya cross' variety is very exciting because if it proves satisfactory in the rice-fish systems farmers may be able to reduce the amount of pesticide they use. This is good news for the farmers in terms of input costs and their health as well as good news for the fish!

The consensus was that in addition to the stocking experiments, the Jaya cross variety should be tested in sample plots at all of the freshwater sites. Together, the experiments and information sharing plans make up the learning strategy. The learning strategy was discussed with farmers at all

of the sites in a series of workshops. Action plans were created at each detailing the roles and responsibilities of the government and the villagers in the experiments.

The process was successful and consensus was reached at all but one site. Rice seed has been distributed and planted and fish seed are beginning to be supplied now that the rains have arrived. We will keep you informed of progress...



Presenting and discussing the appraisal results and the learning strategy with villagers in Tangramary village, West Bengal.

CONTACT DETAILS

The project is implemented through a partnership between MRAG Ltd, the Mekong River Commission, WorldFish Center and the Departments of Agriculture and Fisheries of West Bengal, India.

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This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.