

STREAM



Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management

STREAM Journal

Learning and communicating about the livelihoods of fishers and farmers

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Note

SJ2(4) is an all-India number which reflects STREAM's partnerships in eastern India. These involve, among others, the Indian NGO Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT), tribal communities and fisheries departments of the three state governments with which STREAM has been working mostly: Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal.

The first three articles all have as their setting Jabarrah and other villages in Purulia District of West Bengal. GVT colleagues describe how Self-Help Groups were formed as part of early development efforts in the village. Next, STREAM colleagues write about what they learned of success in Jabarrah during a field visit there some years later. One of the village representatives from neighboring Jharkhand State, then describes initiatives he has taken with his community as a result of his participation in the same field visit to Jabarrah.

Moving to another neighboring state of Orissa, an official of the Fish Farmers Development Agency of Mayurbhanj District tells a story of a fish farmer who benefited from government support. The last two articles relate how livelihoods approaches and Participatory Rural Appraisal tools are being used by GVT in its work with rural communities.

We are appreciative of the opportunities we have to work with our partners in India, and in particular would like to thank the Gramin Vikas Trust for hosting the STREAM India Country Office in Ranchi, Jharkhand, where Rubu Mukherjee, the STREAM Communications Hub Manager, is based. Thanks are also due to Rubu for his efforts in helping us put together this number of the *SJ*.

Happy reading!

Graham Haylor, STREAM Director
William Savage, *STREAM Journal* Editor

An Experience with Group Formation in Jabarrah, West Bengal

Amar Prasad, Virendra Singh, Binay Sahay and Gautum Dutta

Before GVT's Arrival

Jabarrah is a cluster of villages located in West Bengal's Purulia District. About 48% of Jabarrah's land is undulating with low productivity. Drought and irregular rainfall are common occurrences. Most households have wage laborers who migrate outside the village in search of work. Jabarrah's population is mostly comprised of Scheduled Tribes.

Until 1994, before the arrival of the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP)¹, villagers were not organized and did not know anything about systematic aquaculture practice nor planned village development. Only two or three farmers were engaged in fish culture, using traditional ways to take local fish but getting low income from the fish production.

EIRFP's Participatory Approach

Using a participatory development approach, EIRFP has taken initiatives to improve the livelihoods of tribal and deprived men and women, with their active participation. The project began working in Jabarrah – one of the poorest villages in West Bengal – to facilitate the community to take collective action for their own development. The community formed two men's groups called *Padma Lochan* and *Nabodaya* (with nine and ten members respectively) and two women's groups named *Mahamaya* and *Shilawati* (with ten members each). Another group – *Maa Santoshi* – was formed in 1997.

Community members gradually realized the importance of the groups. This led to greater confidence among themselves. Not only did they open their own accounts in the nearest bank but they also developed norms for group functioning. They further decided to form a central committee called *Jote Solah Anna* to monitor the five groups' activities.

Capacity-building of Group Members

The EIRFP envisaged the development of the village by building group members' skills and capacities. The project also facilitated members to identify others – called *jankars* – with skills and interests in different subjects or activities. In-field training and exposure was organized for improving their skills. *Jankars* were trained in topics such as group formation and management, savings and credit, group fund management, crops, aquaculture, trees, soil and water conservation, livestock and other income-generating activities for landless families (e.g., leaf plate making, rope making and poultry).



Capacity-building of jankars

¹ First managed by KRIBCHO, a government fertilizer cooperative, and since 2000 by the Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT), an autonomous entity that grew out of EIRFP and is promoted by KRIBHCO

Under aquaculture, *jankars* were trained in the release of fingerlings, pond management and water treatment. Trainees reported that not only had their confidence increased but they were able to adopt what they learned because the training was timely, in the field and practical.

Aquaculture Activities in the Village

The groups identified ponds to be used for fish culture. They purchased some ponds from a landlord out of contributions (about Rs 300, or US\$ 6) made by each household and from group funds generated from different activities. They started fish cultivation with improved technical know-how and financial support from EIRFP in the form of fingerlings and fish feed. From a small beginning, the groups embarked on a large aquaculture program within a short period of two years. They are now running it successfully and effectively.



Harvesting the success

Group members harvest the fish together but marketing is done by individuals who purchase fish from groups and sell it in nearby areas. A fisherwomen of the village, Ms Thanda Mahato, usually buys fish from the group and earns Rs 100-150 a day, three or four days a week. She is managing her family's expenses out of the earnings and has deposited some money in the post office.

Linkages with Government and NGOs – Opportunities for Transformation

The strength of the groups has gradually increased and now there are 14 groups represented in the central committee. During training opportunities, farmers have learned from fisheries officers that the government also provides various facilities under its fisheries program. Community members thus applied for the renovation of ponds and got Rs 11,000 on the recommendation of the *Panchayat Samiti*². They also got approval for seed, nets and other necessary materials.

The efforts of Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT) are centered on social and human 'capital' leading toward transformation of villagers' livelihoods, and creating an example for villagers of surrounding areas. Group members build holistic plans for the development of their villages with clear vision and understanding. They also recognize the role of NGOs like GVT in providing new directions for change.

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² Local government body

Aquaculture Self-Help Groups in Rural West Bengal

Satyendra Tripathi, Graham Haylor and William Savage in consultation with Jagdish Gangwar, Virendra Singh, Gautam Dutta and Prabhat Pathak

Back to Jabarrah

In 1996, as Aquaculture Development Specialists with the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP), Satyendra Tripathi and Graham Haylor visited Jabarrah village in rural West Bengal. At that time, 60% of households were unable to secure food for the whole year, and most migrated seasonally to labor for a few cents daily. About a quarter of households were indebted to moneylenders, usually having raised emergency loans for food or medicines. Children were walking four kilometers to school. The nearest bank – should anyone have thought to venture there – was five kilometers away. In spite of floods and drought, three-quarters of Jabarrah households farmed rice; others (and many rice farmers too) sold their labor mainly for *kharif* and *rabi* season agricultural work, brick-making and drumming at weddings. Two-thirds of men and less than a third of women could read.

Since 1995, the Indian fertilizer cooperative, the Krishak Bharti Cooperative (KRIBHCO), in partnership with the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), began encouraging people to come together in groups to plan how to proceed – by building social capital. As Virendra Singh puts it, "Social capital is built by and within the community with a high degree of motivation and awareness campaigning from dedicated Community Organizers."

In September 2003, we had the opportunity to return to Jabarrah together with the Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT), the NGO that had evolved from the EIRFP, and Ajit Banerjee, the branch manager from the Maubhum Gramin Bank in nearby Ludhurka. From three fledgling groups had grown more than forty well-organized Self-Help Groups, not only in Jabarrah but also in neighboring villages.

The 'Doba System'

Like many local families, group members neither owned nor had exclusive access to large perennial tanks for classical fish rearing as extended by the Fisheries Department. "In rainfed areas," said Nityo Gopal, a group *jankar*, "water is much in demand – only a rich man will own a perennial tank." The Self-Help Groups rear fingerlings in seasonal ponds or in small *dobas* (dug-out depressions where water collects) for stocking in larger ponds and tanks. The idea was introduced by EIRFP, and was called the '*doba* system'. Shamlal Yadav, the State Coordinator for GVT in West Bengal, said that research on people's aquaculture options and the use of *dobas* and seasonal tanks had been conducted in collaboration with a DFID NRSP project



Fry rearing in a seasonal pond in Jabarrah

called "Integration of Aquaculture into the Farming Systems of the Eastern Plateau of India" from 1996-2000. A street-play called *The Pond of the Little Fishes*, commissioned by the project, had been written by a local tribal playwright, Rakesh Rahman, highlighting the lives of villagers and the potential low-season village-based activity of rearing fish seed in *dobas*, as an alternative to migration.

Nityo Gopal described how the system functions:

We prepare the *doba* from December, buy seed as the rains come, and test water quality by using litmus paper, adding lime if the paper goes pink or red. We use plankton nets with collecting tubes every 3-7 days to determine the level for additional bran feeding and fertilization, 'thinning out' the fish into other seasonal ponds if the density becomes high. Silver Carp or Common Carp reach about 250-300 g, the Rohu, Catla and Mrigal 50-100 g. If rains come in September-October, the water usually stays until January. Then the Indian Major Carps are 250-300 g, and some of the Silver Carp and Common Carp are over 500 g.

"We eat fish", said Nityo Gopal, "It's only Rs 30/kg, whereas poultry is Rs 100/kg. If you need to eat meat, a goat is for many but a fish will feed one or two. We sell many products. Fingerlings vary in price; big ones early in the season go best. When we stock too many in a seasonal pond they become stunted. Everyone knows that when these fish are set out in a bigger pond they grow extra fast [a phenomenon which fisheries biologists call 'compensatory growth'], so perennial pond owners will buy these from us for Rs 90-100/kg. Harvested fish we sell at the pond for Rs 20-30/kg. Big ones we sell for Rs 60-70/kg to pond owners to release as brooders."

The Energizing Effect of Flexible Rural Credit

In May 2000, the Reserve Bank of India issued a circular instructing rural development banks to work toward the launch of local financial products directly suited to Self-Help Groups. These were rapidly sanctioned loans (within three days), available to groups, requiring no collateral, with flexible repayment schedules where groups can repay any or all of the loan at any time up to a repayment period of three years. The annual interest rate of 12% compared to moneylender terms typically of 5-10% per month. The bank can sanction loans from as small as Rs 500 up to several hundreds of thousands.

Now groups could nominate 2-3 people to visit the bank with the group's 'Resolution' certificate (proof of the existence of the group) and details of their savings, their plan (including the amount of the loan requested), and the purpose for which it would be required. The bank would need a loan agreement to be completed and a document called a 'Demand Promissory' note. Any groups repaying 100% of their loan would be eligible for a second. Self-Help Groups raising fish had been especially successful and have the highest savings among the groups, and therefore tended to receive larger loans. "A big change," said Ajit Banerjee, "Is that loans are now considered by groups as assets to utilize and to be repaid, not 'sticky' bad loans." The forty Self-Help Groups in Jabarrah currently have savings totaling millions of rupees and bank loans of hundreds of thousands of rupees.

Talking about changes, one woman said, "The months of the rainy season were a curse, when we would have no money and nothing to eat. We had to mortgage our utensils to get a loan from the *mahajan* at exorbitant interest rates. Lalita Mahato, an elderly woman, said, "There was a time when we could not dare to talk to the men folk of the village not to think of strangers! Today, we can go to the bank and ask for the loan, approach the authorities and put up our grievances and can boldly face the challenges. We are happy that we are listened to and respected."

Only Dreams ...

The patient support to self-selected Self-Help Groups – by EIRFP and now GVT Community Organizers – is the backbone of a development process in Jabarrah. This goes together with appropriate, flexible technical research by farmers with DFID NRSP support, and much improved micro-credit opportunities guided by the Reserve Bank and implemented with careful vigor by the Maubhum Gramin Bank. All these developments have provided key opportunities for women and men to gain respect and a voice, generate income, savings and security, to avoid seasonal migration, engage with the formal banking sector, and implement ideas. A few years ago, these were only dreams.

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Lessons Learned for Fulwar Toli from an Exposure Visit to Jabarrah

Bhim Nayak and Rubu Mukherjee

From Fulwar Toli to Jabarrah and Back

Bhim Nayak lives in Fulwar Toli, a village situated at Bundu Block of Ranchi District in Jharkhand State. The village has a population of around 900 people, most of whom are landless and migrate to nearby towns for employment. The literacy level of Fulwar Toli is low at less than 20%.

In September 2003, Bhim Nayak participated in an exposure visit organized by NACA-STREAM to Jabarrah Cluster in West Bengal (see previous two articles). During the exposure visit, Bhim became aware of how the villagers of that cluster had formed Self-Help Groups, through which they are now doing so many activities and also getting support from the bank.



During the exposure visit in the GVT-sponsored meeting hall in Jabarrah Cluster, Bhim Nayak commenting on the relevance of that community's experience with women's Self-Help Groups for his own community at Fulwar Toli

After the exposure visit, Bhim decided to encourage Self-Help Groups in his own village of Fulwar Toli. He gathered all his fellow villagers and explained the benefits of the Self-Help Group. They agreed with his view and formed four groups, each with a specific purpose.

Groups, Norms and Activities

First Group

The Ambedkar Carrier Library Group is for the improvement of knowledge and education. The function of the group is to collect and purchase books for the competitive examination held by the state government education department and also to educate other people, including children and adults. Only educated people are members and they are involved in teaching activities. There are 25 members in this mixed group, out of which six are women. Each member deposits Rs 5 every week in

the group fund, out of which books are purchased. This is a social workers group and they also guide other people about agriculture and fisheries activities.

Second Group

This is a women's group which does not yet have a name. The twelve members are spouses of fishermen and they are involved in fish selling. Group members deposit Rs 10 every week in the group fund. They plan to deposit that group fund in the bank so that in emergencies they can use it instead of taking loans from the local moneylender at higher rates. Some of the active members in this group include Ms Lakhi Devi, Ms Shrimatidevi, Ms Lakhi Kumari and Ms Doli Kumari.

Third Group

The Devi Mansa Group has eleven women members who are all involved in agriculture activities. They deposit Rs 5 every week in the group fund. They purchase dry paddy, make it into rice and then sell that product in the market. They also purchase green vegetables from wholesalers and sell them in the local market and in the village.

Fourth Group

The Fishermen's Self-Help Group with 28 men members is mainly involved with aquaculture. They manage and maintain the government and private water bodies. They deposit Rs 5 every week in the group fund. They organize weekly meetings and discuss about new aquaculture techniques and also about topics such as maintenance of the existing water bodies, profit margin and how to stop alcoholism. Some of the active members in this group are Mr Rishav Kumar, Mr Gautam Machua, Mr Nagendra Machua, Mr Kripa, Mr Krishna, Mr Kartik, Mr D Prasad, Mr D Charan, Mr Laxman, Mr Rahul and Mr Manjeet.

Benefits from the Self-Help Groups

After forming the Self-Help Groups, Fulwar Toli villagers have already realized these benefits:

- Group members now know the importance of micro-savings.
- People have more confidence to do something for the betterment of the village.
- Villagers are now better able to know how they can improve their standard of living.
- They have decided to build a small school in their village, which is possible only through groups.
- Now all villagers are involved in at least some of the activities.
- The village is now getting support from other NGOs and after six months with savings, the groups will be eligible for micro-credit from the rural banking sector.



The Fulwar Toli band at a village gathering – playing music at weddings and other celebrations is an income-generating activity

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Livelihood Intervention by Fish Farmers Development Agency – A Success Story from Mayurbhanj, Orissa

G B Parida

A Story of FFDA and a Farmer

The Fish Farmers Development Agency (FFDA) in Mayurbhanj, Orissa was established in 1978 with an objective of increasing small- and large-scale fish production in the district through entrepreneurship development. This is a story of a successful aquaculture enterprise established by a fish farmer.

Shri Pulin Kumar Behera of Nuagaon Village of Barasahi Block in Mayurbhanj District started fish farming through the intervention of FFDA in 1980. He developed a 0.60-acre tank with a bank loan of Rs 6,000 that was made available to him. Having achieved success in fish culture with a financial outcome, Shri Behera wanted to expand his fish farming activities. FFDA Mayurbhanj again came to his rescue.

Tanks, Loans and Subsidies

In 1985, he again developed a 1.35-acre fish culture tank with a bank loan of Rs 25,000, for which a government subsidy of Rs 1,350 was provided to him. Inspired by his fishing activity with motivation from FFDA Mayurbhanj, Shri Behera again developed a 1.25-acre tank in 1992-93 with a bank loan of Rs 50,000. He was provided with a subsidy of Rs 10,000 by FFDA. Shri Behera further extended his farm in 2001-02 with the development of a 3.50-acre tank through a bank loan of Rs 345,000. A government subsidy of Rs 79,000 was administered to him by FFDA Mayurbhanj. Similarly, he also developed a 0.80-acre pond with a loan of Rs 80,000 and a subsidy of Rs 18,400 from FFDA.

Fish, Seed, Poultry and Vegetables

Before the establishment of FFDA Mayurbhanj, Shri Behera was doing only agriculture activities. But with his own interest and the support of FFDA, today Shri Behera is a progressive fish farmer of the district with a farm area of 4.30 hectares. He is not only taking up fish culture but also fish seed production. During 2003-04, he has produced and sold 2,000,000 fish seed to other fish farmers of the district and earned Rs 40,000. He has already achieved a production level of three tons of fish per hectare of water area. As Shri Behera says, his annual profit margin is Rs 250,000 from the sale of fish seed and table-sized fish. Shri Behera is not only a progressive fish farmer but also continuing his agriculture business. He has started integrated fish farming activities with one poultry unit of 100 birds. He has also done some vegetable plantation on the banks of the tanks, including banana, chili and tomato.

Tank and Well Water

Shri Behera is using the tank water for sprinkling irrigation of horticultural crops and for ensuring regular and timely supply of water. He has the advantage of having one bore well from which regular 24-hour discharge of water is maintained without the use of diesel or electric power. This is a gift of nature for Shri Behera which has allowed him to accelerate his activities. He has also dug another bore well and fitted one five-horsepower electric motor to prevent water scarcity.

A Farmer and the FFDA in the Years to Come

This year Shri Behera has stocked 35,000 seeds of giant fresh water prawn (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*) with fish seed for polyculture for additional income generation. He wants to enhance his activities and have his own fish seed hatchery in the coming year. And from this year on, FFDA Mayurbhanj will also start working with Self-Help Groups.

Lessons for Learning

It is noteworthy to mention that in March 2003 fish farmers from Jharkhand State visited Shri Behera's farm. They learned that his success can be viewed on the strength of these factors:

- His keen interest and involvement in fish farming activity
- Credit worthiness
- Timely repayment of bank loans to facilitate further lending by the bank
- Proper utilization of loans and subsidies, and
- Intervention of FFDA from time to time.

This year FFDA Mayurbhanj arranged an exposure visit for 15 farmers to Shri Behera's farm. The farmers were impressed after seeing facilities such as a wastewater management system, and prawn and fish culture tanks.



G B Parida (second from left) and Department of Fisheries colleagues in discussion during a STREAM State-level Communications Strategy Workshop in Bhubaneswar, Orissa in November 2003

[A Note from the STREAM India Communications Hub Manager: FFDA Mayurbhanj is working closely with STREAM India on sharing their experiences. Frequent telephone discussions about the different Orissa government schemes for fish farmers take place between the CEO of FFDA Mayurbhanj and the STREAM India Communications Hub Manager. Members of FFDA Mayurbhanj also contributed their experiences during a State-level Communications Strategy Workshop in Bhubaneswar, Orissa in November 2003. In these ways, a communication network is being established between FFDA Mayurbhanj and the STREAM India Communications Hub.]

G B Parida is a District Fisheries Officer cum CEO with the Fish Farmers Development Agency in Mayurbhanj, Orissa. He can be reached through the STREAM India Communications Hub Manager, Rubu Mukherjee, at <streamindia@sancharnet.in>. Rubu is based at the STREAM India Country Office in Ranchi, Jharkhand, one of Orissa's neighboring states.

Understanding of Assets-based Livelihoods through Participatory Rural Appraisal to Eliminate Hunger

Binay Sahay

Poverty in India

India is a huge country in which poverty remains pervasive. Before the mid-1970s, the percentage below the poverty line remained fairly static at about 55%, and from 1975-87 there was a steady decline to 38%. This coincided with an increase in the annual economic growth rate from 4 to 5% (World Bank India, 1997). Poverty reduction continued into the 1990s, but the proportion of people living in poverty fell more slowly, particularly in rural areas. Poverty patterns vary among women, Scheduled Tribes and Castes, and deprived sections of communities in rural areas. Approaches to reduce poverty and eliminate hunger have evolved over the past 50 years in response to deepening understandings of their complexities.

Evolution of Strategies against Poverty and Hunger

In India in the 1950s and 1960s, many viewed large investments in physical assets and infrastructure as primary means of development. In the 1970s, awareness grew that physical assets were not enough and that health and education were at least as important. The 1980s saw another shift toward a two-part poverty strategy: promoting labor-intensive growth through economic openness and infrastructure investment, and providing basic health and education services to poor people. In the 1990s, 'governance' and 'institutions' moved towards the center stage of strategies to 'attack' poverty by promoting opportunities, facilitating empowerment, enhancing security and building institutions (World Bank, 2001).

Significant progress has been made in reducing poverty over the last two decades. Much money has been spent on addressing poverty and eliminating hunger, especially to bring deprived rural poor people into the mainstream of development processes. A major constraint remains the complexity of poverty and developing appropriate understanding and especially strategies to eliminate hunger.

Understanding Hunger, Poverty and Livelihoods

Poverty is strongly associated with a lack of assets or being unable to use assets for productive purposes. Hunger is often a symptom of extreme poverty, the causes of which include social, economic and educational exclusion, lack of voice and representation, powerlessness, ill health as well as inadequate income. 'Hunger' is often used interchangeably with 'food insecurity', whereby poor people do not have the means to get enough food by growing or buying it.

EIRFP believe that individual and community livelihoods are built upon assets sometimes categorized as human, social, natural, physical and financial (Carney, 1998). To formulate strategies to eliminate hunger – or food insecurity – we need to understand the use of assets, and their importance in people's lives, so that improvements can be made in individual and community livelihoods.

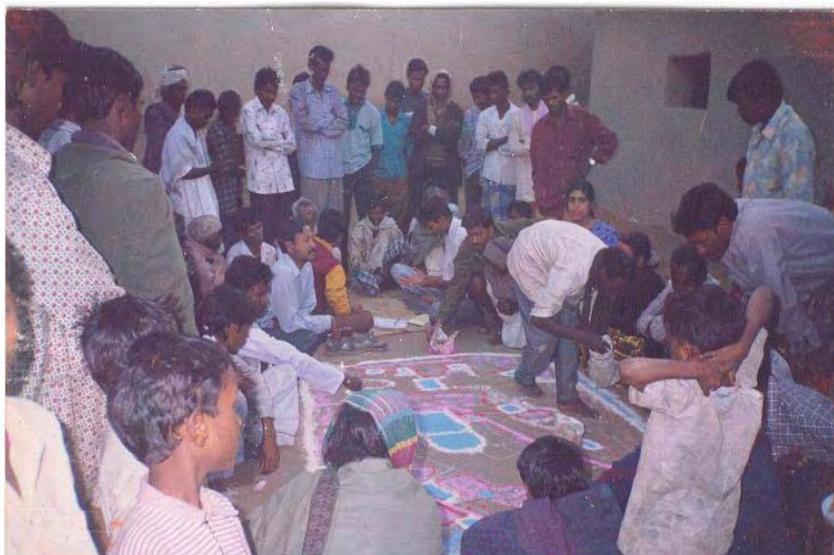
Using PRA to Understand

The Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP) (see box) has been gaining experience in the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods to understand how people and communities draw on assets to build up their livelihoods. One goal was to have a significant impact on food security and eventually the elimination of hunger.

EIRFP is managed by the Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT), supported by KRIBHCO and the Government of India, and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It was a project to initiate a process of change in the livelihoods of resource-poor men and women of the eastern Indian plateau region in the three states of Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal.

The project has developed an approach and processes to ensure the participation of deprived men and women in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs for the sustainable improvement of their livelihoods, with a special focus on tribal communities and women.

PRA methods have facilitated EIRFP community's to look at themselves – their situation and possibilities – and enable them to articulate these findings in ways that are meaningful, useable and realistic. The awareness of causes of identified problems has become deeper through this analysis and understanding. EIRFP communities have also taken up initiatives to realize their own recommendations.



Community members building a social map

Participatory approaches have been used by EIRFP to understand fundamental causes of hunger – including

understandings of livelihoods assets (Tomar et al., 2001) – and the processes, institutions and practices which affect the way that poor people use them. PRA tools not only enable the collection of information, but also create awareness among individuals who can be the main actors in the fight against poverty and hunger – about how to mobilize themselves to improve their livelihoods. Examples of tools used by EIRFP to learn about assets are listed in the figure below.

<p><i>Human</i></p> <p>Demographic Information Skills and Occupation Gender Roles and Responsibilities Health and Nutrition</p>	<p><i>Social</i></p> <p>Social Map Wealth Ranking Timeline Family Tree Migration Trends</p>	<p><i>Natural</i></p> <p>Natural Resources Map Transect Occupation Seasonality Matrix Ranking Forest and Livestock Trends</p>
<p><i>Physical</i></p> <p>Geographical Map Institution and Infrastructure Map (Venn Diagram) Tools and Implements Use</p>		<p><i>Financial</i></p> <p>Savings Institutions Credit Institutions</p>

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Poverty Ranking Tools – Experiences of EIRFP in Addressing Vulnerability

Binay Sahay

Poverty Ranking in EIRFP³

Using poverty ranking, EIRFP facilitated villagers to identify three categories of community members, each with their own criteria:

1. Surplus: Land, service or business, purchasing capacity, resources for production, sources of loans, able to afford meals and clothes throughout the year
2. Self-sufficient: Upland, sharecropping, no or some wage earning, at least two meals a day throughout the year, no or limited migration
3. Deficit: Little land or landless, poor quality of land, sharecropping and share-rearing, wage earning, days without meals, migration, poor quality of house, indebtedness

The “deficit” category was recognized as the “poorest among the poor”. The project had further defined this category to cover a range of households:

- Lower Deficit: Little land and largely upland, or landless; sharecroppers dependent on the sale of their daily labor for a livelihood or engaged in head-loading; households with few working hands and couples with young children; migrating over several months; artisans and groups with traditional skills; and those belonging to lower social status castes within villages
- BLAD (Between Life and Death): Elderly, mentally and/or physically handicapped and without any family support; homeless; households with drinking problems; widows with young children and without family support; family members living through long periods of illness and sometimes living by begging

In carrying out the poverty ranking exercise, villagers typically identify five “well-being” categories within the village. The fifth and lowest are destitute persons, similar to the project-identified “BLAD households”.

The “lower deficit” or fourth category is households which struggle for food for the whole year and face problems of malnourishment. Their children usually do not go to school as the family migrates for part of the year.

A third category – in project terms called “upper deficit” – is typically made up of households with more working adults. The main difference between the third and fourth categories is that these households are less vulnerable to food insecurity. Many “upper deficit” households are also engaged in petty trading and small business contracting in nearby towns. Most are able to manage their food supply over the year.

The two “highest” categories of households – “self-sufficient” and “surplus” – are least vulnerable. Although these households are not the project’s target group, their participation is facilitated where their resources and skills may be used for the benefit of poorer men and women.

Strategies

A livelihood profile of the different categories identified by the project through poverty ranking shows that each has different coping strategies to deal with situations of scarcity. While “lower deficit” households migrate over long periods of time, or engage in low-return activities such as head-loading or sale of fuel wood, BLAD households in practice often live under conditions of continuous

³ See the previous article for a description of EIRFP – the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project – and its use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods to carry out livelihoods analysis with farming communities.

malnourishment and distress. These households also do not get access to loans for consumption purposes.

The project's poverty reduction strategy envisaged developing a differentiated approach based on the conditions of households and facilitating the community to address both economic and social dimensions of poverty, in particular exclusion and disempowerment. The project strategies included creating an environment conducive to change, developing understanding among community members, and encouraging the participation of tribal villagers and women. The EIRFP engaged community organizers with social science backgrounds to initiate participatory development processes and build rapport among the target group. This involved activities such as door-to-door visits, meetings and even the distribution of seeds.

The group-focused strategy provided social recognition, status and security – especially of the poorest and most marginalized groups – and helped them become involved in decision-making processes. It also encouraged poor households to have their own Self-Help Groups which led to access to loans for a variety of purposes. The improvement and scaling-up of human and social assets also led to an increase in available opportunities for individuals, groups and communities.

A Case of a BLAD Household

A little support can help overcome hurdles – no one realizes this more than Ravati Mahato of Khanasdi, Kaipara, West Bengal. A widow with leprosy – and with a marriageable daughter – she was discarded by society and left to struggle for her survival. It was at this juncture when EIRFP came forward and identified her as a BLAD household. Through a rapport-building process, EIRFP facilitated her to develop a strategy to fight the situation. She was given two goats with help from the project and two more goats were provided through a group fund by villagers who understood their community's social responsibilities. On realizing the urgent needs of fulfilling day-to-day requirements, additional support was given to Ravati in the form of short-term paddy dehusking activities that assured her regular income.

It is a different story now. The dehusking activity not only helped her survive, but she has built up a bank balance of Rs 2,000. She now has ten goats and established a business with access to the wider market. On the top of all this, she has been able to arrange her daughter's marriage. And she has been recognized by society.



Ravati

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About the *STREAM Journal*

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Purpose

The *STREAM Journal* is published quarterly to promote participation, communication and policies that support the livelihoods of poor aquatic resources users in Asia-Pacific, and to build links within the aquatic resources management and other sectors across the region. The *STREAM Journal* covers issues related to people whose livelihoods involve aquatic resources management, especially people with limited resources, and government, non-governmental and international practitioners who work with them in communities. Such issues include learning, conflict management, information and communications technologies, aquatic resources management, legislation, livelihoods, gender, participation, stakeholders, policy and communications.

Another equally important purpose of the *STREAM Journal* is to provide an opportunity for seldom-raised voices to be heard and represented in a professional publication that is practical yet somewhat academic. The contents of the *STREAM Journal* should not be taken as reflecting the views of any particular organization or agency, but as statements by individuals based on their own experience. While authors are responsible for the contents of their articles, STREAM recognizes and takes responsibility for any editorial bias and oversights.

Distribution

The *STREAM Journal* is available in three formats:

- An electronic PDF version which is printed and distributed by the STREAM Communications Hubs in each country
- A version which can be accessed and downloaded in PDF format from the Virtual Library on the STREAM Website at www.streaminitiative.org, and
- A printed version which is distributed by the NACA Secretariat.

Contribution

The *STREAM Journal* encourages the contribution of articles of interest to aquatic resources users and people who work with them. The *STREAM Journal* also supports community-level colleagues to document their own experiences in these pages.

Articles should be written in plain English and no more than 1,000 words long (about two A4 pages of single-spaced text).

Contributions can be made to William Savage, *STREAM Journal* Editor, at <savage@loxinfo.co.th>. For more information, contact Graham Haylor, STREAM Director, at <ghaylor@loxinfo.co.th>.

About STREAM

Support to Regional Aquatic Resources Management (STREAM) is an Initiative designed within the five-year Work Program cycle of the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA). It aims to support agencies and institutions to:

- Utilize existing and emerging information more effectively
- Better understand poor people's livelihoods, and
- Enable poor people to exert greater influence over policies and processes that impact on their lives.

STREAM will do this by supporting the development of policies and processes of mediating institutions, and building capacity to:

- Identify aquatic resources management issues impacting on the livelihoods of poor people
- Monitor and evaluate different management approaches
- Extend information, and
- Network within and between sectors and countries.

The STREAM Initiative is based around partnerships, involving at the outset a coalition of founding partners (AusAID, DFID, FAO and VSO) supporting NACA. It has adopted an inclusive approach, reaching out to link stakeholders engaged in aquatic resources management and supporting them to influence the Initiative's design, implementation and management.

The partnerships' work is coordinated in each Country Office through a National Coordinator (a senior national colleague agreed with the government) and a Communications Hub Manager (a full-time national colleague supported in the first two years by STREAM), and linking a range of national stakeholders. The Communications Hub is provided with hardware, software, training, information-technology support, and networking and human resources support, and links national stakeholders through an internet-based virtual regional network.

National coordination is guided by an annually-reviewed Country Strategy Paper (CSP) drawn up by the Coordinator and Hub Manager in consultation with stakeholders with whom they regularly network. A CSP identifies key issues, highlights regional linkages, proposes and prioritizes key actions, and seeks funding for these from STREAM and elsewhere (with STREAM support).

The STREAM Regional Office (at the NACA Secretariat in Bangkok) directs the Initiative, provides a regional coordination function, and funds and manages cross-cutting activities dealing with livelihoods, institutions, policy development and communications, the four outcomes-based STREAM themes.

STREAM implementation is an iterative process, initially operating in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Vietnam and Yunnan, China, and expanding within Asia-Pacific where opportunities exist to tackle poverty and promote good governance, as experience is gained, lessons are learned, impact is demonstrated and additional funding is secured. STREAM's communications strategy aims to increase impact by ensuring that existing knowledge and expertise inform ongoing change processes around the region, and that the lessons learned are disseminated throughout Asia-Pacific. The *STREAM Journal* and the STREAM website are components of this strategy.

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