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## **Impact of homestead farming system on rural economy**

A study in South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal

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India is a country where, over 70% of the population still live in rural areas and agriculture and allied farming activities is the key source of income for about 60% of the population. India ranks second worldwide in agricultural farm output (Economic Survey, 2010). As per the Planning Commission of India report (2009-10), in the state of West Bengal 26.7% persons were living in poverty with Rs.643.2/capita/month income. Hence poverty alleviation is the central pillar of rural development and it can be achieved by adopting different farming system. Development of homestead farming system (HFS) has the potential for poverty alleviation in states like West Bengal since irrespective of the land holding size, most of the households in the coastal region of West Bengal, have a small piece of land adjacent to their dwelling where some kind of homestead farming is carried out using the indigenous knowledge. HFS is mainly a need-oriented, self-provisioning, integrated, multi-species, economically sustainable and environmentally safe farming system around the house where the soil is enriched by homemade biological formulations and integrated farming is undertaken. This system allows year round cultivation of different agricultural products (horticulture, aquaculture, timber, etc.) which can provide either a source of additional income to the households or function as an alternative livelihood especially for the women members of the household. In order to understand the contribution of HFS to household income and to devise ways to maximise returns from HFS, a survey was conducted covering 480 households in three blocks (Kakdwip, Namkhana and Sagar) of South 24 parganas district of West Bengal. Of the household surveyed, 91% come under the marginal category of less than 1ha of landholding with an average of 0.4 ha of land of which 0.1 ha was used for homestead farming. The 28% income of total 480 households were contributed by HFS which comprised of aquaculture (54%) followed by animal husbandry (37%) and horticulture (9%). The 22% of total households who practised betel vine cultivation mainly in homestead land and used homestead pond water for irrigation earn an additional gross income of Rs.75,000/annum. Therefore, the betel vine cultivation became the backbone of economy of these households. More than 40 local varieties of horticultural crops and more than 25 fish species are cultured in HFS. However, due to inadequate supply of input and improper management, the quality and quantity of produce is not optimum. The study has clearly indicated the potential of sustainable intensification of HFS for increasing production and income of poor households in rural area, and lead to poverty alleviation. To achieve this, we require specific policies, that ensure supply of quality inputs at nominal cost to these households and increase farmer's knowledge and technical skills through some capacity building programs in the form of trainings and workshops.

Key words: homestead farming, poverty, livelihood security, aquaculture.