

Social Feasibility of Shrimp Sector : **Seeking People's Response**

The key stakeholders of the shrimp sector including shrimp farmers, fry collectors, shrimp traders, *Gher* workers, women and community leaders expressed their concerns about shrimp cultivation in the coastal region of the country. They discussed both the positive and negative aspects of this growing sector at a stakeholder workshop held in Khulna on 28 April, 2001, organized by the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS). It was also participated by relevant government officials, representatives from local government, NGOs, civil society groups, development partners in Bangladesh, academics, researchers, experts of the Fourth Fisheries Project (FFP), lawyers and journalists.

The workshop was a part of the social feasibility study under the FFP Shrimp Component of the Department of Fisheries, which has been under implementation with support from the Department for the International Development (DFID) of United Kingdom. The broad objective of the project is to support sustainable growth in and equitable distribution of benefits generated from increased fish and shrimp production for domestic consumption and export. The project also aimed at alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh by improving the livelihoods of the poor people.

The feasibility studies as designed by DFID comprised of 12 study components, of which BCAS was involved with the following nine components: (i) literature review, (ii) village level participatory census, (iii) livelihood analysis (iv) shrimp producers' livelihood study, (v) fry collectors' livelihood study, (vi) women and children study, (vii) network and political analysis, (viii) economic analysis of shrimp sector and (ix) community building/GOPP exercise.

The workshop aimed at sharing the primary findings of different study components and get the views and opinions, knowledge, experience and perception of different stakeholders of the shrimp sector in order to make the study findings relevant, systematic and comprehensive. The workshop was divided into two sessions: (i) introductory session where background of the workshop and the feasibility studies including the general state and development strategies of the shrimp sector were discussed; and (ii) the technical session where the above mentioned study components highlighting the objectives, issues, methodologies and findings were presented and wide-ranging discussion on different aspects of shrimp sector took place.

Dr. MS Shah, Professor, Department of Fisheries Management and Research, Khulna University, chaired the inaugural session while Md. Liaquat Ali, Fisheries Division Head of BCAS delivered welcome address. Mr. SN Chowdhury, Director of DoF overviewed the Fourth Fisheries Project and Shrimp sector while Dr. David Edwards, Team Leader, FFP highlighted the activities of the shrimp component of the FFP and shrimp sector feasibility studies. Mr. Shamsul Huda, Director of ADAB in his address expressed views of NGOs in general on the shrimp sector. Dr. Atiq Rahman, Director, BCAS highlighted the details of the shrimp sector feasibility study and role of BCAS in the study.

Inaugural Session

Md. Liaquat Ali in his welcome address gave a brief overview of the coastal shrimp culture in Bangladesh including background and importance of shrimp culture, its development, problems and constraints and public sector intervention in the sector. He pointed out that coastal shrimp farming in Bangladesh is an important economic activity contributing significantly in country's export earnings and employment.

Highlighting the importance of the feasibility study, David Edwards, said that the study would come out with results on the relationship between agriculture and fisheries and involvement of the community with the sectors. He mentioned that it was essential to chalk out a balanced plan conducive to the environment.

Mr. Shamsul Huda, said that besides social and economic aspects, environmental and human rights issues should be considered as prime concerns related with shrimp. He felt that the mangroves under Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira have been declared as world heritage sites by UNESCO. Impacts of shrimp culture and other economic activities on the Sunderbans should be carefully looked at. He stressed the need of civil society's involvement in decision making process with regard to the shrimp sector.

Dr. Atiq Rahman informed that the studies focused on the social situation. Environment issues were not included in the studies. DFID wanted to know whether shrimp was socially acceptable or not and thus the studies were geared up to address this basic question. He hoped the participants would sincerely raise their felt issues in the forum, so that those could be incorporated in the final report.

Dr. MS Shah, Chair of the workshop said that the impact of shrimp culture was not necessarily only social but also environmental and technological for which a holistic approach was necessary. He stressed on the need for finding linkages between the environment and shrimp cultivation.

Technical Session

Dr. Mahmudul Karim, Fisheries Sector Specialist of ATDP-II, chaired the technical session. The team leaders of different study components presented preliminary findings of the feasibility studies. Few designated persons experienced in the shrimp sector made their comments about sectoral issues, problems and strategies. Further, different stakeholders such as shrimp farmers, fry collectors, shrimp and fry traders, shrimp processors and exporters, NGO representatives, journalist, government officials, academics and experts participated in the open discussion. Following are the highlights of the key findings of the studies and open discussion.

Literature Review

The objective of the literature review was to provide a systematic review of the existing knowledge in the sector and provide necessary guide for the project. The study covered issues including community management in polders; fry collectors; rural economy; institutional and organizational influences in polders; social impact of shrimp cultivation and environmental impacts of shrimp cultivation. It was reported that most of the literature is local and site specific, focusing on shrimp farming areas rather than the industry as a whole.

Village Level Participatory Census

The main objective of the participatory census was to focus on the trends and patterns of livelihoods of people in their social, economic, institutional and environmental settings in order to develop programmes for the sector. Multiple methods and tools, including survey and PRA, have been used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The villages in the study areas varied widely in terms of population size. The primary source of income included shrimp farming, fry collection and wage labour while agriculture played a very reduced role in the shrimp villages. An overwhelming majority of the study population (78%) identified themselves as poor. Of them, 20% was very poor. About 22% households reported them as non-poor, i.e., affluent in the study villages.

Livelihood Analysis

Livelihood analysis attempted to identify the factors that contributed to livelihood patterns of the people in the shrimp producing areas. It was found that most of the land in the study villages was owned and controlled by the rich. About 40% households were involved in shrimp related activities while only 19% households were engaged in crop farming. Majority people including the poor have greater employment opportunity in the post shrimp period. The findings also suggested that the incomes as well as costs of living of the people have been increased, but the distribution of income has been highly unequal.

Shrimp Producers' Livelihood Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the process of economic changes among the shrimp producers and to assess the various forms of uncertainties due to environmental and socio-political conditions. It was found that about 60% land was under shrimp and paddy cultivation and only 26% land was under shrimp cultivation. Majority shrimp producers were small and medium size *Gher* owners. Most of the shrimp producers felt that shrimp farming had brought significant positive changes in their livelihood and mentioned that shrimp farming gave them higher benefit than paddy cultivation.

Fry Collectors' Livelihood Study

The objective of the study was to assess the status of fry collector's livelihood and their responses in the wake of banning of shrimp-fry collection. The poor are involved in shrimp fry collection. About 86% respondent of this category are functionally landless. A large number of women (mostly divorced, separated, deserted and widowed) and children are engaged in fry collection. Fry collection is the major source of income for this section of people and mainstay of their livelihood. Most of the fry collectors,

irrespective of male, female and children, strongly resented the banning of fry collection, because they felt this would make them unemployed.

Women and Children Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the status and role of women and children in the shrimp sector. It was found that a large number of women were engaged in shrimp related activities, particularly in fry collection and wage labour. However, the primary occupation of the majority of women (91%) had been reported as household work. Although women's contribution in household income increased, their role in family decision making has not increased to that extent. They also reported that women and children had to encounter some form of discrimination, abuse and disturbance while working in the *Gher* and collection/trade depot and they did not get much institutional and legal aid in the locality.

Network and Political Analysis

The study primarily attempted to find out the socio-political situation of the shrimp areas and assess the effectiveness of the existing conflict resolution structure in the context of land and water uses. The study also identified the role and position of poor in the decision making process. The study found that there had been a number of shrimp related conflicts and violence and the root cause of most of the conflicts was competition for controlling the scarce land. The intensity, magnitude and type of shrimp related conflicts varied locality to locality. A positive change has been evident that the intensity of conflict is falling with the number of years of shrimp farming. The mode of local decision making has been top-down and the structure of conflict resolution is still traditional, where the power elites play a very dominant role and the poor have almost no capacity to influence the decision making process at the community level.

Findings of both economic analysis and community building exercise could not be presented, because those were at the planning stage. The key findings of all the study components of the shrimp feasibility study are expected to be published in the next issue of BEN.



Dr. A Atiq Rahman, Executive Director, BCAS, addressing the stakeholder workshop in Dhulna

Comments of the Discussants

The discussants felt that there is lack in government policies for shrimp sector. Arguments were put in favor of benefits derived from shrimp and damages caused by shrimp culture. They also provided suggestions for developing the sector in an environment friendly, economically viable and socially acceptable form. The highlights of the discussion are briefly described here.

Mr. Frances Atul Sarkar, Regional Director of Caritas, Khulna Region pointed out that Caritas raised similar issues as the current social feasibility study of FFP during the implementation of Third Fisheries Project. Caritas appreciated to create opportunities for the poor particularly for the distressed women in various ways, but failed mainly due to lack of cooperation from the concerned government departments.

Mr. Manik Shaha, Journalist of The Daily Sangbad, Khulna identified the shrimp sector as an unplanned one. This sector may contribute to economic growth, but there is question of sustainability. He also observed that due to shrimp cultivation, infrastructures (roads, homestead and schools) were being damaged, number of trees and livestock have been reduced, women and children were facing health related problems and children's mental growth was being hampered. He hoped that the study might find the alternatives.

Advocate Feroze Ahmed, Member of Bar Council of Khulna highlighted few negative impacts of shrimp culture including: high rate of women divorce, degradation of land under shrimp cultivation, loss of green cover and cattle heads, serious fuel crises and large number of court cases in the shrimp area.

Mr. Gouranga Nandi, Journalist of the Daily Janakantha, Khulna mentioned that water management problem was the vital one, which would be more complex due to the increase of small size *Ghers* and also fry collectors will suffer if they fail to catch fries due to ban on fry catching. Benefits of shrimp are unequally distributed and physical as well social environment of the locality has been degraded greatly due to shrimp cultivation.

Dr. Moniruzzaman, Community Management Specialist, FFP-DFID pointed out that there is lack of scientific studies in the shrimp sector. Many study reports have used either secondary data or recycled previously written information. Only few study reports were prepared on the basis of primary data.

Dr. Aftabuzzaman, President of the National Shrimp Farmers Association disagreed with the statement that mainly shrimp farming caused the environmental damages. He felt only salinity does not damage soil fertility. For instance, rice cultivation has not stopped in the shrimp area. Land in some polders is now being used for both rice and shrimp culture and thereby people are getting double benefits from their land. The feasibility study would show the change in the sector and hoped that economic analysis would show whether this sector is economically beneficial, or not.

In the open discussion session, over 40 participants expressed their views on the issues. They focused on the constraints in development of shrimp, importance of shrimp policies, improper management, inadequate coordination among development agencies and the area specific problems. The key challenges as highlighted by the participants were: how to overcome the difficulties existing in the shrimp sector and manage the resources properly for improving peoples' livelihood.

The workshop concluded with a set of recommendations regarding how to improve the shrimp sector considering all the social, economic, technological and environmental issues.

-SS Alam and S Asad