

Sajal's success in biofloc fish farming

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Needless to say that the young entrepreneurs, engaged in fish farming, are quite vocal and active nowadays. It's not just that they are interested enough in using the modern technology, they are also more determined in using the technologies. Today, I would like to share with you the success of another young man in technology-based fish farming.

At the end of October this year, I went to the northern region of the country. It was the pre-winter season and the vehicle was heading towards Panchagarh's Atwari upazila. Green paddies on the vast fields, as far as your eyes can travel. Finally, I reached my destination. I went there to meet a young biofloc fish farming entrepreneur, Shahrar Kabir Sajal. He had a dream of getting involved in productive activities after completing his studies. Back in 2015, he became very interested in fish farming by watching a Hridoye Mati O Manush (Soil & People) episode on aquaponics fish farming. Afterwards, researching different spheres, Sajal started fish farming using aquaponics method.

Primarily, he did not succeed in the journey, but his relentless efforts to bring success continued. The question is how to use the tanks used in aquaponics. It was during this time that he discovered biofloc farming. He came back from Kerala, India with training on biofloc and geared up his fish farming. The news of Sajal's biofloc project came to me a couple of years back.

subject which is intertwined strictly with science and needs special knowledge and skills before entering the sector, aiming to be commercially successful. Sajal claims he has researched various technologies of fish farming. A biofloc fish farming project has been set up at his backyard. The aforesaid technology has been applied in various tanks and ponds. In all, he is cultivating fish in 25 lakh litres of water.

Most of the young entrepreneurs are experimenting with biofloc. Zahirul from Narayanganj, Romel from Comilla and Ashraf from Mymensingh are all trying their very best to make the best use of the biofloc technology to bring the ultimate commercial success. In the meantime, I am getting news of many initiatives of this technology all over the country. Entrepreneur Sajal is not only farming fish, he is also conducting various experiments to make the biofloc method sustainable. Especially in this method, what kind of fish, in what way or in what season can be farmed, is his predominant focus. What is the right way to use probiotics? He also has detailed research on these. The biggest thing is that he does not want to count losses in fish production. All his efforts are to ensure production and reduce production costs. Not only this, with the help of biofloc technology in the pond, he has achieved remarkable accomplishment. Sajal also claims the application of biofloc technology in the pond was first initiated by him in Bangladesh.

It is a small pond under a shade called 'Pond Culture'. Tilapia is being



Sajal with his Vietnamese koi, produced through biofloc method, at his fish farm in Panchagarh's Atwari upazila.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is a BIDS, Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.



Let me remind you my dear readers: it has not been possible to decide on a reliable biofloc strategy yet. Individual entrepreneurs are claiming to be successful but that's a specific claim. The training and teaching trade of the biofloc system is the most widespread issue now and it has turned into pretty much commercial. One more issue needs to be clear, fish farming with biofloc method is a science-based method. It would not be right to go into a large investment without being fully proficient in the

cultivated in 50,000 litres of water in a small pond built on one and a half decimals of land. I have not seen this strategy of Sajal anywhere else. Others have built tanks using cement or plastic paper. Sajal has made this pond with sandbags and Korean PVC coated plastic covers. Sajal said it is possible to produce 2,800 to 3,000 kg fish in a space of only 30 feet by 18 feet. It will cost Tk 70,000 (USD 826) in four months. Sajal said he would be able to sell fish, worth at least Tk 3 lakh (USD 3540.78). He gave also

gave an information that if it is farmed in biofloc method, the fish is auto-graded. Due to the high density of fish, some fish cannot grow in the same size at the same period. That is why there are three sizes of fishes at Sajal's biofloc project.

Three large cement tanks were spotted at Sajal's biofloc farm. His first aquaponics venture started with these three cement tanks. Now it is being used in biofloc project. One tank is farming Vietnamese koi. Three and a half months back, Sajal released the fish fries in his tanks. Now, the weight of three koi fishes is around one kg. I also saw a greenhouse. Sajal said it was an aquaponics method of fish farming in the greenhouse, which has now been changed into biofloc. Tilapia is being cultivated on one side and Rupchanda on the other. Sajal says, if success is found in Rupchanda, a new success will be added to the biofloc method.

Vietnamese koi is being cultivated in two ponds, nearby the tanks. He is netting fish for the third time. Koi fishes

worth Tk 6 lakh (USD 7081.57) has already been sold from the ponds. Sajal spent around Tk 2 lakh (USD 2360.52). I looked at the diffusers at the bottom of the pond. How these controls oxygen in the water, I had a chat about it with Sajal. The mind becomes enchanted, seeing the sizes of fresh fishes. Feels like all the fish here came from freshwater. These fishes are sold quickly for their colour and taste.

Sajal's success is probably right here. He has been able to ensure quality production and sales. The fish produced by him is very much acceptable to the buyers and consumers. In the last four years, with his persistent work, intelligence and dedication, he has invested little by little and made a profit of millions of dollars. Sajal also had to face many obstacles while growing up in the far north of the country. But his mother Shamsunnahar provided the highest inspiration to his son that he would certainly be able to survive with fish farming. With such encouragement from his mother and following the

inspirational agricultural videos of Hridoye Mati O Manush, Sajal looks even far to take biofloc technology to another level for the development of fish farming in Bangladesh.

Success requires promise, sincerity and devotion and we find these attributes in every entrepreneur behind the agricultural success of the country. In this regard, Sajal is also an extraordinary entrepreneur. Bangladeshi youths are very interested in biofloc technology. The positive vibe of biofloc is flowing across Bangladesh. Government's fisheries research institutes should look at how scientific the biofloc is, and how profitable this method is in fish farming in real terms; what are the odds and how a farmer can overcome it to move onward. I believe those who have been involved in technology-based farming activities in different parts of the nation with true loyalty, are certainly playing a pivotal role, not only in bringing their financial success, but also in the development of the country's comprehensive economy.

Two boys drown in Kaptai Lake

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Two teenage boys drowned in Kaptai Lake near Kerani Pahar area of Rangamati town on Wednesday.

The deceased are Mohammad Adnan Ankon, 15, son of Mohammad Subedar Islam, chief conservator of forest department (Rangamati Circle), and his friend Mostahid Ahmed, 15.

Local said the duo went to take bath in the Kaptai Lake around 12:00pm when they suddenly slipped into the water of the lake due to strong current and went missing.

Seeing this, people nearby informed the matter to local fire station.

Being informed, a team of firefighters from Rangamati Fire Station rushed to the spot, rescued the boys after an hour of frantic search and took them to Rangamati General Hospital, where the doctors declared them dead. Assistant Director of the fire station Ratan Kumar Nath said.

Man held over attempted rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police arrested a man for allegedly attempting to rape a housewife in Phulbari upazila of the district on Wednesday.

The arrestee, Mostafizur Rahman, 39, son of Azhar Ali, is a resident of Madhyapara village in the upazila.

Quoting locals, police said, Mostafizur entered the house of the victim, who runs a small grocery shop at the village, on Tuesday night and tried to rape her forcibly.

Hearing screams, villagers caught the culprit red-handed and gave him a good bearing before handing him over to the police.

IN FOCUS

Floods in the north and ESDO response

Start Fund Bangladesh responded to flood situation in the north with a series of funds to member organisations that targeted below-the-radar areas and affected communities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Floods hit the low-lying areas of northern region in Bangladesh as the Padma, Jamuna and Brahmaputra rivers and their tributaries swelled above danger marks since June 27, 2020. The flood levels increased gradually and this rise, coupled with more rains, lead to the floods going into a second wave.

Riverbank erosion and broken embankments made things worse and together with the pandemic, the overall situation was a dire one, calling for immediate humanitarian assistance to the affected people of the northern region, where it was estimated that around 30,000 households in 13 districts were affected by the floods.

Start Fund Bangladesh, a project funded by Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly UKAID), used data from Global Flood Awareness System (GloFAS), indicating areas at risk of facing severe flooding, reaching a peak around July 18, 2020.

The challenge was to reach these far flung communities as they fell under some of the most underprivileged districts, with more than 90 percent of their population involved in formal forms of labour. This meant they needed far more support to avoid negative coping mechanisms which include selling assets or migrations.

Sirajganj, one of the highest cattle producing areas of the country, was part of the flooded region and people were selling their livestock at staggeringly low rates. The Covid-19 crises made it harder to not only provide relief but for these people to find work to sustain themselves. Despite the available data and adequate media attention, the aid being provided by the government would not suffice and extra support was required.

Start Fund Bangladesh (SFB) responds to below-the-radar crises, with a 47-member strong base of local and international NGOs, providing the opportunity to profile the disaster and creating the scope for other funds to flow through.

SFB relies on the strength of its members and their efforts for an on-ground needs assessment of each situation, with a "Leave No One Behind" strategy. This often leads to inclusion of areas or communities that have not been included in high risk zones outlined by government or other agencies.

SFB's mechanism ensures fund allocations within 72 hours. This 72-hour rapid response period starts from the time an alert is raised, to receiving proposal submissions by



organisations; shortlisting them by the Project Selection Committee (an autonomous body of representatives from member organisations) till disbursement of funds to the chosen organisations.

SFB allocated funds of Tk 9.3 for alert B032, to Islamic Relief, World Vision, Eco Social Development Organisation (ESDO), Manab Mukti Sangstha (MMS) and SKS Foundation, for providing some relief to the people of the north amidst the pandemic and floods.

With a presence in 49 districts of the country, ESDO had been collecting information on the flood affected areas of Bangladesh for more than 40 days. They further consulted with the Indian organisation IQVIA, getting data to better understand the situation of floods from the upstream areas.

It was deduced that the Indian floods were a major contributor to this slow onset flooding situation and ESDO decided to go for an early action which would also cover some ground when the second wave of flooding was expected in late July or August.

ESDO responded to the alert number B032, with a project supporting the Flood Survivors for Reducing the Misery (SFRM). Through this initiative, it distributed Tk 3,000 to each of the 2,218 flood-affected families in 12 unions of five

upazilas of Kurigram district. It also provided a hygiene kit with a dignity kit package (includes a bathing soap, detergent, bucket with a lid and tap, a bowl, disposable surgical masks, non-disposable sanitary cloth for menstrual hygiene and an awareness raising pictorial leaflet on COVID 19, flood and snake bite).

Mosheur Rahman, disaster focal point of ESDO, explained that 6,000 to 7,000 people died annually from snake bites. There was not only a lack of awareness regarding treatment using anti venom but there was also an inadequate supply of it, which led to such a loss of lives.

This part of Bangladesh often suffers from a period of food insecurity so the locals have adapted by collaborating and forming a reserve system where they save rice grains to be used during periods of stress.

ESDO took a cue from this system and set up a Food Bank, where Tk 300,000 was provided as an initial boost. Three women were assigned to work in the Food Bank and a total of 75 women are working there on a voluntary basis, equipped with emergency response materials including life jackets, hand mikes, bleaching powder, spray machine, and temporary shelter materials. These 75 women are also the first contributors to the food



bank as this community-based initiative rely on the collective efforts of the locals to adapt with their situation. People can buy dry food during monsoon for immediate relief and the Food Bank acts as a first responder to any crises situation, as an all-time reserve.

One of the major issues that came up during response to alert B032 was a duplication of ID cards.

"The lists of affected people to receive relief sometimes become an issue as IDs are duplicated so member organisations take pains to ensure the lists are authentic," Mr Rahman explained. "We personally verify the households etc. But there are still loopholes and this leads to an accountability issue, as the relief provided could end up with people who might not require it."

Each organisation prepares a Situation Report or Sitrep, with the objectives of understanding the crises better through a shared overview of districts. SFB and its members are trying to establish the concept of a One District One Sitrep and One List approach, which will also reduce the duplication of information sharing and could complement a collaborative, whole of society approach in district level crises/disaster management. It is being viewed as a collaboration between government and non-

government bodies to present a singular list of affected persons and disaster hit areas.

There is a discrepancy in reaching communities as news channels often report that many places have no relief but these areas need to come under the radar through a One District One Situation Report/List which provides humanitarian agencies a clear snapshot of number & location of affected communities. This will also help capture the coverage, needs, prioritisation and challenges of the ongoing arrangement of Covid preparedness and response. Being a disaster-prone country, Bangladesh can start preparing ahead for disasters so an anticipatory approach to preparing lists can lower the risk of leaving communities out of these lists.

Start Fund Bangladesh is a £10 million rapid emergency response fund created by the Start Network in 2017 with support from (FCDO), modelled on the successful Start Fund that activates funding within 72 hours of a crisis alert. The Fund, during the last six months, has awarded around Tk 32 crore to its member agencies to reach communities affected by COVID-19 and other crisis like measles, dengue, cyclone Amphan, nor'wester, riverbank erosion, ongoing flooding in the North and the current waterlogging in the southwest regions.