

# Water Farming for more Resilience

## The Inequality Challenge. Innovative Solutions to a Global Issue

### The Challenge

Many people live in agrarian marginal communities close to the floodplains of the major rivers Ganga, Brahmaputra and Padma in India and Bangladesh. They have been facing recurring floods and environmental hazards over centuries that have also changed the geomorphology of the arable land area, which is now highly vulnerable to inundation and erosion.

Every year, more than one third of the land is completely submerged and about a quarter of it remains partially submerged by floodwaters for five to seven months. In Majuli River Island alone, 77% of agrarian land is flooded, which forced two thirds of the indigenous marginal community to migrate temporarily. This renders to livelihood vulnerability, social distress and poverty due to the scarcity of food, employment and social security. The inhabitants have no alternatives for survival, no opportunities to combat the impacts of climate change and succumb to societal disintegration.

Affected people are in crucial need of an alternative flood resilient farming practice for food and social security.

### The Objective

The main objective of the project is to:

- Train farmers in hydroponic farming and aquaculture as an integrated climate adaptive agricultural practice (ICAAP) for promoting flood resilience.
- Ensure sustainable livelihood and food security for marginal farmers and raise awareness about community level disaster preparedness.

Project title	Water Farming for Climate Resilient Agriculture and Disaster Preparedness in India & Bangladesh
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Country	India & Bangladesh
Implementing Organisation	South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE)
Partner Organisations	ICAR & NABARD (India), BARCIK (Bangladesh)
Duration	July 2018 – September 2019

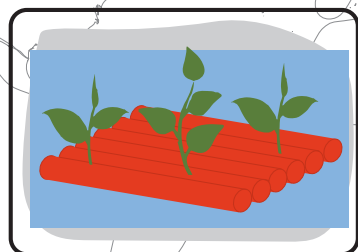
- Promote inclusive growth through financial inclusion and develop market linkage of young farmers' groups (Joint Liability Groups).

### The Target Group

The target group in India are marginal communities in the east of Majuli River Island of Assam, 63% of them are agrarian farmers or fishers, 16% are labourers and 21% are non-workers. The populace consists of nine indigenous communities and two displaced hill tribes, who are still excluded from mainstream development. These communities are highly vulnerable to natural disaster. About 85% of the inhabitants survive below the poverty line and mostly consist of indigenous groups like Mishing and Aapatani tribes.

The other location in the East Saharsa district (in Bihar bordering Nepal) is known for severe flood devastations. The tribal communities living in the area, like Musahar and Madhesi, survive in acute poverty.

The community in Bangladesh is based in Shyamnagar, the Satkhira district of the Khulna division, which is often inundated by sea storms and losing its habitat to rising sea level in the face of climate tragedies. In the sub-district Shyamnagar upzila, people mainly live on agriculture, however, only one third of them engage in subsistence agriculture. The others do not have fixed occupations, which makes them even more vulnerable to climate and societal risks.





Dr Dipayan Dey  
[chair@safeinch.org](mailto:chair@safeinch.org)  
[drdipayan dey@gmail.com](mailto:drdipayan dey@gmail.com)

## The Approach

In order to provide a local sustainable solution, the project introduces flood resilient hydroponic farming practices in connection with aquaculture of fish through capacity building and technology transfer. Moreover, local institutions are strengthened by forming community groups called 'Joint Liability Groups' who work collectively and have a common banking account for earned revenues.

Float farming originally comes from the deltaic districts of Bangladesh, wherein the float bed of rotten biomass is loaded with soil for farming. The project improves this concept, making innovative changes to the design, material, size and capacity of each float. The project uses hydro-foam and sponge for the hydroponic circulation of water and builds the flood resilient structure from locally available non-timber forest products. The farming medium consists of proportionate amount of vermicompost, coco peat, biochar and sand.

The project team trains young and motivated rural farmers and fisher folk in raft making, cultivation techniques, weed and pest management and post-harvest management of the rafts. The crop cycle planning is a participatory process, wherein the beneficiaries decide which crops shall be planted. The farmers are also introduced to fish cage and pen culture along with disseminating small hatchery management techniques.

An integrated placement of rafts and fish cages substantially augments the flood mitigation potentials and disaster prepar-

edness of the community. A sustainable and circular economic paradigm of conserving the habitat and agro-biodiversity could thus ensure food security, social assurance and economic wellbeing.

## The Results

Outcomes of the 15-month intervention in India and Bangladesh is enunciated as:

- **Extent:** It deployed 785 hydroponic trays in 18 different locations covering nearly 8.75 hectares of float-farm and 72 hectares of fish-farm.
- **Outreach:** 68 Joint Liability Groups with 7 to 10 members each are financially included following LNOB principle and 25 groups got credit-linked as registered cooperative.
- **Productivity:** 620 project beneficiaries successfully grew 37 metric tons of horticultural crops, seedlings and cut-flowers and raised 128 metric tons of table-fish during project span.
- **Sustainability:** 60 workshops had built capacities of 1500 farmers on adaptive resilient agriculture that is now mainstreamed by the local stakeholders now. 120 master trainers are leading the enterprise and the Japan Social Development Fund is keen to spread the intervention to other parts of South Asia.

The project details were covered in the national newspaper: [Times of India](#)

### About the Inequality Challenge

*The Inequality Challenge supports innovative approaches that tackle inequality and the 'leave no one behind' principle of the 2030 Agenda with the ultimate goal to integrate these approaches into German Development Cooperation's portfolio. Initiated by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), it supports ten projects in India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mongolia, Jordan, Serbia, Nigeria, Mauritania, Brazil and Mexico with up to 100,000 EUR.*

GIZ manages the Inequality Challenge. For further information, please visit [www.poverty-inequality.com/inequality-challenge-projects](http://www.poverty-inequality.com/inequality-challenge-projects) or contact Maria Krisch, [fundmanagement@giz.de](mailto:fundmanagement@giz.de).

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Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

Sector Project 'Reducing Poverty and Inequality' as part of the 2030 Agenda  
 Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36  
 53113 Bonn, Germany  
 T +49 228 44 60 0  
 F +49 228 44 60-80

[fundmanagement@giz.de](mailto:fundmanagement@giz.de)  
[www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)  
[www.poverty-inequality.com](http://www.poverty-inequality.com)

Author Sangram Mandal

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